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THIS ISSUE: ODD COUPLES!

BACK ISSUE!

DENNY O'NEIL
GREEN LANTERN
CO-STARRING
NEAL ADAMS
GREEN ARROW

ENGLEHART'S JLA • DAREDEVIL & BLACK WIDOW
POWER MAN & IRON FIST • CLOAK & DAGGER • & MORE

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Volume 1,
Number 45
December 2010

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

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BACK ISSUE
The Retro Comics Experience!

Odd COUPLES ISSUE!

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BACK seat driver

by Michael Eury

Our cover by the remarkable Neal Adams has an interesting genesis: Neal created it a few years back as a specialty item for the Warner Bros. retail stores, but when WB closed those outlets the art had no home. Until now. Thank you, Mr. Adams, for sharing it with us, and special thanks to Jason Adams for his help in providing art for this issue.

We're happy to spotlight the trailblazing *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* in this collection of comics' "Odd Couples," as well as examine the work of the ultra-talented combo of writer Dennis O'Neil and artist Neal Adams through interview comments old and new. *GL/GA* is one of the Bronze Age's most re-readable classics—I've lost count of the times I've read *GL* #76, and I suspect I'm not alone. Given my passion for *GL/GA*, which back in the day anchored me to comics when I had reached a period when most kids were aging out of reading them, this issue is a personal favorite.

Superman TM & © DC Comics. Muhammad Ali TM & © Muhammad Ali Enterprises.

Another of Denny and Neal's collaborations featured an odd couple—Superman and (vs.) Muhammad Ali—and that 1978 classic is in the news this month. First, DC Comics, in cooperation with Muhammad Ali Enterprises, is reprinting the original mega-length tale (originally published as Superman vs. Muhammad Ali in *All-New Collectors' Edition* #C-56) in two hardcover formats, a comic-sized Deluxe Edition and tabloid-sized Facsimile Edition. And DC Direct is releasing a Superman vs. Muhammad Ali cold-cast porcelain statue with a logo base, sculpted by Jack Mathews and based upon the one-shot's cover art by Neal Adams (which worked from Joe Kubert's original cover to the series, you may recall).

O'Neil and Adams aside, there's much more interesting content this issue exploring several of comic books' most unusual duos—and if you're asking, *Where's Captain America and the Falcon?*, please see *BACK ISSUE* #22.

Green Hornet © 1936-2010 The Green Hornet, Inc. Book © 2010 Martin Grams, Jr. and Terry Salomonson.

A DIFFERENT GREEN TEAM

Another odd couple—the Green Hornet and Kato—will be in movie theaters before our next issue hits, courtesy of director Michel Gondry and starring Seth Rogen as the Green Hornet, Jay Chou as Kato, and Cameron Diaz as Lenore Case. The odd coupling of man-child comic Rogen and costumed crimefighters outraged many fans, but some, ye editor included, have been persuaded to give the movie a chance upon the merit of its impressive summer trailer.

If you're more of a Green Hornet traditionalist, however, or if you're green regarding the character's past and want to learn more, I heartily recommend the impeccably researched book *The Green Hornet: A History of Radio, Motion Pictures, Comics, and Television* by Martin Grams and Terry Salomonson (2010 OTR Publishing, LLC). This 812-page (!) reference volume raises the bar for this type of character guide with its in-depth episode and issue listings, behind-the-scenes information, and trivia.

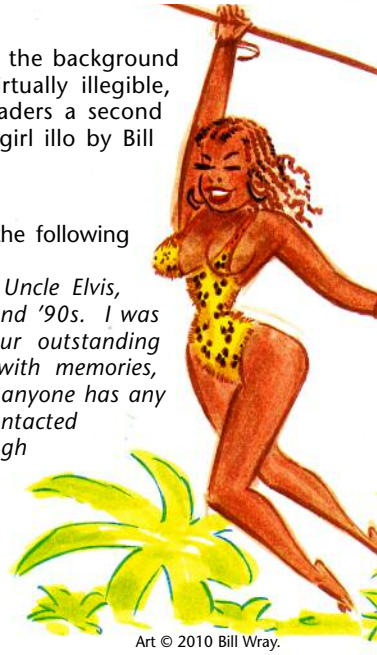
ROY AND GENE MAKE A SPLASH

Roy Thomas informs us that the penciled version of the splash page to *Wonder Woman* #288, which we showed on page 28 of issue #41, was later redrawn by artist Gene Colan to better mimic its inspiration, the Iron Man splash from *Tales of Suspense* #73. Pictured below are the published WW page and the Iron Man page.

Wonder Woman TM & © DC Comics. Iron Man TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

BUNGLE IN THE JUNGLE

BI #43's print job unfortunately made the background art to page 1's Table of Contents virtually illegible, so we're including it here to give readers a second chance to appreciate it. It's a jungle girl illo by Bill Wray, contributed by Jerry Boyd.



Art © 2010 Bill Wray.

UNCLE ELVIS

Mark Griffin has asked that we share the following announcement:

I am working on an article about Uncle Elvis, one of the big letterhacks of the '80s and '90s. I was hoping you could please post in your outstanding magazine that I am seeking people with memories, impressions, and/or pictures of him. If anyone has any he or she is willing to share I can be contacted at quakezine@hotmail.com *or through snail mail at Mark Griffin, 2164 Orndorff Mill Road, Russellville, KY, 42276. I'm not necessarily looking strictly for flattery from people so if someone was an "UnElvis" they are welcomed to comment as well.*

POWER MAN AND IRON FIST®

FlashBack

by Timothy Callahan

A man accused of a crime he didn't commit undergoes an experimental procedure in prison and emerges as a superhero of the streets. An orphan finds himself in a hidden mystical city and learns to become one of the world's greatest martial artists. Power Man. Iron Fist. Each a four-color offspring of the grindhouse cinema of the early 1970s. Iconic characters from the Bronze Age of Marvel Comics, and together they anchored a *Power Man and Iron Fist* series that ran for over eight knock-down, drag-out years.

Luke Cage, the man later to be known as Power Man, appeared before his metal-fisted partner, one year after the Blaxploitation renaissance that was 1971. In the wake of Melvin van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, and Richard Roundtree's turn as detective John Shaft in the first *Shaft* film, Archie Goodwin and George Tuska launched *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire* #1 (June 1972). The title character, co-created by Goodwin and John Romita, Sr., was a jive-talkin' action hero with a chip on his shoulder and a heart in the right place. He may have been a hero "for hire," but he was also a hero of the people—and his people were the denizens of the grungy corners of New York City, where pimps and gangsters ruled the land and a superhero with a mercenary mindset tried to clear his name while protecting those around him (and put a little money in his pocket when he could). Luke Cage was in the same universe as Spider-Man—even in the same city—but Cage's turf, in and around the Gem Theater, might as well have been in a different galaxy from that inhabited by Peter Parker. Cage's world was a rough-and-tumble one where switchblades were drawn quickly and a fall in the East River would ruin your chances of avoiding hepatitis.

Two years after the debut of Luke Cage, his soon-to-be erstwhile companion hit the comic-book scene. Millionaire's son Danny Rand, raised in K'un L'un by the likes of the Thunderer, learned to master his chi and inherit the mantle of the Iron Fist. One year after the death of the legendary Bruce Lee in 1973, during the height of what used to be called the "Chopsocky" movie genre, Iron Fist premiered in, appropriately enough, *Marvel Premiere* #15 (May 1974), in a story written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Gil Kane. Though born of trash—though fondly remembered—cinema like Luke Cage, Iron Fist patrolled a different type of dangerous street. His back alleys were loaded with kung-fu assassins and feral villains. His allies were just as dangerous, with their skill in edged weaponry and their penchant for sass. Supporting-cast members Colleen Wing and Misty Knight, sometimes known as the Daughters of the Dragon, were as intriguing as Iron Fist himself.

The Grindhouse Dynamic Duo

Luke Cage, before he was dubbed Power Man, and Danny Rand, a.k.a. Iron Fist. Details from this odd couple's respective debut covers: *Hero for Hire* #1 (June 1972; cover art by John Romita, Sr.) and *Marvel Premiere* #15 (May 1974; cover art by Gil Kane and Dick Giordano).

Two-in-One

Original/production cover art for the first issue to bear both heroes' names in the title, by Dave Cockrum. The main figures are photostats from Cockrum's earlier, rejected version of the cover in which Cage and Rand are busting through a brick wall. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

GRINDHOUSE DYNAMIC DUO

Perhaps it was inevitable that Luke Cage—by then known as Power Man—and Iron Fist and would team up for an extended run. Or maybe it was just that Power Man and Iron Fist were the last two Blaxploitation/Chopsocky characters left standing at Marvel by the late 1970s, long after the crazes had died down in cinema. But no matter the reason, Iron Fist joined Luke Cage in *Power Man* #48 (Feb. 1978), and stayed on as the series changed its title to *Power Man and Iron Fist* with issue #50 (Apr. 1978). From then on, Luke Cage and Danny Rand were inseparable. Until death did them part.

JO DUFFY

Former Marvel staff editor and longtime writer of *Power Man and Iron Fist* Jo Duffy recalls the decision-making behind the team-up of the grindhouse dynamic duo: "Finally the day just came that neither one could quite support his own book, and that was the basis on which they were put together. And I think the reason that I wound up taking over the series when Chris Claremont couldn't do it was because I really wanted it. I was absolutely crazy nuts about both those characters individually and I was dying to get them to work together." Writer Claremont, still a few years away from his *X-Men* heyday, shepherded Iron Fist through his solo *Iron Fist* stories, and wrote the three-part tale that brought the two heroes together to wrap up *Power Man*'s run and launch the pair in *Power Man and Iron Fist* #50 and beyond. But Claremont only lasted until issue #53, and after a couple of fill-in issues by writer Ed Hannigan and penciler Lee Elias, Jo Duffy and Trevor von Eeden came in as the new creative team.

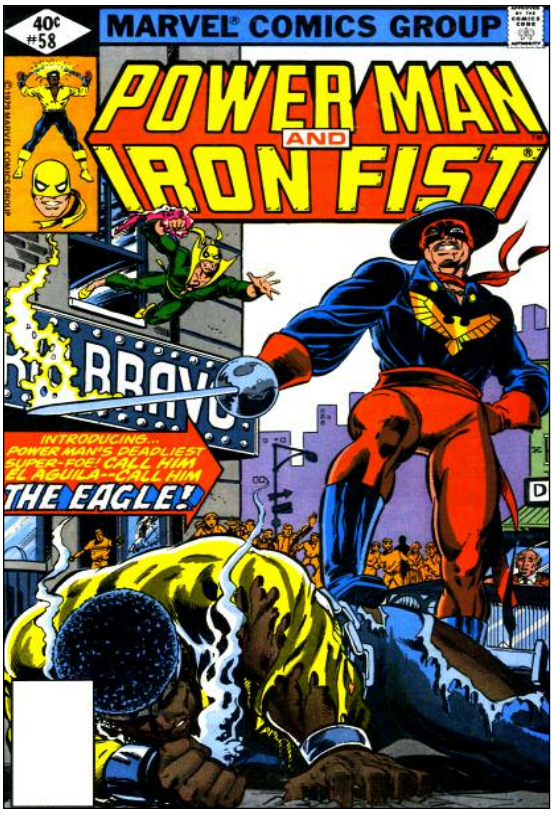
Duffy, who was credited as "Mary Jo Duffy" in the comic, explains how she ended up taking over for Claremont, even though she hadn't written much more than a few single fill-in issues for *The Incredible Hulk*, *Daredevil*, and *The Defenders* at Marvel up to that point: "At the time there were not multiple editors, really," says Duffy. "Marvel was still a small operation, and an editorial meeting consisted of about five people, and what had happened was that I was the only editor on staff who wanted to write that hadn't been given an assignment." Claremont was working on several books at the time, including *Ms. Marvel*, *Power Man and Iron Fist*, and *Uncanny X-Men*, and, according to Duffy, what then-editor-in-chief Jim Shooter expected "was that Chris would want to give up *Ms. Marvel* and give it to me because, 'Oh, this would be so fitting, the girl would get the girl book.' But I had no interest in *Ms. Marvel* and Chris *loved* her."

