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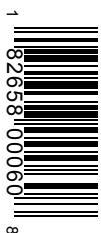
ALL-JERKS ISSUE!

BACKISSUE!



**GUY
GARDNER**

**A HERO
HISTORY
OF THE GL
YOU LOVE
TO HATE**



**Namor in the Bronze Age • J. Jonah Jameson • Flash Thompson • DC's Biggest Blowhards • Reggie Mantle
The Heckler • Obnoxio • featuring Buckler, Busiek, Byrne, Englehart, Giffen & more**

Volume 1,
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ALL-JERKS ISSUE

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In "Echoes" (Green Lantern #189, June 1985), written by Steve Englehart and illustrated by Joe Staton and Bruce Patterson, Hal Jordan, no longer a Green Lantern, visited the comatose Guy Gardner—once Hal's backup in the Green Lantern Corps—at a convalescent hospital. Hal introduced himself as a former GL, and explained to Guy the common bond they shared as the "Old Guard." Hal promised to visit Guy more often, wished him the very best, and then departed. But the readers did not, as two haunting panels focused on Guy's faceless expression from two different angles. Had Guy understood Hal? Was he feeling anything? And then the readers turned the page to find themselves in a different setting of the story.

In *Justice League International* #7 (Nov. 1987), written by Keith Giffen and J. M. DeMatteis and illustrated by Kevin Maguire and Al Gordon, Guy Gardner was free of his coma and now a Green Lantern in the reformed Justice League. In the aftermath of a brief confrontation that rendered him unconscious, Guy awoke and slammed his head into the bottom of a kitchen sink. The severity of the blow changed him. He became kinder, gentler, unaware of his past, prone to whistling a happy Debby Boone or Carpenters tune, complimenting his teammates excessively, and worrying over their feelings and the feelings of everyone, actually—much to the annoyance and surprise of all. It would be a while before he reverted to the personality his fellow superheroes had grown accustomed to.

In "Once Upon a Time" (Guy Gardner: Warrior #0, Oct. 1994), scripted by Beau Smith with pencils by Mitch Byrd and inks by Dan Davis, Guy Gardner was physically transformed and his extraterrestrial origins were revealed as a result of a rebooted timeline. The survivors of the Vuldarian race, in an attempt to continue the bloodline of the way of the Warrior, as protectors against evil, initiated a merger of alien and Earthling whose lineage over the centuries eventually produced the perfect Warrior spawn: Guy Gardner, whose drinking of the Waters of the Warriors brought to fruition this latent destiny. Now "feelin' pretty damn powerful," in Guy's own words, Gardner had a new life to fulfill.

BAD BREAKS

It's easy to feel sympathy and pride in Guy Gardner given what he's been through, isn't it? The thing is, between the dramatic events of GL #189 and GGW #0, with the extended personality disorder sandwiched in-between (*Justice League International* #7-18), Guy Gardner was pretty much a jerk, a jerk that his fans loved to hate.

Arrogant, brash, hotheaded, insensitive, conceited, obnoxious, and boasting all the qualities of a complete jerk—that was Guy Gardner, "the one, true

What a Guy!

Detail from the Kevin Maguire/Terry Austin cover to *Justice League* #5 (Sept. 1987), the "One Punch" issue.

TM & © DC Comics.

All About

[Gardner]

He Was a Hero to Some, a Jerk to Others...

by Jim Kingman



girlfriend Kari Limbo, a psychic, become romantically involved with Hal Jordan, and even witness their wedding, which was abruptly cut short when Kari collapsed. Hal learned that Guy was in the Phantom Zone, along with a beaten Superman. Guy wasn't interested in being rescued by Hal; he just wanted to thrash Jordan for stealing his girl. Hal was able to bring Superman back to Earth. There was simply no stopping the nasty string of bad breaks befalling Guy.

In "Mission of No Return" (*Green Lantern* #123, Dec. 1979), by O'Neil and artists Staton and Giordano, Hal made a second attempt to rescue Guy from the Phantom Zone, and he was on the verge of success when Sinestro nabbed Gardner. During the battle between GL and renegade Green Lantern Sinestro, Guy suffered further mental injury. Hal eventually rescued Guy and returned to Earth,

but Gardner had slipped into a coma, his mind "damaged in a way I've been never seen before," as the doctor told GL. Kari called off the wedding with Hal to tend for Guy, the only good break Gardner received after a devastating string of bad ones, although he didn't know it (making it kind of a bad break after all). With that, Guy also entered comics limbo, where he would reside for years—until 1985, when Englehart and Staton replaced writer Len Wein and artist Dave Gibbons on the ongoing *Green Lantern* monthly, beginning with GL #188 (May 1985).

Shortly after Hal's visit with Guy in GL #189, Guy abruptly emerged out of his coma, walked out of the convalescent hospital on his own accord, and went about desecrating Abin Sur's grave. Jordan confronted him and realized that Guy was now an angry, violent individual, intent on claiming the power he felt was rightfully his, yet always denied him. A Guardian of the Universe appeared before the battling duo and chose Gardner to be a Green Lantern and lead a mission to help save the universe, much to Gardner's satisfaction and Jordan's dismay.

"When I took over," recalls Englehart, "John Stewart was the GL, but everybody expected Hal Jordan to come back and relegate John to backup duty once again. I decided that John deserved better, so I asked myself, 'Why can't there be two GLs?' And that led to, 'Why can't there be more than two?' That eventually led to the GL Corps, but along the way, I decided to resurrect the lost GL, Guy Gardner, who had been terminally bland and then brain-damaged—a completely useless character, as things stood. I was being a good soldier, trying to help my friend Dick Giordano sell the book, and it turned out to be the second biggest mistake of my entire career—because ever since, DC has claimed that since Joe and I didn't create the original Guy Gardner, our completely new take counts for nothing. If I had called the new guy Joe Smith we would have earned major royalties, but as it is, we get nothing, and we get dissed by the people we helped. So adding it all up, I wish I hadn't done it." Sadly, the writer and artist who took a character that was constantly being discarded and made him popular, controversial, and enduring have received their own bad break, with no royalties for the character they successfully recreated!

"It was Steve's inspiration," Staton tells *BACK ISSUE*. "He had lots of really clever takes on who or what could be a GL. So maybe a human GL didn't have to be totally heroic and idealistic, maybe he could be petty and resentful as well. Gardner had never amounted to anything and had actually been written entirely out of the book, so Steve could use him as a blank matrix to hang a new characterization on. Steve's creation of Guy really was something new."

"I just wanted someone who would shake things up," says Englehart. "I liked Hal and John a lot, but they, like most GLs, were fairly high-minded. I wanted my new character to break that mold completely. And Joe, for his part, saw that most of the others wore basically the same outfit, and so gave him a completely new sort of uniform. Guy's whole point was that he was completely unlike anyone before."

"I did have somebody in mind when I drew the new Guy," says Staton. "At the time we were creating him I was following a PBS series called *The Jewel in the Crown* set in Colonial India. A central character was a Major Ronald Merrick played by Tim Pigott-Smith. He was a tough officer who felt he'd been denied his entitlements. I related his resentment to Guy's and I kept him in mind for Guy's look. Sometime, Google 'Major Merrick' and you'll find shots of him face-to-face with somebody and he'll have this nasty sneer. That's Guy."

