

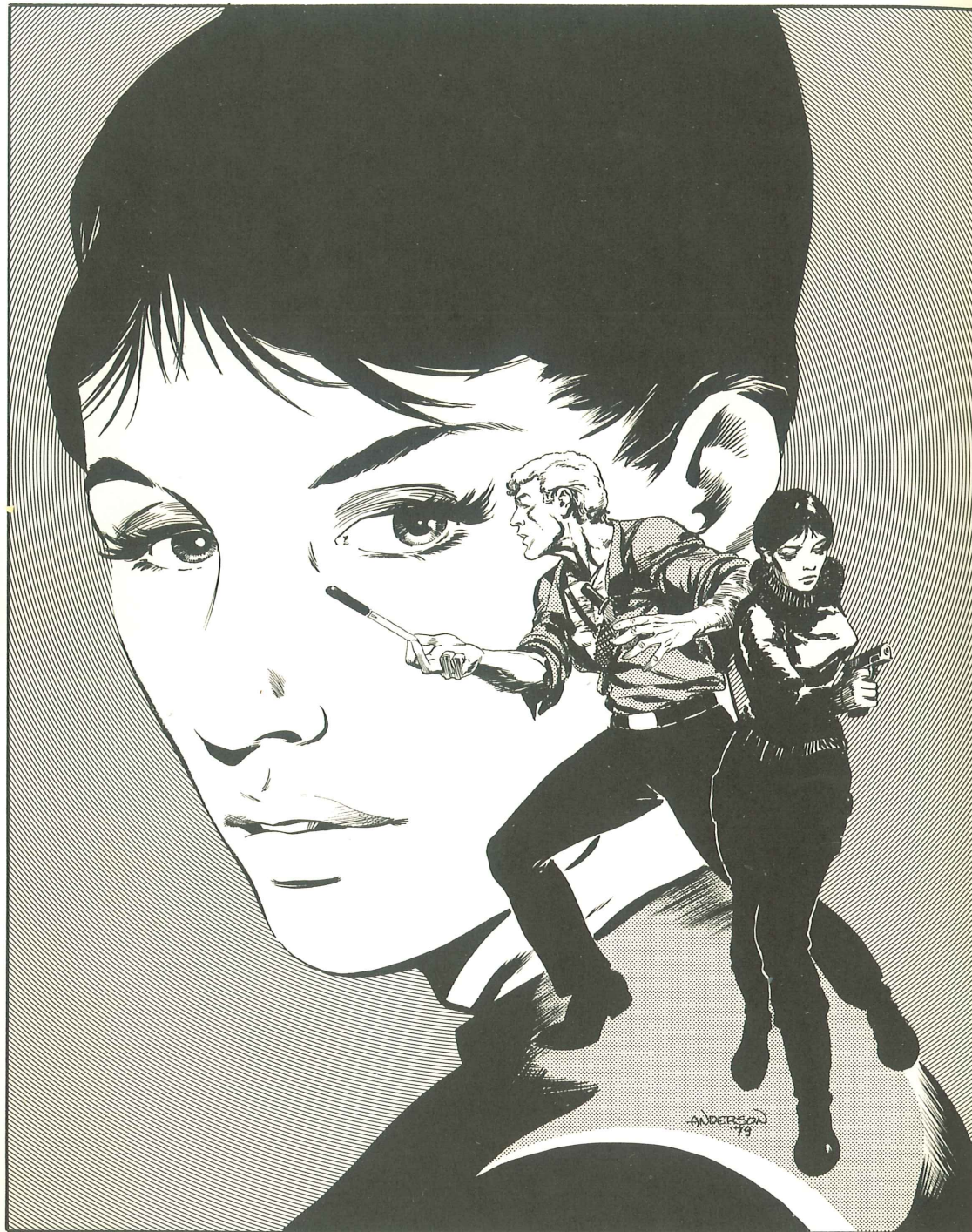


THE U.K. HEROINES SHOWCASE



no.2

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THE UNITED KINGDOM HEROINES SHOWCASE #2 1979

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or £2.50 (£4 for airmail) to
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at their respective addresses on
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AN INTRODUCTION (of sorts)

It is hard for me to believe that three years have
passed since the publication of THA/UK #1. At the
time I was the new assistant editor for the CHFC
with the assignment of coordinating the U.S. end of
that zine. Now I find myself as the publisher and
chief (read: *only*) production person for the CHFC
with this project (in its final stages of production at
this writing) in my hands.

This second volume represents the renewed colla-
boration between British and U.S. fans in putting
(continued on next page)



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together a special issue of *The Heroines Showcase* for both countries. The first issue was produced and printed in Great Britain by Martin Lock and was released in May 1976 as part of a special double issue of *Bemusing Magazine* (#9), a well respected British fanzine still being published by Martin. And after a journey across the Atlantic Ocean to the U.S., copies of THA/UK #1 were released as an individual issue to CHFC subscribers by Al Tanner.

So to continue in adding an international flavor to the endeavor, this second issue is being produced and printed in the U.S. with copies to be sent back across the Atlantic to Great Britain.

At this point most of the contributors don't even know who they've worked with at each end of this trans-Atlantic venture. But I do feel a unique interweaving of writing and artistic skills has been achieved. And the transitions between British and American spellings will no doubt be noted as you work your way through this collaboration.

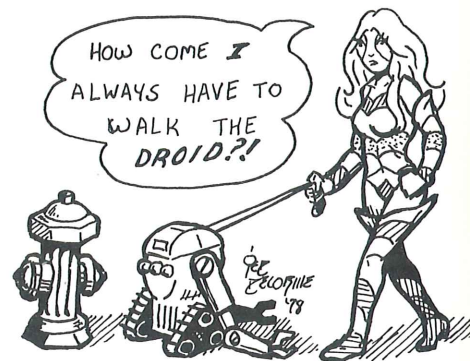
A vote of thanks goes out to Martin Lock for compiling the British contributions for this book, and for his continued enthusiastic support of this project throughout its more than 1 year in produc-



tion. (And he has been pushing for this second issue since THA/UK #1 was released!)

And a special thanks to Phil and Grace Sharples of Mendo Litho, and Dave Bleyl of Computer Color for their parts in making the dream of full, processed color covers by Lela Dowling a reality. And of course to Lela herself for making time amidst her schoolwork and numerous *paying* commissions to lend the magic and joy of her brush to our covers.

The Club has gone through many changes during the last three years; many new contributors have joined our ranks and numerous "old timers" have left to pursue new projects. For those who have unselfishly and unquestionably stuck with me through the thick and the thin of my 2+ year tenure as CHFC publisher, I'll never be able to convey my thanks for your generous understanding and support of my efforts.

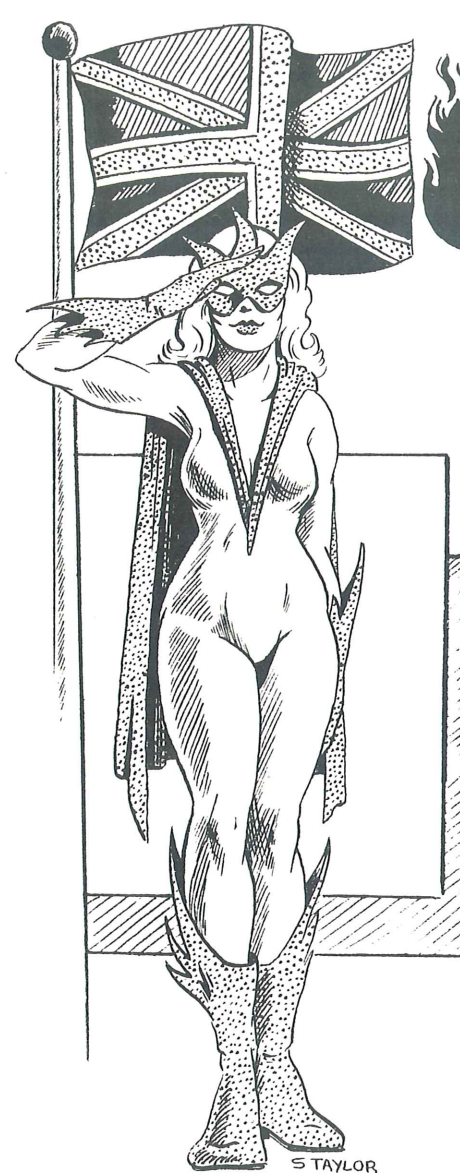
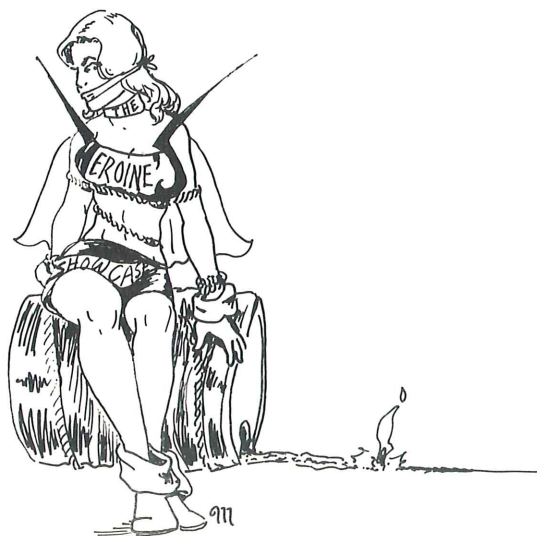


It is very hard to tell what direction the CHFC is headed at times if indeed it is headed in a direction at all, but we hope this volume will show that they aren't all bad or wrong.

This volume also represents the culmination of all the skills and knowledge of typesetting, production, graphics and printing that I've amassed over the last 3 years. I've literally poured my soul into it. I trust that you will appreciate efforts of everyone involved in this project even as you (hopefully!) enjoy it. And if you are willing to wait another 3 years, well, we'll see what special things we can dream up for the third issue.

— Steve Johnson

This issue is dedicated to Mark Bowers and the people at Quantic Art Studios in Los Altos, without whose cooperation and support, this volume would never have taken its present form.



SALUTE TO SPITFIRE

who saved her, and saw her safely home, meeting her father Lord Falsworth for the first time; he soon revealed that he had been Union Jack, "the famous masked spy-buster of World War I," and it wasn't long before the return of an old menace that he was tempted to resume his secret identity. Jacqueline at that time was sans powers, and only gained super-speed after having a near total blood transfusion (in issue 11) from the Human Torch after another attack of the vampire. Together, the vampire bite and the android's blood gave her greatly increased speed — as she had already been trained in self-defense by her father, she had a fine start in the superheroine business.

In *Invaders* #12 Jacqueline Falsworth made it very clear that she wished to join the team of heroes, and by doing so she brought herself under some criticism from various readers. Why? Mainly because she had been very much against her father joining the *Invaders* in his Union Jack guise, and yet rushed to join them herself as soon as her chance came. Some people thought she was being hypocritical — but surely there is a difference between seeing someone you love walking into danger, and handling that danger yourself? Jacqueline didn't want to stop her father from joining for any selfish motive, it was merely that she loved him, and had no wish to see him hurt or killed. Her outburst against Captain America upon seeing her father returning in costume with the *Invaders* proves this; she's obviously overwrought with worry about her father for his *own* sake, not for any other reason. When it comes to her own safety, she is willing to take any risk for *other people*. In *Invaders* #11, before she knew she had any special powers, and while she was recovering from a near total blood transfusion, she willingly risked her own chance of escape to save the Torch from "Blue Bullet" — hardly the action of a selfish person.

But, then, it's strange how the words and actions of a heroine *can* be misconstrued, and I'm sorry to say that Spitfire's are no exception. The main example of this takes place in *Invaders* #9; Jacqueline has

"Have no fear, Father — for if Union Jack cannot carry the family crest to new glory — then, let that be the first task of — SPITFIRE!"

With those rather melodramatic words, Jacqueline Falsworth became the first female member of the *Invaders*; a British member at that.