Claremont, with his tight schedule, was put in the position of choosing between his favorite characters. He couldn't continue to write all of them. "I think he would have hung onto Iron Fist if he could," says Duffy, "but what he wanted was to hang onto the X-Men first and foremost and then Ms. Marvel. And if he was going to give up anything it would be the one I wanted the most. But I think Chris really, *really* loved Iron Fist and the characters, and I don't think he was ever quite as crazy about Power Man as I was."

Duffy was joined by artist Trevor von Eeden for the as-advertised-in-the-previous-issue "new direction" of *Power Man and Iron Fist* with issue #56, but while she stayed on the title all the way until issue #84, von Eeden bowed out after only four issues. Von Eeden says, "I liked Luke Cage well enough—although he became too much of a cartoon character sometimes, with 'Sweet Christmas!'—but it was Iron Fist that really appealed to me, since I was a big martial-arts fan. Unfortunately, I didn't get as many opportunities to draw him in action as I'd liked."

Right at the start of Duffy and von Eeden's run, they told a two-part story that catapulted Power Man and Iron Fist into the superhero big time, giving them an epic story with the Living Monolith (and this was only one issue after the Ed Hannigan-penned issue that had Luke Cage working as an auto-show pitchman). It was a tale that also featured the X-Men, though Cyclops and company didn't end up doing a whole heck of a lot.

After the defeat of the Living Monolith at the hands of her protagonists, Duffy began telling stories that were more character-based and less involved in large-scale exploits. Not that her stories lacked strong



Marvel's "Zorro"

Writer (Mary) Jo Duffy introduced El Aguila, a.k.a. the Eagle, in *Power Man and Iron Fist* #58 (Aug. 1979). Cover art by Bob Layton.

plots, but instead of larger-than-life supervillains, Duffy populated her next few stories with street-level threats like El Aguila and urban terrorists. And von Eeden soon left the title, doing his last work on *Power Man and Iron Fist* #59 (Oct. 1979), though Trevor claims that his departure wasn't his choice: "My leaving Marvel," says the artist, "was due to my being fired by Jim Shooter, who'd told me specifically, when I'd first started there, to try and draw like Jack Kirby—and apparently wasn't happy that I didn't."

Marie Severin and Steve Leialoha filled in for an issue before artist Kerry Gammill came onboard with issue #61 (Feb. 1980). Presumably, Gammill had enough Kirby flair to keep him employed at Marvel for a long time, because he stayed with the series all the way through *Power Man and Iron Fist* #79 (Mar. 1982).

DUFFY MAKES HER MARK

During that time, Duffy put her own distinctive mark on the tone of the series, as she balanced the humor of the oddball team-up nature of the two male leads with stories that explored deep thematic concerns. She avoided stories that were simple superhero slugfests, and part of that was due to the nature of Power Man and Iron Fist's unique abilities, but part of it was her awareness of how to contrast various personalities off her lead characters, how to provide foils against which they could react.

She describes the conception of El Aguila—the street vigilante of the people with the bolero hat and the sword that can shoot blasts of electricity—and sheds light on the way she conceived threats for her heroes to face: "El Aguila was designed by Dave Cockrum and he had this big Zorro thing, and Zorro was another one of these characters that I was just crazy about and *Power Man and Iron Fist* was tricky," Duffy explains. "These were not guys who could fly. Their superpowers were defensive and if they were offensive, it was going to be hands-on, and it's remarkably tricky inventing a villain for somebody like that, because it can't just be a regular guy, because then it's just two big bullies beating up a regular guy—or a regular woman—and if it's somebody that's a big, huge supervillain then all the villain has to do is fire a raygun and fly away and the story's over."

Duffy goes on to say, "It seemed to me that someone like Zorro but with one or two powers would be about the right level and since Iron Fist was a little bit easygoing and unworldly, and Power

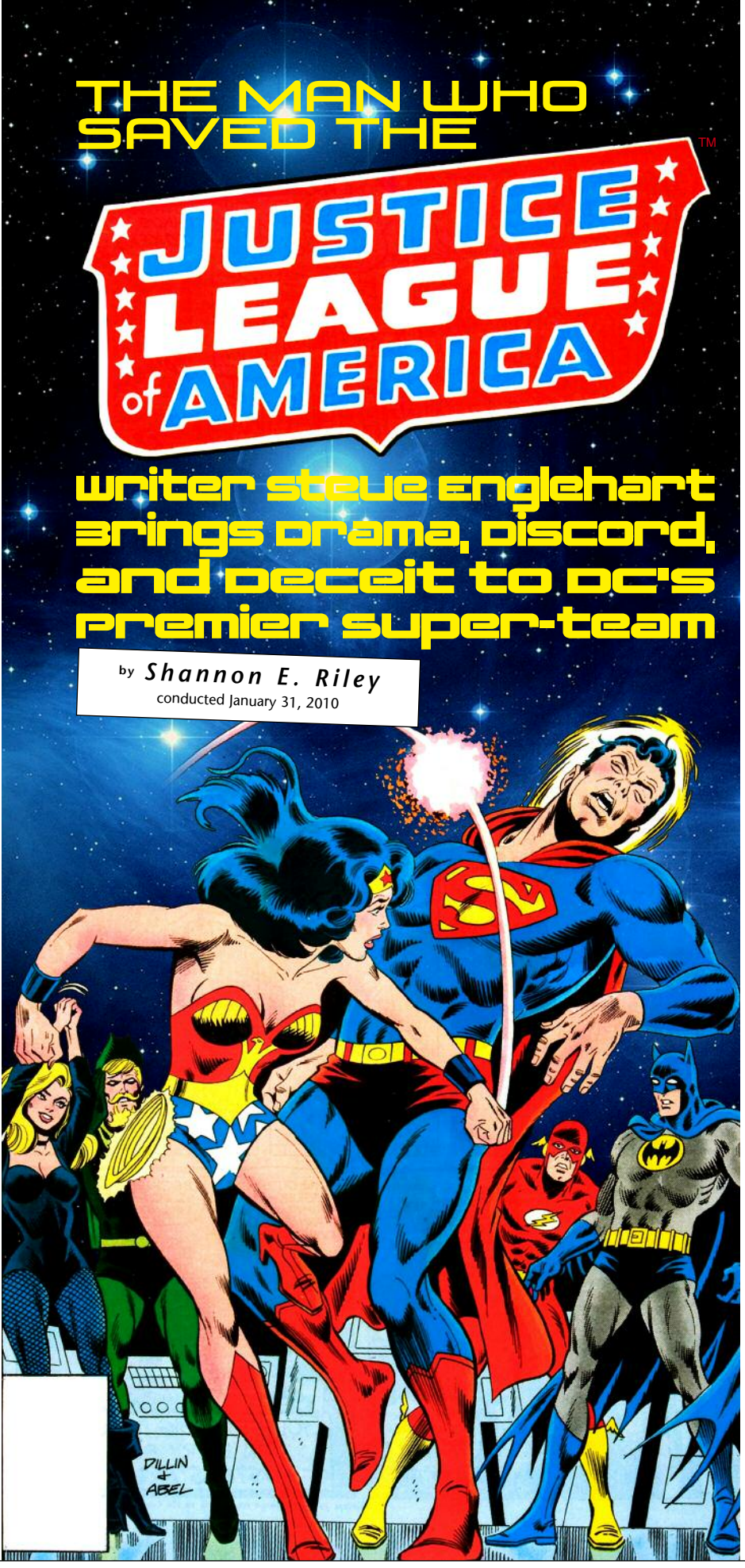
The Misty Knight Returns…

…and so does Colleen Wing—the Daughters of the Dragon—in #66 (Dec. 1980), with its energetic cover by future *Dark Knight* artist Frank Miller (with inks by Klaus Janson).

THE MAN WHO SAVED THE JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA™

writer steve englehart brings drama, discord, and deceit to dc's premier super-team

by Shannon E. Riley
conducted January 31, 2010



Threat + divide & conquer = tidy resolution. *In 1976, DC Comics'* Justice League of America *had a 15-year-old tried-and-true formula. A threat was introduced, heroes divided up into smaller groups to combat the foe, a tidy resolution was arrived at, and all was well once again. The team operated like a well-oiled machine. Villains as diverse as Starro, Despero, and Dr. Light were no match for the might and sheer power of a League united. Members were respectful, efficient, and trustworthy, rarely offering a strong word or differing opinion.*

In a word, things had gotten boring.

Boring not only in Justice League *but in other DC titles, as well. The publisher was losing top creators to Marvel in droves. DC needed a Hail Mary pass to raise flagging sales and infuse some creative adrenaline into its line.*

Enter veteran writer ***Steve Englehart****. After injecting action into* The Avengers *#105–152 (Nov. 1972–Oct. 1976) for Marvel, Englehart was ready to quit comics, travel Europe, and focus on writing novels. Just when he was about to walk away, he got the call that sucked him back in.*

His mission: save the JLA.

Over turkey sandwiches on a sunny January day, Steve and I talked second-stringers, unsung veteran artist Dick Dillin, sexism in comics, and how he slipped a beloved Marvel character into his Justice League *run.*

– Shannon E. Riley

SHANNON E. RILEY: ***Steve, for our "Odd Couples" theme I think it's extremely fitting that we discuss your year writing* Justice League of America*. For DC Comics in 1976, it was certainly a different approach to try to bring some Marvel flavor to these stalwart heroes—but then, what choice did they have?***

STEVE ENGLEHART: Well, that's what they asked me to do. DC was really at rock bottom at that point. All the people who were stars at DC had all gone to Marvel—Neal Adams, Gil Kane, Bob Brown. Until that point, DC had been secure/arrogant in their superiority. I started working at Marvel in the early '70s and I was only there a couple months before Marvel surpassed DC in sales for the first time. [For] pretty much 98 percent of my career at Marvel in that first run in the '70s, Marvel had surpassed DC in sales. DC really had its mind-set that "We're DC, end of story, and we've been DC since the '40s when we became number one with Superman and Batman, so we don't have to change. This is a temporary thing."

By '75, there were three or four years where they refused to change. All the people that were working for them started saying, "There's more stuff going on at Marvel. I'd rather go over there." So finally, in '75, they got rid of Carmine Infantino as the publisher and hired Jenette Kahn to fix it. So the first thing she did was hire me and try to hire John Buscema. Stan [Lee] outbid [for John Buscema].

Superman vs. Wonder Woman

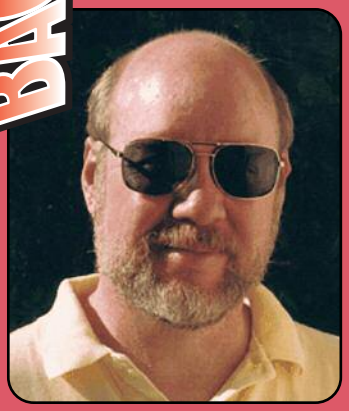
Writer Englehart added friction among the members of the JLA, as seen in this detail from the cover of *Justice League of America* #143 (June 1977). Art by Dick Dillin and Jack Abel.

