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Issue 5: "The Martian Manhunter"
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Last night I dreamt again of the red planet, my lost homeworld...

The people of my adopted world long ago named it Mars, the Bringer of War, and perhaps they were not far from the truth; much of the history of my planet is strife and conflict. Green Martians and Pale Martians and Red Martians... for millennia we fought to direct the destiny of our evolution, until at last we had decided that if we were to survive at all we had to make peace and live *together*.

And *what* we achieved together...! Our cities were monuments to our gods, and every bit as much expressions of grace and fluidity as the shapes we assumed to explore the truth and beauty of our souls... Before history was reckoned as a thing that could be recorded on Earth, our civilization teetered on the pinnacle of transcendence. It was a time of tranquility and lasting peace, and never again would the universe see such a flowering of science and art and beauty.

Then came H'ronmeer's Curse.

It has been many long years since I dreamed of the Burning.

I was a Manhunter, one of those chosen to guard and protect my people from the renegade few who still rebelled against society. For even in utopia, there are the wicked. And *I* brought the wicked to justice. Among the most wicked was a man named Ma'alefa'ak, and he was the son of my mother— I shall never call him brother. He was my twin, but as different from me as night is to day, or as white is to green. Where I was

content to explore the subtle and multi-faceted shades of perfect intimacy with my mate M'yri'ah and my daughter K'hym and to protect the peace and serenity of my people, Malefic, as he shall ever be known afterwards, plumbed the darkest arcane secrets of a bloody past best left forgotten.

The greatest foe and fear to a Martian is fire. It strikes terror into the hearts of my people, and robs us of the natural gifts we are born with. In ancient times, the most terrible god was H'ronmeer, a dark and pitiless deity whom we all thought abandoned. Death and chaos were in his hands as he was a god of fire, and no true Martian worshipped fire... But in the end, H'ronmeer found one last disciple.

It was a telepathic plague that Malefic unleashed upon our people. It spread from person to person and city to city, striking at us through our most profound and elementary function: the sharing of our minds. As a Manhunter, I had learned to shield my mind from the thoughts and feelings of the wicked, as had some few others, but I could not save my wife and child. As our city smoldered around us, and our little girl caught flame in the sanctity of our own home, I begged M'yri'ah not to open her mind to the suffering of our little one, but she could not bear it. She ignited before my eyes, the flames driving me back.

This is the image I see most often in my dreams. The horror of the death of my family has been forever burnt upon my mind's eye.

As H'ronmeer's Curse raged across the surface of my world, snuffing out the brightest civilization in the universe, I had but one thought: destroy Malefic.

I found him atop the peak Earthlings call Olympus Mons, and our battle was titanic. Our world died all around us as we raged in combat. For days, weeks. I do not know. I was mad with grief. In the end, I proved the stronger. I threw him down from the mountain, but even in my grief and rage I remembered my oath never to take a life. I would not betray myself and all that my people had stood for by killing Malefic, for that, too, would be his victory. Instead, I imprisoned him within the mountain for all time, and left him, wailing and alone.

For weeks , months, years after, I wandered the burnt and ashen

landscape of my homeworld, searching for survivors. But it was the same everywhere I went. Those the Burning had not taken had ended their existence out of grief. Our civilization had been wiped out.

Mars was dead.

I don't know how long I roamed the wastes, the air filled with ashes, the red sands creeping over to cover the cities. My people are long-lived if they but have the will to live... Only my madness kept me from self-immolation.

That's when Dr. Erdel's machine took me.

It felt like my every atom was yanked and ripped away separately. I screamed in pain—and when next I could think coherently, the damage had already been done. I had been teleported across space and time, to a laboratory on Earth. I can only imagine the horror Dr. Saul Erdel must have felt looking upon me for the first and last time, writhing there on the transport platform. It is not easy for a Martian to maintain their shape in extremis, so I cannot be certain what form I took before the man who had brought me to Earth, nor why he had done it in the first place. For the old man's heart could not take the strain of what he had just witnessed. He was dead before I regained my senses.

Sometimes, he is in my dreams, too. I have always blamed myself for his death.

I check my wrist watch. It's past 7 P.M. on a Friday night, and I can still see Audrey working at her desk through the frosted glass of my office window. I get up and poke my head out the door.

"Ms. Carroll, it is very late. Why don't you call it a night." I say.

Audrey Carroll is an attractive woman, though she tries her best to hide it behind frumpy clothes and a severe hairstyle. She blinks at me though her wire-rimmed glasses, brushing a lock of auburn hair from her face.

"Yes, Mr. Jones. I'm just finishing up the billing on the Ludlow Case.

You should be heading home yourself, sir.”

“I’ll just be a little while longer.” I tell her.

She nodded. “I’ll order you in some dinner.”

It is useless to argue with her. Audrey has worked as the secretary for *John Jones Investigations* for the last ten years, and I didn’t need to be a telepath to realize she was in love with me. We never talked about it, but we both knew it was there. Even after all the years I’ve spent on Earth, I’ve never been able to feel for a human anything like what I had with my wife. Still, I cherished Audrey for her loyalty and devotion. And in the solitary anonymity of my existence, she was the closest thing I had to a friend.

I sighed. I knew I had a long night ahead of me. A missing child case that I had taken *pro bono*. It bothered Audrey every time I waived my fee, which was more and more often these days, because, as she often reminded me, we had bills, too, and the landlord was getting increasingly impatient with *JJI*.