Jacqueline made her first appearance in *Invaders* #7, where she took the usual role of "threatened female" to begin with . . . threatened by a vampire, and a Nazi vampire at that. It was the Human Torch

been abducted by Baron Blood, who is telling her what he plans to do with her, i.e. impale her on his fangs. Unlike most female victims she doesn't scream or beg for mercy; instead she says: "Do it then, and get it over with . . ."

Which inspires her father, who has just tracked the Baron down, to exclaim "Don't be such a defeatist, daughter!"

How could anyone ever think that her words were words of defeat? They were words of defiance, as were her words to Colonel Eisen in *Invaders* #13 after the group had been taken prisoner — her words then were "Eisen! Let me down from here and I'll deal with you myself!"

So, Spitfire, brave, petite, blonde and blue-eyed, and with superspeed, is a typical superheroine — but with a difference. She's a liberated woman.

"A liberated woman in the 40's?" I hear you saying? Of course she's liberated, and she knows it. That's why she doesn't feel the need to go around trying to prove she's an equal with the other Invaders, as she knows she is; there is no reason why

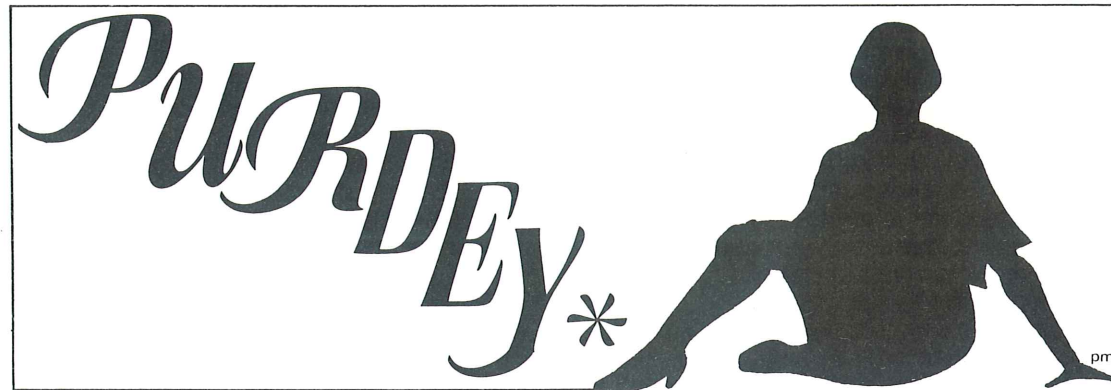
she should stress the point that she's a woman, she acts and wants to be treated as a member of the team.

Of course Marvel had to involve her in the usual "love interest mix-up" of all their heroines. Upon their first meeting in *Invaders* #7 she seemed attracted to the Human Torch (or Jim Hammond, as he told her to call him), but from *Invaders* #11 onwards she became more interested in Captain America. I guess it's understandable for her to prefer a human to an android, but for the same reason it's hardly likely that any sensible woman would have got into that position in the first place — and Jacqueline is anything but stupid. Far from it. In fact, if the Invaders was set in the present, Spitfire could easily become the leader of a group such as the Avengers or Defenders.

Which brings me to another point; strangely enough it seems that Jacqueline is not the first heroine to use the name 'Spitfire' — some fifty or so years ago there was a heroine of that name featured in a British comic. Could she have been some relation to the present Spitfire? Perhaps an enterprising scriptwriter could plot a story or two along those lines?

Actually, though, I really do think that Spitfire needs some feminine company in her group; so, how about Miss America? From a different background certainly, but all the same I think that Spitfire and Miss America would make good teammates; and adding another girl would certainly make for some interesting plotlines, such as the two girls against a female spy ring. In *What If* #4 both British members leave the team before she and the Whizzer join, but she could have a few adventures with the Invaders as a guest star.

But, for a while, I am going to leave Jacqueline's character and concentrate on her powers. As she only has superspeed on her side she could be thought of as a rather weak member of the Invaders; no superstrength, no invulnerability (as explained in *Invaders* #23), and no power of flight . . . or has she? Already by kicking her legs as superspeed she has found that they create an air cushion to break her fall from a height; surely it will only take a very short time for Spitfire to develop this still further. Indeed, if a certain married male hero with super-speed three decades later can develop the power of flight, then I'm sure that Spitfire could do the same. She just hasn't, as yet, worked on her powers to see just what she *can* do . . . This also applies to the question of invulnerability; she can vibrate strongly (continued on pg. 15)



Steed: "Gambit? . . . I want Purdey."

Gambit: "Who doesn't?"

With that exchange, thousands of Avengers fans were introduced to the fourth female partnered with ace professional espionage agent John Steed. From the Ministry's file: **Name:** Purdey. **Occupation:** Former ballerina. **Experience:** Born in India where father was brigadier in British Army. International education, including spell at Sorbonne. Lived with

father in many of world's trouble spots, including Cyprus and Aden. Father seconded to Secret Service but later shot as spy. **Special Qualifications:** Expert shot, competent driver. Learned Chinese martial skills while studying arts in Peking. Also well versed in fighting style based on French martial art of Panache.

The Avengers girls have always reflected, and quite often anticipated the trend in female fashions and attitudes. On September 29, 1962, Honor Blackman first stepped into the black leather of Catherine Gale. Mrs. Gale could be called television's first liberated lady. Once married to a Kenya farmer with whom she fought the Mau-Mau, she became Steed's partner when widowed. In 1966 Emma Peel replaced Cathy Gale and continued the liberated image. Mrs. Peel had also lost her husband, a test pilot lost over the Amazon jungles, though her husband returned and allowed Diana Rigg to leave and Linda Thorson to enter as Tara King. Tara-ra-boom-de-a, was single and presented a variation on the liberated type of her predecessors. Softer, wide-eyed and pert, more prone to skirts, mini and maxi, than pants and black leather, but nevertheless a very independent lady. The year 1969 saw the end of the old series and Steed waited in video limbo for seven years for a new partner.

Purdey carries on in the grand tradition of the Avengers girls, but she plays it as the ultimate '70's woman. Her fashions are layered and filmy. She wears high heels and boots. And she drives an MGB and a moto-cross bike. As a former ballerina Purdey stays in shape by combining balletic and eastern martial arts movements in sparring bouts with the third Avenger, Mike Gambit.

Mock kung-fu blows aren't the only sparring engaged in by the two junior agents. Purdey seems to delight in taunting Gambit with her love life, which, as yet, doesn't include him. In "Hostage," Purdey





mentions having had a fellow agent over to her mother's for dinner. In the course of the show Gambit has occasion to speak to Purdey's mother on the phone, "... and I hope to have dinner with you soon." Purdey's romantic life during the series seems



to be made up of dinner dates and weekends with a variety of men, centering on none.

The reason behind her romantic conduct was revealed in "Obsession" which opened in the early seventies when Purdey was a ballet dancer and engaged! Her fiancé's father was killed as a spy and her

intended became obsessed with killing the middle-eastern official he held responsible for his father's death. Purdey foiled his first attempt, he struck her, and that ended the relationship. Time shifts to the present and the current Avengers investigation causes Purdey and her former fiancé to meet again. He makes overtures to Purdey to start where they left off, believing this possible because he is soon to assassinate the mid-eastern gentleman, and, in his mind, remove the block between them. She has to stop both his advances and the plot while Steed and Gambit are unaware of the relationship between herself and the chief suspect. Unfortunately it's left to Gambit to make the final resolution of both problems. After such an episode it's understandable that she lets no one get that close again. It also may explain why Gambit is, at this time, merely a working colleague.

Steed and Purdey's relationship is open to interpretation. How he feels about her is obvious. In "Hostage" Steed would have willingly given up government secrets in exchange for his young partner. "After all there is only one Purdey!" Just how his feelings manifest themselves is the question. About his former partners Patrick MacNee has said, "We took the sex relationship for granted. By the mid-sixties the pill was a part of life, so we took it for granted that Steed and Emma slept together, but simply didn't dwell on it. We treated sex as naturally as eating." The paperback adaptations lead one to believe that Steed and Purdey do engage in "undercover" activities but as I view the series I get another impression. Steed projects a strong, wise, albeit sexy, father image. His advice and guidance are important to both Purdey and Gambit. Steed has quite an active sex life but I don't believe Purdey is a part of it.

Glimpses of Purdey's family have occurred occasionally during the series. As mentioned before, her mother lives in the English countryside, where Purdey visits sometimes on holiday. Her actual father was executed as a spy, but her mother remarried to a clergyman. It was to her step-father that she turned for help in identifying the whereabouts of a church steeple in a photograph during "The House of Cards." No siblings have shown up as yet.

The seasons of the "New Avengers" were produced in England and have since been imported to the U.S. I fervently hope that Avengers Productions Ltd. see fit to continue so that both British and American fans can see more of Steed, Gambit, and most of all, Purdey.

— Paul McCall
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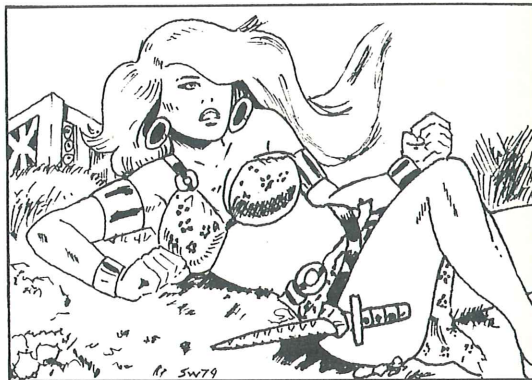
THE BRITISH HEROINE SCENE

The situation in Britain for comics heroines isn't anything like as encouraging as it is in the United States. One reason for this is the nature of the comics publishing scene, with weekly comics, aimed at a slightly younger age-group, as the back-bone of the industry, instead of monthlies. There are different kinds of comics around; humour titles, war titles, romance titles, and adventure titles, but the comics for boys tend not to have girls in them, and the comics for girls tend to concentrate more on school life and romance, not to mention pop stars. The ever-popular war comics have never thrown up an equivalent to Mademoiselle Marie, hardly Robert Kanigher's most successful creation; and the adventure heroes all seem too busy saving the country or playing soccer to have any sort of social life. When you only have three or four pages per installment, there's not room for much besides the main action! A character called Fireball, who until recently was the mainstay of *Bullet*, did have an arch-foe called the Cat, alias Catriona Klansberg, who, although she didn't have a regular costume, was in some ways quite reminiscent of Catwoman... but, apart from a couple of features I'll come to later, the only other lady of any importance was in a short serial in *2000 A.D.* (progs 62 to 70), the science fiction comic which has had quite a few comics fans as contributors in its hundred issues to date. Commander Lorna Varn was in charge of a colony ship that crashed on a highly inhospitable planet, and the main figure in the strip.

At the time of writing, the British Marvel operation is still mainly reprinting American material; the Black Widow is active in the Daredevil strip, and Princess Leia appears regularly in *Star Wars Weekly* of course, which has recently overtaken the Ameri-

can monthly so that we get to see the stories before you do! *Savage Sword of Conan* appears monthly, with Red Sonja in a regular back-up strip from either the American black & white title or her own colour comic, but it's still only reprints.

Tarzan Monthly, now defunct, did once run a Korak story with a Shanna-type "Golden Girl" in



action; I would assume that it was the first English-language appearance of the story, which was produced by the E.R.B. organisation either for that aborted range of titles they were going to publish themselves in America, or for the continental market. The horror film magazine edited by Dez Skinn before he took charge of British Marvel, variously entitled *House of Hammer*, *Hammer's House of Horror*, and *Halls of Horror*, featured adaptations of Hammer films in almost every issue; "Twins of Evil" was in #7, but the most interesting from the heroine point of view was issue 14, which led off with "One Million Years BC," the caveperson movie featuring Raquel Welch, drawn excellently



by John Bolton, one the most able British artists.