"I did all the design work on Guy and it came organically," continues Staton, "taking off from what Steve was giving me in the scripts. The key to Guy was the awful haircut. When the previous Guy had been abandoned in a custodial facility he was comatose, a blank. It came to me that somebody would come around periodically and give him a quick trim, a bowl cut, sort of institutional. Steve was playing off the idea that Guy was brain-damaged and had the social controls of a little kid. Remember Raymond Chandler comparing Humphrey Bogart and Alan Ladd?



JOE STATON

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.



That's Our Guy!

An undated sketch by Joe Staton of Guy Gardner—with bowl-cut! —from *Heritage* (www.ha.com).

(inset) The sneer of actor Tim Pigott-Smith inspired Guy's look.

Guy Gardner TM & © DC Comics.
The Jewel in the Crown © Granada Television.

He's No Super Friend
 (left) Tim Brown submitted this Aaron Lopresti sketch of Guy trying to make time with his JLA teammate Wonder Woman. Thanks, Tim (and Aaron)! (right) Yellow-ringed Guy's showdown with Superman, from Jurgens and Burchett's *JLA* #66 (Sept. 1992). (background) Cover of *JLA* #63.

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once they were solidified, did what I could to work them into the book."

Guy's return was nasty and kicked off with a battle with the League and then a showdown with Superman. Batman and the Atom arrived on the scene to calm matters down, and Guy was given a second chance with the team. He and the League battled Doomsday and lost. Guy mourned Superman, in his own way, after the Man of Steel was killed by Doomsday. He aided the team in their recruitment drive for new members, and helped defeat Dr. Destiny. Jurgens' last issue of *Justice League America* was #77, the end of a two-part story Guy was not involved in because he had been abducted by aliens (more on that soon).

Of course, Jurgens' stories in *Superman* and *Zero Hour* would impact Guy's future significantly: the destruction of Coast City, which led to Hal Jordan's tragic meltdown; and Parallax's attempt at rebooting the DC Universe (which was actually accomplished by a group of superheroes, including Guy, in *Zero Hour* #0). "With the destruction of Coast City," says Jurgens, "we really opened the door to some wide-ranging possibilities. It was up to Guy's writers to decide how they wanted to handle it and what type of things they wanted to extract in order to affect their characters. Obviously, some major developments evolved out of Coast City's death, so from a dramatic standpoint, I'd have to say it worked out pretty well."

Writer Dan Vado took over *Justice League America* with #78, and with him came Guy Gardner, a different Guy Gardner, as this was a replicate created by the Draal and now on Earth as a sleeper agent. The real Guy Gardner was trying to get back to Earth to stop his evil twin. This had taken place in Guy's own series, which I haven't discussed yet because again I've gotten a little ahead of myself here. Let's go back to when Hal Jordan stripped Guy of his Green Lantern status. In the space of two months, Guy was out of *Green Lantern* and briefly out of *Justice League America*. He was on his own, and embarking on a new career.

REBIRTH

In *Guy Gardner: Reborn* #1-3, published during the summer of 1992 and written by Gerard Jones and illustrated by Joe Staton and Joe Rubenstein, a broken and powerless Guy was still determined to be a hero, and set out to steal Sinestro's yellow power ring from the body of the dead renegade Green Lantern. Tricking Lobo into aiding him, Guy accomplished his task, although it wasn't easy, as he and Lobo and the new Green Lantern Corps had to thwart an invasion of Oa by the Weaponers of Qward. Once Guy had the ring, he returned to Earth, and received his own monthly series, *Guy Gardner*, where he donned a new uniform and began ridding New York of its criminal elements.

Staton designed Guy's new blue look, which was similar to the clothes he was wearing when he desecrated Abin Sur's grave in *Green Lantern* #194. Recalls Staton, "An editorial decision was made that Guy needed a new look. I tried to make it something in line with what I thought Guy should have been wearing but different enough to meet the requirements. I've since found out that this is now known as Guy's 'pimp' look. I ran into somebody cosplaying this look at a con a while back and it looked sort of cool in the flesh."

Guy having his own series risked too much of a good thing. His arrogance and brashness worked well in a team setting: the readers enjoyed the conflicts between him and his teammates, and could relate to their annoyance with him. But Guy was still part of a team. Going solo meant the reader had to deal with Guy 22 (pages)/12 (times a year). That much arrogance and brashness threatened to be overwhelming, and it was for the first few issues of the series, with the exception of the 'silent issue,' *GG* #3. *Guy Gardner* #1-10 are certainly entertaining, and it was interesting to have Guy learn the ropes of a ring whose language he couldn't interpret and whose power fizzled out at the most inopportune times, but these were gimmicks, and with one super-baddie to battle issue after issue, nothing new under the sun. Something had to be done





BULLIES AND BLOWHARDS OF THE

DC

BRONZE AGE



by John Wells

Clark shot a blast of heat vision at its inner workings and hosed down the jock when the handle was turned again.

It was the sort of wish fulfillment that appealed to a bullied kid who wished his own tormentors could get their comeuppance, and Julius Schwartz was completely taken with the idea. For the next few years, Lombard-Kent scenes figured into most of his Superman stories. After a certain point, even the sportscaster knew what was coming. In an Elliot S. Maggin-scripted tale in 1974's *Superman* #281, Lombard whipped himself into a frenzy when his payback for a prank at the start of the issue hadn't materialized. Snagging his pants on the way to the news desk, he realized only after a smirk from Lois Lane that his britches had been unraveled up to his belt. Around the corner, Clark Kent smiled as he tossed a ball of thread.

"The idea behind the Lombard character was to create a friendly adversary and workplace foil for Clark, to contrast with his chummy relationships with Lois, Jimmy, and Perry," Cary Bates tells *BACK ISSUE*. Running with Schwartz's suggestion of adding a sportscaster to Clark's news broadcast, Bates adds, "We were vaguely influenced by *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (inset), believe it or not, which was in its prime back in 1973 when Lombard debuted. He was sort of the WGBS version of the Ted Baxter character on *MTM*. Though Steve wasn't a complete idiot, there was usually a humor component to his scenes."

"All of us were taken with the character's potential," Martin Pasko adds. "I think you can see that in the published work, in that Lombard is one of the few examples of a character that all of us Superman scripters at that time wrote in more or less the same way—as opposed to, say, the way Lana Lang seemed to be a totally different character when she'd show up in *Action* on occasion.

"I think that's because Lombard was one of the most sharply drawn and purposefully designed (though not particularly complex) characters I've ever handled—the most clearly communicated idea I've ever heard from an editor and the writer who co-created it: the jock doofus unwittingly trying to bust Superman's *cajones*. The audience waits for it, knowing that a hotfoot with a match won't trump a hotfoot from heat vision, or whatever. And I gather the other Superman writers thought so, too.