But I wanted little more out of life. I was content running my well-respected (if perpetually cash-poor) private investigative firm, and living in my one bedroom apartment in Middleton. Once I had strode this Earth like a giant, a hero more feared than respected. The Martian Manhunter, the papers had dubbed me. I struggled against the forces of evil and injustice, as I had on Mars, as I had all my life. But it was a never-ending battle, and the peace I had sought— had longed for since that day I watched my family Burn!— had always eluded me. So I retired. I realized I could never save this world, as I could not save Mars, so I contented myself with doing a hundred little “goods”. The public acclaim I received after defeating Dr. Zero and the Future-Men was nothing compared to the ease I felt in my soul the first time John Jones returned a lost little girl to her mother and father.

I had come to realize that if I was to find some kind of peace and contentment on Earth, I must live *among* the earthlings, not above them as some sort of protector or superhero... For thirty years now I had pursued this quiet, solitary existence, and had eked out some measure of satisfaction...

Before I could retreat back to my office, I noticed we were about to receive a visitor. Through the frosted glass window front, I watched as a shapely feminine figure approached my door. She didn't knock, but entered boldly. As humans reckon things, I noted that she was extremely beautiful— dangerously so! Her hair fell in waves of darkest jet, sitting on slim, rounded shoulders. Her clothes were cut to accentuate her voluptuousness, and the look in her eyes made apologies neither for that, nor for the burning cigarette held daintily in one small hand. Her skin was bronze, like a Brazilian's, but deeper; almost she would have passed for a Red Martian.

"I'm looking for J'onnn J'onzz." She regarded Audrey and I through heavily-lidded eyes and spoke in a voice that was husky enough to manipulate a human man. But I am no human man. And I did not miss the subtle inflection with which she had spoken my name.

"I'm sorry, Miss, but we're closed for the—."

I placed a hand on Audrey's shoulder, my eyes not leaving those of my visitor. There seemed to be something smoldering behind those brown orbs.

"It's alright, Ms. Carroll." I said. "I'm John Jones." I announce pointedly. "How can I help you, Miss...?"

"Call me Justine." The woman's sensuous lips pursed in a tight little smile. "And I need to discuss an urgent matter with you, Mr. Jones. Privately."

I measured her carefully. She took a long languorous drag on her cigarette, exhaling the smoke out before I answered her. I made it a habit not to probe the minds of people without good cause, but there was something about this woman. She was completely inscrutable to me, a rare but not unheard-of specimen. It only made me curious to hear what she had to say.

"You will have to put out the cigarette." I told her.

Justine acquiesced graciously. She raised one foot behind her, the slit in

her dress giving me a glimpse of her long leg, and put out the cigarette on the sole of her spiked heel. She tossed the butt into Audrey's waste basket, then without waiting for an invitation, brushed past me as she walked into my office.

I closed the office door behind me, ignoring Audrey's look of distaste, and turned back to Justine. She was perched on the edge of my desk, one long leg crossed over the other, and staring at me as if I were a morsel to be devoured.

"How can I help you, then?" I asked, immune to her obvious wiles. I did my best to appear distant in all my dealings with humans, lest the unchecked emotions that raged in their minds overwhelm me. I opened myself a little to this Justine— and found myself staggering backward into the closed door! Her thoughts were all of flames and ashes and brimstone...

"I want you to help me find a missing person, Mr. J'onzz."

Again the subtle but significant inflection in the way she pronounced my name. My Martian name...

I took a moment to regain my composure, and face her with a stony expression. I had chosen a plain, non-descript form as a human, of indeterminate age with a slightly dispassionate, careworn face. I have been told that my visage closely resembles the movie actor Humphrey Bogart, and I have wondered if this was not perhaps, an accident. In my years on earth, I had become enthralled with motion pictures, and among my favorites were *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*.

"I'm afraid I am working on another case at the moment, and can't spare the time—."

"Oh, but this shouldn't take too long." Justine interjected, sliding off her perch. She strolled around the desk, trailing her fingers on the surface, the sound of her heels clacking loudly on the floor. "In fact, I'm relatively certain we can conclude our business tonight." Her smile was girlish and impudent.

“Who is this person you’re looking for?” I asked, intrigued despite myself.

Justine halted her perambulation, pausing to pick up a paperweight in the shape of a globe. She examined it, as if testing it for something.

“A very unusual person, indeed.” She remarked, absorbed in her study of the wooden paperweight. “He wasn’t from around here. A bit green around the edges, if you catch my meaning. Disappeared about thirty years ago.”

That was enough for me. Whoever she was, she was a threat.

Audrey, get out of here! Go now and leave the office. For the first time, I sent a telepathic message to my secretary, hoping she would heed my warning.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” I demanded, letting my human disguise fall away. I stood revealed before her in the form I had taken as the Martian Manhunter, over seven feet tall, red eyes glowing and my cape billowing out around me dramatically.

She was decidedly unperturbed. Indeed, she seemed delighted.

“Why, I thought it was obvious, Mr. J’onzz,” She chuckled huskily, and in her hands, the paperweight burst into flame, instantly becoming a fireball. “I want you!”

She hurled the burning object at me, laughing. I was taken by surprise by the sudden instance of flames, frozen in place as it streaked towards me. It was at this moment that Audrey burst into my office, knocking me aside with the door, and out of harm’s way.

“Mr. Jones, what in the—.”

