

# FOREWORD



**T**he Idol-Head is the color of jade, but it cannot be jade because jade does not float. We are never told what it is made of. It has been floating for a month now, since the last full moon. Tonight is another full moon, so it drifts ashore, landing on the coast of another unnamed city. The top of the Idol-Head flips open, emitting black smoke, or spitting out a bolt of blue lightning, or ejecting a tiny seed-pod. The seed-pod is carried by the wind to a farmer's garden, where it buries itself in the soil. The next morning something has grown from the seed, an armless moss-covered giant with vague facial features. From the giant's eyes shoot rays that turn smaller beings—a farmer, Zook, anybody who gets in its way—into fellow giants. Or it is black smoke that emerges from the Idol-Head. The black smoke is taken by the wind to the nearby city, and along the way the smoke devours everything in its path. Or the smoke solidifies, taking the form of a giant who is guardian of an enormous spotted egg, and from that egg hatches another giant, who casts a "doom shadow", and everything that falls under the "doom shadow" turns into what appears to be petrified wood. Or the Idol-Head hatches an orchestra of malevolent flying musical instruments, whose compositions

can lull an audience to sleep, provoke hysterical laughter, or drive the hearers into a violent rage. Or how about the purple-skinned Venomee, who turn our hero, the Martian Manhunter, into a fish? Or the color-devouring color rings, or the man-thing that unearthed secrets, or the supernatural masterpieces? And so on, every full moon, all from the head of what looks like something you'd find at your neighbor's yard sale. Maybe you'd pay him five bucks for it.

Jack Schiff has been fired from DETECTIVE COMICS. Sales are lousy. Apparently readers don't like Batman as a science-fiction-fantasy hero, battling the robot beasts of Skyland and Alpha, the Experimental Man, or taken captive by alien zookeepers, or being transformed into a Bat-Genie. Readers are wondering why the book is called DETECTIVE COMICS, since there isn't much detective work involved in defeating Dr. Double-X or the Polka-Dot Man. Some readers may be old enough to remember when the Manhunter from Mars back-up feature was about a detective named John Jones, but nowadays the Martian superhero, J'Onn J'Onzz, and his extradimensional sidekick, Zook, are battling pretty much the same alien robots, cosmic creatures and mad

scientists that crop up in the Batman stories. (And on one occasion it's not just pretty much the same, but the exact same mad scientist. But we'll get to him later.) The Martian Manhunter still has his John Jones identity, but Detective Jones barely functions as a secret identity anymore, usually only appearing on the first page, to receive an assignment from Captain Harding that is more suited for the Martian Manhunter than for Earthman Jones. "Er—Did you say alien robot bandits, Chief? I'll check it out at once!" ("But not as an ordinary human being," our hero adds in a parenthetical thought balloon.) Even when the criminals are ordinary human beings, who were not lucky enough to find a space-capsule that crash-landed on Earth, containing alien robots and complete operating instructions in English, but instead just your average Joes with guns, a plan, and one of the many abandoned shacks one might find in the woods near Middletown, it is not Det. Jones who arrives bursting through the door, his own gun drawn, but rather the Martian Manhunter who crashes through the roof of their shack, and Zook who glows red and makes the inside of their getaway copter hotter than a furnace. In most stories Det. Jones doesn't even make a return appearance on page 12; by page 2 he's forgotten. Can readers be blamed for wanting DETECTIVE COMICS to have some detectives in it, and for being disappointed when they find Martians, extradimensional imps, and Bat-Genies instead? Sales are so low DC even considers cancelling DETECTIVE COMICS. Instead, they fire the editor. And when Julius Schwartz takes over as editor he fires the Martian Manhunter, replacing him with a new back-up feature, the Elongated Man.

The Martian Manhunter's last story in DETECTIVE COMICS, from issue #326, could

have ended up being his last story ever. It's even called "The Death of John Jones, Detective". In his final case Det. Jones investigates the theft of a Babylonian idol called Diabolu. As its owner, an art collector, explains, "According to legend, all the evils of mankind were locked up inside it! This book tells all about it!" Det. Jones opens *The Book of Diabolu* and reads, "Once opened by the secret key, Diabolu will release one of its evils...and henceforth, each time the full moon appears, the idol will automatically open, to release another of its evils!" Collins warns Jones that he must get Diabolu back, before the Idol-Head is opened. But it's too late. The thief, a fellow with a scar on his left cheek and a Hitler mustache named Vince Durskin, has the key to Diabolu. He inserts the key in the Idol-Head's mouth and turns it. The head's top flips open, and instead of the rare jewels Durskin was hoping he would find inside, a bolt of pale blue lightning bursts forth and strikes Durskin in the eyes. Now Durskin's eyes project destructive beams, and the only thing that can stop the beams is a pair of sunglasses Durskin has in his pocket. But the Idol-Head isn't through yet. Before it closes a black cloud emerges and pursues Durskin. The thief is able to outrun the cloud, so it seeks prey elsewhere, absorbing everything in its path: railroad cars, airplanes, scraps of paper, a steel tower, even Det. John Jones. You can go to page 115 and read about Jones' apparent death, about how the Martian Manhunter was able to survive the black cloud but was unable to "rescue" his secret identity, and about how he was able to defeat both Durskin and the black cloud but was unable to find the Idol-Head.

