

FOREWORD



In the world of science fiction, few things are more endearing than seeing an otherwise alien character assume a human trait or two. Spock had his own wry sense of humor, Data had his cat, Spot, and the Martian Manhunter has Oreo cookies.

The 90's saw a divergence in interpretations of the Alien Atlas: was he to be the alien living amongst humanity with all-too-human quirks of his own, or was he to leave humanity behind and fully embrace his Martian roots? The question remains unanswered by both fans and creators alike, with the issue of "how human is J'Onn J'Onzz" still being a divisive one. Collected in this volume are stories which represent both visions of the Martian Manhunter, and when read together, throw the dichotomy of J'Onn J'Onzz into sharp focus. The Martian Manhunter

has been plagued by an ill-defined character premise almost since his inception, and the revelations of the 1988 MARTIAN MANHUNTER mini-series by J. M. DeMatteis and Mark Badger, coupled with the exquisite, deeply rooted in humanity *noir* of MARTIAN MANHUNTER: AMERICAN SECRETS, the 1992 mini-series by Gerard Jones and Eduardo Barreto, only drove the two separate interpretations further toward the (not-Martian) poles.

Further background to these 90's stories is the groundwork Keith Giffen and J. M. Dematteis laid down during the fan-favorite JUSTICE LEAGUE INTERNATIONAL series, which drew J'Onn J'Onzz as friendly, albeit wry, patriarch to a group of juvenile superheroes. Some stories collected in this volume, such as "The Fire this Time" from ADVENTURES IN THE DC UNIVERSE #5, capture the playful-

ness with which the character can be written. While this story is a light-hearted tale written for a younger audience, many a modern DC writer would do well to attempt to recapture the wry humor presented in this story, as this kind of humor always works well for the character. In this story, we see him enjoying his milk and cookies and renting low-budgeted sci-fi films from a Denver video store.

Whether in his “alien-only” or “alien-amongst-humans” interpretation, tragedy is a recurrent theme for the Martian Manhunter in many of his modern-era stories. From the Bronze Age onward, death, failure, and just plain bad luck follow J’Onn J’Onzz around as closely as Zook did in the Silver Age. Despite his shortcomings, the Martian Manhunter never loses his sense of compassion for the human race, and stories such as “Deep Down” from SHOWCASE ‘95 #9 show the depth of J’Onn’s compassion as he brings peace to an elderly survivor of the Titanic, a few years before Leonardo DiCaprio assumed the same role.

While the stories in the 1996 MARTIAN MANHUNTER SPECIAL #1 and 1998’s MARTIAN MANHUNTER ANNUAL #1 insist on pulling the Sleuth from Outer Space

either away from the dearly-held ties he had formed with his adopted homeworld, or from the character’s morals, both JLA SECRET FILES AND ORIGINS #1 and JLA ANNUAL #1 plant a well-characterized J’Onzz firmly amongst Humanity, in situations both shining and corrupted.

Proving again that the most interesting stories happen when superheroes are on their day off, “A Day in the Life: Martian Manhunter” from JLA SECRET FILES AND ORIGINS #1 shows the efforts J’Onn has taken to protect the parts of the world neglected by other heroes, using intelligence and diplomacy in addition to brawn. Silver Age fans will also rejoice to see the human guise of “John Jones” alive and still solving weird crimes, and J’Onzz’s adoption of other human guises in his quest to further understand humanity pays homage as well as expands upon his original concept in a logical and inspired fashion. There is even a bit of Silver Age lightheartedness in the choice of “Johann Johnson” as the name of J’Onn’s cab-driving alias. Completing the story is an interpretation of J’Onn’s Martian spirituality that nicely dovetails the groundwork laid down in the 1988 J. M. DeMatteis miniseries without jettisoning his ties to humanity for the

sake of “embracing” his Martian heritage.

For those fans who regard the Martian Manhunter as a *noir* detective with a superhero twist, “Hardboiled Hangover” from JLA ANNUAL #1 provides a well-written, albeit a tad over-the-top, strange mystery with a tragic turn. “Martin Smith” is a bit more hard-boiled and world-weary than “John Jones” ever was, yet still possesses enough vulnerability for the *femme fatale* to prey upon. Though readers may find it jarring to see J’Onzz channeling Mike Hammer more than Sam Spade, it is worth a look if only for the untapped potential contained in this perspective on the character.

While many fans enjoy reading a Martian Manhunter who is free from all ties on Earth to explore his past on Mars, to forget that so many solid stories were penned with the Manhunter from Mars firmly planted amongst Humanity would be a disservice to the character and his original intent. In all the aforementioned stories, you will find humor, pathos, tragedy. Given the freedom to roam the Earth as one of us, J’Onn is a dichomatic mirror reflecting our own potential: he is both naive and worldly, witty and humorless, compassionate and torn. To look

away from J’Onn in his human guise is to look away from ourselves. Given his efforts to understand humanity even after so many failed attempts, don’t we at least owe him the honor of gazing back?

— Martin Lowell

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