The fireball slammed into the doorframe ineffectually, but my secretary could not help but be taken aback by the sight before her. I was a stranger to her in this new form, but she would no doubt recognize the image of the long-ago superhero, the Martian Manhunter.

Before either of us could react, Justine snapped her fingers and her clothes went up in flames, burnt off a body now too hot to cover. Indeed, she seemed to become a creature of molten fire, a living human torch!

"You can call me Scorch, Mr. J'onzz." She smirked. "I just wanted you to know who it is that kills you!"

She raised her arms and summoned a fireball into each hand.

I was seized by a momentary horror, by a vision of my beloved wife writhing in flames, of flames consuming my world, my history, my life. I was frozen to the spot, enthralled and terrified.

Then Audrey screamed. And I remembered I was a superhero.

Scorch's fireballs sailed toward me— and through me! I became intangible, allowing them to pass harmlessly through me. But they hit the wooden wall behind me, igniting it. The fear of fire is primal in my people, and psychically debilitating; I would not have use of my powers long in its presence, so if I did not act fast, I was doomed.

Unable to sustain the effort, I regained my physical form and rushed to my loyal secretary, who was still screaming in sheer panic.

Do not fear, Ms. Carroll. I have you. I spoke again to her mind, though this seemed to have the opposite effect of calming her. I wrapped her up in my arms and crashed through the wall of my office into the waiting room, stumbling like a drunken man in the wake of the fiery assault. I had to put enough distance between myself and the fire, or I would become easy prey. Already it was all I could do to maintain coherent thought.

"Come, back, Mr. J'onzz!" Scorch stepped through the hole in the wall I had just made, the heat of her body causing the wall to catch fire. "We've hardly had time to play!"

Hang on! I sent to Audrey, clutching her more tightly to me. Summoning all the reserves of mental fortitude I still possessed, and without looking back, I leapt through the open window and into the night!

The offices of *John Jones Investigations* were on the ninth floor of the building, so it was a long way down. Luckily. Halfway to the ground, and with Audrey's renewed screams ringing in my ears, I found myself far enough away from the fire to regain my ability to fly. I pulled us out of the fall and climbed back into the sky, sailing gracefully over the rooftops of sleepy downtown Middleton.

We alighted on the roof of the Mandrake Hotel, where I released Audrey. She stumbled away from me, staring wide-eyed.

"You— You're the Martian Manhunter!" She gasped, still shaking.

"I am as I always have been, Ms. Carroll. Only the outward appearance is different." I reminded her gently. But like many humans faced with the *outré*, the unknown, her mind refused to deal with it rationally. She fainted.

But I could spare her no further attention. A quick glance behind me showed my former offices completely ablaze now, and Scorch rising from the window, floating on a thermal of super-hot air. It was obvious she was intent on coming after me, and there was no telling how many innocents she would harm in her pursuit. I had to draw her away.

I rose into the air again, and she spotted me instantly. She cackled madly and aimed herself at me, riding the thermals she created around herself in waves.

I took off, but did not fly at my top speed. I wanted to present to her a tempting enough target to follow...

Below me, I could sense the excited and confused feelings of the people watching from the streets, emerging from their cars to watch the spectacle.

Look, up in the sky— Hey, that's not Superman...!

Who is—? Is he green?

Is that the guy from the Fifties? The Martian Headhunter, or something...?

He's back! The Martian Manhunter! I haven't seen him since I was a kid...!

Who's the flaming hottie...?

I angled myself away from town, drawing Scorch after me and away from innocent bystanders. She was still hot on my trail, and gaining speed on the increasingly heated air. I put a little more distance between us as we flew out over the Colorado River, leaving Middleton behind us.

She was already dangerous to me, but for my plan to work, I would have to expose myself even more to her deadly grasp.

I whirled around in midair, reversing my direction, and streaked by her at close range. My maneuverability in flight gave me a slight advantage, but this almost cost me dearly. She tracked me with her eyes, then opened her mouth and vomited out a jet of fire at me! The flames narrowly missed me, and taught me more caution. She was deadlier than I had supposed.

I resumed my headlong flight, pulling her after me into Rocky Mountain National Park. It was night, and there was no moon above us, making the river beneath us a glossy black road. I taunted her again by decreasing my speed, exposing myself to her fiery dragon's breath. And every time the flames struck closer, it became harder and harder to maintain my concentration, to keep control of my powers. I executed some evasive maneuvers, forcing her to scramble to keep up with me. I flew in increasingly erratic patterns, maddening her with the need to keep up.

"You're only delaying the inevitable, J'onzz!" She screamed, wrenched and jerked this way and that by my flight path. "I'm going to *burn* you! Melt that green skin off your body, and make you suffer like your wife and child did!"

This nearly undid me. With the flames so close, I already found it difficult enough to maintain some semblance of calm, rational thought. *How could she know about my wife and daughter?* I had never spoken of them on Earth!

Before I could ponder it further, Scorch exploded in fury. She reached out with her pyrokinetic powers and ignited nearly every living thing close to her! Treetops burst into flames, the grass and undergrowth of the park caught fire, and even the nearby birds and small animals ran screaming from their hiding places, burning.

And I was trapped in the middle of this conflagration, stunned into catatonia within a labyrinth of fire.

I lost my ability to fly, and plummeted out of the sky.