Every August or September, a vast quantity of Annuals appear for the Christmas market, normally in stiff covers with between 64 and 160 pages, some in colour, for between 95 pence and £1.65. Just about every current weekly comic has an annual, unless it has only started so recently that there wasn't time to put one together — and also a lot of comics that no longer appear still have annuals! Sometimes a popular feature in a comic can have its own annual too (for example, Dan Dare has his own "1979" annual, in addition to the regular *2000 A.D. Annual*) — but a large proportion of the annuals are based not on comics but on television shows both

British and American, with photographs, features, and a few pages of comic strips. Last year, "Star Maidens," a TV show I never managed to see, had an annual, this year's offerings include, as well as "Star Trek," "Blake's Seven," "The New Avengers," "The Sweeney," "Van Der Valk," "Six Million Dollar Man," "Dick Barton," "The Return of the Saint," "Man From Atlantis," "Emergency," "Planet of the Apes," "Logan's Run," "Tarzan," and "The Muppet Show," "Bionic Woman" and "Charlie's Angels" books once again, though both are rather poorly produced, except for 18 pages of "Bionic Woman" strips by Ian Gibson.

In fact, that pair of American TV shows are the basis for the only two regular heroine strips produced in the United Kingdom these days; Charlie's Angels appear every week in rather inconsequential adventures in *TV Comic*, while Jaime Summers stars in just about the best strip going at the moment, in a weekly magazine called *Look-In*.

Most weekly comics are printed on low-quality newsprint, although the Marvel UK trio (*Mighty World of Marvel*, *Super Spider-Man* and *Star Wars Weekly*) use fairly slick paper; *Look-In* however has paper of a quality *Heavy Metal* would be proud of, with some pages in full, painted colour. Unfortunately not all its pages are devoted to comics, as it regularly carries features on rock stars, footballers (the soccer variety, of course, not those American chaps with the comical shoulders), and television, but every week brings two colour pages of Steve Austin and two more of Jaime Sommers, plus two black & white pages of "How the West Was Won" (which replaced "Logan's Run" a few months ago) and a couple of British TV shows.

The "Bionic Woman," while slightly limited by its two-page format, is rather better, to my mind, than the TV show of the same name, and nothing at all like the Charlton production; John Bolton is the artist again, and while it's difficult to describe art in words, he has certainly been influenced by both Frazetta and Wrightson, and the work he turns in every week for this strip is excellent. Unlike most American tie-in strips, British adaptations normally do use the likenesses of the actors involved, a fact John uses to great advantage. The scripts are pretty good, too...

Well I'm sure I've written enough now, without touching on the newspaper strip side at all — but then, aside from one or two recent sex-ploitation jobs in the less reputable tabloids, "Modesty Blaise" doesn't really have any competition there!

— Ruan Lanihorne

SPIDER-WOMAN

Just a Reflection?

In the span of just a few weeks time, Spider-Woman has become Marvel Comics' foremost heroine. She dethroned both Red Sonja and Ms. Marvel in her climb to the number one spot and is currently the only heroine at that company to hold her own title — and it's a monthly one, at that.

A good deal of controversy surrounds this fact, as surrounds the character itself. There are those who decry "Webby" (as Marv Wolfman fondly calls her) as a cheap rip-off of the hugely successful Spider-Man. I agree. Spider-Woman was originally conceived as a means of cashing in on the attraction of their top-selling super-hero. But where do we go from there? Many of these protestors feel that the heroine has yet to live up to any real unique attractions of her own and that her only real achievement has been to lower the overall quality associated with the spider name. I disagree. Through a painfully slow metamorphosis, Spider-Woman has continued to improve. A damn good heroine is emerging from what was originally a frail and faulty concept.

Spider-Woman first appeared in *Marvel Spotlight* #32 (February, 1977). As Marvel is wont to do with new heroines, she was first a villainess. "Dark Destiny," written by Archie Goodwin and illustrated by Sal Buscema, opened with the character breaking into a S.H.I.E.L.D. installation on the French Riviera with the intention of killing Nick Fury. Her past unfolded in flashbacks as she met and battled Fury. As a young girl in an Alpine Village, Arachne (as she was then called) was being chased by a mob of angry townsmen who believed her to be a witch because she had the startling ability to dispense lethal shock-blasts from her fingertips. Arachne was saved from the crowd by a well-dressed gentleman named Count Otto Vermis who took her to his castle. Vermis revealed to the lass that he was an area commander of Hydra, which he led her to believe was a charitable organization dedicated to

aiding the world. Hydra agents tutored Arachne in combat techniques and helped her to develop her own powers (which also included the ability to adhere to and walk on walls and ceilings and to glide on air currents). They presented her with a special outfit, the costume she wears even now, different only in that the mask was then a skullcap which concealed her hair completely. Then Vermis encouraged her to fall in love with another Hydra agent named Jared.

Later Jared was captured by S.H.I.E.L.D., and, in a rage, Arachne went to free him.

These were the sum total of Spider-Woman's memories and they explained why she was in the process of trying to destroy Nick Fury and free Jared. But Arachne inadvertently shot Jared with a venom-blast by mistake. Before he died, the Hydra agent revealed the truth — Hydra was actually dedicated to ruling the world and that he had never been in love with Arachne — rather, he detested her.

Infuriated at being duped, SW returned to the Hydra stronghold and thrashed Otto Vermis. Realizing that all of his plans were in shambles, the villain agreed to fill in the gaps of Arachne's memory if she would let him go free. She assented. The Count then revealed that Arachne had been evolved from a real spider by The High Evolutionary. But her near-human form had alienated her from The Evolutionary's other creations, so she left his sanctuary for the Alpine village which had been cruel to her also.

Overcome by these revelations, the spider-woman fled to the mountains to think these things over. The world, it seemed, had seen the last of her.

The story was a relatively complete and independent one, just like most of the trial strips which

appeared in *Marvel Spotlight*. And just like the majority of these largely forgettable issues, it seemed unlikely that the character would reappear, much less make her way into her own title.

To the surprise of many, Spider-Woman surfaced at the end of *Marvel Two-In-One* #29 in July of the same year. Ben Grimm was in London with girlfriend Alicia Masters. He and Shang-Chi, the Master of Kung-Fu became involved with — you guessed it — Hydra. Just when it seemed that the heroes had put the kibosh on that evil organization once again, Hydra played its trump card — Spider-Woman! As the story carried over into *Marvel Two-In-One* #30, readers learned that Arachne was back to square one again. She had been plucked from the Swiss mountaintop where she had last been seen and again brainwashed into believing she was a Hydra agent. But a dunk in the Thames restored her memories, although this came too late to prevent the damage she had caused. SW had kidnapped Alicia and given her over to Hydra who used her in an experiment to create another spider-woman. But plans went awry, and Ben's gal was instead transformed into a hideous spider-monster.

The dilemma continued throughout issues #31 and 32 where, aided by The Invisible Girl, Spider-Woman was at last able to atone for her misdeeds and help restore Alicia to her usual docile self. Then Arachne simply faded into the background a few pages before tale's end. Again it seemed she was bound for limbo.

Not by a long shot. When The Thing teamed with Modred the Mystic in a brand new story in *Marvel Two-In-One* #33, The Webbed Wondress unexpectedly surfaced to aid them when they became embroiled in a crisis at Stonehenge. This was a single-issue adventure, however, and it ended with Spider-Woman deciding to remain with Modred because he told her he believed he could restore her memories and show her the past as it really happened. Modred also cast a spell over Ben Grimm and Alicia causing them to forget all of the pains they had endured while in Great Britain. An unfortunate side-effect was that they also lost all memories of Spider-Woman. Presumably Sue Storm, who was not with them at Stonehenge, *did* retain her memories and awareness of Arachne. As a fleet of clouds closed over Stonehenge, a final postscript to the story promised that the new life which Modred was about to reveal to the heroine would begin to take shape in Spider-Woman's own book.

All of the *Marvel Two-In-One* episodes were written by Marv Wolfman, the same man who went



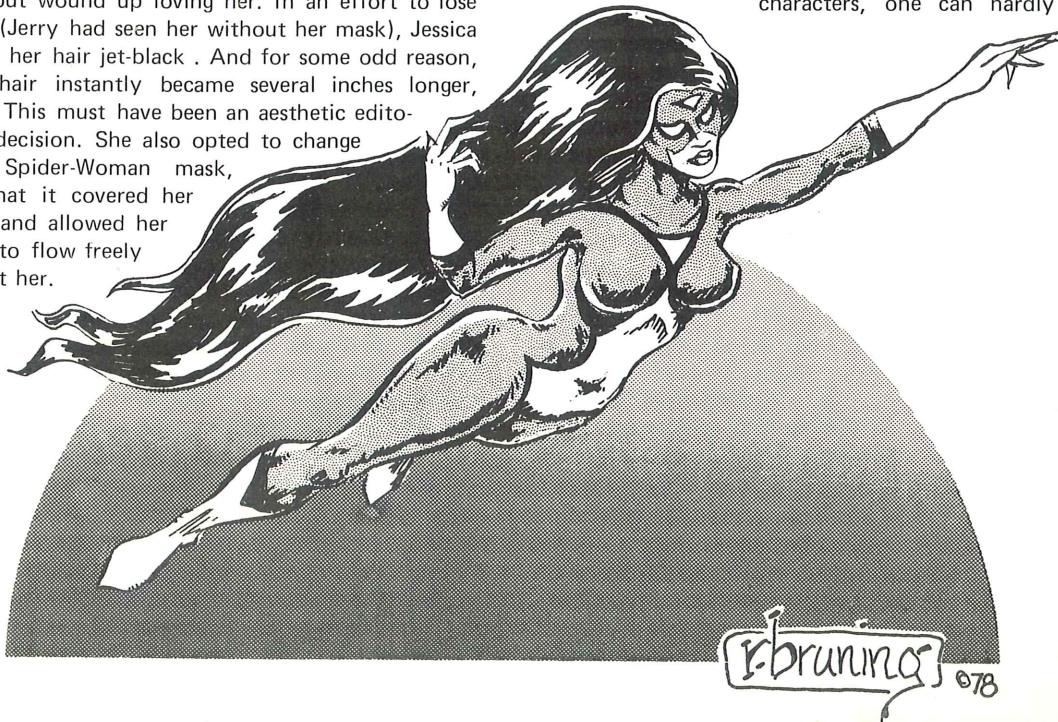
on to shape SW's life in her own book. As he revealed in the text page of *Spider-Woman* #1, the *Marvel Two-In-One* episodes provided an integral training ground during which he was able to familiarize himself with the character and mold her into the sort of heroine he felt would form the crux of a viable and successful solo series. The dozen-plus issues which have since been published would seem to bear this out: Spider-Woman's day of change and renovation came even before her own book saw the light of day. Since then, she has yet to falter or change directions in mid-stream as would seem to have been the undoing of her peer Ms. Marvel.

The premiere issue of *Spider-Woman* was dated April, 1978. Still living in London, the heroine had

finally — through Modred the Mystic — learned the real truth about herself. Her name was Jessica Drew and she *hadn't* been evolved from a spider. She had, however, been accidentally exposed to a massive dose of radiation as a child. She was dying. Her father, a research scientist, injected her with a serum extracted from spiders. After that, he mysteriously vanished. His partner, an unnamed genetics expert who later assumed a new identity of The High Evolutionary, continued treating Jessica over a period of several years by bathing her in the rays of his genetic accelerator. The treatments saved her life and gave her an array of unique powers — and a few liabilities, as well. But those come later.

But knowing her true past was small consolation to Jessica Drew. She was alone in London, living in a small flat with no job and no friends. An odd side-effect of the cure-treatment had set the woman aside from other human beings. They seemed to sense that she was different. Women feared and loathed her. Men pitied her, though they found her beautiful and mysterious.

