

We hope you enjoy this **FREE BACK ISSUE #23 PREVIEW!**



Edited by former DC and Dark Horse editor **MICHAEL EURY**, **BACK ISSUE** magazine celebrates comic books of the 1970s, 1980s, and today through recurring (and rotating) departments such as "Pro2Pro" (a dialogue between two professionals), "Greatest Stories Never Told" (spotlighting unrealized comics series or stories), and more! Issue #23 is our "Comics Go Hollywood" issue, featuring a "Pro2Pro" roundtable examining Spider-Man's love life, with **STAN LEE**, **JOHN ROMITA, SR.**, **JIM SHOOTER**, **ERIK LARSEN**, and other top Spidey creators! Then, in the first part of a second roundtable, Star Trek writers including **PETER DAVID**, **MICHAEL JAN FRIEDMAN**, and **MIKE W. BARR** compare notes on writing for the space franchise in comics and in other media. Also: star-studded behind-the-scenes looks at TV's **ISIS** and **THE FLASH**, with celebrity interviews including Flash star **JOHN WESLEY SHIPP**; and spotlights on **SUPERMAN** movie adaptations and some of your favorite TV tie-in comics (including **ISIS** and **WELCOME BACK KOTTER**). Bonus: An 8-page color "ADAM HUGHES GOES HOLLYWOOD!" art gallery and cover. Bi-monthly!

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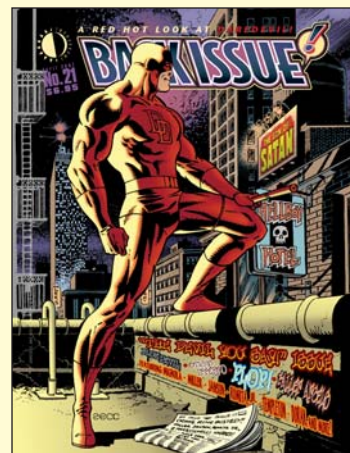
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Marriage isn't an institution for the timid, especially in today's world. Most husbands and wives are under terrific stress as they strive to have it all while balancing their careers and their home life. But can you imagine what it must be like to also have to deal with the likes of the Green Goblin, Dr. Octopus, and the Kingpin on top of everything else? No doubt about it, it's not easy being Mr. and Mrs. Parker, but Peter and Mary Jane have been making a go of it for an incredible 20 years since tying the knot in 1987 in *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #21.

In honor of their anniversary, BACK ISSUE gathered together some of Spider-Man's most famous creators—Stan Lee, Sal Buscema, Gerry Conway, Tom DeFalco, Danny Fingeroth, Erik Larsen, David Michelinie, John Romita, Sr., Paul Ryan, Jim Salicrup, Jim Shooter, and Marv Wolfman—to examine:



roundtable

by **Dan Johnson**

Twenty Years of Webbed Bliss

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The Married Life of Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man



DAN JOHNSON: Stan, as the creator of both Peter Parker and Mary Jane Watson, I was wondering what it was in 1987 that made you realize it was time for these two kids to finally tie the knot.

STAN LEE (Spider-Man co-creator): I had always wanted the Spider-Man series to be as realistic as possible. After a few years of Peter and MJ having a romance, their marriage just seemed like the most natural event. It had to happen.

JOHNSON: Jim Shooter, what were your first thoughts when you found out that Stan wanted to have Peter and Mary Jane get married?

JIM SHOOTER (Marvel editor-in-chief at the time of the wedding storyline): First of all, that's not the way it happened. It was my decision. The way that came about is this: Both Stan and I were guests at the Chicago Con the summer before the wedding, 1986 (I think). Stan was supposed to do a one-man panel Q&A, but at the last minute, he asked me if I'd come up onstage with him because he knew that most, if not all, of the questions would be about things going on in the comics, with which he was very out of touch. I was happy to help. We worked pretty well as a team in such situations, with me handling the comics questions and Stan adding color commentary, anecdotes, reminiscences; essentially doing snappy patter and being entertaining, as only he can.

Starting in 1979 or 1980, Stan was based at the animation studio in L.A. I don't remember what his title was, but his job was more or less just being Stan. He served as a creative advisor to the animation people and our face to Hollywood, trying to get film people interested in Marvel properties. Who wouldn't take Stan's call? He also wrote the *Spider-Man* strip, of course. Other than that, he wasn't in charge of anything. I don't think anyone reported to him except his secretary.

I was EIC [editor-in-chief] and VP of Marvel then, head of creative for everything but the animation studio. I reported to the president, Jim Galton, and on some business affairs and other matters to publisher Mike Hobson, who was mainly in charge of Marvel Books, the children's book line. As Stan used to say, I was Marvel's "entire editor." I used to say I had Stan's old job. I did, actually, and I was the only one besides Stan ever to hold that lofty position. No one else, before or since, has had exactly the same job with the same authority and clout.