But I had planned well. I splashed into the Colorado River, sinking beneath its cool, dark depths, where the fire could not touch me. In her mindless rage, Scorch followed me under— just as I had hoped she would!— hitting the water like a hot iron from a forge. She was instantly doused, and sank, steaming and stunned.

I only needed a moment to recover my powers. Morphing my form, I seized my attacker in my long tentacles, drawing her with me upriver, and far from the fiery devastation she had wrought above the surface of the river.

By the time we broke the surface, she had lost consciousness and was safely in my control.

I spent the rest of the night delivering Scorch to the proper authorities (a local branch of S.T.A.R. Labs), and making sure that all the damage she had caused was under control. I returned to the block where my offices had been, in the form of John Jones, and joined the small crowd gathered to watch the firemen dig through the extinguished wreck.

Audrey Carroll was there, sitting on the back of an ambulance. She all but flinched as I approached her.

“We lost everything.” She announced. “It all went up in the fire.”

“We have good insurance.” I attempted to console her, smiling gently.

“We’ll reopen.”

Audrey nodded, but still regarded me as if seeing me in an entirely new light. Which, I suppose, she was.

“Yes, Mr. Jones. Of course.” She chewed on her lower lip, and said after a moment: “What did she want? That awful woman...?”

“She wanted me.” I replied. But that was the wrong question. The question was why. Why did she come after me? And how did she know about my life and family on Mars...?

Not even Scorch herself knew. Her conscious mind seemed to have conveniently forgotten those vital details...

Z’onn Z’orr.

It was my secret garden on earth, deep within the rainforest of the Amazon Jungle and far from the prying eyes and minds of the rest of the world. Here, I cultivated a sanctuary that lived and flowed with nature, not imposed upon it— a graceful and serene retreat of wild and colorful flora and exotic, peaceful fauna. I had designed my hideaway to be a little piece of Mars on Earth, but what I had created was a sublime melding of the two, replete with all the fluidity and grace of my birthworld, and complemented by the teeming life and vibrant beauty of my adopted home.

I came here when I needed to find again the peace I fought long and hard for after the extinction of my people. When I sought the answers to questions one could only find by looking within.

Scorch had opened some old wounds.

In my true form, the form my wife and daughter would have remembered, I sat upon the moist earth amidst fragrant wildflowers and meditated.

My peace was suddenly and cruelly shattered.

There is a special place in the Halls of H'ronmeer reserved for you, J'onnn J'onzz!

The telepathic sending came like a psychic assault, but dulled as if from a great distance. As if it came from Mars...

This is no echo from a long dead world, J'onnn! I live! I live, despite your best efforts!

My blood ran cold. I recognized this voice. I had heard it in my mother's womb.

"Malefic!" I gasped aloud.

Yes, brother! Centuries it has taken me to break the bonds you imposed upon me, but I am at last free! And now at last I find you, my beloved enemy! Among the worms and amoeba of the third planet! Wallowing in the evolutionary mud, eh?

You are behind this attack on me? You created Scorch?

Of course! I could almost see his lip curl in scorn. **I am the creator of the Burning, J'onnn! And now I have brought it to your adopted world! Oh, I have changed and modified it a bit— these human have such limited telepathic ability; they shall have to be infected individually. But they are remarkably resilient. They shall make excellent foot soldiers in the wars of conquest I shall wage across the galaxy!**

Never! I swore, resolute. **I swear by the memory of M'yri'ah and K'hym, and of all our people, that I will always and ever stand in your way!**

Then come, my brother! Come to the red planet and face me! At long last we shall have a reckoning... I await your coming on Mars!

Dr. Erdel's machine had reached through not only space, but time as well, to bring me to Earth. To the best of my calculations, Martian civilization died when the Mesopotamians built their first ziggurat to the sky

god Marduk. All that I find on my homeworld is sand and rock. The proud accomplishments of my people turned to dust long ago...

The exploration of Mars by the people of Earth has hardly scratched the surface. They see what they want to see, convinced that they are the only bastion of sentience in the solar system. One day, when they come here, they may unearth the wonders that brightened the cosmos so long ago...

I stand on the blasted waste, my cape snapping in the howling wind. Everything is tinged a pale red, though this was not always so. The ashes of my civilization lay all around me, for those with the eyes to see it.

Until now, I had never returned to Mars. I knew there was nothing left for me here.

But I was wrong. There was one thing. *At long last we shall have a reckoning!* Malefic had crowed jubilantly. Unfinished business.

I stood at the foot of Ma'hav'alek, what the people of earth called Olympus Mons, the most sacred and the most dreaded place in Martian history. This vast, sprawling mountain is three times the height of the tallest mountain on Earth and hundreds of miles wide at its base. In ancient times, my people thought it to be the home of our gods, as it had once spewed fire and magma from its cone. We had reverently explored its caverns, erecting a temple to H'ronmeer in its depths, offering sweet smelling sacrifices to propitiate the capricious diety. But even in my day, the temple had long been abandon, as had the worship of H'ronmeer, god of fire and death, and the volcano had long been cold and inactive.

It was here that I had pursued Malefic. It was in the Temple of H'ronmeer that I had imprisoned him.

It was here, I was sure, that he waited for me.

I became intangible and delved into the mountainside, making my way towards the lost temple.

Yes, J'onnn! I sense your coming... Welcome home!

This ends today, Malefic.

About that, at least, you are right, my brother!