Having no luck in finding work, Jessica at last resorted to donning her Spider-Woman outfit and stealing food from grocery stores. During one of these forays, she was nearly apprehended by a passerby named Jerry Hunt who was a Scotland Yard official. She managed to escape from him, but he vowed to track her down. He started out tracking her but wound up loving her. In an effort to lose him (Jerry had seen her without her mask), Jessica dyed her hair jet-black. And for some odd reason, her hair instantly became several inches longer, too! This must have been an aesthetic editorial decision. She also opted to change her Spider-Woman mask, so that it covered her face and allowed her hair to flow freely about her.



In her second issue, Jessica met her sometimes mentor and friend, the elderly sorcerer Magnus. The pair came to the United States in #3. A summary of Spider-Woman's adventures in America is hardly necessary, since all of them are less than two years old and most people are already familiar with them. Suffice it to say that Jessica has faced an array of exciting, deadly intriguing and macabre villains including the likes of the Hangman, Brother(s) Grimm, Morgan Le Fay, Mrs. Dolly and the remarkable Needle.

Jerry Hunt followed Spider-Woman to the U.S. and remains a supporting character in the series. Magnus has recently departed. Jerry is now classified as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent rather than a Scotland Yard man. This seems to be a more realistic post for him to hold, since he and Jessica show no signs of heading back to the United Kingdom.

Carmine Infantino has illustrated all of Spider-Woman's issues to date, but Marv Wolfman recently handed over the writing chores to Mark Gruenwald. No perceptible change in writing styles or quality has been evident. Both men have maintained the sombre and forbidding atmosphere in which all of SW's adventures take place. It is a series unique in comics today.

Let's turn briefly to the subject of Spider-Man/Woman again. While many fans (myself included) do not like the apparent tie-in between the two characters, one can hardly

fault the people at Marvel Comics for following this route.

Fact One: Marvel, like all comics companies, is in the business to make money.

Fact Two: Few super-heroines have ever been a commercial success.

Fact Three: Spider-Man is a commercial success.

Fact Four: If they are going to protect the profitability of that success, they are going to have to use the name before someone else does.

Conclusions: Marvel did the smartest thing possible.

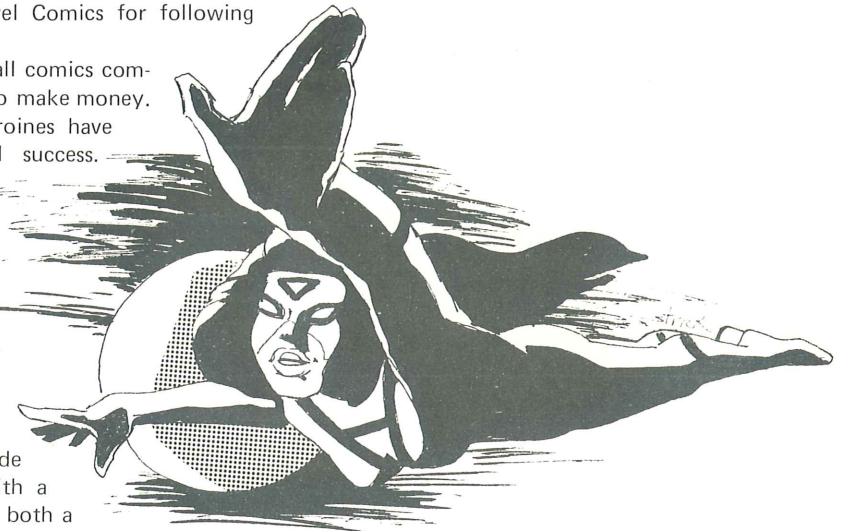
They wanted to provide heroine-hungry readers with a character which would be both a critical and commercial success.

What more logical route to follow than to attempt a "spin-off" of sorts? Television does it all the time. That doesn't necessarily make it right, but it works. And at the same time they protect their interest in the original name and prevent someone else from taking advantage of this closely-related name. If the book flies, great. If not, they've covered their bases and have copyright protection for this weak link in their corporate armor.

The only significant tie-in between the two characters is the spider-name and the name-related power of being able to adhere to walls. Face it, gang — this is going to have to satisfy us. If not for *Spider-Woman*, there would be no Marvel heroine books today and a very dim outlook for the future. We really ought to count our blessings . . . were it not for those comic book readers (not *fans*, just *readers*) who, intrigued by the spider-name, venture to buy an issue of *Spider-Woman* even she would not be a commercial success.

I suppose a few of those readers who buy hoping to catch a glimpse of Spider-Man feel cheated. But Spider-Woman herself is an intriguing character. If she weren't, those upset readers would have stopped purchasing the comic after the first time that they felt they had gotten burned, and the book would have failed a long time ago. With eighteen plus issues behind her, this obviously hasn't been the case. Those who have stuck with her have generally put their injured feelings behind them and simply enjoy Jessica Drew for her own sake.

She's well worth it.



SALUTE TO SPITFIRE (cont. from pg. 6)

enough to dispel a smoke grenade (*Invaders* #23), so if she can vibrate at a still greater rate then she could become more or less invulnerable. Why? Well, most objects when vibrated give off some form of heat. Keeping this in mind, and considering that Jacqueline is a very intelligent young lady, it would be a simple matter for her to design a costume that was both heat-resistant and attractive, perhaps from the same material as the Torch's costume. Then, as she vibrated, the heat intensity could gradually be increased until she was able to melt bullets.

Considering this, it would seem that Spitfire has the potential to become one of the most powerful of the *Invaders*. As well as her powers there is a certain streak of ruthlessness about her, which is shown in her little "conversation" with Colonel Dietrich in *Invaders* #21.

And so my Salute to Spitfire is nearly concluded; but before I end, I must say I have been wondering what happened to Spitfire after the war. The fates of the other *Invaders* were revealed long ago, but Spitfire? Is she even now living in a Stately Home somewhere in England? If she married, would her children have inherited her powers? And if so wouldn't that child make a good addition to any present-day superhero group? Daughter of Spitfire! Those words have a certain ring to them, don't they!

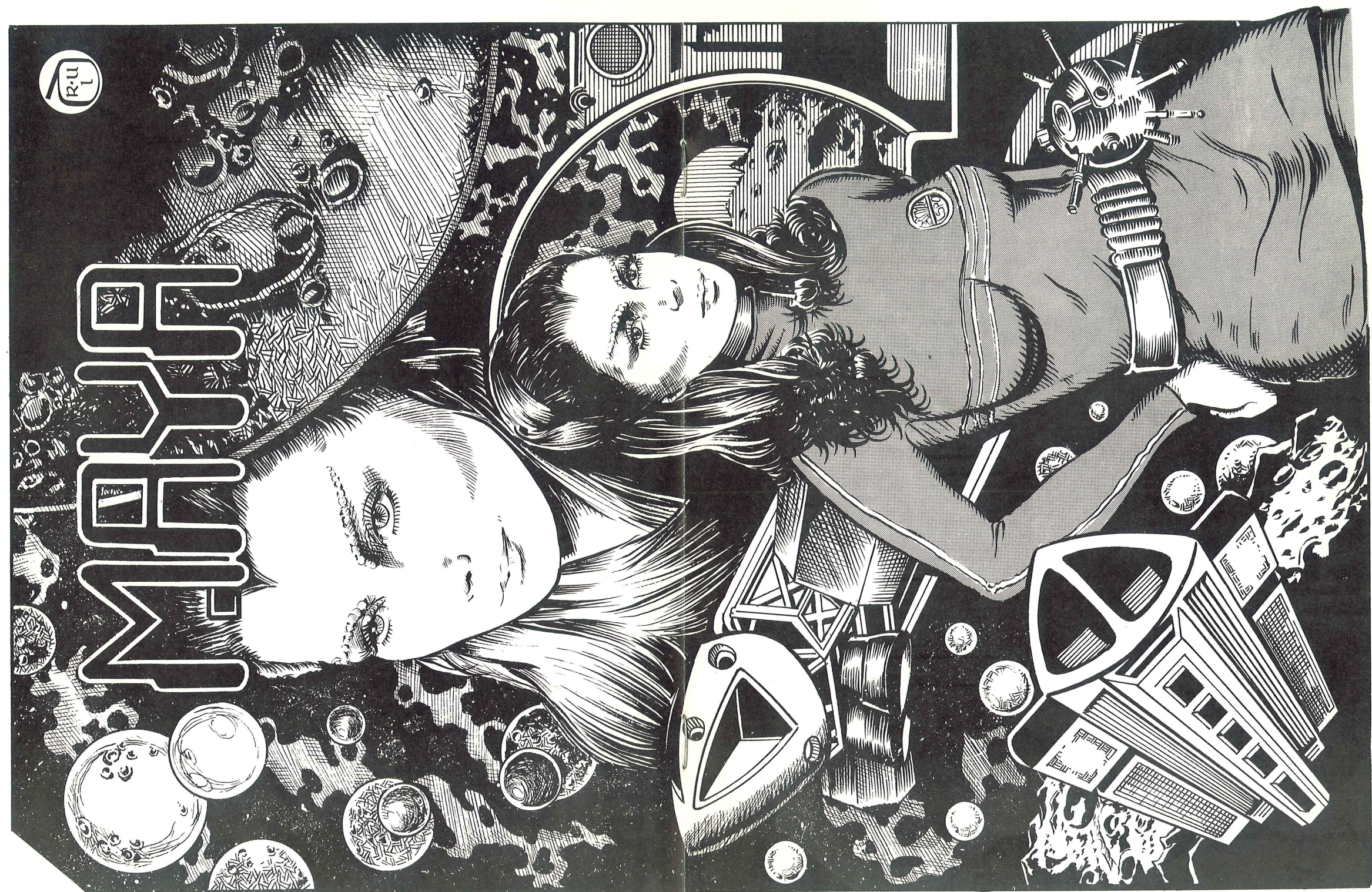
But I think Spitfire herself should have (almost) the last words — "Never underestimate a woman . . ." And she's certainly one young lady who could never be underestimated or overlooked.

— Scott Gibson

— Maureen James

12-11

ME



Minutes of the Joint Protest Meeting of the Super Heroine Equality Group (S.H.E.), the Evil Villainesses Equality Group (E.V.E.), and the Females as Supporting Character's Images Now Are Terrible, It's No Good (F.A.S.C.I.N.A.T.I.N.G.), also known as S.W.C.A.T.F. (Society Who Carry Acronyms Too Far)

Officials Present:

Wonder Woman, Earth-1, Chairperson for meeting
(Chairperson from S.H.E.)
Lois Lane, Secretary for meeting
(Secretary from F.A.S.C.I.N.A.T.I.N.G.)
Wonder Woman, Earth 2
(Secretary from S.H.E.)
Umar the Unspeakable
(Chairperson from E.V.E.)
Catwoman
(Secretary from E.V.E.)
May Parker
(Secretary from F.A.S.C.I.N.A.T.I.N.G.)
Ms. J. Kahn
(Special Guest from Earth-Prime)

Opening: The meeting was held in a magically formed multi-time-and-dimensional hall, courtesy of Clea, Zatanna, Agatha Harkness and the White Witch of Naltor. Attendance was truly excellent, comprising the entire body of membership of all three groups. The Watcher was also present — no men were supposed to be allowed, but nobody could figure out a way of making him leave. He was repeatedly asked at intervals throughout the proceedings why there were no female Watchers, and how the supply was maintained without them, but did not reply.

Seating was arranged in alphabetical order by either fighting title or surname. Several unfortunate incidents took place because of this — there was a brawl among several Huntresses, a magical duel between Enchantresses, and Rachel Van Helsing flatly refused to sit beside Vampirella, who she said had so led astray her distant cousin Adam that he now had no interest at all in the old Van Helsing hobby of sticking wooden objects into vampires, and moreover no decent woman would wear such a costume. Several members of the Legion of Super-Heroes protested loudly at this remark, but with a shout of "Lla tis nwod dna tuhs pu" Zatanna brought the meeting to order, at the cost of a badly twisted tongue.