WRITER

BACK ISSUE DATACARD

Beginnings:
Art assistant to Neal Adams on "The Soft, Sweet Lips of Hell!" in *Vampirella* #10 (Mar. 1971) / "Iron Man: D.O.A." in *Amazing Adventures* #12 (May 1972)

Milestones:
The Defenders / *Captain America* / *The Incredible Hulk* / *Vampirella* magazine (writing under the pseudonym "Chad Archer") / *The Avengers* / *Super-Villain Team-Up* / *Detective Comics* / *Justice League of America* / *Mister Miracle* / *Coyote* / *Green Lantern* / *Green Lantern Corps* / *Millennium* / *West Coast Avengers* / *Fantastic Four* (writing under the pseudonym "John Harkness") / *X-O Manowar* / *The Avengers: Celestial Quest* / *Batman: Dark Detective*



Works in Progress:
The Plain Man / *The Box Man* / *The Clock Man*—continuing the story started in his first novel, *The Point Man*, published by Tor Books

Cyberspace:
steveenglehart.com

STEVE ENGLEHART

Big Change
JLA expanded its page count with Englehart's first issue, #139 (Feb. 1977). Cover art by Neal Adams.

I was leaving Marvel anyway. I was pissed off at Marvel. My brief then was to basically save DC, come in and fix everything. So they wanted me to write *Justice League* and do whatever I did—whatever mysterious thing I did—to turn the company around with all their major characters. I said yes I would do that, but I also really wanted to write *Batman*, per se, so that's how that worked. But the original concept was to come in and fix these characters.

RILEY: ***You'd had a really successful run on* The Avengers*, but you mentioned you were ticked off at Marvel. What happened and why did you leave?***

ENGLEHART: When I started at Marvel, Stan was still the editor. Within six months, it had become "Stan Lee Presents" and Roy Thomas [had stepped in as editor]. In fact, Roy Thomas had been the de facto editor for about a year or so, even though Stan was still listed. Then Roy did it for several years. Roy was more a creative guy than an executive guy. He didn't like some of the business decisions that were made. Around '73, he left. Then they went through this whole range of revolving [editors]—Marv Wolfman was editor for a while and Len Wein was editor for a while. Archie Goodwin was editor for a while. Then it became Gerry Conway. Gerry Conway has gone on to be a producer on the *Law & Order* TV franchise. He's come quite a way, but he was a young guy in those days. He basically said, "I'm the editor at Marvel. I can do whatever I want to do. I want to write *The Avengers* and I want to write *The Defenders*." So he just took them. He took *The Avengers* away from me and he took *The Defenders* away from Steve Gerber. We said, "This is not the collegial atmosphere that we've all been working under."

I quit. I got into Marvel because of the whole Bullpen, the whole ambience that you could see from the readers' side. When I came in the door, it was exactly like that inside. Marvel was a wonderful place to work. This was a big change, this kind of "I have power" [mentality]. Stan could do anything he wanted to but he didn't. Roy could take anything he wanted to [but didn't]. It wasn't that Draconian. I just said, "Screw it. This is not what I want to do." In fact, my original idea was, "Fine, I'm done with comics. I'm going to go write novels." Along the way, after quitting Marvel, before writing [*The Point Man* novel], I got a call from Jenette Kahn who said, "Let's have lunch and talk about what you can do for us." I really didn't want to do comics a whole lot anymore. I had already planned that I was going to go to Europe and travel. My wife actually had done that, when she was young and single. She had gone for a year with a backpack and done that kind of stuff. I hadn't done that. I'd been writing comic books. I had lunch with Jenette. I said, "Okay, yes, I'll fix *Justice League* for you, but I'm only going to do this for a year."

RILEY: ***So that was the agreement?***

ENGLEHART: Yeah. I would come in and do whatever it is I do. Since I'm pissed at Marvel at the moment, I'll try to do the best damn thing I can do for DC. In a year, I'll be gone. Now, I had this idea that if I was actually going to do a story, and I was going to do lots of characterization, I couldn't do all that in a standard-sized comic book. That's why I came up with this idea of doing the double-sized thing. I still really like that concept. It was really fun to have that extra-long story each month. It was still a

GERRY CONWAY ON ENGLEHART LEAVING MARVEL

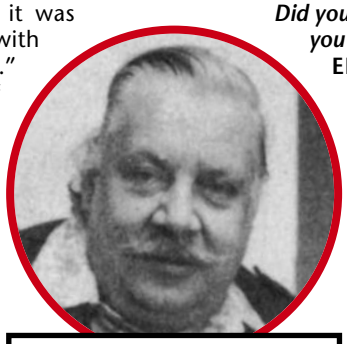
"Being pretty young … I probably wasn't as smooth in my dealings with the writers and artists as I might have been [as editor-in-chief]," Gerry Conway notes. Ultimately, though, Conway's job was to keep Marvel's books on schedule; *The Avengers*, in particular, "was perennially late to the printer, which was costing Marvel a lot of money."

Gerry explains, "I asked Steve for a commitment to have his next plot for *The Avengers* in by Friday, so that George Pérez could get started on it by Monday. I gave Steve a Friday deadline for one reason—so that, if he didn't make it, I'd have time over the weekend to plot a replacement issue. I made it clear to Steve this is what I'd do. He agreed to have the plot in by Friday." Conway recalls that Steve's plot didn't arrive by the agreed-upon day. "I called him, and he denied he'd ever made any commitment to delivery by Friday—as far as he was concerned, George didn't need the plot until Monday, so he wasn't going to deliver a plot until Monday. When I told him this wasn't what we'd agreed, so I was going to write a replacement plot myself, and he'd have to miss an issue, Steve responded [that] a fill-in story would ruin the overall storyline, and he accused me of trying to take over the book. He said if I insisted on doing a fill-in, he'd quit.

"Well, if I was going to have any authority as an editor, I had to do what I said I'd do. Maybe someone else would have backed down and given Steve another chance to deliver his plot by Monday. I didn't feel I had that option. So Steve quit *The Avengers*."

Conway, himself, exited Marvel not long after Englehart. As he explains, "I met a great deal of entrenched opposition and resentment from some people whose egos were offended by the idea I'd been put in charge. Maybe that was because I'd left Marvel for a year and then returned to the top job. Maybe it was because of my personality. Whatever the reason, the hostility I encountered made the job intolerable, and I left after about a month and a half. "

monthly book. Dick Dillin [had] been with DC for years and had been doing *Justice League of America* for a long time. In those days, everything was assigned. You didn't go to the editor and say, "I've got George Pérez and we'd like to do a project." It was just like, "You're going to do *Justice League* and somebody is going to draw it. We'll let you know who that is." In this case, I knew it was going to be Dick Dillin. I came up with this idea, "Let's do 34 pages a month." They said okay and that was sort of the end of it.



DICK DILLIN

RILEY: ***Dillin's output was pretty amazing. He penciled* JLA *from issue #67–183 (Aug. 1968–Oct. 1980), with only two exceptions. Issue #153 (Apr. 1978) was penciled by George Tuska and then Dillin did the framing sequences for Juan Ortiz in issue #157 (Aug. 1978). That's 12 solid years of work on one title. Not to mention your double-size issues!***

ENGLEHART: [Only much later] did I get the concept [that] somebody called up Dick Dillin and said, "Hey, Dick, you're going to draw twice as many pages every month." Dick, as a working professional in those days, said, "Okay, I get twice as much money then." He did the job. That's what people did in those days. It was a job, but it was an adventure. It never occurred to me, "How is this going to impact Dick Dillin?" It was just like I do the writing and somebody else does the art. Dick not only did 34 pages a month, they're good pages! He's not just banging it out with half the effort. Because it all worked, it all really worked. I loved writing those longer stories. I loved Dick Dillin's artwork … he was old school. I like old school.

RILEY: ***What was the creative process like with Dick? Did you collaborate on stories with him, or did you write the script in advance?***

ENGLEHART: It was all scripted in advance. Marvel, in those days, worked on what was called the "Marvel style." Marvel doesn't do this anymore either, but Marvel style, a writer comes up with a concept and writes down everything the artist needs to know. The artist draws that and then you come back and put in the dialogue. I like that way best. You're taking the chance that the artist isn't going to tell your story quite right, but you do get to see the pages that the reader is going to see. You can write everything to what's going to appear in print. If you do script in advance, you can be damn sure that everything that you want in the story is going to be there, but you don't know how he's going to do it.

This is just an anecdote, but I started out as an artist working with Neal Adams. Neal had a script from somebody. Neal is an Artist (with a capital "A").

Sometimes, It Takes a Deadman to Save a Sea King!

The Unexpected Teaming of Aquaman® and Deadman®

What the--?!

by John Schwirian

At one time, there were a multitude of comics on the racks whose entire purpose was to bring together unusual heroes and have them team up to solve a crime. Books like *The Brave and the Bold*, *Marvel Team-Up*, *DC Comics Presents*, and *Marvel Two-in-One* come instantly to mind.

However, before team-up books began to populate the comics stands, it was rare that two heroes paired off—especially since one had to take on the role of guest-star in another hero's solo book title. This meant, of course, that the glory went to the series' star. To have the guest-star actually save the day, well, that was practically unheard of! Yet such was the case in the bizarre teaming of Aquaman and Deadman in *Aquaman* #50–52 in 1970, where not only did Deadman save the world, but nobody, including Aquaman, knew that Deadman was there!

The circumstances leading up to the meeting of the Avenging Ghost and the King of the Sea were just as strange as the printed story itself. When the team of writer Steve Skeates, artist Jim Aparo, and editor Dick Giordano took over *Aquaman* with issue #40 (July–Aug. 1968), they made waves by presenting a nine-part story arc in a time when two-part story arcs were rare. Having immediately shaken up the status quo with what has come to be known as the "Quest for Mera," they were left with the quandary: What to do next?

Writer Steve Skeates was happy that the year-and-a-half epic was over and took a breather with a dramatic single-issue tale. "I had come to believe," Skeates explains, "that the best comic-book stories were those that were short and straight-to-the-point. Instead of struggling to make chapters resemble short stories, why not just write short stories instead?" So if Skeates wanted to stick with short stories, why did *Aquaman* #50 launch into a three-issue arc, complete with a Deadman backup feature?

"Illness on the part of Jim [Aparo] was the primary cause of all this," Skeates elaborates. "Illness which had already been responsible for Jim not inking the 46th issue and for forcing me to transform my 23-page final episode into two 16-page episodes [#47

Dead in the Water

Our ill-fitted duo as rendered by Neal Adams: Aquaman is excerpted from the cover of *The Brave and the Bold* #82 (Feb.–Mar. 1969), one of the few times Adams has drawn the Sea King; and Boston Brand comes from the slipcase cover for the *Deadman Collection*.

Deadman Begins

Of the three issues with the Deadman backup, only *Aquaman* #50 (Mar.–Apr. 1970), with the first installment, mentioned it on the cover. Cover art by Nick Cardy.

and 48]. Jim had done a great job on issue #49, but it had been a struggle, and therefore (instead of having a relapse) he wanted to cut back on his workload. To accommodate Jim, Dick [Giordano] came up with the idea of doing an arc consisting of three 16-page episodes, and therefore, rather against my will, there I was, back working on a multi-part piece!"

The story opens with Aquaman talking to his brother and arch-enemy the Ocean Master under a flag of truce, only to be ambushed by a band of strange aliens who zap him with an strange black energy that casts him into an alternate dimension—a rather clever plot device, actually, as it allowed Skeates to explore several themes of prejudice and intolerance while simultaneously giving Aparo the chance to draw all sorts of "psychedelic" settings and scenes. Now that the plot for the first 16 pages were set, one problem remained for Giordano: What to do with the remaining seven pages?

The explanation was provided by Steve Skeates in a text piece published in *Aquaman* #52: "Days later, while Dick was still pondering this problem, the word somehow leaked out that there were now seven free, clean, and unused pages in the back of the *Aquaman* book. And suddenly, all of the younger writers (Gerry Conway, Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, and Mike Friedrich) started to deluge Dick's office with new series ideas."