I found the enormous, natural cavern out of which was carved the colossal Temple of H'ronmeer, and gently floated into its precincts. I ignored the hideous images engraved in the stone, and the stained altars. I lamented that in their past, my people were as ignorant and superstitious as any culture on Earth...

At last I found the heavy inerton chains I had bound Malefic in. The special radioactive properties of the metal make it impossible for a Martian to shapeshift or become intangible. Indeed, inerton was the strongest metal in the universe, and sapped the strength and will of any organic being. The chains were empty and abandoned on the ground. It must have taken a fearsome effort for Malefic to throw them off.

"A thousand years, in fact." Came a voice as dry as tinder.

I scanned my surroundings and followed the sound of the voice. He was there, by the mammoth statue of the dark god he worshipped, stepping out of the shadows.

"A thousand years of mind-numbing effort. Of solitude. Of pain."

He came towards me, and his form was misshapen and twisted. It had been so long since he had seen another living being that he no longer had a frame of reference with which to mold his shape. He was all shambling spikes, claws and jaws, dragging long talons on the ground.

I recoiled in disgust.

You chose your fate, Malefic. You were the instrument of annihilation for our race. How did you think this would end?

The creature who had once been my brother loped closer to me, snarling and dripping hot, sizzling drool from his jagged mouth.

I merely worked the will of H'ronmeer. He hissed. **He whispered to me his plan for the universe. He whispers it to me still. What began in flame, shall end in flame!**

He was mad, that much was clear. But Malefic was a powerful telepath; perhaps the most powerful that had ever lived on Mars. He had fashioned the Burning out of pure malice and madness. The last time, in my grief, I had matched him madness for madness, but I am not the same person now; I mourn my loss, but I can cherish the memories— allow them to give me strength. I only stood a chance against him if I closed off my mind to him, refused him access.

You speak of the V'ora'vash, the Martian Apocalypse.

The Endless Burning!* He crowed. *All the universe aflame! It comes, J'onn! And I am the harbinger of that doom!

And with that, he launched himself through the air at me.

I rose to meet him, shifting shape.

Martian combat is a thing unique in the universe, and difficult to relate. For a race of beings who can shift their shape as easily as breathing, morphing into whatever form gives them advantage, combat is a thing of constantly fluid transformation and motion. There are infinite variations and modes of attack, and in truth, battle was more like an intricate dance, a struggle to determine who would lead the other to pain and death.

My foe was an excellent combatant, his mind and imagination unbound by sanity. But he had not the advantage I had: for millennia he had been bound and chained, stuck in one form, and his body must have suffered a certain amount of atrophy. While I had spent the last several decades honing my body and skills, as a Manhunter on Mars, and as a superhero on Earth.

Yet for all that, we seemed evenly matched. His fury gave him strength, while that which I was fighting for gave me mine. We swirled and caviled around each other, probing defenses and pressing the minutest advantage. He took the “battleform” called by my people the Storm of Hammers, and I replied with a Flesh Vortex to repulse him. I seized him

in the Ten Thousand Tentacles but he countered with the Myriad Maelstroms. And so it went.

How long we struggled against each other, again I could not say. Many days, no doubt. Time was impossible to quantify in the belly of Ma'hav'alek, in the Lost Temple of H'ronmeer. But in the end, as I had before, I threw down my enemy, pinning him beneath my form, which I now shifted to its original state. I wanted him to know it was a Martian—and all that Mars had stood for!— that defeat him.

He laughed, what remained of his mind snapping.

You haven't won, J'onn! Though you have defeated me, you can never defeat H'ronmeer, himself! He comes, my brother! He comes! And he brings the V'ora'vash!

I wrapped Malefic in the inerton chains and left him in that forgotten temple. I would have to come back soon, to devise a more permanent solution to the problem he presented, but for now, I needed to return to Earth, to rest.

I emerged onto the slopes of Olympus Mons, welcoming the touch of the frigid Martian air on my skin—and was faced with a nightmare. For there, towering over me, was a colossus of dark molten fire, looming hundreds of feet high!

“Moons of Mars, no!” I muttered aloud, entranced by the flames dancing on this monster’s magma-like flesh.

Yes! Malefic cheered, miles beneath my feet. **H'ronmeer! I am here, lord!**

But the towering infernal nightmare only roared dumbly, his mouth a spewing furnace.

I was driven to my knees, almost at the feet of the colossus, unable to summon coherent thought, never mind the power to fly away.

Was this the incarnation of H'ronmeer, Martian God of Fire and Death? Was this the Bringer of War and Apocalypse to the cosmos? No matter. It

was, at the very least, my death...

The giant raised its arm over me, its fist clenched. It was the last thing I saw before it struck me down...

"Brimstone proved to be the perfect choice to bring in the Martian, my lord."

"Yes. Our little laboratory experiment did well... A curious weakness, this long dead race possessed. Fire is power. The catalyst of birth and destruction. Amazing that they evolved..."

"Aye, my lord. Most amazing! Perhaps that is the reason the Martian DNA holds a critical component of the Anti-Life Equation...?"

"It matters not, Desaad. The Martian race is dead, but for our specimen. And he shall serve our purposes."

"Aye, my lord. And what of the mad, broken one buried beneath the mountain?"

"Leave him. His fate is of no moment to us..."

On the cold, red planet, a long desolate howling arose... then faded away on the Martian wind...

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From the same author on Feedbooks

The Adventures of Superman #0 (2005)

The Adventures of Superman: Lost Sons of Krypton, Prelude:
Strange Visitors!