Ron +
Mike

WORLD COLOR



Technically, even the *Spider-Man* strip fell under my authority because the “Special Projects” department reported to me. That said, I didn’t mess with the strip at all, ever.

Sometimes, when he had a little spare time, Stan would call me up and ask for work! Talk about surreal. I recall an Erik Larsen job that he scripted on one of those occasions.

This is not meant to diminish Stan in any way. It’s just that, at that point in his career, he was just not involved in the governance of the properties and uninvolved with publishing except as a writer of the strip, and occasionally a comic book. Technically, the wedding was my call, and Stan respected that, because that’s the kind of guy he is. That said, all technicalities aside, he was still Stan Lee, my mentor, the resident legend/genius, and I would have deferred to him about almost anything.

So there we were on this panel and someone asked whether Spider-Man and Mary Jane were ever going to get married. Stan said that it was up to me but that he thought they should. He turned to face me and asked me, extra politely, if they could get married. The audience was screaming. Trapped!

Nah. Actually, if Stan thought it was a good idea, I sure didn’t have a problem with it.

TOM DeFALCO (former *Amazing Spider-Man* writer): I guess you could blame the whole marriage thing on Ron Frenz and me. When we were on *The Amazing Spider-Man*, we proposed a storyline where Peter asks Mary Jane to marry him, she accepts but eventually—in true Spider-Man fashion—leaves him at the altar. Jim Owsley was our editor and took the idea to Jim Shooter, who mentioned it to Stan ... who thought the couple really should get married. Shooter agreed and went ahead with the idea after Ron and I were taken off *Amazing*.

At the time, I thought it was a veryyyyyy bad idea. History has proven me wrong. I now think Mary Jane and Peter really work well as a couple and their relationship is one of the cornerstones of my *Spider-Girl* series.

SHOOTER: Tom is mistaken. I never asked Stan about his proposed story. It happened exactly as I said. There were no preliminaries.

JOHNSON: *It’s still pretty interesting though to hear about what might have been with the Peter and Mary Jane relationship. What else can you tell us about this idea?*

RON FRENZ (former *Amazing Spider-Man* penciler): One way to look at it is the best way to write a Spider-Man story is to make a list of all the sh*ttiest things that can happen to a human being, then you eliminate all the things that other writers have already done, and what is left are some story ideas. Certainly being left at the altar is the hugely sh*ttiest thing that can happen to a human being.

First Loves

No one is as dear to Peter Parker’s heart than his Aunt May; here she’s terrorized by the Green Goblin in a Ron Wilson/Mike Esposito illo for a 1975 British reprint. And Peter’s first crush, Betty Brant, tied the knot in *Amazing Spider-Man* #156 (May 1976); cover art by John Romita, Sr. Courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

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Get Me to the Church on Time

The splash page to *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #21 (1987). Note the tribute to dress designer Willi Smith below the story credits. Original art scan courtesy of Richard Morgan, whose collection of Spider-Wedding art and memorabilia is simply astounding!

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Tom and I made Pete and Mary Jane best friends, and we kind of left it at that, and then a lot of the other writers started taking that into the romantic realm. We had talked about the idea that now that they were romantically involved, they would get engaged, and we would get to the point of the marriage. Spider-Man would then be off battling the Sinister Six or something like that, and be completely out of contact for several days, and Mary Jane would get the opportunity to reconcile with her sister who she was estranged from. Then Mary Jane would use that as an excuse to bug out because she's been having second thoughts. She would try to get a hold of Pete, but he's fighting for his life up to the last minute. [In the end,] Pete would race to his apartment, throw on his tuxedo, and web-swing to the church where Harry would be waiting for him out in front. There would be a silent sequence where they talk for a couple of minutes, Harry would hand Pete the ring and then he would walk away. Pete would be standing in front of the church, and we would pull back and the ring would drop to the ground, and there is the end of your sequence.

Where this would then go is: Pete would have moved back in with Aunt May and take over the attic and turn that into an apartment. Then we would experiment with shifting their relationship a little bit as Pete would be moving back in to take care of Aunt May. We had an idea for a cool scene where occasionally the phone would ring, and Aunt May would answer it and it would be Mary Jane calling Pete. She would beg to speak to Pete, and May's response would be, "There is no one here who wants to speak to you, young lady!" Then Peter would come down the stairs and ask who was on the phone, and Aunt May would tell him, "No one you need to concern yourself with, dear."