Gerry Conway confirms this statement. "I don't recall this, but it sounds about right—any opportunity to write something back then would've brought all of us young snots out in force," Conway says. "'Young Snots" was the affectionate and ironic term the 20-something Denny O'Neil coined to refer to those of us who were younger than him. I think I was 18 at the time, so the term certainly applied to me."

However, Giordano wasn't interested in a new, untested series. He wanted an established character to use in a way that would tie in closely with the events in the Aquaman story. The idea of using Deadman evolved during a conversation with his old friend, Neal Adams.

Deadman was a character created by Arnold Drake and Carmine Infantino to take over the lead feature in *Strange Adventures*. In his first appearance [issue #205, Oct. 1967], Boston Brand, a circus acrobat whose gimmick was to perform death-defying stunts in a costume and make-up that made him resemble a corpse, was murdered during an aerial performance one night by a mysterious man with a hook for a hand. Brand's ghost was imbued by the goddess Rama Kushna with the power to possess the living and was sent forth to avenge his murder. Jack Miller took over the scripts and Neal Adams the art with the next issue, with Adams eventually assuming the writing as well. Deadman ran for 12 issues in *Strange Adventures*, only to be replaced by Adam Strange. Deadman's story in the pages of *The Brave and the Bold* [issues #79 and 86], in Batman/Deadman team-ups connecting the Hook to the League of Assassins. After that, Deadman had nowhere left to go, and seemed destined for comics limbo. Giordano, who had edited the last five *Strange Adventures* of Deadman liked the character and suggested that Neal Adams revive him for the backup in *Aquaman*.

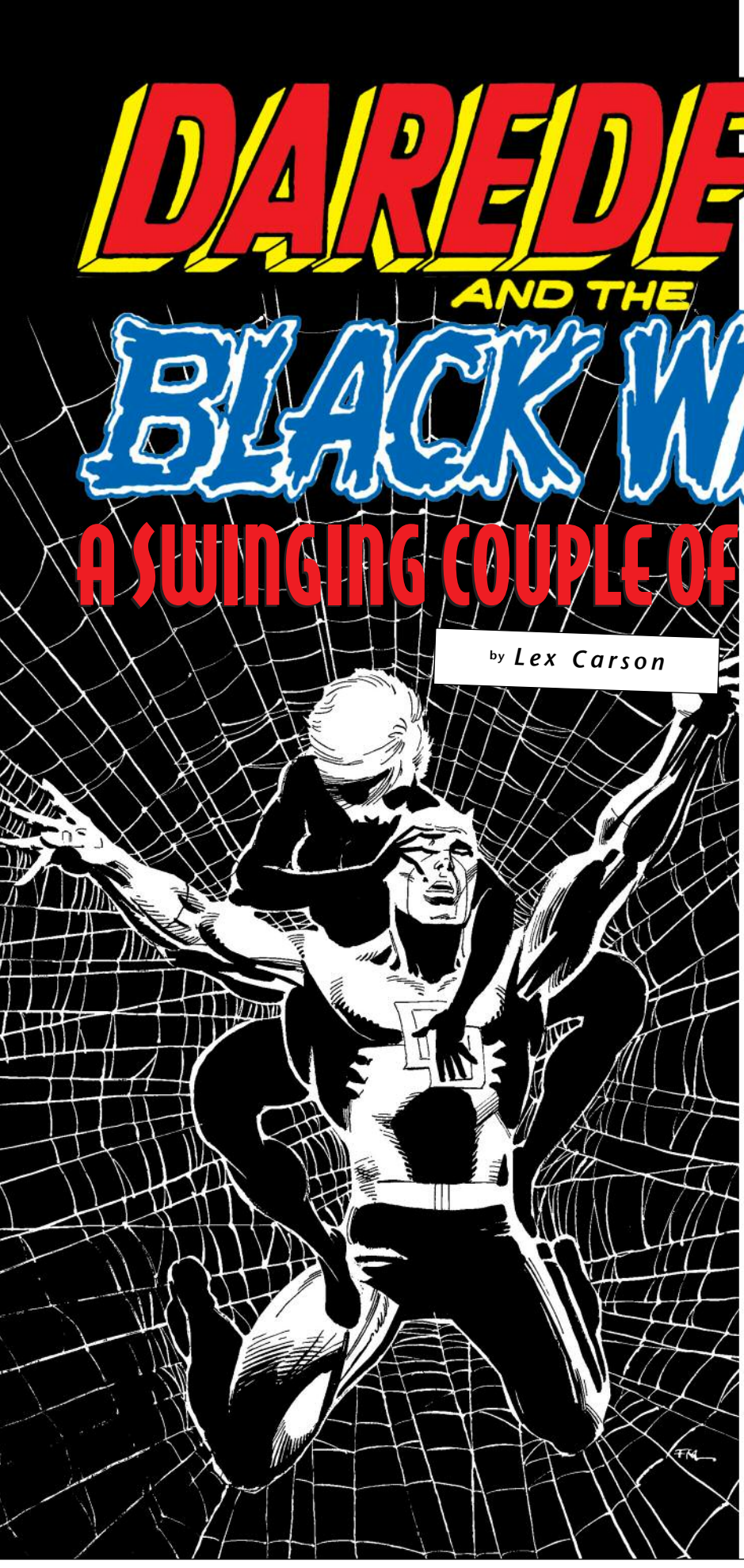
"Unconsciously, or consciously," Neal Adams recalls, "Dick and I never wanted Deadman to go away. But the bullsh*t that was going on at DC was too heavy to counter. And there was always something interesting to do. Dick had come to trust me as a writer, as did Julie [Schwartz], who shared the office with Dick. So I was in very friendly territory. Dick told me about the backup opportunity, and although I was busy on other stuff, we agreed that it might be a good idea to do a Deadman backup. Actually, agreed is not correct—agreed after a time would be correct. I didn't think a backup was a good idea for Deadman. He's a lead feature type character, not a backup.

"So while Dick was proposing the idea, I was ruminating that I wasn't enjoying these long, drawn-out, Skeates stories," Adams says. "You could almost feel the burden that Steve was under, as he dragged these things out. Dick had brought both Denny [O'Neil] and Steve over from Charlton. And I chose Denny, because his stories chugged along,

DAREDEVIL® AND THE BLACK WIDOW

A SWINGING COUPLE OF CRIMEFIGHTERS

by Lex Carson



At the height of the United States' Cold War with the Soviet Union, take a straightlaced, somewhat conservative, blind New York lawyer and pair him with a Russian jet-setting femme fatale, and you easily have a very unlikely relationship taking place. That's what happened when Matt Murdock, also known as the costumed crimefighter Daredevil, began a partnership with the former Soviet and S.H.I.E.L.D. spy Natasha Romanoff, a.k.a. the Black Widow.

The concept was intriguing. Murdock had only one romantic interest since *Daredevil* #1 (Apr. 1964). On the other hand, Romanoff had not only been previously married, but also had a crush on Tony Stark (a.k.a. Iron Man) and more recently had been romantically linked with the Avenger known as Hawkeye! Be that as it may, in the early 1970s, Daredevil—"the Man without Fear"—boldly coupled with the Black Widow.

Since his first appearance in the Marvel Universe, Matt Murdock had displayed his passion only for his secretary Karen Page. Although Daredevil's later scribe Frank Miller would reveal that Murdock had an earlier affair of the heart with his college classmate Elektra Natchios, in 1971 readers only knew of Matt's persistent, sometimes unrequited interest in Karen. And at this particular time, the two had agreed to end their relationship. Page had recently moved to Los Angeles to pursue an acting career. It was a career move that did not include accommodations for Matthew Murdock. Similarly, the Black Widow had also recently parted ways with her long time romantic interest, Clint Barton, a.k.a. Hawkeye.

Oh, What a Tangled Web…

Writer/artist Frank Miller returned Black Widow to the pages of her ex-partner/lover's title in *Daredevil* #188 (Nov. 1982). Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

The Streets of San Francisco (below) Our Bay City heroes as rendered by fabulous Fred Hembeck. From the collection of Patrick Starnes. (right) The "new" Black Widow debuts in *Amazing Spider-Man* #86 (July 1970). Cover by John Romita, Sr.

LOVE AT FIRST WIDOW'S BITE

Daredevil's writer at the time, Gerry Conway, explains his vision for the two: "It was my idea to team up Daredevil and the Black Widow, mainly because I was a fan of Natasha, and thought she and Daredevil would have interesting chemistry. I'm not sure what I based this on, other than my desire to bring the characters together. I'm a sucker for redheads!" Natasha Romanoff (now identified as Natalia Romanova in the current Marvel Universe) had recently been updated in *Amazing Spider-Man* #86 (July 1970)—her hair, traditionally curled short and black, was now a shoulder-length dark hue of red. Shortly thereafter, the Black Widow became Marvel's first female character to become a regular star in her own feature in *Amazing Adventures vol. 2*. This series began with much acclaim with writer Gary Friedrich and tremendous artwork from John Buscema. However, after eight issues the Widow had been replaced after much greater fan interest was shown in Neal Adams' "Inhumans" feature in the same title.

Daredevil's own title was also struggling to stay solvent. Despite some great Gene Colan artwork, and recent appearances by Spider-Man, Iron Man, the Sub-Mariner, and Nick Fury in the series, sales were at such a low that Marvel announced in its Nov. 1971 "Bullpen Bulletins" page that Daredevil and Iron Man would be combining into one title with both heroes as co-stars. Gerry Conway recalls, "As far as I know, *Daredevil* wasn't in imminent danger of cancellation, but there was a feeling the series was treading water and needed something to boost it creatively." The *Iron Man and Daredevil* double-feature magazine never came to fruition. What *did* take place was the "boost" Conway was hoping for. The pairing of Daredevil and the Black Widow would prove a commercial and creative success with the Widow becoming a recurring guest star from issues #81 through 124, and serving as a titled co-star of Daredevil's title from issues #93 to 108.

Part of Matt Murdock's initial attraction to Natasha might have been the Widow's new look. She had been a part of the Marvel Universe for years, initially wearing formal dresses and box hats and later appearing in a Soviet-designed ensemble featuring suction boots, a cape, fish-net stockings, and a cat-mask. However, with her relaunching in *Amazing Spider-Man*, the Widow had designed herself a new outfit to be the envy of her jet-set crowd, complete with seamless anti-gravity boots and a S.H.I.E.L.D.-designed "Widow's Web" for swinging and climbing. Her face was unmasked, and her costume was a jet-black, skin-tight, extreme form-fitting jumpsuit.

This look of the Widow has been the depiction comic readers are most familiar with. The anti-gravity boots have been either removed or ignored by the Widow's writers and editors over the years. However, the costume design has endured. In her sultry portrayal of the Black Widow in 2010's blockbuster *Iron Man 2*, Scarlett Johansson wore a similarly snug black battle-suit. In the film, upon first seeing the Black Widow, Tony Stark quips what Matt Murdock may have also initially thought of the Black Widow: "I want one!"

The stars seemed aligned in New York City when the Black Widow first saw Daredevil battling the Owl and subsequently being knocked unconscious and dropped from an aircraft into the Hudson River. She instinctively plunged into the deep and rescued the unconscious DD. Later, when Daredevil recovered, he was unaware of the Widow's heroic actions. It took some time for him to later encounter the Widow and thank her for her help.