The story ends with a tearful gathering of the late Det. Jones' closest friends, Diane Mead, Captain Harding, Zook and the

Martian Manhunter. This is the last time we'll see Diane Mead and Captain Harding in a Martian Manhunter story. By "killing" Jones, writer Jack Miller also eliminates most of the supporting cast...a move that seems inevitable by this point. Captain Harding was never a fully realized character but was merely a plot device. His role was to give Det. Jones his assignment, which, of course, would turn out to be another job for the Martian Manhunter. Now it would be the Idol-Head of Diabolu that would be giving the Martian Manhunter his assignments. Diane Mead's fate was sealed when Zook was introduced as the Martian Manhunter's new partner. Only in two of this volume's stories, "The Challenge of the Alien Robots" from DETECTIVE COMICS #317, and issue #324's "The Beast Who Was J'Onn J'Onzz", does she have more than a cameo role. The monsters summoned by the Idol-Head take no prisoners, so she wouldn't even serve as a damsel in distress, waiting for our hero to rescue her.

But it's not the end of the Martian Manhunter and Zook. In the last panel J'Onn vows to avenge Det. Jones' death by hunting day and night for the Idol-Head of Diabolu until he has found and destroyed it. Below him a caption reads, "And so we say farewell to the detective career of John Jones! The Manhunter from Mars will now be featured in HOUSE OF MYSTERY! Look forward to the next full moon—and the next evil released!" Fired from DETECTIVE COMICS, Schiff still has another title, HOUSE OF MYSTERY, and the Martian Manhunter has a new home.

And, at last, his own covers. J'Onn never had a cover appearance during his 102-issue, 8<sup>1/2</sup> year run in DETECTIVE COMICS, not even one of those headshots in one of the upper or lower corners (which is why, until this volume, we haven't reprinted any covers).

HOUSE OF MYSTERY would give him 9 covers, in issues #143-148 and 151-153. The covers of issues #149, 150, 154 and 155 featured the kind of sci-fi/fantasy stories that had been appearing in the title up to this point, and which continued to appear as back-ups during the early part of Martian Manhunter's run. "I Was Tried by an Insect Jury" (#149) and "Prisoner of the Purple Demon" (#154) are typical titles. A new super-hero feature, Dial H for Hero, would debut in issue #156 and would take over as cover feature, putting an end to the brief run of Martian Manhunter covers (and to the sci-fi/fantasy back-up stories; for a time HOUSE OF MYSTERY would be taken over by super-heroes).

Eventually the Martian Manhunter would track down the Idol-Head of Diabolu and learn its origin, but that will have to wait until the next volume.

Before we conclude this Foreword, we need to say a few words about two stories. One of them, included in this volume, is "The Man Who Destroyed J'Onn J'Onzz" from DETECTIVE COMICS #322, in which the Martian Manhunter is introduced to his first recurring foe, Professor Arnold Hugo. The particulars of this battle can be found on pages 67-78, so we needn't describe them here. What is worth mentioning here is that this is the only Martian Manhunter solo-story in either DETECTIVE COMICS or HOUSE OF MYSTERY to include an appearance by another DC hero. The guest is Batman, who only appears in the last panel. Batman had previously battled Prof. Hugo 16 issues ago, in the Batman story in DETECTIVE COMICS #306. Yes, J'Onn's first ever arch-enemy is another super-hero's sloppy seconds. The story in issue #322 ends with the Martian Manhunter handing Hugo over to Batman,

and with the grateful Caped Crusader promising to return the favor if any of the Martian Manhunter's foes should ever visit Gotham City.

Any battles Batman may have had with Mr. Moth or the Human Squirrel remain unrecorded, but there is a record of Batman's own encounter with Prof. Hugo, which brings us to the second story we have to discuss, which, since it is a Batman story and not a Martian Manhunter story, does not appear in this volume. This volume's Martian Manhunter story includes a two-panel flashback which hardly does justice to the earlier Batman story. Yes, it tells us how the Professor's brain-stimulator gave him advanced scientific knowledge (that is, even more advanced than the scientific knowledge required to build a brain-stimulator) and an abnormally large head (to accommodate his abnormally large stimulated brain), but it leaves unanswered the most important question, not *how* the Professor was able become a master criminal, but *why*. Why did this troubled genius embark on a life of crime, you ask? As we learn in "The Wizard of 1,000 Menaces", it is because he was snubbed by the Gotham City Historical Society. To promote the construction of its new museum, the Historical Society stages a series of reenactments, selecting certain prominent citizens of Gotham City to each take on the role of a famous ancestor and to recreate the event that earned the ancestor his fame. Prof. Hugo thinks his scientific genius should earn him a place of prominence among Gothamites, and he has an ancestor whom he claims was a famous warrior. But Arnold has another think coming, so he unleashes his rage upon the Historical Society for rejecting him. The first two historical reenactments are disrupted by a giant tiger, injected with a growth serum

Hugo concocted, and another Hugo invention, a lightning cannon. Both menaces are defeated by Batman and Robin, so to prevent further interference from the Dynamic Duo, Hugo sends his invisible flying robots to capture them. (It's the little propellers on the robots' heads that allow them to fly.) The Historical Society has suspended its reenactments, so Hugo moves on to the main event. He will turn an orbiting satellite into an artificial moon that will rival the size of Earth's natural moon. "...And all the world will see a moon I created—Hugo's Moon! My name will live through eternity!" But so warped has Hugo become that he doesn't realize the havoc that having two moons will cause on Earth. Massive tidal waves are just the beginning of a series of catastrophies that could exterminate all life on Earth. If DC eventually reprints this tale, you can read for yourself how Batman and Robin escape Hugo's trap so that they can save the Earth from moon-doom.

Hugo is imprisoned, but 16 issues later he escapes, hoping he'll have better luck defeating DETECTIVE COMICS' back-up feature. He will have further battles with the Martian Manhunter in HOUSE OF MYSTERY, which you can read in our next volume.

For now, enjoy the stories we have to offer in this book.

—Wade Greenberg

*WADE GREENBERG has no famous ancestors that he knows of, but his numerous books, including his latest, Tasty Brains, have earned him a modest amount of fame (or infamy, according to some reviewers).*