The chair welcomed all present. As they knew, the recent discovery that certain inhabitants of the world known as Earth-Prime had the power to influence events on other spheres had led to the



calling of this meeting. There were certain matters that must be laid before these people. Without further ado she called on the Invisible Girl to speak on the first item on the agenda.

Dialogue and Soliloquy: *The Invisible Girl* said that, as one of the most famous sufferers, she had been called upon to lead the protest on this matter. No human being ever spoke and thought as she and many others there were depicted as doing. Though the True Romance Union of Trite Heroines (T.R.U.T.H.) had elected not to attend this meeting, those of the superheroic genre were too often reduced to the same levels as they. For instance, when addressing her husband and not under compulsion she called him Reed. This was his name. Any follower of the Fantastic Four could be excused for thinking his name was actually Ohreedreed, the other two members being Ohben and Ohjohnny. None of the males were ever found calling her Ohsuesue. Why then must she have to say things like "Oh Reed, Reed, how can I tell you I must leave you? Yet I *must* go to — the Ladies!" *Alicia Masters* said that this was fractionally better than "Oh Ben, Ben, though others say you are ugly, to me you will always be the most wonderful man in the world" — after a bout of this sort of thing she went home and threw up, more often than not. *The Black Canary* said this was no means confined to Earth-M. She had for years been trying to live down having once been compelled to think of her partner-in-crimefighting

as "My rebel Robin Hood." She thanked God she had never had to call him this to his face, as it could hardly have done much for their relationship. *The chair* said that the less said about her disgusting personal relationships the better. On being pressed by all present but the Watcher and the Canary for elucidation of this remark, she said that during the recent disturbance in time documented as *World's Finest* #250 the Amazons had been scanning Earth-1 especially closely with their Magic Sphere attempting to locate the source of the trouble, and had inadvertently got an image from the recent past of the Black Canary and her accomplice indulging in behaviour which, apart from being *disgusting*, had traumatised three Amazon observers, who had ever since been clamouring quite inexplicably to be allowed to visit Man's World. *The Black Canary* said that she hadn't been aware she was being observed by voyeurs, or was it voyeuss. She supposed Baldy there had been looking in too. Anyway Wonder Woman shouldn't knock it till she'd tried it, although come to think of it she herself wouldn't fancy trying it if Steve Trevor was all that was available. *Supergirl* said hastily that this was all irrelevant. To return to the subject, her own bete noire was the ubiquitous "(sob)." Anyone who read her early adventures would imagine she spent half her time snivelling. *The Hellcat* said that God knew what anyone who read *her* adventures from the start would think. She added "****, ****, and ****" (the chair has forbidden her exact words to be minuted). She then apologised to the company, but said that after years of "gee," and "gosh," and "cheese and crackers," something had to give. Also if she had to call herself "Happy-Go-Lucky" just one more time she would have kittens. *Polaris* said that that was as nothing compared with the plight of any woman whose name began with an L, for she would then be made to call herself "little" whatever — *Leiko Wu* said "hear, hear." *Phantom Lady* said that, given a free choice, the word "Ooooooh" would never pass her lips again. *May Parker* said what about "Peter, wear your red flannel and drink you milk and cookies dear, oh I'm having another heart attack"?

It was put to the vote, and unanimously agreed, that more realistic dialogue must be introduced.

Costume and Attitude: *Vampirella* said that a certain frozen-faced individual present had earlier made remarks about her costume. Did that person imagine she *wanted* to wear six square inches of precariously draped cloth? Was that individual aware that it was

only the judicious application of glue that prevented her mammary glands from popping out any time she made a sudden move? Princess Projectra was at least allowed laces. Not to mention the colds Vampirella got. Why, it was under the pretence of showing her a great new cold cure that the frozen-faced person's unscrupulous distant cousin had first — (she was interrupted by the chair, and told no more *disgusting* personal reminiscences would be allowed at this meeting). She would in fact rather wear something a bit more practical, but her sexist publishers compelled her not to. *Red Sonja* said that all male publishers, and indeed all men, were like



that. She made no complaints of her own outfit, as she and the lack of protection it offered, as she was a good enough swordswoman to avoid the wounds that a lesser warrior wearing it would certainly receive. Many of the men who lived in her era were also lightly clad. But the attitudes in which the women of her era were depicted especially annoyed her. Was it likely that *she* would ever appear on a cover with a male nude clinging in terror to her leg? It was not. Yet Conan never appeared without a scantily-clad girl in such a position — incidentally, from what she knew of the gentleman, any girl who hampered his movements so in the middle of a battle would find herself kicked clear, and probably with several broken ribs, so fast she wouldn't know what had happened. She did not personally think much of the women of her era, but they weren't *that* stupid and cowardly. The Watcher here spoke for the first and only time. He offered to tell Red Sonja *What* would happen *If* Conan defeated her in single combat. Red Sonja said that she had a damned good idea what would happen, but made a date to meet the Watcher afterwards and hear the gory details. *The chair* said this was irrelevant, as well as *disgusting*. The frightened blonde crouching on the cover and missing half her clothes was by no means confined to the Hyborian Age, and was another typical Man's World insult. *Ms. Marvel* said that she had a suggestion to offer to amend the situation. Either female super-beings should be allowed to wear non-sexploiting costumes, or else, in true equality, male super-beings should be made to wear nothing but barely, no pun intended,

adequate jockstraps. Also either women in cover backgrounds should be shown brave and defiant, or else fifty per cent of the time screaming, cringing men must appear. This suggestion was adopted by acclaim.

Villainesses: *Umar the Unspeakable* said that it was obvious to all that E.V.E. formed the smallest group in the hall. And why was this? For one thing, among the ranks of S.H.E. were



many who had started out as promising villainesses, only to reform or turn out to have been goody-goody all along. And even in E.V.E.'s depleted numbers were all too many women who were only nominal villainesses, frequently backsliding into good often because they were infatuated with some hero. Half of them weren't sure whether they were going to stay bad — look at Dr. Minerva of Kree-lar, who was not only possessed of good motives for bad deeds, but actually wanted

to become a — the very idea revolted her — mother. Now women could be just as wicked as men, if not more so. It was an insult to the female character to suggest it was so weak and vacillating it could not remain consistent in anything, even evil. *Clea* said that Mother (*Umar*, crying "Just once out of curiosity and look what you get," tried to throw a bolt of bedevilment at her and was stopped by the stewards, *Barda*, *Hildegard* and *Thundra*) had a point there. She (*Clea*) would be the last to advocate more villainy of any kind, but there was no doubt of the imbalance between the sexes in this area. As a compromise, could not more male malefactors be made to reform or develop unrequited crushes on heroines? This would both restore the balance and mean less work for all on the side of good. The proportion of villainesses being comparatively small, this suggestion was adopted by a majority vote. *Umar* had to be carried out shrieking about serpent's teeth and wait till her next guest appearance in *Dr. Strange*.

Romantic Relationships: *Lana Lang* said that, although the other company was by far the worse for introducing romantic triangles, she had seniority and so was chosen to speak on the subject. Having just been forced into a great leap backwards she had a lot to say. The whole concept of a long-lasting romantic triangle was degrading to the woman or women involved. In the first case she was portrayed as being either unable, through lack of intelligence and discrimination, to make a choice, or unable through lack of moral courage to clearly indicate her choice to both men, or simply so vain and cruel that she enjoyed the situation. In the second case, they were either prepared to wait indefinitely for the man to choose — which suggested they had no pride at all, or both would leave him — or else he had chosen and one of them lacked the courage to accept to this and go away. She had once been allowed at least that much dignity herself, and was now being robbed of it. It was, of course, a fact that these situations threw no little credit on the men involved — but it was almost always shown as being the woman's, or women's fault. She pleaded that this should cease. If happiness was not possible, at least some measure of honour, pride and dignity could be allowed to third parties. *Ms. Lang* received a standing ovation.

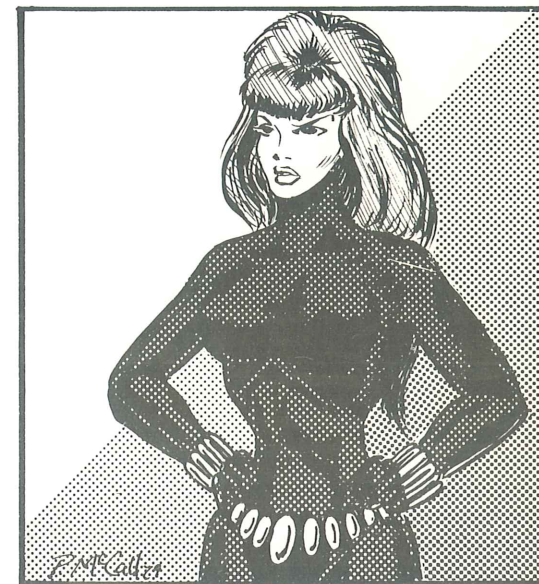
The Black Widow rose to say that she believed



that, contrary to what *Earth Prime's* comics writers seemed to think, it was possible for a man and woman to have a relationship that was both long-term and happy. She would rather like to have such a relationship herself, but had never been allowed to, being shuttled about from place to place and man to man by inconsiderate writers, who also never hesitated to produce yet another man from her past when stuck for a plot. She had now lost count completely. The circumstances in which she was made to change men made her look stupid, fickle and in at least one instance needlessly cruel. On that occasion she had been getting along quite well with an exponent of the art of toxophily, to whose only character faults, a quick temper and a sarcastic tongue, she had accustomed herself — the lady sitting beside her would testify that a quick-tempered toxophilite was quite an easy creature to manage — when suddenly she was forced to jilt him, for no valid reason, change her costume, hair colour, speech patterns and personality, and take up with another hero who kept pushing her into romantic triangle situations, and now they were making her go back to him *again*, oh God, hadn't she been through enough without having to go back to old no-**** (the chair has forbidden precise description of the missing parts of *Daredevil's* anatomy to be recorded). Here she had to pause to recover her composure. The other point which she wished to raise was that too many couples, especially those influenced by G. Conway of *Earth-Prime*, were forced into endless stupid quarrels and bickering, usually due to the woman behaving in a childish, illogical and unreasonable manner. Someone should speak severely to G. Conway of *Earth-Prime*, were *Black Canary* seconded this, saying that since the chair had seen fit to make public matters not usually discussed at meetings she wished to assure the company that she would not normally express a wish to go and mourn for her late husband while still warm from the embrace of her present lover, much less encourage her present lover to accompany her on the trip. This bit of hypocrisy and bad taste had been the idea of none other than G. Conway of *Earth-Prime*.

Another unanimous vote in favour of a complete overhaul for romantic relationships ensued.

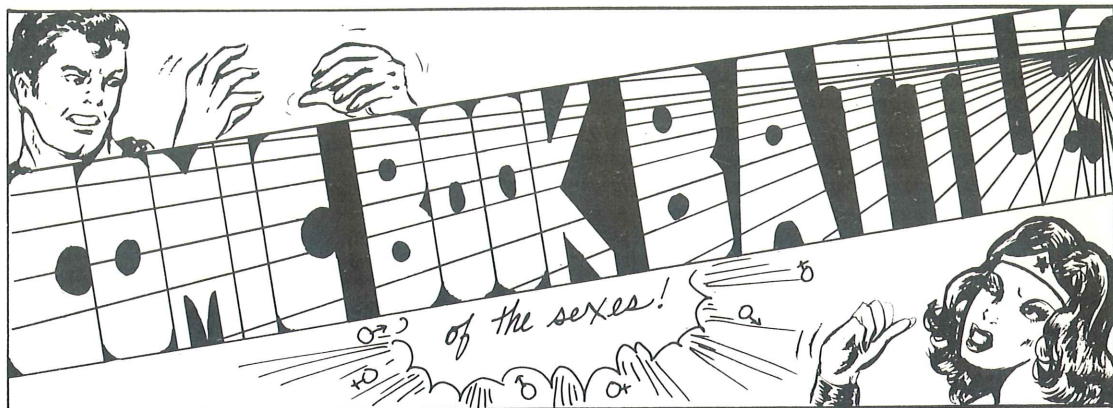
Any Other Business: *The Black Widow* and the *Black Canary* jointly stated that G. Conway of *Earth-Prime* should also be told that dress designing was *not*, as he seemed to imagine, the ultimate in liberated professions for women.