What Matt saw first in Natasha was a woman in need of an attorney. While battling Mr. Hyde, who later was revealed to be an android creation of the alien Mr. Kline, the Black Widow appeared to throw Hyde to his death from a New York City rooftop. Appearances can be deceiving, and Murdock was convinced of the Widow's innocence. This did not prevent New York's district attorney and Matt's best friend, Franklin "Foggy" Nelson, from vigorously prosecuting the Black Widow to the fullest extent of the law. It was later revealed that Foggy was being blackmailed by Mr. Kline to pursue the Widow's prosecution. Matt saw that Natasha was in need of good legal defense and opposed his former law partner and friend to represent the Widow.

GO WEST, YOUNG HEROES!

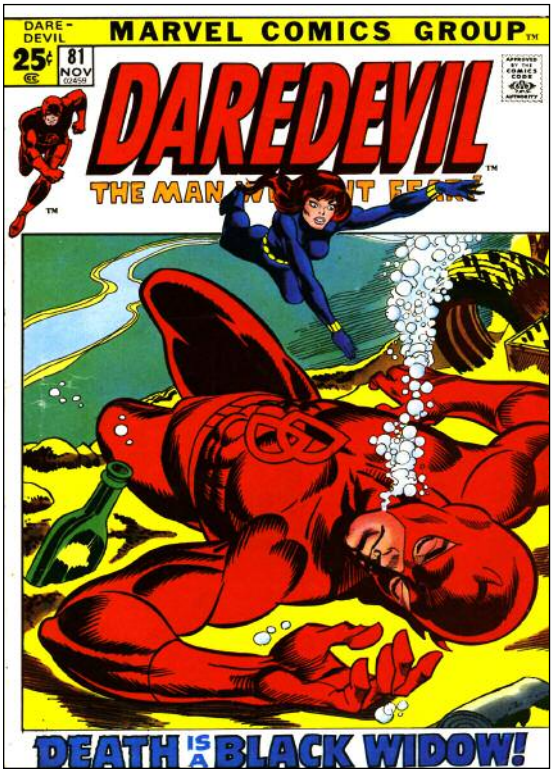
The Black Widow's appearances in Daredevil's title allowed her much more character development. In *Daredevil* #82 (Dec. 1971), readers learn that Natasha's last name is "Romanoff." In the next few months, it is established and reinforced that the Black Widow is an independent, self-reliant, and highly competent heroine, whose only need for a partnership with Daredevil is because she enjoys his company. However, despite her apparent self-confidence, the Widow continues to ponder her long-standing, self-proclaimed "Widow's Curse" to hurt any person that she comes to love. She often wonders if this will continue to be her self-fulfilling prophecy with Matt Murdock.

Murdock is able to eventually able to clear the Widow's name. Matt quickly reveals his secret identity to Natasha and has an immediate appreciation of her love of adventure and crimefighting. Natasha is a far cry from Karen Page, who never understood Murdock's love of superhero antics and vigilante justice. Following the Widow's much-publicized trial, Daredevil takes advantage of a generous offer from the apparently wealthy Natasha to get away from the Big Apple. Murdock leaves his estranged friend Foggy Nelson and New York City behind and relocates with his new partner, the Black Widow, to San Francisco. The Widow had acquired a one-year lease on a scenic North Shore mansion in the Bay Area.

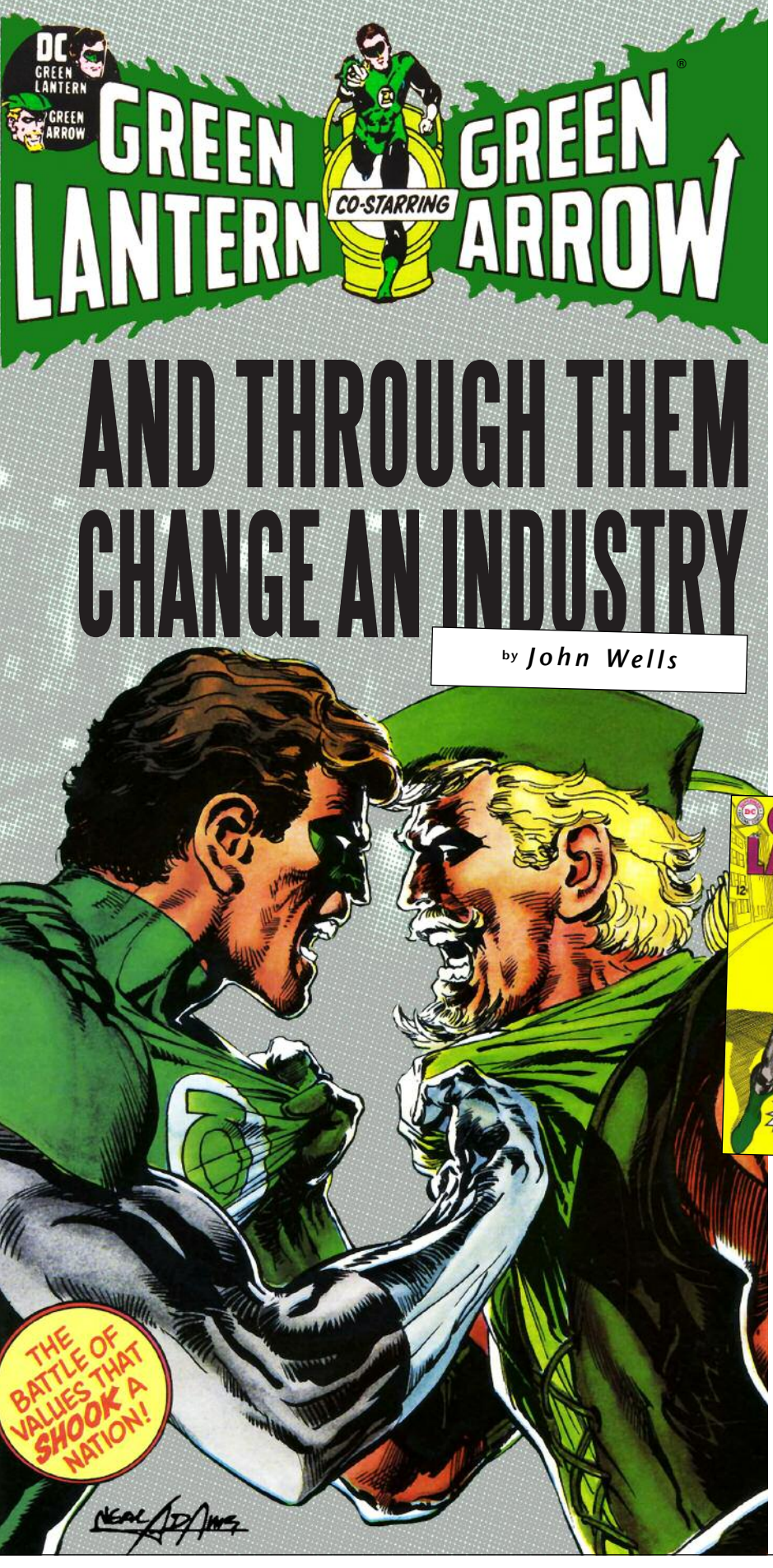
Writer Gerry Conway explains the migration to the West Coast: "I'd just spent some time in San Francisco a month or two before, and I'd fallen in love with the city as a location. I thought the idea of Daredevil, who spent so much time leaping and diving from rooftop to rooftop, doing this in such a hilly city could make for spectacular visuals. I'll admit the idea of a blind hero jumping around the rooftops that gave Jimmy Stewart vertigo appealed to me as well. Also, it would allow him to be *the* costumed hero for an entire city, which would allow him to flourish without having to defer to more super-powered heroes like Spider-Man or the Fantastic Four."

Conway orchestrated the Widow's introduction to the series in *Daredevil* #81 (Nov. 1971) and oversaw their move to San Francisco and early adventures of the duo. Conway says, "San Francisco's cultural identity was very film noir. Gene Colan's art had terrific noir aspect, and I believed the San Francisco local would play to Gene's artistic strengths."

Some might believe that Matt Murdock and Natasha Romanoff were the first unwed male-and-female partners of the Marvel Universe. However, that distinction goes to master of many sizes, Hank Pym, and Janet van Dyne, a.k.a. the Wasp. Reed Richards and Sue Storm, of course,



Natasha Dives In (left) Black Widow made such a splash in *Daredevil* #81 (Nov. 1971) that she was soon co-starring with the titular titan. Cover by Gil Kane and Frank Giacoia. (below) An undated "Dare Devil" painting by the late—and underappreciated—Don Newton. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).



The right writer. The right artist. The right time. *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* was that odd mix of fire and water, liberal and conservative, reality and fantasy, that proved that sometimes opposites *do* attract.

Writer Denny O'Neil and artist Neal Adams had arrived at DC Comics independently of one another in the latter half of the 1960s shortly after the company's merger with the Kinney National Services. The gregarious Adams brought a realistic advertising-industry slickness to his comics work—mostly covers at first—and quickly began knocking down the barriers previously applied to page layouts and color palettes. A journalist by trade, O'Neil was comparatively neutral in making his own mark on comics, going so far as to employ the pseudonym Sergius O'Shaughnessy when penning a more personal social commentary piece like "Children of Doom" for Charlton Comics.

At DC, O'Neil passed on an offer from editor Julius Schwartz to work on Batman. The character "was still in the throes—or in the death throes, perhaps—of the camp phase, and that didn't have very much appeal for me," O'Neil told Mike W. Barr in *Amazing Heroes* #50 (July 1, 1984). "I chose to do *Green Lantern* for him instead because that was a character that I had remembered enjoying as a kid." O'Neil's Lantern, secretly radio broadcaster Alan Scott, was mostly out of the limelight by this point, having been succeeded by test pilot-turned-insurance salesman Hal Jordan in 1959. What both had in common was an emerald power ring that enabled them to create energy constructs, deflect projectiles, fly, and generally occupy the higher end of the superhero scale.

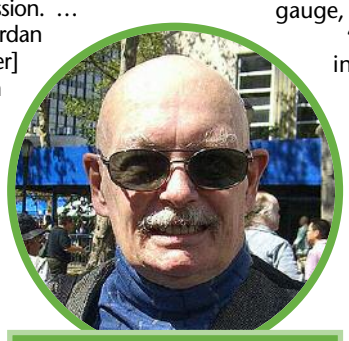
Portentously, O'Neil's debut story in 1968's *GL* #63 (left) sported a cover by Neal Adams, the artist's first and only contribution to the title prior to issue #76. Writer and artist continued to hover in the same orbit without actually coming into direct contact. Adams, for instance, created an entirely new look for all-but-dormant DC bowman Green Arrow in a Bob Haney-scripted story in *The Brave and the Bold* #85 (Aug.–Sept. 1969) while O'Neil had the hero's alter ego Oliver Queen lose his fortune in *Justice League of America* #75 (Nov. 1969), imbuing him with the start of a new empathy for the common man (and romantic feelings for widowed teammate Black Canary). When O'Neil and Adams finally collaborated on the landmark Batman story "Secret of the Waiting Graves" (*Detective Comics* #395, Jan. 1970), the result was electrifying.

Polar Opposites

Detail from the cover of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #1 (Oct. 1983), one of the many, many reprint editions featuring landmark GL/GA stories.

On *Green Lantern*, O'Neil became part of a rotating band of writers, fairly typical of a Schwartz comic but increasingly maddening to readers like Alan Brennert. "I'm beginning to think Hal Jordan is a bit of a psycho," Brennert declared in #75's letter column. "Within the past year, he's had two jobs, three emotional upsets over girls, and about 65 fits of depression. … O'Neil pictures him as more of a Hal Jordan masquerading as Green Lantern; [Gardner] Fox pictures him as Green Lantern masquerading as Hal; and [John] Broome is the equalizer, blending both personalities. It stands to reason that when three totally different viewpoints combine in a series, the result is hash."

