

FOREWORD



Take me down—to the river of dreams . . .
Take me up—to the mountains of passion . . .
Take

me
home?

You probably think I'm repeating the attention-getting gimmick from the previous volume's Foreword, quoting the lyrics of some wacked-out '70s pop tune, but the above is actually the complete text of the opening page of this volume's first story. In seven volumes we've come a distance almost as great as between Earth and Mars, from a six-page remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* with Sam Spade as the Martian savior, to a hundred-page fever dream with a theme song by John Denver on acid. And most of that distance was travelled *in between* the last volume and this one.

At the end of THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER ARCHIVES Vol. 6 it appears we have come full circle—not without some lengthy digressions, but still pretty much back to where we began, with J'onn J'onzz the Martian exile fighting evil on his adopted Earth. In JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #230, the last issue reprinted in that volume, he is welcomed home by his super-hero comrades. He officially rejoins the League in JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA ANNUAL #2. A few months later he even resumes his human John Jones identity.

But this is not the same League he had left years ago. The team was originally conceived as an updated version of the Justice Society of America from comics' Golden Age. Just as the JSA united DC's greatest heroes of the 1940s, the mightiest heroes of the modern era joined forces as the JLA. Over the years the League's ranks expanded from the seven founding members—Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Flash, Green Lantern, Aquaman and our own J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter—to over twice that number. Most menaces were not significant enough require the entire membership. In a typical story less than half the membership would appear. This meant that no individual member had to commit to the team full-time. This arrangement worked well enough for the first 200 or so issues, especially since either Superman or Batman, or often both, found the time to participate in most adventures. Wonder Woman, Flash and Green Lantern were also frequent participants. You would think that the more powerful, and more popular, a super-hero was, the more demands would be made of his or her time, and the less time he or she would have for the League. But fortunately, the opposite was true, and in every issue readers could count on appearances by two or more of the "big five". That is, until "The War of the Worlds—1984!" When the League had to defeat a Martian invasion of the planet Earth

without help from *any* of the “big five”, current team-leader Aquaman decided some changes were in order. From now on, each member would have to commit to the League full-time, resulting in a smaller, but more dedicated membership. From the old League Aquaman would be joined by Zatanna, Elongated Man, and the returning Martian Manhunter, and to this new League four new members would be added—Vixen, Commander Steel, Gypsy and Vibe. For the first time in the long history of JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, the book’s concept would be redefined. Instead of a banding together of The World’s Greatest Super-Heroes™ (a phrase trademarked by DC), the JLA would now be four veteran super-heroes mentoring four promising newbies. Of the many revamps and relaunches the League would endure over the next quarter of a century, “Justice League Detroit” (so nicknamed by readers because the team moved its headquarters to the “Motor City”) is still considered the least successful. After two and a half years of declining sales, “JLD” was forced to disband when Vibe and Commander Steel were murdered by old JLA foe, Professor Ivo. Gypsy retired from super-heroing and Vixen went on to join a more popular group, the Suicide Squad. DC went so far as to cancel the original series and relaunch it with a new first issue, a slightly different title, and, of course, a new membership. JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #261 was followed the next month by JUSTICE LEAGUE #1 (which would become JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL with issue #7).

The new team’s membership was determined not by co-writers Keith Giffen and J. M. DeMatteis, or by editor Andy Helfer, but by folks higher up in DC’s management. Once again veterans would join forces with newbies. DC hoped that new characters Guy Gardner and Dr. Light, along with recently revamped versions of Golden Age greats, Captain Marvel and Dr. Fate, and the Blue Beetle, a Silver Age character DC had recently acquired from another publisher,

would be the stars of tomorrow, and that veterans Black Canary, Mister Miracle and the Martian Manhunter would finally achieve the stardom that eluded them for so many years. And then you had Batman as the loss-leader. This second relaunch proved to be more successful than the first one. It spawned its share of spin-offs, including the four-issue mini-series, MARTIAN MANHUNTER.

But all of this background still doesn’t prepare us for what JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL co-writer J. M. DeMatteis did to our hero, so bear with me as I still have some more ‘splainin’ to do.

In the mid-1980s the Justice League wasn’t the only DC property that needed fixing. The task of fixing the three biggest stars, Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman, went to the three most popular creators of the day, John Byrne, Frank Miller and George Perez. Byrne chose to streamline the Man of Steel’s mythos, which had gotten hopelessly complicated over the decades. Gone were the various spin-off characters, including Superboy, Supergirl, Krypto the Super-Dog, Comet the Super-Horse, Beppo the Super-Monkey, and the microscopic populace of the Bottled City of Kandor, leaving Kal-El the last son of Krypton and the only bearer of the big red “S”. Frank Miller’s fearsome, revenge-driven Dark Knight had nothing in common with Adam West’s campy TV crimefighter, or the goofy sci-fi hero of the late 1950s and early 1960s, or any of the other incarnations of Batman that had strayed from Bob Kane and Bill Finger’s original conception. And George Perez strengthened the Amazon Princess’ connections to Greek mythology, opening up interesting story possibilities neglected by previous writers.

In the wake of these successful revamps, many more DC characters were given new origin stories, new costumes, completely new identities, or in some other way had their lives turned topsy-turvy, in the hopes that they, too, would win new fans. Not every “bold new direction” or attempt to show that “you only thought you knew him” was a success, but they certainly gave readers a lot to talk

about. It was an interesting, and sometimes frustrating, time to be a comics fan.