"That's why Lombard became, for me, at least, one of the best examples of what, in sitcoms, we call the 'run-through character.' That's certainly what Ted Baxter was on TV: the character you knew you could 'run through' a scene and get laughs just from his showing up. (Perhaps a better, slightly more recent example of that would be *Seinfeld*'s Kramer.) They all have that one most important thing in common: The audience starts laughing when they show up because they're laughing at what they're imagining is gonna happen. They're 'waiting for it.' "



© MTM Enterprises.

While a few episodes revealed that Lombard had a scientist brother and nephew (*Superman* #267) or that mystery novelist Kaye Daye—previously seen in *Batman*—was his aunt (*Superman* #277), the sportscaster never really deviated from his intended role. Like his Morgan Edge short story, Martin Pasko wrote a "Sporting Life of Steve Lombard" tale for 1976's *Action Comics* #465 that rose above the cliché. Dictating his memoirs to an amusing secretary, Steve explained how he came to



Jock Shock

(top) The Nick Cardy cover (with a Murphy Anderson Superman face) to *Superman* #264 (June 1973), which introduced (bottom) blowhard football pro-turned-sportscaster Steve Lombard. Detail from that issue's Bates/Swanderson story. (inset top) Lombard's inspiration, Joltin' Joe Namath.

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CLIFF CARMICHAEL

Introduced by writer Gerry Conway and penciler Al Milgrom in December 1977's *Firestorm* #1, Clifford Carmichael—like Simon Stagg—was the catalyst for creating the hero of the series, but the details couldn't be more different. Sporting trendy glasses and mutton-chop sideburns, Cliff was the class brain at Bradley High School, and he wasn't shy about letting anyone know. He had a particular dislike for jocks and he set his sights on transfer student Ronnie Raymond in that first issue, doing everything in his power to embarrass the newcomer in front of Ronnie's prospective girlfriend Doreen Day. Worn down by the barrage of insults, Ronnie was desperate to prove to Doreen that he was more than a dumb jock and thought that joining an anti-nuke rally would win her admiration. Instead, it was the precursor to an accident that transformed both Raymond and Professor Martin Stein into Firestorm the Nuclear Man.

Unfamiliar with the page in the playbook about great power and great responsibility, Ronnie often used his powers to go on virtual joyrides and—in issue #3—to settle a score. Buzzing Carmichael near the school grounds, Firestorm took him to task for referring to him as “a mental midget hung up on violence” and threatened to “plant [him] where [he'll] bring up roses” if he did it again. The irony of the monologue was lost on Ronnie, but it *did* silence his nemesis for most of the issue. If anything, the confrontation planted a seed of suspicion. When Cliff caught a flash of the hero's transformation in issue #5, he realized that Firestorm either attended classes at Bradley High or was part of the faculty. Unfortunately for Carmichael's suspect list, half the school bore a grudge against him for one reason or another.

That particular subplot went nowhere, however, because *Firestorm* was canceled after its fifth issue as part of 1978's DC Implosion. By the time the new *Fury of Firestorm* series was up and running, Cliff was back in the role of general irritant. The smirking bully's prank in 1982's *Fury of Firestorm* #8—putting a lizard in a bucket of popcorn—was the last straw for Ronnie, who finally decked his nemesis and broke his glasses as a bonus. In a ball court rematch in *FOF* #9, the outcome was different. Thanks to Cliff's recent workout regimen, a distracted Ronnie wound up bleeding and on his back. It also sent Doreen's sympathies flooding to her boyfriend, and Carmichael was left to wonder who really lost.

Cliff “was the personification of everything that made Ronnie's life hell,” Gerry Conway tells *BACK ISSUE*. “My original notion on *Firestorm* was to do a book that would be DC's complement to [Marvel's *Amazing*] *Spider-Man*, in a sense. We would have a young adolescent male who gets superpowers and doesn't know quite what to do with them. My flip on it was that rather than being the science geek who was being picked upon by the jock, my hero would actually be the jock who was picked on by the geek, and that was going to be Cliff Carmichael's role. Cliff Carmichael was basically supposed to be Peter Parker ... an *evil* Peter Parker. Ronnie Raymond was a *good* Flash Thompson.”

There was a brief ceasefire when Cliff believed that Ronnie's father had been killed (*FOF* #17–18), but the feud started anew thanks to the bully's embarrassment over having shown his softer side (*FOF* #23). The last day of high school saw the two teenagers trading blows again, Cliff ranting that his personality had been shaped by jocks who'd bullied him (*FOF* #41). Like before, Ronnie lost the fight but won the girl.

For conflict's sake, it was inevitable that the duo would both end up at Vandemeer University. Cliff searched his nemesis' room when he wasn't around (*FOF* #44) and implied to Ronnie's dad that he was doing drugs (*FOF* #45–46), but the worst was yet to come. Ronnie and Cliff's good-natured cousin Hugo Hammer were both playing football when they inadvertently switched helmets in 1986's *Fury of Firestorm* #50. The game turned tragic when Hugo lost his helmet during a play. His neck was broken and his spine was severed. Discovering that the strap on his helmet—the one Hugo was wearing—had been cut, Ronnie feared that he'd been targeted himself.

Over the next three issues, Ronnie and Doreen both theorized that Cliff had cut the strap and unintentionally crippled his cousin, but Carmichael wasn't



“An evil Peter Parker”...

...that's what *Firestorm* creator Gerry Conway calls Cliff Carmichael, shown here (top) in his first appearance in *Firestorm the Nuclear Man* #1 (Mar. 1978). Art by Al Milgrom and Klaus Janson. (bottom) Milgrom's original character designs for Cliff Carmichael and Prof. Martin Stein, courtesy of *Firestormfan.com* via John Wells.

TM & © DC Comics.



by John Trumbull

Watch Out, Spidey!!

Excuse us while we take a quick detour into the late Silver Age to repurpose this Jazzy Johnny Romita jolter (cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #58, Mar. 1968)—but how could we resist?

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The Bugle's Blowhard

In addition to the panels cited in this page's text, (right) *Amazing Spider-Man* #18's splash page is a classic JJJ-taunting-Spidey image.

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"PARKER! What're you lazing around here for? Get off your tail, go out there, and get me some PICTURES! Pictures of that wall-crawling freak SPIDER-MAN!! He's a MENACE!!!"

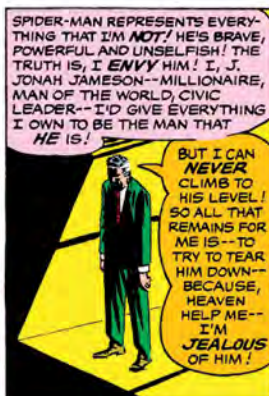
It's a familiar rant from a familiar character. He's been a thorn in Spider-Man's side since 1962. He's been portrayed by Oscar winner J. K. Simmons, Emmy winner Ed Asner, and Darrin's boss from *Bewitched*. He's bankrolled Scorpions, Human Flies, and Spider-Slayers. He's terrorized secretaries and fathered a Man-Wolf. He's the cigar-smoking, mustachioed face of tabloid journalism in the Marvel Universe. He's J. Jonah Jameson, one of comics' most enduring—and endearing—supporting characters.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

J. Jonah Jameson first appeared in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 (Mar. 1963), in Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's second-ever Spider-Man story. Appropriately enough, Jameson is first seen behind a typewriter, bragging, "When I'm through with this article, Spider-Man will be run out of town!" The *Daily Bugle's* publisher stymies Spider-Man's return to show business, urging for Spider-Man to be outlawed so the nation's youth can "learn to respect real heroes—men such as my son, John Jameson, the test pilot!" When the younger Jameson's space capsule malfunctions, Spider-Man saves the astronaut's life by replacing a vital guidance unit in midair. But instead of praising Spider-Man's heroism, J. Jonah Jameson demands his arrest, accusing him of sabotaging the capsule to steal his son's glory. It set a formula for future stories: Spider-Man trying his very best, only to have Jameson believe the very worst.