More generally, DC's audience was being increasingly hijacked by upstart Marvel Comics, whose cool factor and acceptance of the younger generation stood in sharp contrast to stories like *Green Lantern* #71's "Hip Jordan Makes the Scene" that characterized long-haired types as foolish and dishonest. Even Hal Jordan's regular artist and co-creator Gil Kane bailed on the book effective with #75, initially moving to *The Flash* before becoming ensconced at Marvel.



DENNY O'NEIL

THE GREEN TEAM

Between 1968 and 1969, *Green Lantern*'s sales had dropped a precipitous 24% and sell-through of a typical issue averaged 48% (versus a comparatively healthy 60%). Even allowing for the fact that comics sales data was notoriously spotty and difficult to gauge, the outlook was grim.

"The book was faltering," O'Neil recalled in *the Amazing World of DC Comics* #4 (Jan.–Feb. 1975), "and Carmine [Infantino, then DC's president] said, in effect, 'If you have any ideas, go with them.' I had for a long time wanted to see if we could combine a journalistic concern with the flamboyance and fantasy that's part and parcel of super-hero concepts. By happy coincidence, Julie—and Neal Adams—were thinking along approximately the same lines."

Fresh off writing an anti-pollution two-parter in *Justice League of America* #78–79, O'Neil prepared to take aim at other societal ills. "We would dramatize issues. We would *not* resolve them," O'Neil wrote in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #1 (Oct. 1983). "We were not in the polemic business. I was smart enough to know enormously complex problems couldn't be dissected within the limitations of a 25-page comic book and humble enough to know that I didn't *have* solutions anyway."

For O'Neil, Green Lantern represented the ultimate policeman, empowered by the blue-skinned Guardians of the Universe to enforce law and order. Although originally portrayed as a cocky blue-collar ladies' man, he was about to become a symbol of the more privileged Establishment.

"As I mulled possible plots, I realized that Green Lantern needed a foil, someone to argue with. Green Arrow was the logical choice, and not because of their first names, either," O'Neil elaborated in 1983's *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #1. Noting the archer's new costume and changing fortunes, the writer asked, "Why not give him a new characterization, particularly since the old one was so undefined that nobody really knew what it was? He could be a lusty, hot-tempered anarchist to contrast with the cerebral, sedate model citizen who was Green Lantern. They would form the halves of a dialogue on the issues we chose to dramatize."

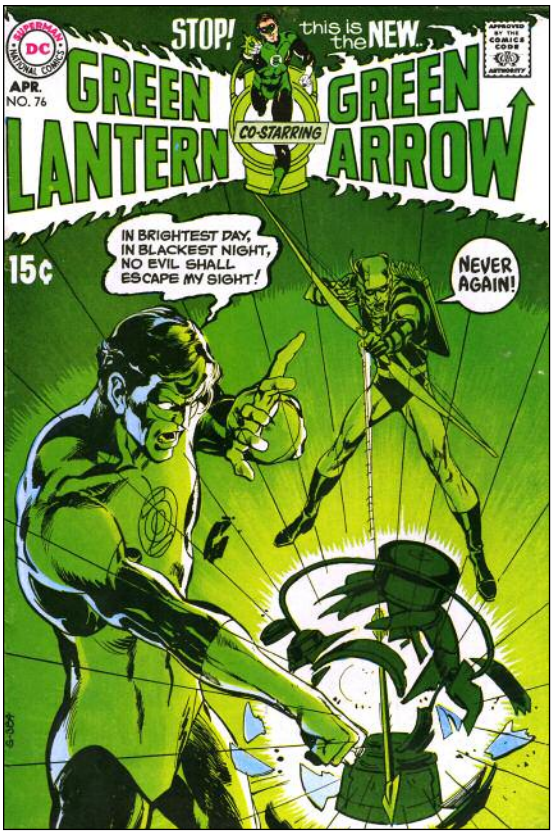
Of his first story combining the heroes, O'Neil related in *AWODCC* #4, "I didn't think Neal was going to draw it at the time; I thought it was going to be Gil Kane. For that story I wrote two pages of character and atmosphere notes, something very rare for me, since I generally leave that up to the artist. It so happened that Adams got the script, got—I assume from what he said—turned on by it, and other people got turned excited about it too: Julie … Carmine…"

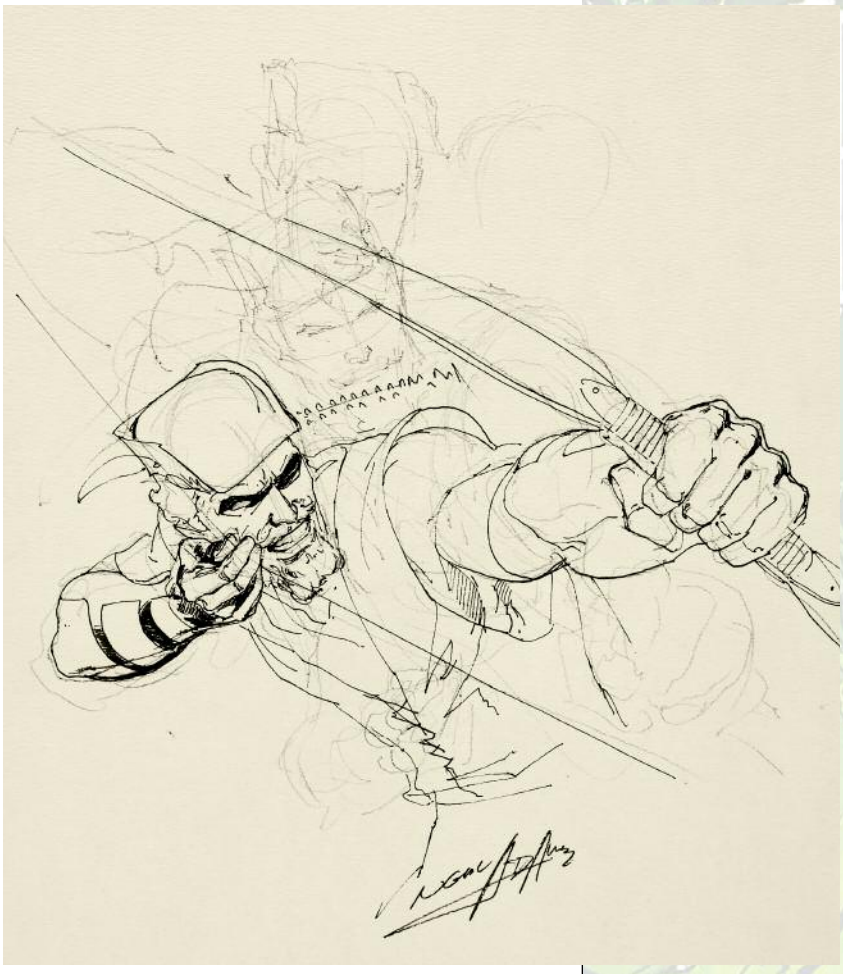
Learning of *Green Lantern*'s impending cancellation, Neal Adams had begged Julius Schwartz to allow him to draw the final issues. "All I wanted to do was draw Gil Kane's character and live up to his image of it," he explained in *Comic Book Marketplace* #40 (Oct. 1996). "Julie told me I had too much to do, but I knew I could do it. And I wanted to do it. I had done so much with Batman that everybody's eyes were bugging out. So what was I going to do with Green Lantern?" After reading O'Neil's script, he knew.

"Stop!" screamed the cover of issue #76 (cover-dated Apr. 1970). "This is the new Green Lantern co-starring Green Arrow." Below the revised logo, GA shattered GL's power battery with an arrow in an iconic image

In Brightest Day

The Emerald Crusader in a painting by the incomparable Neal Adams. This original artwork is available for sale at *www.nealadamsstore.com*. Special thanks to Jason Adams for the scan.





illuminated only in shades of green. It was February 19, 1970 when the issue was released. A day earlier, the trial of the Chicago Seven had ended, the latest outgrowth of protests over the war in Vietnam. Campus unrest was nearing a flashpoint. Discrimination. Poverty. The Haves versus the Have Nots. And two Emerald Crusaders were going to confront it all head-on.

Playing off a line in the oath Green Lantern used while recharging his power ring, "No Evil Shall Escape My Sight" asserted that Hal Jordan "[had] been fooling himself." Rescuing well-dressed Jubal Slade from being beaten up in a Star City slum, GL was astonished when the locals—including Green Arrow himself—turned on him. In fact, the Emerald Archer explained, the "victim" was a slumlord intent on tearing down his properties to erect a parking lot and the poor tenants' frustration and anger was beginning to erupt. Insisting he was only doing his job, GL was silenced when an old black man stepped forward to ask him a question.

"I been readin' about you … how you work for the *blue skins* … and how on a planet someplace you helped out the *orange skins* … and you done considerable for the *purple skins*. Only there's *skins* you never bothered with … the *black* skins. I want to know … *how come*?! Answer me *that*, Mr. *Green Lantern*!"

Shoulders slumped, head drooped, GL stammered, "I … can't…"

Technically speaking, as many would observe in later years, it was a bum rap but those three panels took on greater significance as a symbol of the comic-book industry's renewed embrace of social issues and a world that was filled with more than just white skins.

"It was pretty much all instinctive," O'Neil asserted in *Comic Book Marketplace* #56 (Feb. 1998). "I knew that we had to set up the rest of the series, though we had only a vague idea of what it was going to be at the time, and we needed to bring about this humbling of Green Lantern. A lot of the credit goes to Neal because, I think I said in the shot directions something like, 'This has to be a great face,' and he certainly gave me a great face." Adams added in *CBM* #40, "A lot of people think this was drawn from a photograph. I would crave for a photograph."

Joining forces with Green Arrow, the chastened GL helped expose Slade as an attempted murderer. The Guardians of the Universe had taken a dim view of Green Lantern's earlier strong-arm tactics against the slumlord ("This human has committed no crime!") and were prepared to reprimand him when his bearded partner jumped in with a stunning monologue that invoked the spirits of the recently assassinated Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy.

"Something is *wrong*! Something is *killing* us all…! Some hideous moral cancer is rotting our *very souls*!" GA cried. Green Arrow challenged the Guardians to "come off your perch" and experience humanity firsthand. Incredibly, they listened. Dispatching one of their number to Earth in the guise of a human, the Guardians commanded him to join Hal Jordan and Oliver Queen on a cross-country journey in a pickup truck to search for America. In doing so, they echoed the trek of Dean Moriarty and Salvatore Paradise in Jack Kerouac's landmark 1950s novel *On the Road*.

"So we went with it," O'Neil continued in *AWODCC* #4. "We decided that for as long as it lasted we would plot stories from the headlines and from our personal concerns about what was happening in the United States and the world." Adams heartily concurred, noting in *Comic Book Marketplace* #56 that "it was a real opportunity for Denny to go and kick out. And it was an opportunity for me.

Battling Bowman

(left) One of the comics that defined the early Bronze Age, *Green Lantern* #76 (Apr. 1970). Art by Neal Adams. (right) A 1980s Green Arrow sketch by Adams. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

SHATTERED DREAMS: VISION® AND THE Scarlet WITCH

by Karen Walker

FlashBack

No Ordinary Romance

Marvel's oddest romantic couple, as seen in details from two *Avengers* covers: the Vision from issue #57 (Dec. 1967), drawn by Big John Buscema; and Scarlet Witch from #47 (Oct. 1968), by Don Heck and Frank Giacoia.

Has there ever been a more tragic relationship in comics than that of the Vision and the Scarlet Witch? The persecuted mutant girl and outcast android came together despite so many obstacles. Their "love conquers all" story was inspiring. For many years the couple was a great example of a strong, committed relationship in the Marvel Universe. And then … things suddenly unraveled. How did it all go so wrong?

The couple's eventual downfall seems to boil down to one thing. The successful nature of their relationship was based on the belief that the Vision was human, or at least, human enough. But when that belief was denied, the relationship began to collapse like a house of cards.