JOHNSON: Jim, the continuity of the comic strip and the Spider-Man comic books have always been kept fairly separate. Was there ever any thought about having Peter and Mary Jane tie the knot in the strip and not in the comic books? If there were, what finally made you decide that they would get married?

SHOOTER: Regarding the wedding, for once we actually tried to coordinate the strip with the comics. But then, the PR people got involved, things started to get complicated—"too many cooks"—and we botched it up some. I was on my way out then, barely paying attention to what was going on, so I wasn't quite the firm hand on the helm I might have been otherwise.

MARV WOLFMAN (former *Amazing Spider-Man* writer): I never thought Spidey and MJ getting married was a good idea, but I also always thought the Spidey newspaper strip was a very different entity from the comic and had to appeal to a very different audience where that kind of soap opera was fine. I just think for the comics Peter should have stayed single and still be struggling.



Paullyan

FRENZ: I didn't like it either. I had a lot of the same concerns that fandom in general seemed to have had in response to that whole everyman-being-married-to-a-supermodel thing. I'm still a big proponent of comics being wish fulfillment for your adolescence, or arrested adolescence, and I don't think marriage is a part of that. I feel comics should still be done the way Stan did them in that they are very, very palatable for adults, and written for adults, but kids should still enjoy them.

Let's put it this way: There is a 15-year-old in all of us, and I don't think any 15-year-old's wish fulfillment is accomplished by marriage. There was also an element of the stewardship of the character to me. I understand the illusion of change—as a storyteller we do it all the time—but I don't think it's necessarily a good thing to have a major change like that in a character. Every decision you make about a character should be about the stories it

Save the Date!
 This May 17, 1987
 press release
 announced Marvel's
 promotional plans for
 the web-slinger's
 wedding. From a
 Spider-Wedding press
 kit, courtesy of
 Richard Morgan.

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brings to the table, and whether or not the story has legs. I don't think that's an idea that necessarily has legs to open up any particular character.

JOHNSON: *Jim, what was the general consensus at Marvel at the time this marriage was announced? Would you say most of the Spider-Man creators were for this or against it?*

SHOOTER: Hmm. I don't remember any major dust-ups about it. I think people got adjusted pretty quickly. Everyone realized that it was a ground-breaking event. Pretty cool.

JOHNSON: *And the rest of you, what did you think when you found out that Peter was taking himself off the market?*

JOHN ROMITA, SR. (former Amazing Spider-Man penciler): I merely reminded everyone of Li'l Abner and Daisy Mae getting married and how soon after the strip seemed to wane. But, as usual, my business thoughts were ignored, and it was a huge PR success.

GERRY CONWAY (former Amazing Spider-Man writer): This happened after I left, so I didn't have any input. If I'd had input, I would have argued against it. I would've argued against Peter graduating from high school, too, and at the very least, I would've kept him in college. Some aspects of a character are defining, some are not. Peter Parker, single and in need of approval from the world and those he loves, is a defining aspect of the Spider-Man character. Marrying him off destroyed an essential part of his character dynamic, but that's a mistake Stan made before when he married Reed Richards and Sue Storm. I call it the Rhoda Morgenstern effect. If you know why, you're as old as I am.

DAVID MICHELINIE (former Amazing Spider-Man writer): To be honest, I wasn't thrilled. Having Peter get married would change the character forever; he could never be single again. He could only be widowed or divorced, which is an awful lot of baggage to carry around. Of course, that was before the era of "reimagining," which allows series to start over from

scratch every few years, correcting old mistakes while creating new ones.

The Amazing Spider-Man was the title that got me back into comics in college, and I loved the character and the stories. So it was a little disappointing when I was finally given the chance to write *Amazing*, literally my dream job, only to find that I wouldn't be able to write the same character I had been reading about for all those years. I have to admit that it was still fun, and provided a lot of interesting story opportunities, but it was definitely something I had to adjust to.