A strange visitor from another planet comes to Metropolis--- and Superman is all that stands in his way! It's a battle royale in the skies and streets of the City of Tomorrow as a mistake from Jor-El's past comes back to haunt his son. And intrepid reporter Lois Lane is onto the story of her career, but can the Man of Steel save her when she goes too far?

The Adventures of Superman #1 (2005)

The Adventures of Superman: Lost Sons of Krypton, Pt. 1: A War of Brothers!

Zod, the Destroyer of Krypton, has come to Earth, and with his Tigris and Hound, the bastard son of Jor-El, at his side, can even Superman stand against him? Meanwhile, Lois plays a deadly game to get to the bottom of the sinister machinations of Lex Luthor!

The Adventures of Superman #2 (2005)

The Adventures of Superman: Kingdom of Zod.

Superman leads a desperate assault on the Antarctic Kingdom of Zod. But even with the aid of an unexpected ally, can the Man of Steel overthrow the might of the Destroyer and his Doomsday Bomb?

Wonder Woman #0 (2005)

Wonder Woman: A Game of Gods and Men, Prelude.

Meet the Amazing Amazon as she hosts a summit of world leaders at Themyscira House--- but danger stalks the hallowed halls as a familiar foe lurks, thirsty for the blood of her enemy Wonder Woman! Meanwhile, on Paradise Island, former USAAF Colonel Steve Trevor becomes embroiled in the deadly affairs of gods and men--- and learns that sometimes they are one and the same!

Detective Comics #0 (2005)

Detective Comics: Lustmord, Prelude.

A wicked new serial killer with a bloody history stalks the night-time streets of Gotham, and no one is safe! Reeling from personal crises, the Dark Knight must confront hidden dangers from his own past and new enemies laying in wait for him... From Crime Alley to Arkham Asylum, Batman is tested by a diabolical mastermind!

Detective Comics #1 (2005)

Detective Comics: Lustmord: Shadows and Fog.

The mystery of the Gotham Ripper deepens as his murderous rampage continues. Batman haunts the streets and shadows, determined to bring the lunatic to justice, but in Arkham Asylum, plots are laid for the Dark Knight's demise!

Detective Comics #2 (2005)

Detective Comics: Lustmord: An Uncommon Fondness for Blood.

With Vicki Vale in the clutches of the Gotham Ripper, Batman must contend with a foe who has studied him for years--- and discovered his secret identity! This is the gruesome conclusion to the Lustmord storyline!

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman #0 (2005)

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman: Under Ancient Stars.

In the days of the pharaohs, in the land of the pyramids, is born a hero for all time! Defying the will of men and gods, Prince Khufu and his beloved Chay-Ara embark upon a destiny filled with triumph and tragedy, sacrifice and murder. With the wizard Nabu and the champion of Shazam who will one day be known as Black Adam at their side, they must use the power of the otherworldly Thanagarian Nth Metal and the gifts of the hawk-god Horus to defeat the villainous immortal tyrant known as Vandal Savage! Born in the fires of war, undying passion and treacherous betrayal, this is a definitive retelling of the ancient origin of the hero who will be known as--- Hawkman!

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman #2 (2005)

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman: Wings of Destiny, Part 2.

The two part origin arc of the Golden Age Hawkman concludes as Carter Hall takes up the mantle of the immortal hero and races against time to save Shiera Saunders from the clutches of the

villainous Dr. Anton Hastor! But first he must survive the attack of the undead Sons of Anubis, and defeat the man who is destined to slay him!

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman #1 (2005)

The Immortal Legend of Hawkman: Wings of Destiny, Part 1.
"Wings of Destiny, Pt. 1" First in a two part origin arc! It is 1938, and the world hovers on the brink of war... Troubled by dreams of past lives, museum curator and archaeologist Carter Hall receives a mysterious package from a lost colleague that sends him across the globe to Egypt, where he will be reunited with an immortal love and encounter an enemy that stalks him through the ages! A hero discovers his destiny as the Golden Age Hawkman is born!

Wonder Woman #1 (2005)

Wonder Woman: The Swords of the Amazons!
As Wonder Woman hunts the Cheetah, Doom's Doorway opens and Themyscira is besieged by the horrors of the underworld! Diana must contend with a deadly and secret mastermind determined to destroy her and all she holds dear!

Teen Titans #0 (2005)

Teen Titans: Friends and Heroes.
Reeling from recent harrowing events in Gotham, Dick Grayson struggles with the decision to hang up his cape and mask forever as he goes off to college in New York City. Joined by Roy Harper and Wally West, the trio have a fateful meeting with the girls who will forever change their lives! Guest starring Wonder Woman!

Wonder Woman #2 (2005)

Wonder Woman: The Rage of Angels.
As the Minotaur leads the Sons of Uranus against the walls of Themyscira and Wonder Woman does battle with Typhon, the Father of Monsters, a more devastating threat comes to Olympus... Nothing will be the same after this issue!

Teen Titans #1 (2005)

Teen Titans: Serpent's Tooth, Part 1 (of 2).
As the team comes together, Wally West is seduced by a mysterious girl with a dangerous secret. The Titans must infiltrate the

church of a fanatical ancient cult to rescue one of their own, but a fierce enemy awaits them: Enter Brother Blood!

Teen Titans #2 (2005)

Teen Titans: Serpent's Tooth, Part 2 (of 2).