Closing Remarks: *Wonder Woman (II)* said that before closing they must decide what action should be taken in the future if the copies of these minutes which *Ms. Kahn* had agreed to distribute to all interested parties such as Messrs. *Lee*, *Warren*, and *G. Conway*, did not have the desired effect. She suggested that the best solution might lie in the separation of the sexes. If all heroines retired to, say *Paradise Isle* then the *Earth-Prime* gang would be compelled to write all-female comics, and would not be able to belittle women in them. This idea struck her as perfect. It could last for generations, the supply of heroines being maintained by making little clay statues and asking the Goddesses . . . Here cries of "Rubbish," "Nonsense," "She doesn't *still* believe that clay statue story, does she?," "Some *Paradise* that would be," "What, and leave little *Franklin* and stretch-to-any-size *Reed* behind," and "*****" drowned her out. When order was restored, *Iris Allen* said that this was a bit drastic. (Cries of "Hear, hear.") She said that if, after a time, no improvement became apparent, then a group of the stranger and least inhibited of the members could visit *Earth-Prime* via her husband's *Cosmic Treadmill*, which he would cheerfully lend them if he wanted the normal comforts of his home to remain unimpaired, and personally remonstrate with the guilty parties.

This suggestion was almost unanimously (two votes for the original idea were recorded) carried, and the meeting closed.

— *Kathleen Glancy*



It's pretty easy to recognize a comic book battle of the sexes story. There's usually some female on the cover shouting, "You struggle in vain, Thing! What hope can a puny *man* have against — the power of Thundra!" (*Fantastic Four* #133). Or, "Every male chauvinist pig in the world will tremble — when he sees the Hulk hurled to his death — by a woman!" (*Incredible Hulk* #142). Or, "All right, girls — that finishes off these male chauvinist pigs (the male Avengers)! From now on, it's the Valkyrie and her Lady Liberators!" (*Avengers* #83). Or there's simply a cover showing Wonder Woman all but kayoing Superman with a punch to the jaw while male Justice Leaguers stand around in the background looking appalled, but Black Canary cheers (*Justice League of America* #143).

Once you open the book, the stories have even more in common. Typically, one of these tales involves a woman from an Amazon-type background — the Femizons for Thundra, the Valkyries (Norse myth's approximate equivalent of the classical Amazons) for the Valkyrie, the Paradise Island Amazons for Wonder Woman — taking on a superhero who is billed as the strongest man in the world for a fight to the finish — and winning. The hero's death is always averted, of course, but usually by circumstances beyond either combatant's control.

A clear pattern also emerges in battle of the sexes stories involving more than one superman and superwoman. Usually the female member of some long-established super-team — the Avengers, the Legion of Super-Heroes — revolt against their male comrades. (I have found only one story in which the heroes turned against the heroines, the comparatively recent *JLA* #157, in which the male Justice Leaguers become pawns of the seductive Siren.) There is sometimes some attempt made to show that the female members of the team do have legitimate

grievances against the men who always seem to end up running things. However, the superheroines never rebel against the teams' male domination of their own accord, but have to be conned or hypnotized into doing it by some outside agitator, again usually a member of some Amazonian society like the Matriarch of Taltar or the kingdom (queendom?) of Femnaz. As when a single superhero and heroine fight, when male super-teams battle female super-teams, the women always win.

The pivotal role of superwomen from feminist — or, more accurately, female chauvinist — societies in these stories is significant. In some earlier tales, the idea behind this seems to be that all-American dream girl types like the female Avengers and Legionnaires would never question the traditional way of doing things in a patriarchal society. It takes someone who's been indoctrinated from birth with an exactly opposite set of ideas — i.e., that men are less important than women — to even dream of a female takeover, much less justify it.

In fact, in the two Legion stories with this theme, "The Revolt of the Girl Legionnaires" (*Adventure* #326, and reprinted in *Adventure* #410), and "The Mutiny of the Super-Heroines" (*Adventure* #368, May 1968), there is no reference at all to any grievances the girl Legionnaires might have against their boy teammates, even though the boys hog most of the action in their joint adventures. Instead, the female revolt is presented as something totally alien to all the girls' own attitudes and beliefs, forcibly imposed upon them by sleep hypnosis in one story and by radiation that first steps up their powers and then affects their minds in the other.

In "The Revolt of the Girl Legionnaires" especially, the girls' rebellion is not only presented as completely unjustified, but as "the most treacherous conspiracy in all Legion history!" (p.3, Part I).

Laying the melodrama on thick, the caption at the beginning of Part II of the story warns, "Now this astonishing tale of female super-treachery in the far future zooms into high gear as the remaining girl Legionnaires villainously strike down the boys Legionnaires they hate!! One by one, the brave super-lads are caught unawares and doomed by the super-maidens they adore!" In fact, for most of the story the girl Legionnaires actually do seem to have suddenly switched archetypes. Usually sweet, unassuming girl next door types, they abruptly throw themselves into the part of the back-stabbing femme fatale, who is seductively adoring on the outside, but scheming, calculating, and determined to get what she wants no matter who she has to step on the inside.

At a signal from Saturn Girl, the superheroines assemble at the Legion Clubhouse, eagerly saying to each other, "Maybe this is it . . . what we've waited so long for, girls!" "I have a feeling 'Operation Betrayal' is about to begin!!" (p.3, Part I). Momentarily switching back to her usual loyal Legionnaire persona for the benefit of a shipful of boy Legionnaires returning from a mission, Saturn Girl sends them back out into space on a phony assignment to get them out of the way, then turns away from the communicator and chuckles, "Ha, ha! Males are such fools! — When they return a month from now, we'll get rid of them permanently! Now to pick our victims!" (p.3, Part I). Then each girl picks a boy hero to "sneak-attack . . . with our charms and super-powers" (p.3, Part I) at the Interplanetary Fair the next day.

At the Fair, each superheroine lures her victim "to some romantic place" (p.4, Part I) with kisses and flattery, then cold-bloodedly attacks and leaves him marooned in some place where he will meet a lingering death. Completely fooled by these underhanded tactics until it's too late, the doomed boys are left moaning such classic cries of the lover betrayed by a heartless vamp as, "A devil lurked behind her sweet smile!" (p.6, Part I). Even when all the boys not sent off on the wild goose chase mission have been eliminated, apparently permanently, we're still only told that for some reason which has nothing to do with the behavior of the boy Legionnaires themselves, the Legion girls have suddenly begun to hate all men, as shown by their cries of, "Down with boy super-heroes! Here's to — the Legion of Super-Heroines!" (p.3, Part I).

At this point, it is finally revealed that the girls' sudden treachery is the work of Queen Azura of Femnaz. While the female Legionnaires, on a good-

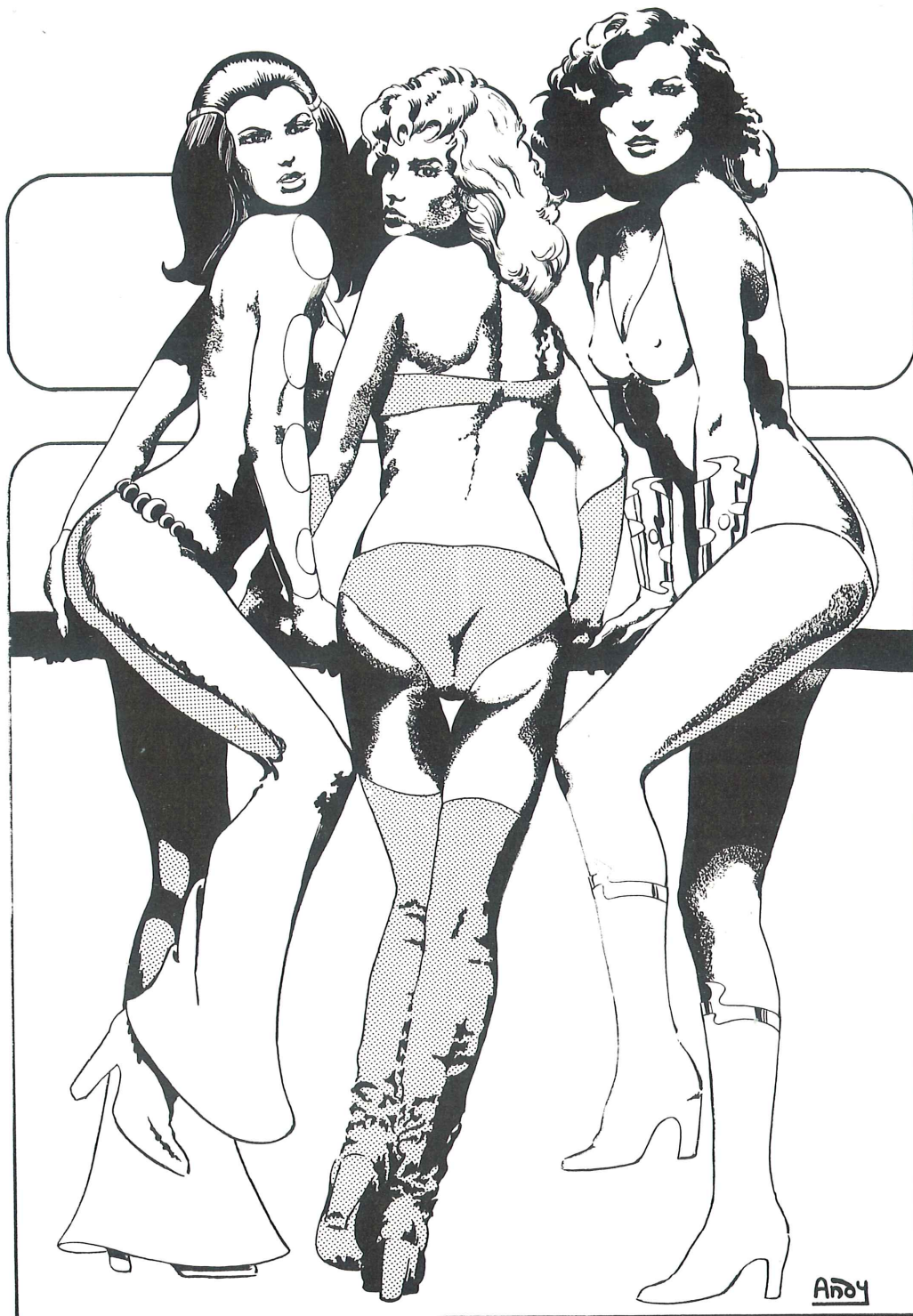
will tour of Femnaz, were asleep, the Queen told her henchwomen, "We loathe men and so we'll do the Legion girls a great favor! With the Glow Jewel, we'll give them hyper-powerful post-hypnotic commands which will make them destroy their male comrades, and have the super-hero club for themselves alone!" The Queen has managed to arrange it so that even the invulnerable Supergirl will be affected by this "super-hypnotic command to hate males" (p.5, Part II).