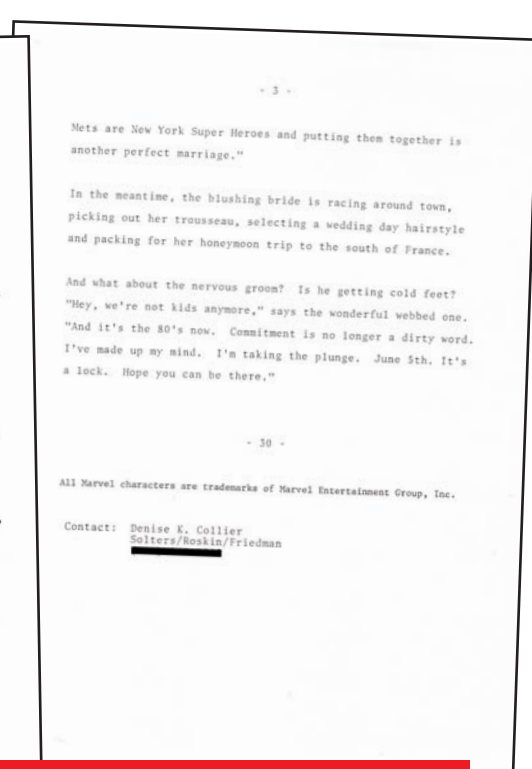
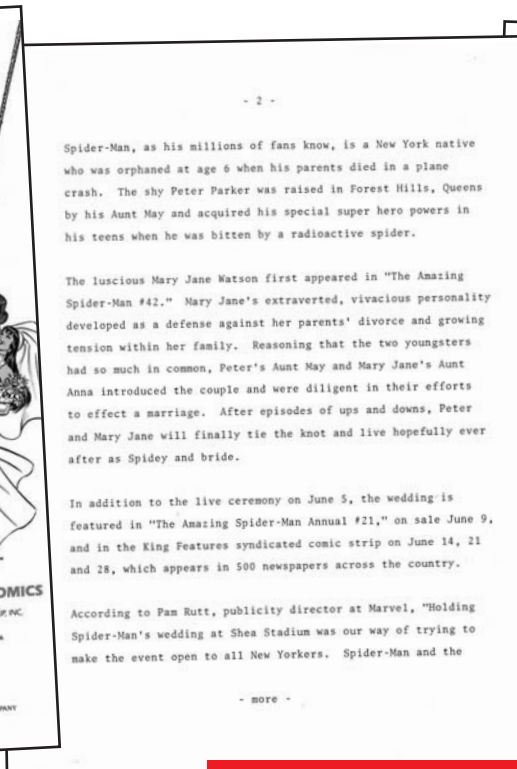
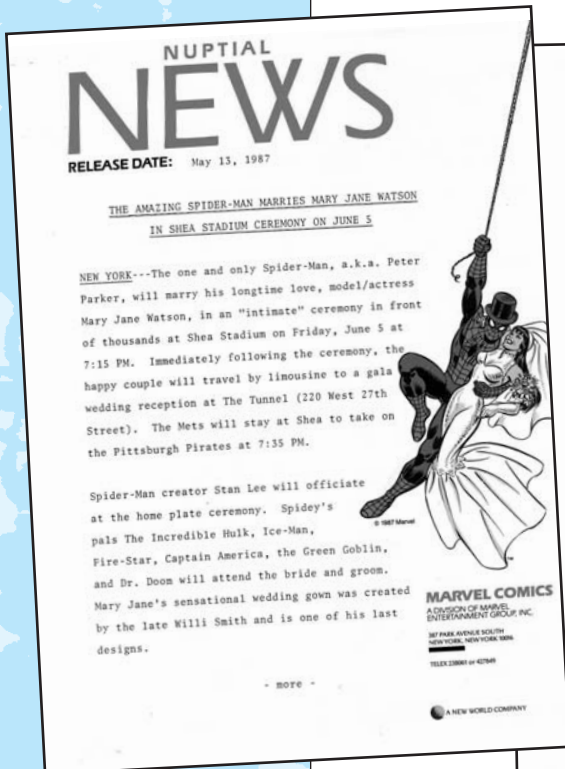
DANNY FINGEROTH (former Spider-Man group editor): I thought it made sense in terms of the idea that Marvel's characters in general behave in a relatively realistic manner.

SAL BUSCEMA (former Spider-Man penciler): I liked the idea. I thought it was a very natural transition.

DeFALCO: I didn't think it had any material effect on the character of Spider-Man. Peter is still Peter. He just has a wife to think about whenever he risks his life. It's a situation that any cop or fireman knows very well.

PAUL RYAN (former Amazing Spider-Man penciler): I thought it was a good idea at the time! I identified with Peter Parker for most of my life. Spider-Man debuted when I was in grammar school. I was the second smallest boy in my class and occasionally got picked on during recess. It was pretty much the same in high school. I was not part of the "jock" set. I got a motorcycle around the same time that Peter did. My first girl friend was a brunette, the second was blonde, and I eventually married a redhead. Get the picture? I was elated to hear that Peter, the perpetual underdog, was getting the girl of his dreams.

ERIK LARSEN (former Amazing Spider-Man penciler): I don't recall what I thought. The marriage in the comics was pretty abrupt because, at the time, the two hadn't even been dating and MJ had previously refused Peter's proposal some years earlier. Their reconciliation and following nuptials came out of left field.



For the rest of this roundtable, don't miss BACK ISSUE #23, on sale now from TwoMorrows!