In *Amazing Spider-Man* #2 (May 1963), the perpetually broke Peter Parker sells photographs of Spider-Man fighting the Vulture to Jameson's *NOW* magazine. Impressed with a mere teenager getting photos even his staff photographers can't, Jameson urges Peter, "If you get any more great pictures, remember to give me first crack at them! We're always in the market for sensational photos!", establishing another regular element of the Spider-Man series: Jameson buying Parker's Spider-Man pictures to fuel his anti-Spidey editorials, unaware that his freelance photographer is secretly the Web-Slinger himself.

Although largely used as comic relief, Jameson revealed another side to himself in *Amazing Spider-Man* #10 (Mar. 1964). In a scene teased on the cover as "Why J. Jonah Jameson really hates Spider-Man!", Jameson privately confesses (below), "Spider-Man represents everything that I'm not! He's brave, powerful and unselfish! The truth is, I envy him! I, J. Jonah Jameson—millionaire, man of the world, civic leader—I'd give everything I own to be the man that he is! But I can never climb to his level! So all that remains for me is—to try to tear him down—because, heaven help me, I'm jealous of him!"



OF SCORPIONS AND SPIDER-SLAYERS

Jameson's jealousy and hatred of Spider-Man soon lead him to extremes. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #20 (Jan. 1965), Jameson, hoping to create a hero to defeat Spider-Man, hires Dr. Farley Stillwell to transform P.I. Mac Gargan into the all-powerful Scorpion (above). The great power swiftly corrupts Gargan, who becomes yet another villain for Spider-Man to defeat. The Scorpion murders Stillwell, leaving only Jameson to know his true responsibility: "Nobody knows it, but it's all my fault! I'm the one to blame! If not for me, there would be no Scorpion! Just to satisfy my own personal hatred, I tried to destroy Spider-Man! And, in so doing, I've unleashed a far worse menace upon the world! A menace I can no longer control! A menace which no one can control!"

In "Captured by J. Jonah Jameson!" in *ASM* #25 (June 1965), inventor Spencer Smythe shows Jameson his new creation: a robot designed to track and capture Spider-Man. Jameson agrees to bankroll Smythe, who lets Jameson control the robot. The Spider-Slayer, as it's later dubbed, returns in issue #58 (Mar. 1968), where we see the limits of Jonah's obsession. When he hears the robot's new name, Jameson immediately declares, "Now wait a minute! Nobody's talking about murdering him! I just want him captured, see? I want him behind bars... like forever!" But just like the Scorpion before him, Smythe is overcome by his bloodlust, earning him Jonah's enmity.

Perhaps no story in Spider-Man history better displays the many facets of J. Jonah Jameson than *Amazing Spider-Man* #105–107 (Feb.–Apr. 1972). It opens with JJJ clashing



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J. JONAH JAMESON: HERO OR MENACE?

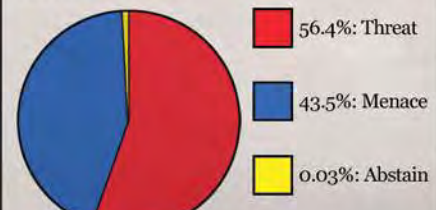


In our divided culture of political polarization and unending snark, surely we can all agree on this: that J. K. Simmons IS J. Jonah Jameson!

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POLL RESULTS: IS SPIDER-MAN A THREAT OR A MENACE?

Response was overwhelming to last week's poll.
Here are the results:



interview conducted by **John Trumbull**

[Editor's note: Jovial John Trumbull recently pulled up a chair with six of Spidey's all-time best writers—Kurt Busiek, Gerry Conway, Tom DeFalco, Tony Isabella, Roger Stern, and Marv Wolfman—to pick their brains about the Daily Bugle's flat-topped fearless leader. Let's listen in, shall we...?]

JOHN TRUMBULL: How do you see the character of J. Jonah Jameson?

ROGER STERN: Jonah is a very complex man ... in his own way, he's as complicated as Peter Parker.

On one hand, he's a professional journalist. He came up through the ranks as a reporter, and worked his way up to editor and eventually became publisher of a major New York City newspaper. He has an unshakable belief in the power—and the responsibilities—of a free press. There's an old saying about reporters having printer's ink flowing through their veins ... that's Jonah all over.

And he's not above using the power of his newspaper to go after people that he thinks should be taken down. That's not necessarily a bad thing, when he editorializes against crimelords such as the Kingpin or corporations like Roxxon. Unfortunately, Jonah also chose Spider-Man as a target.

GERRY CONWAY: He's obviously an adversary for both Spider-Man and Peter Parker. He represents the conservative forces in society that don't appreciate the efforts of a costumed vigilante. He's both a comic-relief character and not a serious threat, but more like a rebuke. He's the part of society that will never accept the costumed hero.

I've always enjoyed him as a character. I always liked, especially in the early years, his behavior toward Peter as this kind of devilish mentor who's both helping him and at the same time terribly abusing him.

For me, the interesting thing about Jameson was, while he was comic relief, he was also a very deep character. There's a lot of different layers to the guy.

KURT BUSIEK: I think he's a fascinating character, a study in contradictions. As a newspaperman, he does something good, something that's often heroic, but his hatred of Spider-Man makes him small and petty. He's a blowhard, but also a staunch believer in the First Amendment, and he'll stand up to generals to protect the freedom of the press. He's driven by his ideals, fueled by his ego, but he's also weakened by his ego, too, because he can't stand that Spider-Man is a hero, too, and maybe an even greater hero. So he's got to tear down Spider-Man to try to feel better about himself.

Characters whose fatal flaw is also what drives them to achieve make for complex, interesting drama.

MARV WOLFMAN: I see him as a man who started out with the best intentions then found himself caught in what's called the Peter Principle, where he rose to his level of incompetence. He knew he needed to get the *Bugle* to sell better, and to do so he made baby steps into irresponsible journalism. The line between journalism and yellow journalism kept getting smaller and smaller. But as Hearst and Pulitzer realized, yellow journalism attracted more eyes.

CONWAY: He's Charles Foster Kane, without the silver spoon in his mouth.

TOM DeFALCO: He bears a striking resemblance to Stan Lee in so many ways. (As do most of the Spider-Man characters, including Aunt May.) Like Stan, Jonah can be bombastic and self-promoting. He can also be compassionate and driven.