It turns out that the reason the warlike Femnaz women hate males is because their own more peace-loving men refused to fight for sport in the arenas, and finally irritated them so much by criticizing their custom of firing prayer-rockets at the moon in honor of their goddess that the women banished all men from the planet. However, the female Femnazinas saw the error of their ways when, as the men had warned, the prayer-rockets split the moon in two and the fragments hurtled toward the planet. Everyone would have been killed on impact if the boy Legionnaires Saturn Girl had sent on a bogus mission hadn't happened to be passing by at just the right moment to catch the fragments and repair the moon. Then, as the repentant Queen Azura tells the girls, "Though we confessed our plot against the boy Legionnaires, our gallant rescuers forgave us!" (p.6, Part II). At Azura's request, they also brought back the banished men, while the Femnaz women, having now learned that father (or any other male who happens to be around) knows best, remorsefully exclaimed, "They (the men) were right in warning us! We'll beg for their forgiveness" (p.6, Part II).

Finally Queen Azura concludes, "I realize now that we Amazons (sic) were wrong in trying to harm boy Legionnaires! If not for male super-heroes, our world would have suffered a terrible disaster!" (p.7, Part II). And so she releases the girls from her anti-male post-hypnotic command in time for them to save the boys whose lives they'd endangered.

In "The Mutiny of the Super-Heroines," published some years later, in 1968, Ambassador Thora of





Taltar's reasons for instigating a female revolt in the Legion make somewhat more sense, though they are even less admirable. An agent provocateur from a female chauvinist regime, she wants to put Earth men in their place — at the bottom of the heap — just as she claims they are on Taltar. "You mean Earth still has a primitive patriarchal society . . . ruled by *men*? On my world . . . a superior matriarchal system exists! There, women are the stronger, dominant sex! It will seem strange addressing men as equals . . ." (p.6). Thora's objective is to get the Legion girls to lead a "world revolution of women" (p.22). Her hold over the female Legionnaires "could mean the downfall of all males on Earth!" (p.8), the Taltarian ambassador gloats.

In this story, too, the female Legionnaires are presented as the victims of the female chauvinist villain, innocent pawns who would never think of rebelling against the boys on their own. Or would they? Discussing "that woman ambassador" back at the Legion Clubhouse, Princess Projectra remarks, "She sounded as if she believed girls should dominate the universe!" Saturn Girl (a former Legion leader, no less) replies, "That'd be pretty hard to imagine, with guys like Superboy and Mon-El around!" Light Lass says thoughtfully, "Oh, I don't know! Supergirl's every bit as strong as they are!" But Supergirl herself smilingly squelches this startingly feminist thought: "Not really! Though our strength has never been accurately measured, theoretically, Superboy is stronger than I, just as a normal boy is stronger than a normal girl!" (p.7).

But as the girls' powers grow greater and greater under the special remote control radiation Thora focuses on them with her power bracelet, they discover that their male teammates' reactions to their increased powers can annoy even traditional-minded females like them. Of course, it's impossible to tell just how much effect the Taltarian ambassador's radiation treatments have having on the girl Legionnaires' minds at this point. However, I, for one, find it quite refreshing when Phantom Girl remarks, "If this is a



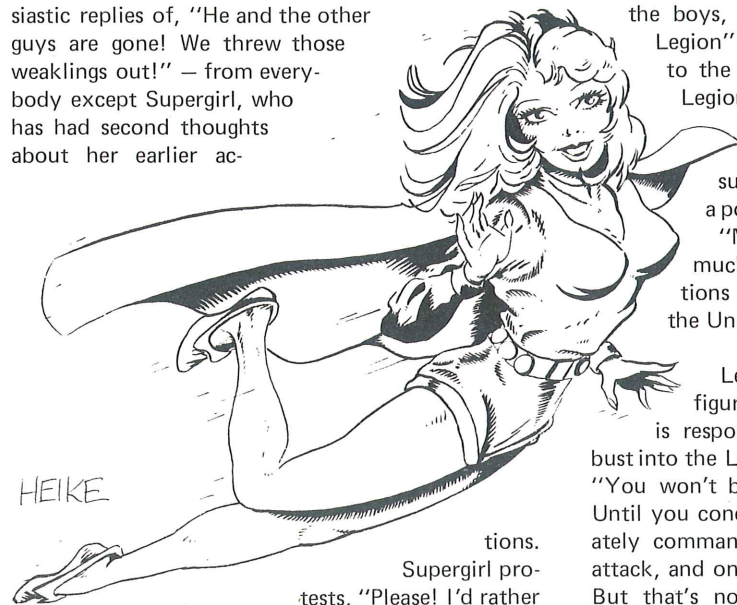
sickness, I hope we have an epidemic!" when the boys immediately jump to the conclusion that the girls' stepped-up powers are merely "the first symptom of a rare space disease!" (p.12) and quarantine them. "Quarantined!" the newly dissatisfied Light Lass exclaims. "Confined like lab animals! Because we've suddenly become more powerful than they are!"

However, "Quarantine be hanged! The fellows need help!" (p.13) and Supergirl leads a charge though the wall when a monitor shows that the boys are apparently on the point of being wiped out by escaped convicts with souped-up weapons at the prison citadel on Mt. Metro. Though the girls easily save the day, they get no thanks for it from their male teammates, who ungraciously remark that if the girls hadn't shown up in the nick of time, "We'd have hit the cons with a counter-punch we had worked out!" And when Invisible Kid barks, "That's enough! Get back to the H.Q., or I'll . . ." (p.14), Light Lass replies, "You'll do nothing! I'm feed up with you men and your tantrums . . . up you go!" (p.15) and cuts loose with her gravity-defying powers. This is the signal for all the other girls — even Supergirl — to attack, too, and they make short work of the boys with their newly-increased powers, especially since they now discover, "Our physical strength has been increased, as well as our powers!" (p.15).

Once the fight is over, Light Lass announces to the boys, "We've decided you're too weak to be in the Legion, so we're taking over and you're out!"

At this point, Ambassador Thora, who has been monitoring all this from afar, exclaims, triumphantly, "Good! Phase One is completed. The Legion is divided . . . now is the time for me to take a direct hand in the matter!" (p.16) and sets off for Legion headquarters.

Once there, Thora oh-so-innocently asks about "that boy who is your leader," only to hear enthusiastic replies of, "He and the other guys are gone! We threw those weaklings out!" — from everybody except Supergirl, who has had second thoughts about her earlier ac-



tions. Supergirl protests, "Please! I'd rather not talk about it! It was wrong . . . I think we should find the boys . . . apologize!" The Taltarian ambassador thinks, "Hmm! The other girls are coming along fine, but the Girl of Steel is still soft! I must fix that!" (p.16). She then excuses herself to give the female Legionnaires another remote control radiation treatment, thinking, "The next dose of radiation will be directed more to the girls' minds! They'll think completely as I do! Then they'll turn Earth into a matriarchy!" (p.17).

The radiation treatment's effects are dramatic and immediate. Suddenly even Supergirl is saying, "Strange . . . suddenly I'm not sorry about the boys any more! I've been thinking how great it would be if Earth was ruled by women!" Shadow Lass replies, "Yes . . . we could put the boys to work as our servants!" But as soon as Shady begins to fantasize about how she'd put Brainiac 5, who happens to be Supergirl's boyfriend, to work "Scrubbing floors . . . if his oh-so-logical super-brain could handle the job!" (p.17), the distressed Girl of Steel snaps back to normal. As Supergirl explains to Thora later, when the unscrupulous ambassador's plot has been

exposed and the female Legionnaires released from her control, "When Shadow Lass made me think about what would happen to Brainiac 5 in a feminist (sic) world, my mind revolted . . . My super-will snapped your control! With my mind free, it was easy to figure that you were behind the plot!"

Meanwhile, however, the other girls become progressively more disgusted with the performance of the boys, who have in fact formed a "Losers' Legion" of their own and continue responding to the same emergencies the now all-female Legion is summoned to, only to be thoroughly outclassed each time by their former teammates. At last the superheroines' annoyance reaches such a point that when Phantom Girl exclaims, "Men! They're so pitifully inferior! much longer can we leave them in positions of responsibility . . . on Earth and in the United Planets?" (p.22).

However, at this point, the boy Legionnaires, who, like Supergirl have figured out that the Taltarian ambassador is responsible for the girls' change of heart, bust into the Legion HQ, shouting melodramatically, "You won't be conquering a world, she-devil! . . . Until you conquer us boys!" (p.22). Thora immediately commands the brainwashed superheroines to attack, and once again the boys are easily overcome. But that's not enough for the ambassador, who thinks, "They've downed the boys . . . but will they kill them? I'll give them one final dose of radiation . . ." (p.23). It is at this point, as Thora gives the female Legionnaires the command to kill, that her booby-trapped (by Supergirl) bracelet explodes in her face, ending her control over the girls and her plans to turn Earth into a matriarch.

Seeing that she is defeated, Thora swallows poison to escape being executed by her superiors on Taltar for having failed to spread the female chauvinist way of life to Earth. But as the ambassador expires, Brainiac 5 reveals that "during her absence, even her own home world overthrew its matriachal government!" And Supergirl rather sanctimoniously concludes, "(This) all goes to show that, despite our puny interference, there's a force in the universe that has a way of setting things right!" (p.24).

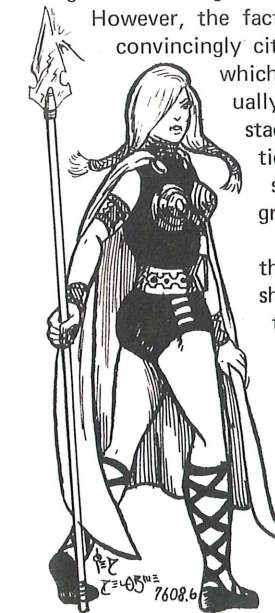
In both of these Legion stories, the female Legionnaires are almost entirely complacent about their slightly less than equal position on the male-dominated team, and return to this definitely un-feminist attitude as soon as they are released from the female chauvinist villain's control. Although in "The Mutiny

of the Super-Heroines" they learn from the boys' resentful reaction to their stepped-up powers that even male Legionnaires can feel threatened by women as strong or stronger than they are, the Legion girls don't even seem to think about this ugly underside of their male teammates' personalities once Ambassador Thora's hold on them is broken. And no one disputes Supergirl's easy assumption that a world in which all men, including her beloved Brainiac 5, were treated as mere slaves would be "feminist," rather than what it really is — even more sexist than patriarchal Earth, only in reverse.

In "Come On In . . . The Revolution's Fine!" the Lady Liberators Avengers story (*Avengers* #83, December, 1970, by Roy Thomas), on the other hand, the superheroines involved are more willing both to listen to the militantly "liberated" Valkyrie's arguments against the not-so-feminist male Avengers and to learn from the results that even if this man-hating stranger was only trying to manipulate them for her own ends, there still may be a grain of truth in her accusations of sexism against Goliath, Quicksilver, the Vision and the Black Panther.

Even here, however, the women's rebellion is made to seem somewhat less than full justified. Roy Thomas does allow the Valkyrie to point out that when male and female superheroes go into battle together, the men usually wind up getting most of the glory — when the women are allowed to do anything more than get in the way or get captured.

However, the fact the the Valkyrie fails to convincingly cite any specific instances in which male Avengers were actually unfair to female Avengers stacks the deck against any rational consideration of the superheroines' very real grievances.



I got the impression that the reader was supposed to share the Wasp's initial reaction to the female revolt. Asked, "Are you with us, or — ?" Jan answers, "I know — I shouldn't be!" (p.6). When even a featherhead like the Wasp realizes that she's acting against her better judgment in joining this "powder-puff protest" (p.4) (although actually



she's got plenty of sexist treatment to complain about even in her origin story in *The Superhero Women*), it can come as no great surprise to the reader when it turns out that once again, the heroines' uncharacteristically anti-male behavior was caused by a form of mind control, not by any realization that they really have not been treated as the men's equals. As the Valkyrie, who turns out to be the Enchantress in disguise, tells

the Scarlet Witch, the Wasp, Medusa and the Black Widow after revealing herself, "To gain all my ends, I disguised myself . . . and used subtle, secret spells to win you four to my cause!" (p.19).