The Vision's creator Roy Thomas had made it abundantly clear that the Vision was a synthetic *man*, essentially a human soul trapped inside an artificial body. Thomas' successor Steve Englehart expanded on that and developed a much more complete Vision. However, John Byrne, as writer/artist on *West Coast Avengers*, nullified this concept by having the android torn to bits, his mind wiped clean and his emotions removed, making him a walking computer, devoid of any personality or humanity. Byrne then went on to have the couple's children disappear, declaring that they had basically been imaginary. To complete this tragedy, Wanda went mad, and even evil for a time.

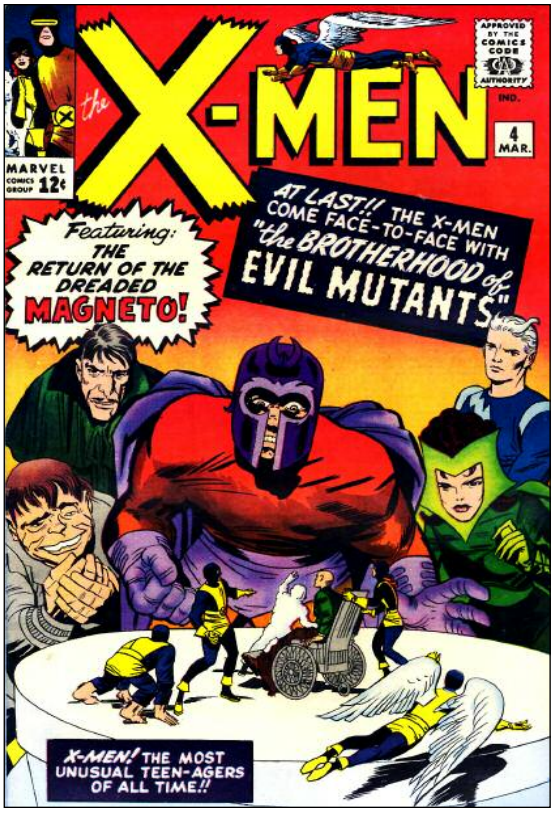
The two former lovers were driven apart due to these circumstances. Even though the Vision later regained his personality and emotions, it seemed there was no going back—not for the couple, and not for the fans. Although the Vision had once been one of the most popular Avengers, after his deconstruction he never returned to his former prestige, and when he was destroyed in the *Avengers Disassembled* storyline, there was no outcry. On the other hand, plenty of fans seemed distressed over Wanda being the *source* of the team's destruction, but by this point in time, after her repeatedly being shown as mentally fragile, most fans accepted the possibility of it.

Both characters had suffered major revisions that drove them down disastrous paths. Today the Vision as we knew him no longer exists, and the Witch may be one of the most dangerous and hated people in the Marvel Universe.

Of course, it all started out very innocently…

Bewitched

(above) Scarlet Witch sketches by Steve Rude, from 2001, courtesy of Jerry Boyd; and John Byrne, from the 1970s, courtesy of Anthony Snyder (*www.anthonysnyder.com*). (right) Wanda's debut, in *X-Men* #4 (Mar. 1964).



A WITCH IS BORN

The Scarlet Witch started her life as a reluctant villain. Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby as a member of Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants in *X-Men* #4 (Mar. 1964), Wanda and her brother Quicksilver (a.k.a. Pietro) were young mutants who were in desperate need of guidance and protection. Magneto offered this to them. But they didn't share his goal of wiping out humanity, and so they wound up elsewhere—no, not as X-Men, which would have made sense. Instead, the siblings became members of the Avengers!

Wanda and Pietro became one-half of "Cap's Kooky Quartet," along with Captain America and new Avenger Hawkeye, who also had a checkered past. The foursome, while under-powered compared to their predecessors, became a formidable team and worked together for years. Wanda and her brother were a core part of the team for a long period.

In the early days it often seemed like Wanda existed only to serve as the sole female member of the team or as a potential love interest for one or more of her male teammates. Her power—her "hex" ability—was poorly defined and unreliable. She did possess certain admirable character traits, though, such as a tremendous respect for Captain America and a loyalty to the Avengers as a whole.

The relationship between brother and sister was always a difficult one. Pietro assumed a possessive role with Wanda—overprotective at best, and dominating at worst. Wanda at times seemed to resent this but mostly assented to his wishes. Her personality at this time (the 1960s) was much more passive than it would later become (a characteristic of most of the heroines of that era).

In issue #53 (June 1968), the two mutants left the pages of *The Avengers*, not rejoining the team until issue #75, nearly two years later. In the meantime, a new member would make a dramatic debut.

THE ANDROID AVENGER

Not long after Wanda and Pietro left, the Vision premiered, in *Avengers* #57 (Oct. 1968). Writer Roy Thomas, feeling stymied by the editorial dictum that he not use any of the "Big Three" of Captain America, Iron Man, and Thor, wanted to create a new hero for the team. Thomas really wanted to use the original Golden Age Vision, a spooky, extra-dimensional being, but editor Stan Lee insisted that the new character be an android. Thomas took a best-of-both-worlds approach, used some of the look and mysterious nature of the original, and came up with the android Vision. The story, "Behold … the Vision!" introduced the Vision as the creation of Ultron, the Avengers' robotic foe. The Vision rebelled against Ultron and helped the Avengers defeat him. Although they might not have been entirely comfortable around the brooding android, the Avengers apparently recognized his innate heroic nature, and by the next issue they offered him membership.

Even though he was quickly accepted into their ranks, the Vision was still an outsider. He was isolated from society by the fact of his being an android, or "synthozoid," as Thomas preferred to call him. In issue #58, as the Avengers ponder admitting him into their ranks, Goliath (a.k.a. Hank Pym) explains the Vision's condition: "Not an android—but a synthozoid! You're basically human in every way … except that your body is made of synthetic parts!"

When the Avengers make the happy announcement that the Vision has been voted in as a member, he says incredulously, "You accept me … even though I'm not truly a human being?" Pym replies, "Is a man any less human because of an artificial leg … or a transplanted heart? We ask merely a man's worth … not the accident of his condition!" With these few words, we learned that "even an android can cry!"

Hands Off My Sister, Pal!

(above) This early flirtation between the Vision and the Scarlet Witch is objected to by Wanda's brother, Quicksilver. From *Avengers* #93 (left, Nov. 1971), by Roy Thomas, Neal Adams, and Tom Palmer.

However, despite this acceptance, there were times when even his teammates had their misgivings. Repeatedly, the Avengers themselves commented on the android's cold nature or chilling voice. Although he appeared aloof and unfeeling, nothing could be further from the truth. The Vision was capable of having the same emotions as any person, but he lacked the experience to know how to deal with them. He even wondered if his emotions were "real" or merely simulated by his android brain. The knowledge that his brain patterns were based on those of Simon Williams (the presumed-dead Wonder Man) also troubled him deeply, and the situation would only worsen when Wonder Man actually came back to life!

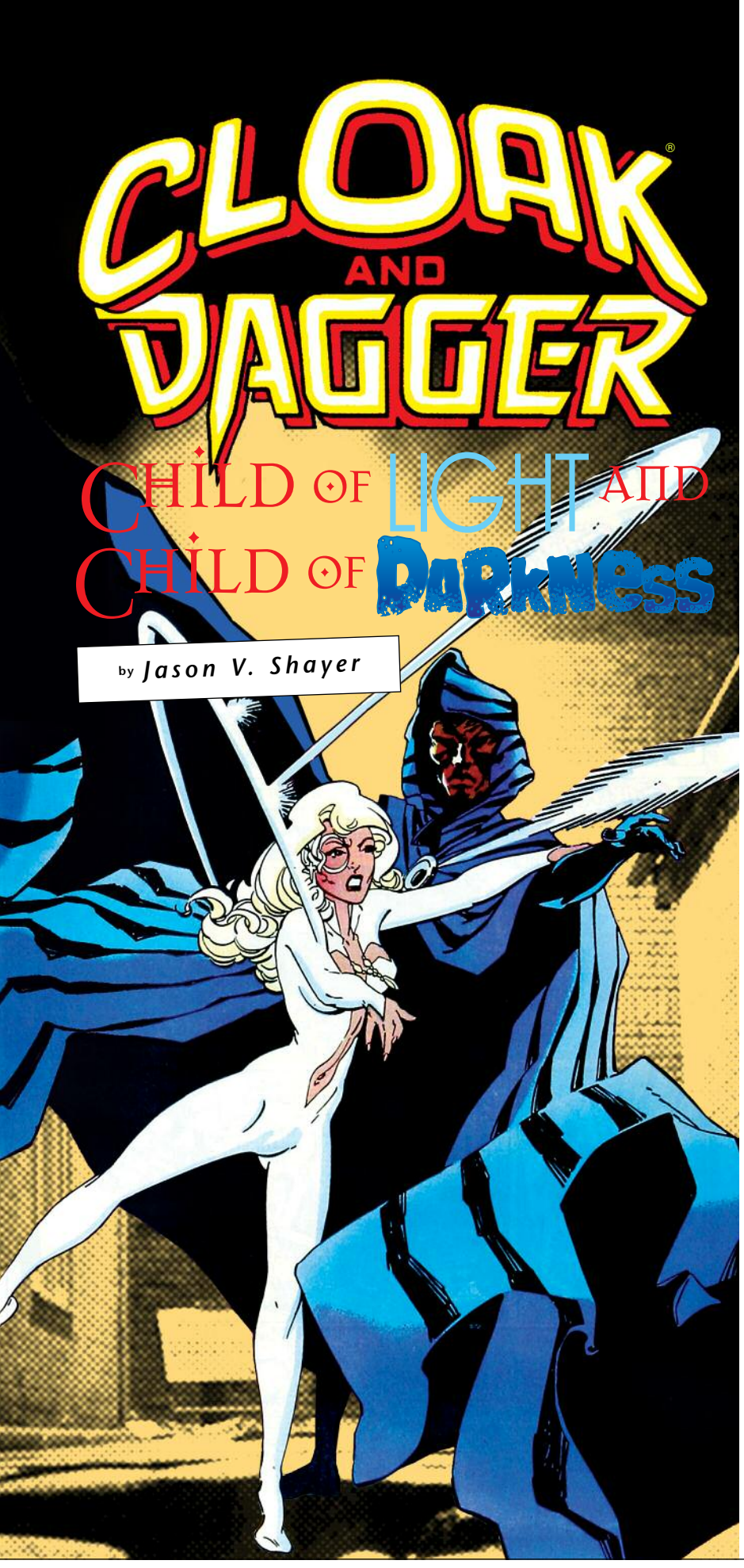
FORBIDDEN LOVE

Just as we had learned an android could cry, we would discover that he could also fall in love. When Wanda returned to the team in issue #75 (Apr. 1970), the Vision seemed to take a special interest in her, and she in him. Writer Thomas explains how the romance came to be: "I felt that a romance of some sort would help the character development in *The Avengers*, and the Vision was a prime candidate because he appeared only in that mag … as did Wanda, for that matter. So they became a pair, for just such practical considerations. It would also, I felt, add to the development I was doing on the Vision's attempting to become 'human.'"

Initially there were only some barest hints that the two were attracted to each other. This plot thread seemed to languish unexplored for quite some time. It was not until the time of the epic Kree-Skrull War that we truly saw these two express their feelings for one another.

In issue #91 (Aug. 1971), while being held captive by the Kree emissary Ronan, their feelings for each other finally come to the surface. Wanda tells the Vision that "…nothing matters—just as long as you weren't harmed. I know that now." Just as they are about to kiss, the Vision suddenly pulls away. "No!" he cries. "It must not be." When she asks why, he says because he is an android—"a mere copy of a human being."