CONWAY: This is probably no surprise to anybody, but when I wrote Jameson, I heard Stan Lee's voice. And I think Stan, even in the creation of Jameson, whether intentionally or not, was parodying his own "Stan Lee, Publisher" persona. So just like Stan is a very complex and interesting guy who both has a tremendously charismatic part of himself and is an honestly decent guy who cares about people, he



KURT BUSIEK



GERRY CONWAY



TOM DEFALCO



TONY ISABELLA

© Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.



Gotcha!

Looks like JJJ's got the goods on poor Peter! Original John Romita, Sr./Frank Giacoia cover art to *Amazing Spider-Man* #169 (June 1977), courtesy of Heritage (www.ha.com).

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also has this incredible ability to go immediately to shallow. [laughter] Just, BOOM, right to shallow. And that's Jameson.

Jameson is a man who obviously started out wanting to be a journalist, wanting to be a good reporter, became powerful, and it went to his head. And he lost touch with the actual people who worked for him, and with the society that he lived in. So he's an interesting, complex character. And his anchor to "the real world" and other people was his relationship with his son.

TONY ISABELLA: A mess. Writers and editors keep shifting him from villain to comedy relief to crusading newsmen with the problem being that his character has become chaotic and, frankly, uninteresting. I'm not sure he serves a legitimate purpose in the stories at this time and, whether his dad is married to Aunt May or not, I think JJJ is due for retirement.

TRUMBULL: A big theme of the Spider-Man series is responsibility. How responsible do you think JJJ is as a person, and as a journalist?

DeFALCO: I see J. Jonah as a man who has great power but chooses to limit his responsibility to his family and career. He values his family and will do anything to protect it. He feels the same way about the *Daily Bugle*. Anything that benefits his family and/or the *Bugle* is good. Anything that doesn't is bad or not worthy of his attention.

ISABELLA: He almost always acts in an irresponsible manner. He bends the truth to sell newspapers. He has helped create supervillains. He's come darn close to ordering actual hits on Spider-Man. When he acts responsibly, it's usually for the sake of a single story. Then he goes back to being a criminal.

CONWAY: He's *horribly* irresponsible! [laughter] The classic Jameson move is the *Daily Bugle* headline "Spider-Man: Threat or Menace?" because he's clearly not providing responsible journalism. He's an advocate for his political point of view. And the funny thing is that in the early '60s, he reflected the way newspapers actually operated. They were very political and sensationalistic, until, for a brief period in the '70s, following the Woodward/Bernstein era, you had this notion of unbiased journalism. J. Jonah Jameson was the antithesis of that. And now, we're back to biased journalism. He was Rupert Murdoch before there was Rupert Murdoch.

WOLFMAN: I think he was once responsible, but his need to sell more papers, to keep the business moving, even to protect his job, corrupted him without him even realizing it. **BUSIEK:** He's idealistic but at the same time capable of being really petty. So it varies. It's not very responsible to twist any news about Spider-Man into an attack (or even to fund the creation of supervillains), so on that score, he's not very responsible. But he's also a scrappy newspaperman who wants to get the truth out—at least when it's a truth he's willing to admit to—so he can be very responsible there.

He has his moments. And then he has bad moments, too. **STERN:** As a journalist, Jonah can be very responsible. He's often used his publications to champion human rights. Don't forget, back in ASM #106, Jonah actually

From the opening splash page of *Amazing Fantasy* #15 (Aug. 1962), Stan Lee and Steve Ditko make it clear that Midtown High's Big Man on Campus is the bane of Peter Parker's high school existence. Their adversarial relationship continues in the pages of Lee and Ditko's *Amazing Spider-Man*, where a frustrated Peter refrains from fighting back for fear of hurting Flash and/or exposing his secret identity. Ironically, much like the classic Superman/Lois Lane/Clark Kent love triangle, Flash's admiration for Spider-Man exceeds his antipathy toward Peter. Over the years, the two become cordial, if not exactly friendly, toward each other. Flash receives his draft notice in *Amazing Spider-Man* #43 (Dec. 1966). In issue #47, Flash and Peter exchange a somewhat friendly goodbye before Flash leaves for Vietnam. Flash comes home on leave a few times before returning to Vietnam in *Amazing Spider-Man* #83 (Apr. 1970).

THE HIDDEN TEMPLE AND RETURN TO CIVILIAN LIFE

Flash Thompson returns home from Vietnam in *Amazing Spider-Man* #105 (Feb. 1972) and announces that he will soon be discharged from the Army. Over the next two issues, it becomes apparent to Peter and Gwen Stacy that something is bothering Flash, who is seemingly kidnapped at the end of *Amazing Spider-Man* #107 (Apr. 1972). In *Amazing Spider-Man* #108–109 (May–June 1972), Spider-Man attempts to save Flash, only to discover that he was "abducted" by Army officials assigned to protect him. Spider-Man learns that a group of Vietnamese natives is trying to kill Flash in the misguided belief that he orchestrated the destruction of their temple. Flash is eventually cleared of any wrongdoing thanks to the assistance of Spider-Man and Dr. Strange. This story also introduces Sha Shan, a Vietnamese woman who will eventually play a big role in Flash's life. Flash's return to civilian life reawakens feelings of jealousy in Peter Parker, who mistakes Gwen's concern for romantic affection. Sadly, it isn't until Gwen's funeral in *Amazing Spider-Man* #123 (Aug. 1973) that Flash assures Peter that there was nothing between him and Gwen, and that Peter was the only man she loved.

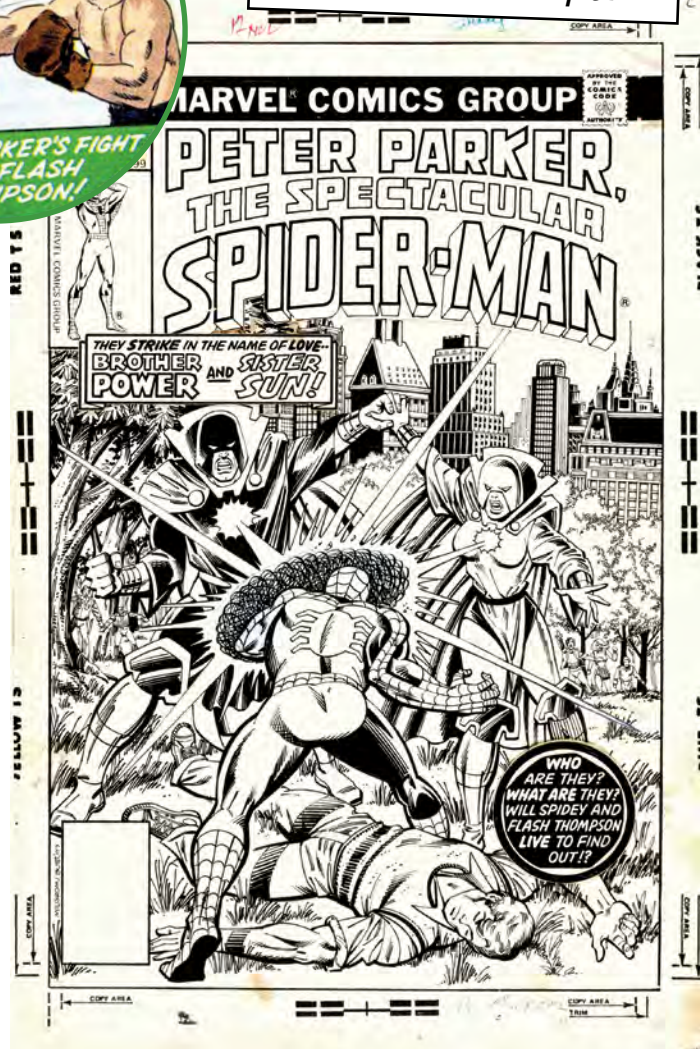
In *Amazing Spider-Man* #138 (Nov. 1974), Peter remembers that Harry Osborn (who had taken on the mantle of the Green Goblin and discovered Peter's secret) had destroyed their shared apartment with a bomb as part of a revenge scheme. Having no place to live, and not wanting to worry his Aunt May, Peter thumbs through his address book, asking everyone he knows if they can take in a roommate. Eventually, he's down to one name—Flash Thompson, who readily agrees to let Peter stay with him. The two men talk for several hours before falling asleep. Peter wakes up and muses, "Well, there's one shattered illusion of youth. I always thought if you got Flash and I alone in the same room, we'd start slugging each other. Instead we find out how much we have in common and talk each other to sleep!" Flash appeared sporadically in the pages of *Amazing Spider-Man* over the next two years. However, little of