The Enchantress' motive for this anti-male charade is an odd one. Unlike Ambassador Thora and Queen Azura of Femnaz, who really believe that women are the superior sex, the Enchantress acts against men out of personal spite — out of the fury of a woman scorned.

As in "The Mutiny of the Super-Heroines," it is one of the women the anti-male villainess has brainwashed who begins to suspect her true motives and eventually foils her plot. In this case it's the Scarlet Witch who suddenly springs forward and turns the Enchantress' magic back on her when she tries to kill all the Avengers. Later, when the Vision asks, "Then you held your hex power in reserve . . . because you suspected the Valkyrie's secret?", Wanda explains, "Yes, but only after she called Jan 'wench' in a tone she once used at me! My suspicions broke her spell over me . . . since it depended on keeping our trust!" (p.20).

At this point Goliath tactlessly interrupts, "Well, at least I'm glad of one thing . . . you birds finally learned your lesson about that Women's Lib bull!" Instead of meekly agreeing that men know best and women should be satisfied with what they have, as the female Legionnaires tacitly do, the Scarlet Witch snaps right back at him, "That's what you think — male chauvinist pig! One of these days, the

Liberators will stage a comeback — right, Jan?" And even the Wasp, who spoke so disparagingly of all things feminist at the beginning of the story, replies, "You know, Wanda . . . they just might, at that!" (p.20).

Speaking of male chauvinist pigs, there is an incredible amount of sexist rhetoric in most of these battle of the sexes stories, and most of it comes from the women. Oh, sure, every now and then some misguided chivalrous hero says something like, "Hulk does not fight — against girls" (*Incredible Hulk* #83, p.16). But usually it's the women, especially the female chauvinist ones who challenge male heroes to single combat, who enter screaming, "Up against the wall, male chauvinist pig!" (which sounds rather odd on the Asgardian lips of the Valkyrie in *Incredible Hulk* #142, p.16) and keep up a steady stream of insults about the weakness and inferiority of the male sex throughout the battle.

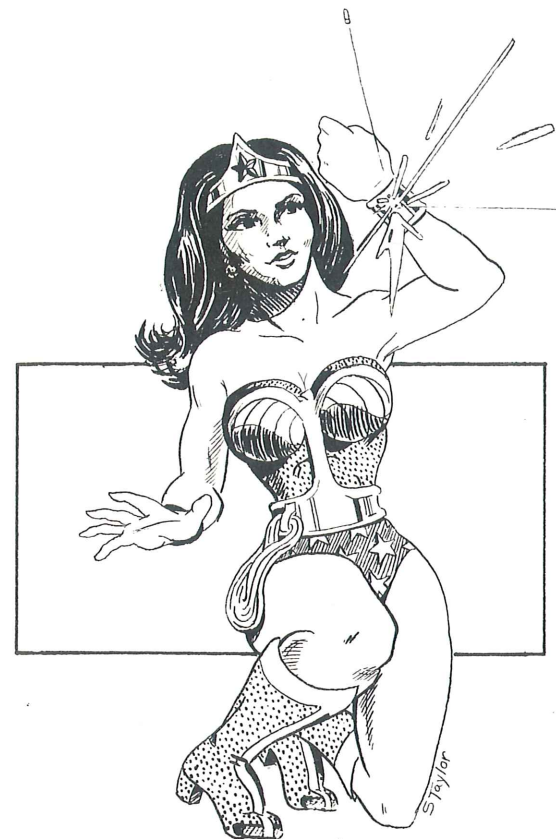
Thundra (in *Fantastic Four* #133, 1972) by Gerry Conway) and the Valkyrie (whose Asgardian persona is joined to the body of feminist debutante Samantha Parrington by the Enchantress in *Incredible Hulk* #142, 1971, by Roy Thomas) especially make no bones about their intentions in challenging the super-heroes who they've been told are the world's strongest men. They intend "to find and battle the Earth's most powerful man — and defeat him so utterly, men will learn their lesson — for all time!" (*Fantastic Four* #151, p.14).

But if this lesson is to be learned by all men, the female chauvinist victory must get as much publicity as possible. So Thundra insists that the Thing must fight her in front of a standing room only audience

at Shea Stadium, explaining, "The defeat of Earth's strongest male is something I wish the world to witness" (*Fantastic Four* #133, p.21). And when the Valkyrie has knocked out the Hulk on a fashionable uptown street, she cries, "This is a welcome sight . . . The mighty, man-monstrous Hulk — a helpless heap of quasi-human rubble — beneath the hand of a 'mere woman!' But, it is not enough that I alone should witness your fall. All mankind — every egocentric male — must know of it — and tremble" (*Incredible Hulk* #142, p.18). So she drags the Hulk to the top of the Empire State Building and prepares to throw him to the street more than a hundred stories below.

There's more than a little anti-male rhetoric when Wonder Woman fights Superman in the *Superman vs. Wonder Woman* tabloid (1978, by Gerry Conway), too — even though this particular male-female fight isn't really intended to be a battle of the sexes at all. In this case, the hero and heroine don't fight to prove that one sex is superior to the other, but for a completely unrelated reason — to decide whether or not the United States government will be permitted to continue its attempts to construct an atomic bomb (the action of the tabloid takes place during World War II).

As usual in a story written by Gerry Conway, who appears to think that feminism is synonymous with hating — or at least despising — men, the heroine starts spouting anti-male dialogue almost as soon as she appears. Coming to the rescue of an atomic scientist and an FBI man who are being attacked by Nazi robots, WW remarks, "If you men will allow me to help, I believe you're badly out-



numbered." "Sometimes I wonder if they all have a masculine death wish!" "Ever since leaving my Amazon sisters, I've found myself in one senseless battle after another! Why can't men order their lives more sanely?" — all on one page (p.12).

Nor is there any shortage of reverse sexist remarks throughout the remainder of the story. Returning to Paradise Island to ask her mother's advice, Wonder Woman comments, "Much as I love America, it is a country ruled by men . . . and men are foolish . . . blind to their humane responsibilities!" (p.29). Later she tells Queen Hippolyte, "Part of my fears are founded on man's weakness for violence — and my belief that even a good man may use any means to achieve victory over his enemies, though by doing so — he becomes as bad as they are!" (p.31).

When she finally battles Superman, he, too, is favored with one of her man-hating monologues. "Men are all alike, even super-men — involving themselves where they don't belong — all for the sake of their masculine honor! An honor that causes war, Superman — ! An honor that kills — !" (pp.38-39). With all these anti-male comments overflowing

almost every page of the tabloid, I was hardly surprised to overhear a male fan leafing through a copy of it at a convention say to a friend, "Did you ever think that Paradise Island may really be the island of Lesbos?" Indignant, but not surprised.

Why do the women always win in these superhero battles of the sexes? Do they always win? Well, the fight in the *Superman vs. Wonder Woman* tabloid is actually a draw, since the battle is called off by an SOS from the U.S. government begging the hero and heroine to retrieve the stolen components of the prototype atom bomb. By the time the model bomb has been recovered and the villains captured, the superheroes' differences have been settled peacefully by President Roosevelt's promising that the United States won't use the atom bomb it's working on, at least not as long as he's President. Since that was all Wonder Woman ever wanted in the first place, she and Superman no longer have anything to fight about, so we never discover who would have been the victor.

However, we can get a pretty good idea from "A Tale of Two Satellites," the story in *Justice League of America* #143 (June 1977, by Steve Englehart), whose cover bills it as "The Most Titanic Battle Ever! Wonder Woman vs. Superman!" In this story, as in all the other superhero battle of the sexes stories I've been able to find, with the exception of the abovementioned tabloid, the woman wins decisively. Oddly enough, like the tabloid, *Justice League of America* #143 is another male-female conflict that technically doesn't qualify as a battle of the sexes story at all, since the fight between Wonder Woman and Superman has little or nothing to do with patriarchy vs. patriarchy or anything of that nature. Instead, Wonder Woman attacks Superman and attempts to betray the Justice League because, once again, her mind is being controlled by someone else. But in this case, that someone else is not a female chauvinist villain, but Construct II, a computer intelligence "born from the matrix of electronic waves blanketing Earth" (p.17), and "he" just wants to destroy the JLA, not prove a feminist point.

Actually, clever strategy and/or deceit are often the keys to the superheroines' triumph over their male colleagues in comic book battles of the sexes. But not as often as might be expected. "The Revolt of the Girl Legionnaires" is the only story where the women rely almost entirely on "feminine wiles," using their charms to get the boy Legionnaires off guard and then sneak-attacking with their super-powers. In *Incredible Hulk* #142, the Valkyrie



seems powerful enough to overcome the Hulk by physical strength alone, assuming anyone could. However, midway through their battle she resorts to a trick, pretending to repent and apologize in order to get close enough to him "so that I might touch a certain pressure-point on (his) neck — and gain the day's victory" (p.17) by knocking him out. However, this hardly seems necessary, since she has no trouble dragging the unconscious Hulk to the top of the Empire State Building — hardly an easy task — and throwing him off. He only survives because he's practically indestructible.

In *Justice League of America* #157 (August 1978, by Gerry Conway), the lone story I have found in which supermen turn against superwomen, the heroines, outnumbered more than two to one (it's Wonder Woman, Supergirl, and Black Canary vs. Superman, Green Lantern, Flash, Green Arrow, Aquaman, Elongated Man and Batman), resort to strategy to subdue the men, who have been mesmerized by the Siren. As the Flash explains later, "In the middle of the confusion, Supergirl got an idea, and tested it with her life . . . She hoped Superman's honest love for her, his cousin, would be stronger than the Siren's influence — so she made herself a target . . . Hit with conflicting emotions, the Man of Steel gave way to his true feelings — and the Siren's hold was shattered! . . . Superman and Supergirl used super-hypnotism to free the rest of us — " (p.33).

However, in all three of the battle of the sexes I've found, the heroines defeat the heroes by sheer brute strength. True, in "The Mutiny of the Super-Heroines," the female Legionnaires had the advantage of having thier powers temporarily greatly increased by Ambassador Thora's radiation treatments. But the Lady Liberators in *Avengers* #83 and Thundra in *Fantastic Four* #133 defeat their male opponents with only their own normal powers, which turn out to be more than enough to vanquish

any superhero.

As Thundra dangles the battered Thing by his feet from the top of the enormous World Globe in Flushing Meadow Park, threatening to drop him to his death if he doesn't concede, Reed Richards hastily sets up an elaborate machine nearby, telling Medusa, "If she hits him again — Ben's finished!"

He then fires the machine at the Thing, who temporarily reverts to his ordinary human form. At this Thundra cries angrily, "No! He's become human again! I've been cheated — cheated! I don't know how — but you've won this round, Ben Grimm. I cannot injure a weakling man! It would be completely — unfeminine" (p.28).

So what does all this female invincibility mean? That men are afraid of women, according to a friend of mine. Perhaps that is stating it too badly. But it certainly does reveal that deep down, under all the soap opera romances and good girl art that they often reduce female characters to, the men who write comics are a lot closer to viewing women as a literally irresistible force than a harmlessly adorable sex object. In fact, the plots of these stories seem to show that, in the writers' view, even the most apparently docile, "feminine" woman can become a threat men's enjoyable superior status at any time. Of course, the consciously feminist type of female, usually portrayed in comics as a slogan-screaming castrating woman out to eliminate all males or reduce them to the level of slaves, is the most to be feared, as shown by her monotonous recurrence in these stories. But the "female super-treachery" of the usually submissive female Legionnaires and Avengers suggests that the writers' half suppressed consciousness of women's ample cause for dissatisfaction with male-dominated society has instilled in them a deep-seated fear that at any moment even the most apparently contented woman could be transformed into an implacable enemy of all male-kind. Ultimately, then, these writers fear that even an adoring female kiss may be only a prelude to a stab in the back.

— Margaret O'Connell



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