At this point the Martian Manhunter had been around for more than three decades, and as a member of the popular Justice League International, seemed like he might finally have a shot at stardom. All he needed was a little fixing. Okay, maybe more than a little.

How do you make a character relevant to a modern audience, when the character was created decades before most of that audience was even born? It's easy when you have someone whose appeal is timeless, such as Superman or Batman. Acknowledge that the character's creators got it right the first time, and strip away everything that isn't consistent with the creators' original vision. But that doesn't work when you have a character whose origin story was very much of its time. "The Strange Experiment of Dr. Erdel" would have been a different story if it had been written in 1988. In 1955, when it was written, science-fiction transformed real life Cold War paranoia into Martian invaders intent on destroying humanity (or in the film *Mars Needs Women*, subjecting the fairer half of humanity to a fate worse than death). The rare benevolent Martian who wanted to live peacefully among us would have to hide his true, alien identity and pretend to be an Earthling. But to audiences of a later decade, who grew up with the TV show *Star Trek*, and the films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E. T.: The Extra-Terrestrial*, wouldn't a visitor from another just as likely inspire curiosity as fear? Even his name was an anachronism. "Manhunter" may have been slang for lawman once upon a time, but the term had become as quaint as "G-man" or "gumshoe". And John Jones? What kind of a name is that?

John Byrne's own words for his approach to Superman were "back to basics". If J. M. DeMatteis had chosen a catchy slogan, it surely would have been, "You ain't seen nothin' yet." Our hero learns that his past as he remembers it is a lie—even his true physical appearance has been unknown to

him all these years. So thorough is DeMatteis' deconstruction of the Martian Manhunter, that in his four-issue mini-series there isn't much room for constructing a new character. That would be left to future stories, and other writers in addition to DeMatteis. That was the plan, anyway. In truth, even DeMatteis himself couldn't deal with the full implications of the changes he had wrought. Perhaps DeMatteis had intended to write a second mini-series, or even hoped for an ongoing monthly series starring the new Martian Manhunter, but the disappointing sales of the first mini-series prevented that. In JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL, the Martian Manhunter was part of an ensemble cast; equal story time was supposed to be given to each member of the team. Of course, since this was a team book, exploring the private lives of individual members was less important than chronicling the adventures of the team as a whole. There simply wasn't enough room in the pages of JLI to create a brand new identity for the Martian Manhunter. It was easier to let him keep his old identity, without fully explaining why he continued to live what he now knew was a lie. The only sequel to the mini-series is the third story in this Archives volume, "The Men I Never Was" from JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL #3, co-written by DeMatteis and his JLI collaborator, Keith Giffen. It shows us Earth and its people from the Martian Manhunter's point of view, and reveals how fond of us he has grown during his time on our world. Perhaps he's maintaining his old identity for our benefit. The old Martian Manhunter is as familiar to us as anything else from 1950s sci-fi, which long ago lost its original shock value. Why disturb us by making us confront something *truly* alien? Of course, this suggests the decades haven't changed us as much as we would like to believe, that a real life close encounter with an extraterrestrial might not be as wonderful as in the movies. Instead of taking human form to be accepted by us, the new Martian Manhunter takes the familiar form of one of our fictional aliens.

One way to avoid having to create a new Martian Manhunter is to present the old Martian Manhunter in his proper setting, the 1950s. That's what we get in the other two stories reprinted in this volume, an untitled story from SECRET ORIGINS #35 and the three-issue mini-series, MARTIAN MANHUNTER: AMERICAN SECRETS.

In SECRET ORIGINS #35 writer Mark Verheiden avoids the implications of DeMatteis' mini-series by having an Earthling tell us the story as the Martian Manhunter told it to him years ago, back when our hero still believed the lie. But since this is a "secret origin" there has to be more than just a retelling of the familiar tale from DETECTIVE COMICS #225. Verheiden answers a question that SECRET ORIGINS editor Mark Waid had heard asked by Keith Giffen, "How did a super-powered alien from another world end up as a police detective, anyway?"

All four of these stories are easily the best written to have appeared in THE MARTIAN MANHUNTER ARCHIVES thus far—showing how much a big mainstream company such as DC could benefit from competition from the smaller publishers that emerged in the 1980s, and that were willing to produce more experimental material—and the crowning achievement is MARTIAN MANHUNTER: AMERICAN SECRETS, by writer Gerard Jones and artist Eduardo Barreto.

A Martian who would adopt an identity as bland as John Jones to avoid giving old men heart attacks—what could be a more perfect metaphor for middle-class America in the 1950s? Turns out it was only the houses, the tacky tacky little boxes, that were all just the same. The people who lived in them, much as they strived to pretend otherwise, were a bit more complicated. What would happen if one of them revealed his or her true self? Would the neighbors, or even those loved ones packed inside the same little box, find themselves confronting something as alien, as frightening, as a creature from another world, not realizing, not wanting to realize, that this was also their own true form? Who among them—which is to say who among

us—would even be able to recognize what we've hidden under masks we've worn so long we've forgotten they are masks? Perhaps it's best not to find out. The next time you look in the mirror, do you really want the face looking back at you to be that of a Martian?

—Wade Greenberg

WADE GREENBERG *won't stop writing books about Mars, both fictional and factual, and sometimes somewhere in between. The latest is My Red Heaven.*