FLASH THOMPSON

Friend or Foe?

by Darrell Hempel



Spidey to the Rescue!

The Wall-Crawler saves Flash Thompson from Brother Power (no geek, he) and Sister Sun (can you guess her secret identity?) on the Bronze-bodacious Al Milgrom/Terry Austin original cover to *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man* #12 (Nov. 1977), courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com). (inset above) Detail from the Steve Ditko-drawn cover of *Amazing Spider-Man* #8 (Jan. 1964).

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note happened to him during that time. Perhaps most noteworthy (for reasons that will become apparent later), he attended the wedding of Ned Leeds and Betty Brant in *Amazing Spider-Man* #156 (May 1976).

SPECTACULAR, SHA SHAN, AND ... CB RADIO?

On the letters page of *Spectacular Spider-Man* #1 (Dec. 1976), editor Gerry Conway explained the need for a second Spider-Man comic by stating that, "...the [*Amazing Spider-Man*] cast is one of the finest ever created in comics. Those people are real, to us and to you, and they need room to live, breathe, and develop. [*Spectacular Spider-Man*] is going to provide them with that room." Flash Thompson certainly benefitted from this expansion. Writer Archie Goodman reintroduced Sha Shan in *Spectacular Spider-Man* #3 (Feb. 1977). However, their reunion was not a happy one. Sha Shan refuses to speak to Flash, and the mystery deepens until *Spectacular Spider-Man* #8 (July 1977), when Flash confronts Sha Shan, who reveals that she is married, leaving Flash to walk off dejectedly. Writer Bill Mantlo concludes the Sha Shan mystery in *Spectacular Spider-Man* #12-15 (Nov. 1977-Feb. 1978), a storyline that revisits the story from *Amazing Spider-Man* #108-109 and introduces Brother Power and Sister Sun, the leaders of a cult who are brainwashing people in Central Park. Flash recognizes Sister Sun's voice as that of Sha Shan; she and her husband, Achmed, are working for the Man-Beast, who is disguised as the Hate-Monger. Spider-Man and Flash thwart the Man-Beast's plan with the help of Marvel's attempt to capitalize on the then-current

CB radio craze, Razorback, a strongman from Arkansas (get it, college football fans?) who wears a pig suit, speaks in CB radio jargon, and drives a semi called "Big Pig." In *Spectacular Spider-Man* #18 (May 1978), Flash declares that he has found happiness with Sha Shan, and the two begin a relationship that would last for several years.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

Flash and Sha Shan made sporadic appearances in the pages of *Amazing Spider-Man* and *Spectacular Spider-Man* throughout the early 1980s. However, writer Al Milgrom introduced a subplot that ran through *Spectacular Spider-Man* #91-100 (June 1984-Mar. 1985) and would spell the beginning of the end of Flash and Sha Shan's relationship. It begins when Flash admits to Peter that he is starting to resent Sha Shan's growing independence, and that he feels like he peaked in high school. Meanwhile, Sha Shan notices that Flash is acting strangely, sneaking out of their apartment and returning home bruised and bloodied. When she expresses her concern, Flash angrily pushes her away. Sha Shan turns to Flash's oldest friends, Peter Parker, Harry Osborn, and Liz (Allan) Osborn, for advice. Later, Flash sees Peter and Sha Shan together and irrationally blames Peter for his relationship problems. Flash's behavior takes a seemingly ominous turn in when he meets with two tough-looking men who offer him a spot in their organization. A chance encounter between Flash and Betty Leeds becomes a close friendship; the two later enjoy a romantic dinner. When Betty questions the propriety of their actions, Flash justifies their behavior, reminding her that they are both being

Big Man on Campus

(left) The classic interpretation of Flash Thompson. (right) Flash opens up to Spider-Man on this gripping page from the Stan Lee/Romita classic, *ASM* #109, from the storyline that introduced Sha Shan.

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Imperius Rex, Prince Namor of Atlantis, better known to most as the Sub-Mariner, has been a thorn in the sides of both heroes and villains in the Marvel Universe. Whether he's waged war on the surface world or locked horns with fellow monarchs T'Challa and Victor von Doom, the Scion of the Seven Seas has proven to be a jerk on more than one occasion.

What makes this anti-hero act in such a manner? Some would say that, like *Star Trek's* Mr. Spock, it's because Namor McKenzie is of two worlds, without really belonging to either. Others might tell you he just has too much water on the brain.

This article will explore the Sub-Mariner's career in his Marvel comics of the 1980s and 1990s as we discover the motivations for the character's behavior.

BOTH SIDES OF THE SEA

Unlike most comic-book heroes created in the Golden Age, Prince Namor didn't combat robbers, corrupt politicians, or murderers. Seeing the unintentional death and destruction of his underwater realm caused by surface dwellers, the Sub-Mariner waged war on his father's half of his dual bloodline. This made most humans believe he was an arrogant villain. Even John Byrne admitted in his *Byrne Robotics* forum that the Sub-Mariner was, in the writer/artist's words, an "egotistical creep" in the days before World War II. However, with the shadow of Hitler looming over Atlantis, the Scion of the Deep allied himself with Captain America and the original Human Torch as the Invaders, the team of heroes named by Sir Winston Churchill. Prince Namor has been on both sides of the sea, so to speak.