The Titans have fallen to Mother Mayhem and a dark messiah is on the brink of awakening! Only Dick Grayson and his new ally, the mysterious and dangerous girl known as Raven, stand in the way of the resurrection of the dreaded... Brother Blood!

New Outsiders #0 (2005)

New Outsiders: What Happens in Vegas...

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A MATURE READERS TITLE.

A gritty and realistic look at vice, corruption and superheroing in Sin City! Meet the New Outsiders---Green Arrow, Black Canary, Huntress, Batgirl, Zatanna, and a driven District Attorney named Adrian Chase, the Vigilante!--- an unorthodox team of heroes banded together to stand against a sinister conspiracy and depraved foes!

New Outsiders #1 (2005)

New Outsiders: House Rules: Luck be a Lady.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A MATURE READERS TITLE.

Things heat up in Vegas as the Vigilante and Huntress face off against each other, and Green Arrow and Black Canary enlist the aid of young college prodigy Barbara Gordon to break into L'Inferno and rescue an old friend from the clutches of the criminal organization, the House, and its cruel mistress, Roulette--- and only Zatanna stands in their way!

New Outsiders #2 (2005)

New Outsiders: House Rules: The Most Dangerous Game.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A MATURE READERS TITLE.

With Black Lightning's life at stake and Green Arrow and Black Canary in the clutches of the House, Batgirl looks for some unlikely allies as she plays a dangerous game with Roulette in the conclusion of the New Outsiders origin arc!

JSA: Legends of the Golden Age #0 (2005)

Justice Society of America: Legends of the Golden Age: The Society, Prelude.

In the dark days before WWII, A Secret Society of Super Villains unleash a masterplan to seize the world in its iron grip of tyranny! But, in the gathering shadows of war, there is a glimmer of hope! The emerging mystery men of America--- Hawkman! the Flash! Hourman! the Atom! Starman! Dr. Fate! the Sandman! and the Amazing Amazon, Wonder Woman!--- rise up in a Justice Society to oppose the evil oppressors! But can even they withstand--- the Spear of Destiny!?!

All-Star Comics #1 (2006)

All-Star Comics: Captain Marvel, Part 1 (of 2).

At last! The history of the World's Mightiest Mortal in the DC2 is finally revealed! The ancient wizard Shazam recalls the career of his champion, even as foes from the past regroup to threaten the world once more. But will there be a Captain Marvel to stand against them?

Action Comics #7 (2006)

Action Comics: Hostile Takeover.

What is Genesis Corporation? Clark and Lois want to know--- and so does Lex Luthor! The Countdown to the Crisis heats up as some major players are revealed and a three-way brawl erupts in the skies over Metropolis!

Action Comics #8 (2006)

Action Comics: For All Mankind...

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 9!

Darkseid has assembled nearly all of the components to complete the Anti-Life Equation. Now, Wonder Woman leads a daring mission to the very gates of Darkseid's palace to rescue the Man of Steel and bring hope to the war-torn planet Earth! Don't dare miss this pivotal chapter, as one man shows just what it means to be a hero! You won't believe the shocking ending!

Action Comics #9 (2006)

Action Comics: Return to Smallville, Part 1 (of 4).

In the wake of the crisis, the greatest tragedy of his life brings Clark Kent home to Smallville. But can you go home again? A new

era in the life of the Man of Steel begins here! New dangers await, an old romance is rekindled--- and you won't believe the shocking ending!

Action Comics #11 (2006)

Action Comics: Return to Smallville, Part 3 (of 4).

The mystery villain stands revealed and the truth about Connor finally comes out! Superman stands alone against friend and foe alike and the surprises keeps coming in this penultimate chapter of the new adventures of the Man of Steel!

Action Comics #10 (2006)

Action Comics: Return to Smallville, Part 2 (of 4).

Reeling from Lana Lang's recent revelation, Clark is forced to re-evaluate his future--- unaware that a secret enemy is lurking and waiting to destroy him! Meanwhile, Lois Lane shows up in Smallville on the trail of the biggest story of her career: the secret identity of Superman!

All-Star Comics #2 (2006)

All-Star Comics: Captain Marvel, Part 2 (of 2).

Billy Batson has no time to adjust to his new role as Captain Marvel as the Monster Society of Evil unleashes their attack upon Fawcett City! And not even the wizard Shazam is safe when the villains storm the Rock of Eternity and a new, deadly fiend is born!

Wonder Woman #8 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Hell Hath No Fury...

Rogues Gallery #1 (2006)

Rogues Gallery: Catwoman: Hot Tin Roof.

A wave of cat burglaries sweeps through Gotham's elite society! But as the Crown Jewels of Bahdnesia come to the city, can the beautiful socialite Selina Kyle resist the lure? Sparks fly when Batman comes face to face for the first time with the deadly feline fatale, Catwoman!

DC2 Special #1: An Arkham Christmas Carol (2006)

DC2 Special: An Arkham Christmas Carol.

Wonder Woman #4 (2006)

Wonder Woman: The Eye of the Storm.

The true enemy is at last revealed, and the gods of Olympus discover there is a traitor among them! Meanwhile, the war on Paradise Island comes to a turning point as mysterious new arrivals appear--- but are they friends or foes? And in the end, Diana must set out upon a new quest to save everything she holds dear...

Wonder Woman #5 (2006)

Wonder Woman: The Quest for the Syrinx.