While the Vision may have felt unworthy to return Wanda's love, he still couldn't prevent himself from caring deeply for her. When she is captured by the Skrulls during the war, he fights like a man possessed to save her. After the Avengers board the Skrull flagship (*Avengers*



FlashBack

"The darkness and light are both alike … I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

– Psalms 139:14

From their first appearance in the pages of* Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man *#64 (Mar. 1982), it was plain to see that Cloak and Dagger were not your usual Marvel characters. They were two single-minded teenagers with incredible powers driven to root out the evils of the drug trade at any cost.

Cloak and Dagger were diametrically opposed, one of light and one of darkness, but forever bound together. Wronged and victimized, they didn't set out as heroes, but rather as vigilantes, eager to exact their revenge. They struggled to be heroes as they tried to temper their vengeance with justice. They were devoted to each other, but often found themselves at odds. It was these conflicts, both internal and external, that made Cloak and Dagger so compelling.

The 1980s was the comics generation of the teen with titles like *The New Teen Titans*, *The New Mutants*, and *Power Pack* exploring real youth issues. In 1982, First Lady Nancy Reagan kicked off her "Just say no" campaign against drugs, and it drew worldwide attention. Drugs, crime, and justice were themes Cloak and Dagger dealt with regularly.

I recall not liking Cloak and Dagger when I had originally read their stories. Looking back on it now, I believe my dissatisfaction had to do with the tone of their stories rather than the characters. The Spider-Man titles were usually lighthearted and fun with a level of conflict that you knew wouldn't have any significant impact. But the issues in which Cloak and Dagger guest-starred carried a certain weight to them. I'm not saying that a weight or depth to a comic book is a bad thing, but it was a radical shift in the escapism I had sought out as a kid. Cloak and Dagger's relevant and hard-hitting stories didn't hold any punches as they boldly and honestly discussed topics like prostitution, drugs, and violence.

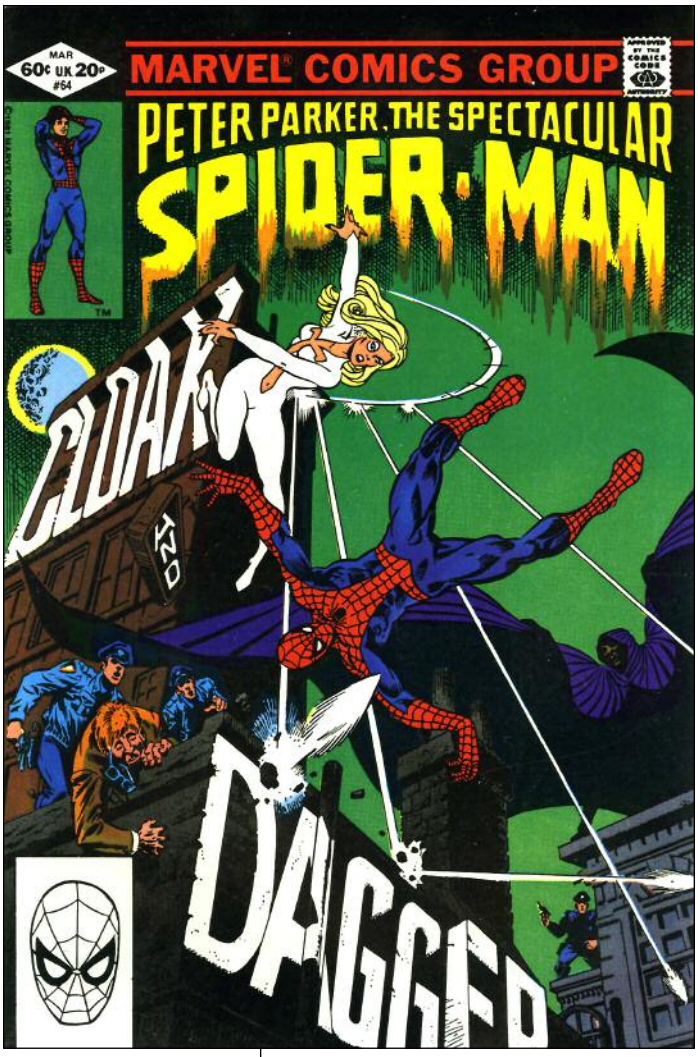
ENTER CLOAK AND DAGGER

It was initially difficult to understand Cloak and Dagger's motivations through their early appearances in *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man* (*PPTSS*). Writer Bill Mantlo successfully eroded any feelings of condemnation that readers might feel as they witnessed Cloak and Dagger's brutal methodology.

Cloak and Dagger were contrasted against Spider-Man, allowing both Mantlo and the reader to explore the role of vigilantes. They were children without colorful costumes or secret identities. They didn't use witty banter to down play the seriousness of the violence they were perpetrating. While Spider-Man acted out of a sense of responsibility, Cloak and Dagger

Night and Day

Detail from the cover to *Cloak and Dagger* #1 (Oct. 1983), the characters' first (mini)series. Art by Rick Leonardi and Terry Austin.



Marvel Team-Ups

Appearances in *Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man* helped make Cloak and Dagger fan favorites in the early 1980s. (left) An Eisner-esque Ed Hannigan/Al Milgrom cover to issue #64 (Mar. 1982), and (right) another Hannigan/Milgrom winner, from #70 (Sept. 1982).

acted out of a sense of necessity, feeling they had no choice as instruments of vengeance. They didn't have the supporting cast that Spider-Man could depend on—they only had each other.

In their first appearance, Spider-Man couldn't stop them from killing a drug dealer. He tracked down the dangerous and misguided duo only to discover they had captured the drug dealers responsible for changing them into Cloak and Dagger.

"It is not justice we want, Spider-Man. It is vengeance! These men must die!," Cloak declared. Protagonists killing bad guys, even though it was difficult to condone, was not seen in the pages of any Marvel Comics at that time (even the Punisher at that time was using his "mercy bullets" rather than live ammunition).

Cloak and Dagger blurred the line between villain and hero. Reading this issue, it was easy to sympathize with them and demand revenge. But you could also feel Spider-Man's point of view, believing the drug dealers had to be brought to justice and not murdered in cold blood.

Cloak and Dagger proved to be popular, spawning several more guest appearances in *PPTSS*. They tangled with the Wall-Crawler as they followed the drug chain, confronting powerful mobsters like Silvermane and the Kingpin.

Spectacular Spider-Man #82 (Sept. 1983) was a significant issue as Mantlo cleverly used the Punisher as another point of contrast to Cloak and Dagger. As the Punisher's war on crime escalated, it took a toll on him, eroding his sanity and driving him into madness. If Cloak and Dagger continued on their reckless path of vengeance, would they too spiral down into madness like the Punisher?

With the growing popularity of Cloak and Dagger, there was a noticeable decline in their unrepentant vigilantism. In their early appearances, Cloak and Dagger had no moral reservations about killing the drug dealers they preyed upon, but if they were to be heroes, that approach had to change.

Mantlo added a new facet to Dagger's light daggers, allowing them to purge the devastating effects of drug addiction rather than inflicting deadly force. Cloak and Dagger's righteousness was also tempered as they focused on the enablers rather than the victims.

After their popular appearances in *PPTSS*, Marvel gave Cloak and Dagger their own miniseries in late 1983. Rick Leonardi drew the miniseries.

"Rich Leonardi has brought an intensity and excitement to Cloak and Dagger that is more than I ever could have hoped for," gushed Bill Mantlo in the Marvel-published fanzine *Marvel Age* #6 (Sept. 1983). "His design is daring and original. His characterization insightful. His draftsmanship a joy to behold."

This miniseries allowed readers to enter the world of Cloak and Dagger and to learn more about this obsessed and troubled couple.

ORIGIN

The origin of Cloak and Dagger didn't involve any radioactive spiders or cosmic rays or gamma bombs. Their destinies unfolded within the stark, brutal reality of the drug trade.

Tyrone was a street-wise, insecure boy with a stuttering problem who grew up in a Boston ghetto. Tandy, on the other hand, was a spoiled but self-reliant girl born into her mother's harsh socialite world. They were both runaways, escaping their old lives and naively hoping for a start fresh in New York City. Alone and afraid in Manhattan, they were preyed upon by agents of the drug trade.

They were kidnapped and, along with other runaways, were used as guinea pigs for a new designer drug. The drug experiment proved to be failure as it had killed all in the test group but Tyrone and Tandy. Perplexed by how they survived (which would later be explained as the drug having activated their latent mutant abilities), Tyrone and Tandy escaped to discover that they had been forever changed.

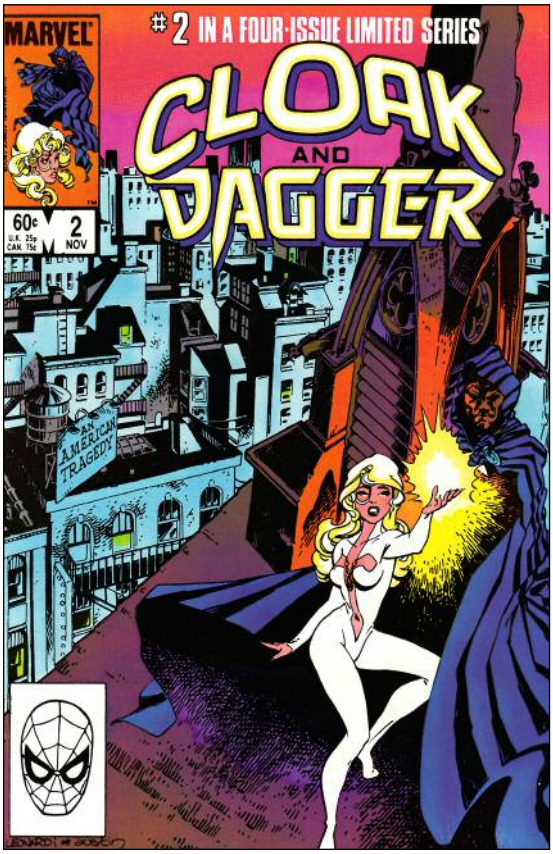
The inspiration behind Cloak and Dagger came to Bill Mantlo in the aftermath of one of many outings which were attempts to avoid penning his first Spider-Man story. He had visited Ellis Island and was deeply shaken by "the Island of Tears."

From Bill Mantlo's article in *Marvel Age* #6, he explained their genesis: "They came in the night, when all was silent and my mind was blank. They came completely conceived as to their powers and attributes, their origin and motivation. They embodied between them all that fear and misery, hunger and longing that had haunted me on Ellis Island."

Cloak and Dagger's co-creator and artist Ed Hannigan recalls, "Bill had a short page or two synopsis of the story that he showed me, and we discussed what the characters would look like. He gave me a lot of leeway, but it was fairly obvious that Cloak would be black and have a big 'animated' black cloak and Dagger would be white with a skintight leotard-type thing. I am not sure, but I think I might have come up with her ballet angle. I put the same kind of amulet/clasp on both costumes and came up with the dagger-shaped cutout on her costume, which was quite daring at the time. The hardest part was determining what her 'light daggers' would look like."

In *Marvel Age* #25 (Apr. 1985), Mantlo further expanded on his beloved characters: "With Cloak and Dagger, I'm trying to deal with children at a very vulnerable and frightened age, where life is seen as oppressive, something that conquers, rather than is conquered. I want these two kids to find a way to survive, and to come out of this process changed and better—and the way they're going to do that is by helping others.

"I don't know in the end run what form that growth is going to take, but I hope that they're going



Into the Darkness (below) Cloak takes care of a pimp on this startling original page to issue #2 of the miniseries. Art by Leonardi and Austin, and courtesy of Terry Austin. (left) The issue's cover.