This behavior went on throughout Namor's career in comics beyond the Golden Age. His Silver Age revival saw him battle the likes of the Fantastic Four, the Avengers, and the X-Men, while teaming up with Dr. Doom, Magneto, and the rampaging Hulk. At the same time, the Sovereign of the Seven Seas was defending both Atlantis and the surface world from such villains as the Puppet Master and the Atlantean warlord Krang. As the Bronze Age dawned, Roy Thomas and other comic-book creators had the Sub-Mariner working together with Dr. Doom in *Super-Villain Team-Up*, and Silver Surfer, Dr. Strange, and the Incredible Hulk in *The*

PRINCE NAMOR THE SUB-MARINER™

Scion of the Deep or Royal Pain?

by James Heath Lantz



Avenging Son

Covers for three Subby first issues from the '80s and '90s: (front) the Bob Budiansky/ Danny Bulanadi for *Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner* #1 (Sept. 1984), plus *The Saga of the Sub-Mariner* #1 and *Namor* #1, discussed later in this article.

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All Together, Now

Bob Budiansky designed his four *Prince Namor* covers to subtly interlock into this combined image. Inks by Danny Bulanadi.

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Her introduction on the second panel of page 15 *Prince Namor* #1 is a favorite of Bob Budiansky's.

As *Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner* progresses, the title character is shocked by something he never thought he'd ever see: There are poor and destitute people in Atlantis. This strikes a chord in Namor as he recalls the time when he was without memories and without a home on the streets of New York. It is here that DeMatteis delves into a humbling, psychological layer in *Prince Namor*.

"I don't think anyone, until that point, had ever dealt with the emotional and psychological scars those years left on Namor," DeMatteis reflects. "Here was a proud man—royalty!—brought to his knees in every way. Living in poverty, shame, and degradation. What did that do to him? How did he deal with that? Well, one way he dealt with it was by partially repressing the memories, denying the full reality of what he'd gone through. That's the aspect of our miniseries that I remain most proud of."

French marine biologist and expert on underwater cultures and kingdoms Jacqueline Trufaut, with whom

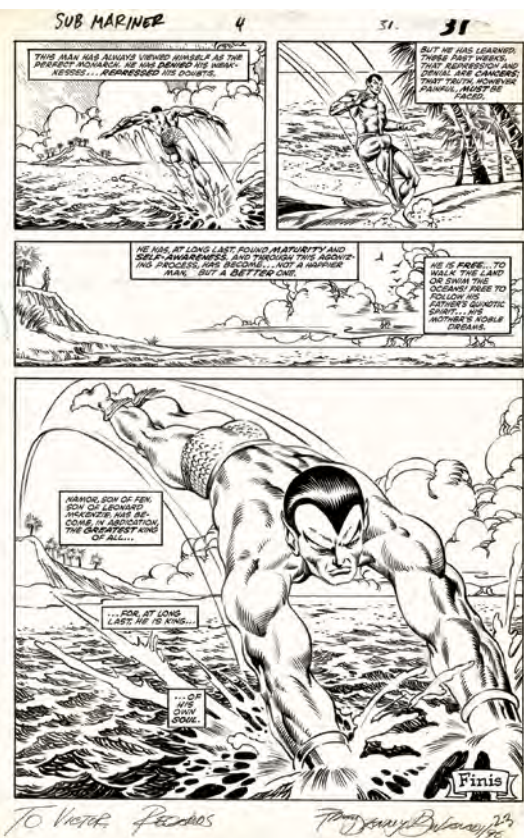
Subby has developed a romance, is the villain behind everything in the DeMatteis/Budiansky arc. In 1952, Atlantis had attempted to join the then-fledgling United Nations. Heated protests caused a shot to be fired. The bullet bounced off Namor and hit the father of a little girl, killing him. That little girl was Jacqueline Trufaut, whose mother had died the year before her trip to New York. Seeking revenge for her father's accidental demise, Jacqueline studied Atlantis to find a means to destroy the Sub-Mariner. She had found various talismans to create Dragonrider and Namor's other foes, whose abilities, the Sovereign of Deep realizes, mimic Neptune's children Triton, Proteus, Otus, and Ephialtes.

Jacqueline Trufaut holds a trident of Neptune similar to the one the Prince of Atlantis sometimes wields. It had turned her into a mermaid. The Sub-Mariner's only possibility for victory is bringing the femme fatale to the surface world. In doing so, Namor notices that Neptune's magic has lost its influence on the three-pointed spire and Jacqueline. Namor takes Neptune's mystical object, and Jacqueline becomes human again. With the woman he had thought he had loved defeated, the Emperor of the Deep returns to his undersea kingdom, only to be forced to abdicate the throne. Thus, once again, the Sub-Mariner has no home in Atlantis.

Return to Atlantis

Writer J. M. DeMatteis summarizes Subby's lessons learned on this stunning final page to the *Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner* miniseries. Original Budiansky/Bulanadi art to story page 23 of issue #4 (Dec. 1984), courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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ARCHIE'S ANTAGONIST,

ReggieTM MANTLE

BEYOND
Capes!

by Steven Thompson



What a Jerk!

Archie's about to become the coolest (and wettest) guy in Riverdale! Dan DeCarlo original cover art to *Reggie Wise Guy Jokes* #7, from the Heritage Archives, colored by Rich Fowlks.

TM & © Archie Comic Publications, Inc.



For going on 75 years, Reggie Mantle is one of the longest-running, surprisingly nuanced jerks in the history of comics. Reggie exists as the dark side to Archie Andrews' light. He was introduced way back in 1942 and shown from the beginning as a rich kid rival for Arch in sports, school, and most particularly romance. In every form of literature, every protagonist must have an antagonist, and in redheaded everyteen Archie's case, Reggie is most definitely it. His opposite number. His Lex Luthor. His Moriarty.

While Archie himself is a clear riff on radio's Henry Aldrich and the movies' Andy Hardy, neither of those two nice guy teens ever had a "Reggie." Oh, there were occasional bullies and friends who tried to put something over on those high school heroes, but there was no regular character performing that all-important role that Reggie was born to fill in Riverdale.

Although never known for its tight continuity, Archie Comics has kept its perennially 16- and 17-year-old

characters recognizable to each succeeding generation for three quarters of a century now. Archie Andrews is middle class, nice, friendly, helpful, a good athlete, an okay student, klutzy, love struck, a good son, and a good friend. Reggie Mantle is a good athlete, comes from a well-off but not-quite-rich family, has a definite sense of privilege, is a bit of a masher, is a world-class practical joker, and a major narcissist.

What Reggie is *not* is a bad guy. Not really. Well ... not thoroughly, anyway! "I'm proud of my reputation as a thorough nogoodnik," he says. Through the decades, though, he's shown over and over to have quite a bit of compassion underneath his haughty exterior. Again and again, Reggie is presented as a close friend of Archie when the two of them aren't fighting over female affections. The two constantly insult each other much of the time, but Reggie's mouth is most likely a way to cover up his own insecurities, something even he seems to realize sometimes.





OBNOXIO

Crazy Magazine debuted in October 1973, published by *Marvel Comics*. It was a deliberate attempt to emulate the success of other humor magazines, namely *MAD* and *National Lampoon*. Editor Marv Wolfman remembers, "Stan Lee wanted it to be more *MAD/Cracked*, where I wanted it more *Lampoon*. We sort of split the difference."