Nemesis is awake, and destined to bring about the end of the cosmos! Only the Syrinx, the Pipes of Pan, can stave off the inevitable fate of the universe, and now Diana, Hippolytus and Steve Trevor set off on a quest to the isle of the witch to find the legendary artifact. But will Circle prove Wonder Woman's most implacable foe yet?

As the traitor to Olympus makes his next move, the gods brace themselves for the final assault of the Furies!

Wonder Woman #3 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Horns of Doom.

Both Olympus and Paradise Island are reeling from the cataclysmic events of last issue, and the true enemy is at last revealed! Be here when Wonder Woman and the Minotaur face off at last under the walls of Themyscira!

Wonder Woman #6 (2006)

Wonder Woman: The Isle of the Witch.

The Quest for the Syrinx continues! As Wonder Woman confronts her old enemy, the witch Circe, the plots and machinations of all the players start to become known: friends are not who they seem and the true plans of the Olympian traitor are revealed as the Game of Gods and Mortals hurtles towards its epic conclusion next issue!

Wonder Woman #7 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Down the Widening Gyre.

Wonder Woman must journey into the Underworld to retrieve the Mask of Hecate for Circe, as time is running out! Even the Gods of Olympus prepare to meet their end as Nemesis, She Whom None Can Escape finally rises to work her terrible will, and the final moves of the Game of Gods and Mortals are played out! The Olympian traitor is revealed--- and his masterplan at last is clear!--- in this penultimate chapter of the epic storyline that began in Issue 0!

Wonder Woman #9 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Armageddon Aria.

The war is over and Wonder Woman is faced with a host of new problems: what to do about the war-like Lost Amazons, who will rule Paradise Island--- and who wants her to get... married?!? And Godfrey's Glorious Crusades reaches fever pitch as a deadly new foe is unleashed upon Diana--- and leads directly into next month's crisis!

Wonder Woman #10 (2006)

Wonder Woman: Darkseid Is.

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 13!

At long last, the Anti-Life Equation is within the grasp of the Lord of Apokolips! The world's greatest heroes come together for the first time--- to destroy each other! Don't miss the epic battle as Wonder Woman stands alone against a world turned against her!

JSA: Legends of the Golden Age #1 (2006)

JSA: Legends of the Golden Age: Attack of the Giant Nazi Robots!

It's mayhem at the 1939 Worlds Fair in New York, as Baron Blitzkrieg attacks the greatest gathering of scientific minds in the world, and the Secret Society of Super Villains continue their quest for the Three Holy Artifacts!

This is it! The birth of the JSA!

Teen Titans #10 (2006)

Teen Titans: Forever and Never, Amen!

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 7!

The city of Metropolis teeters on the edge of an uneasy peace as the truce between Lex Luthor and Darkseid begins to break down.

Who are the Forever People and what happens when they turn the city of refugees against the Titans? Bedlam ensues!

Justice League #0 (2006)

Justice League: Justice Falls.

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, concludes!

This is it! The final battle between Earth and Apokolips as the World's Greatest Heroes take the fight to Darkseid! Don't dare miss this issue--- one year in the making!--- and the senses-shattering conclusion to this epic storyline!

Justice League #1 (2006)

Justice League: A League of His Own, Part 1.

It's finally here! The World's Greatest Heroes have come together as one! But not everyone is happy about that... It's the grand opening of the Hall of Justice, and all of Metropolis has turned out to honor their saviors. But hatred and jealousy lurk in the heart of one man as he schemes to destroy the newly-formed League! And this time, the League has met its match!

Justice League #2 (2006)

Justice League: A League of His Own, Conclusion.

The most powerful members of the Justice League have fallen to Amazo. Now, only Batman stands against the villainous Professor Ivo and his killer android, with all the powers of the World's Greatest Heroes at his disposal...

World's Finest #1: Batman (2007)

Join us on Earth-X for the re-imagined Batman and his new adventures.

World's Finest #1: Superman (2007)

Join us on Earth-X for the re-imagined Superman and his new adventures.

World's Finest #1: Wonder Woman (2007)

Join us on Earth-X for the re-imagined Wonder Woman and her new adventures.

All-Star Comics Annual #1 (2007)

All-Star Comics Annual: Justice Society of America: The Time of Their Lives.

All-Star Comics #10 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 1 (of 4)

All-Star Comics #11 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 2 (of 4)

All-Star Comics #12 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 3 (of 4).

All-Star Comics #13 (2007)

All-Star Comics: Hawkman: Sins of the Father, Part 4 (of 4).

The Flash #23 (2008)

The Flash: Flash of Infinite Worlds!

When Barry Allen agreed to help his good friend Ray Palmer with an experiment, he never thought he'd find himself in another reality! The Cosmic Treadmill takes the Scarlet Speedster to a parallel Earth, and just may give him a glimpse at his own tragic destiny! Can even the Flash fight the future? Find out in this first ever DC2/DC3 crossover issue as we enter the Multiverse!

Adventure Comics #11 (2010)

Adventure Comics: Stranger New Visitor.

The long-awaited return of the DC2's original Superman book, by its original creative team! Springing from the pages of last month's "Action and Adventure" Annuals, the new era for the Man of Steel continues here, as Lois investigates the sinister Evil Factory, a strange figure in a familiar costume arrives and a threat from beyond the stars strikes in the heart of Metropolis... A huge storyline for the Man of Tomorrow begins here!



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