The mascot on the cover of the first issue was an unnamed, sad little character sporting yellow (later black) clothing and a black hat with a red band. He was depressing a plunger to blow up the logos of the aforementioned humor magazines, as well as those of *Cracked* and *Sick* thrown in for good measure. The cover was painted by the great Frank Kelly Freas.

During these early issues of *Crazy*, the unnamed character was shown in similarly gloomy situations, alternately painted by Freas and also by Nick Cardy. Cardy's rendition showed the character less gloomy and more mischievous. By issue #9 (Feb. 1975), the character was finally given a name and was the star of his own interior feature called "The Nebbish," written by Wolfman and drawn by Marie Severin.

As far as the original *Crazy* mascot went, there never was any flack from *MAD* in regard to the similarity in his design with that of the Nebbish character on the cover and in "The Shadow" story in *MAD* #4 (Apr.-May 1953), according to later *Crazy* editor Larry Hama.

Late in 1975, a major overhaul occurred at *Crazy*. Original editor Wolfman and follow-up editor Steve Gerber were reassigned to other comics (*Tomb of Dracula* and *Howard the Duck*, respectively) and the editorial reins of *Crazy* were handed over to Paul Laikin, who revamped the Nebbish as Irving Nebbish and made him a more happy-go-lucky character, with covers now painted by Bob Larkin.

By 1979, *Crazy* sales figures were in trouble and Laikin was soon replaced as editor by Larry Hama. Hama's intent was to turn *Crazy* around and make it more daring the way it was in the title's earliest issues by adding more racy content and new recurring articles. One of those recurring articles was a two-page feature called "Obnoxio the Clown Fun Page," which made its



ALAN KUPPERBERG

Portrait by Michael Netzer.

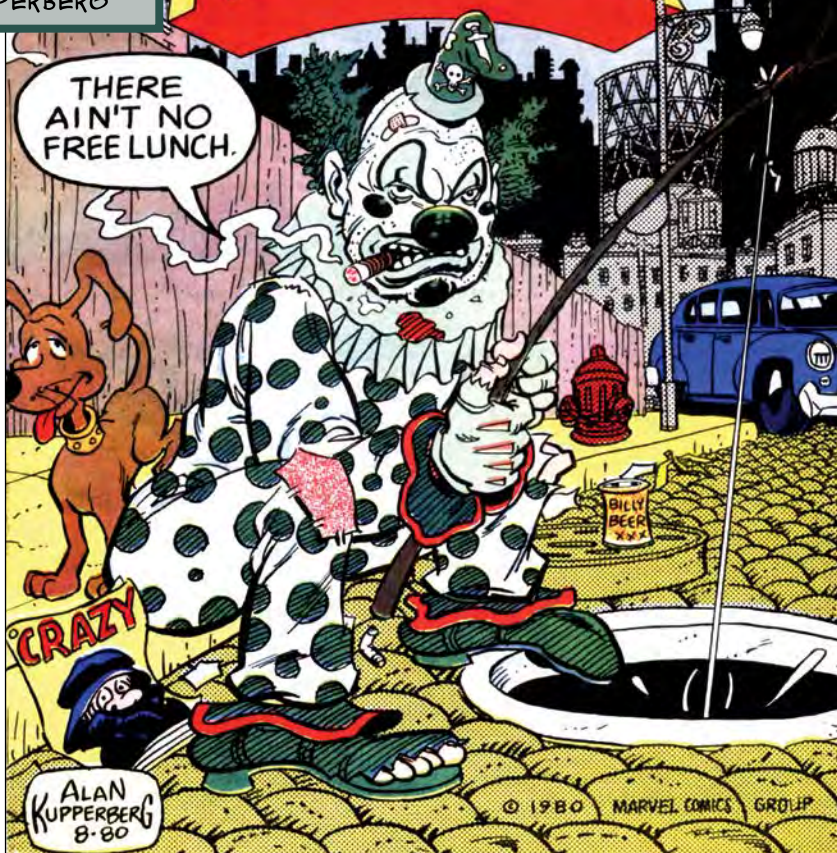
THE CLOWN

by Mark Arnold

\$1.25

April 1981
Number 190

COMIC READER



Put On a Happy Face

Obnoxio lights up the cover of *The Comic Reader* #190 (Apr. 1981). Cover art by the late, and missed, Alan Kupperberg. Art scans for this article courtesy of Mark Arnold.

Obnoxio TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

FlashBack!

The Death of Superman was mere months away. *Knightfall*, and the *breaking of the Bat*, were not far behind that. *Emerald Twilight*, which would see the Hal Jordan Green Lantern go mad and destroy his hometown of Coast City, would arrive in 1994.

Yet even in 1992, fun comics were getting hard to find. Despite this, plotter/penciler Keith Giffen released the *Ambush Bug Nothing Special* that August and one month later, a comic featuring a brand-new character: *The Heckler*. It was a series chock full of physical humor, running gags, and a healthy dose of crimefighting—not at all what readers of DC Comics at the time were expecting, but that’s exactly what they got. In other words, a fun comic.

WHAT’S UP, DOC?

This new creation, which lay somewhere between the anything-goes lunacy of Giffen’s *Ambush Bug* and a more mainstream super-title, proved to have roots that could be traced back to DC parent company Warner Bros.’ illustrious animated past.

Giffen explains, “I had a jones for a specific character DC was publishing, but knew the way I’d have handled said character would have been ... let’s say, off-putting to DC. So, I came up with a superhero version of the character. A superhero Bugs Bunny.” Giffen then adds, “From there on, the weirdness just kept growing and growing, and I for one could not have been more pleased.”

Co-scripter Tom Bierbaum recalls, “I never consciously imitated the animated wabbit (and didn’t realize that was part of Keith’s approach until a few issues in), but it worked well for me because Bugs is one of my all-time favorite characters.”

Bierbaum, along with his wife Mary, who had both worked with Giffen on *Legion of Super-Heroes*, were brought on board as scripters of *The Heckler*.

Giffen tells it thusly: “Tom and Mary and I

had enjoyed making a comic that was a little off-the-cuff, and we made sure that the humor was in the character, not in the plot. They didn’t want to do a comic that was a little off-the-cuff, and we made sure that the humor was in the character, not in the plot.

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BACK ISSUE #91

“All-Jerks Issue!” Guy Gardner, Namor in the Bronze Age, J. Jonah Jameson, Flash Thompson, DC’s Biggest Blowhards, the Heckler, Obnoxio the Clown, and Archie’s “pal” Reggie Mantle! Featuring the work of (non-jerks) RICH BUCKLER, KURT BUSIEK, JOHN BYRNE, STEVE ENGLEHART, KEITH GIFFEN, ALAN KUPPERBERG, and many more. Cover-Featuring KEVIN MAGUIRE’s iconic Batman/Guy Gardner “One Punch”!

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Heck, write your OWN stupid caption while you’re at it, okay?

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the Heckler™

A Jester of Justice Comes to Comics

by Tim A. Moen



KEITH GIFFEN

an off-the-cuff was in insisting

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ego Stu Mosely, an unsuspecting air like before.

