

THE COMIX SECTION

A STOP BUTTON ZINE

SPRING 2025

NO. 1 SIDE 2

SUPERBOY, THE LEGION OF SUPER- HEROES, AND THE SUPER SQUAD

OCTOBER 1974 - JUNE 1977

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUPERBOY #204	1
SUPERBOY #209	4
SUPERBOY #212	5
SUPERBOY #213	8
SUPERBOY #214	9
ALL-STAR COMICS #58	13
ALL-STAR COMICS #59	16
DC SUPER STARS #3	17
ALL-STAR COMICS #60	20
SUPERBOY #218	24
ALL-STAR COMICS #61	25
SUPERBOY #219	28
ALL-STAR COMICS #62	32
ALL-STAR COMICS #63	33
SUPERBOY #222	36
ALL-STAR COMICS #64	38
ALL-STAR COMICS #65	39
ALL-STAR COMICS #66	40





A PANEL FROM “LITTLE NEMO IN SLUMBERLAND,” BY WINSOR MCKAY
(NOVEMBER 26, 1905)



ADDITIONAL NOTES

The Comix Section has two homes on the web:

- <https://thestopbutton.com/cs>
- <https://comix.omg.lol>

They're both currently sparse.

The original author welcomes feedback at thestopbutton@gmail.com.



SUPERBOY #204

October 1974

Cary Bates (script)
Mike Grell (artist)
Ben Oda (letters)
Murray Boltinoff (editor)

What a strange comic book. Cary Bates and Mike Grell contribute both parts, feature and backup, though “feature” is a bit of a stretch.

The lead story is a retcon. In the farther-flung future than the Legion of Superheroes, future Earthlings are obsessed with watching the past through time travel television or something. Except then the kid’s time TV is broken and is

changing history instead of just observing it. The device has somehow changed Superboy’s trials for Legion membership, and now he’s not a member anymore, and the fate of reality is at stake.

Oddly, however, the story doesn’t show how Superboy failed the trials. Neither is the future kid’s resolution—Anti-Lad is his only moniker, the one he takes when he travels back in time to join the Legion to get history back on track. Bates also doesn’t do anything with the future repercussions of Superboy not joining the Legion. It’s easier to identify all the things Bates doesn’t do with the story than the things he does.

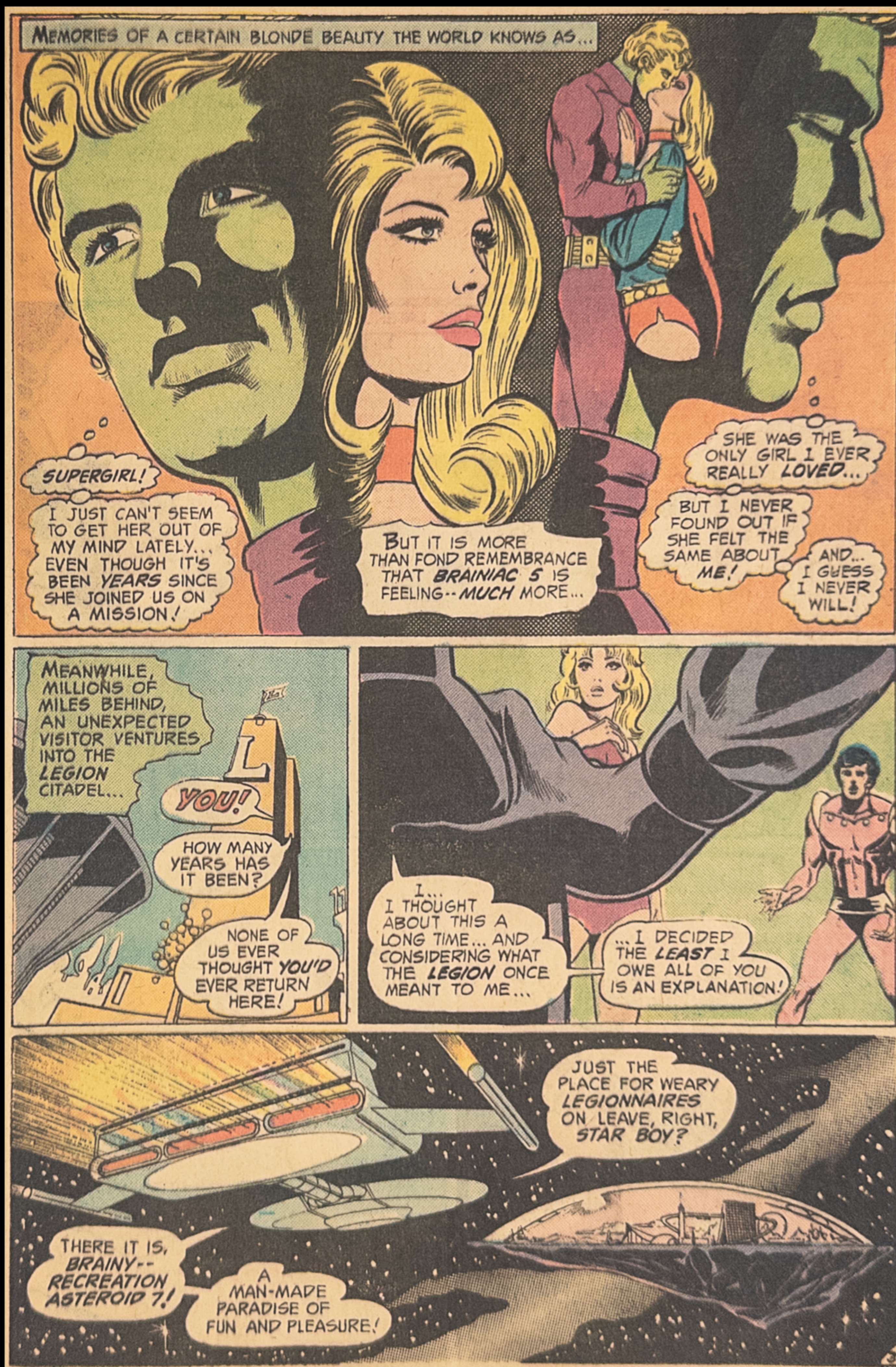
So the comic promises the secret story of Anti-Lad, the Legionnaire no one remembers (because he wiped their memories). It delivers some time travel banter, lots of talking about Superboy but no real Superboy in his own book, Anti-Lad besting the Legionnaires during his membership trial, and Brainiac-5 deducing something’s off about the new prospect.

Not much of a story. Grell’s art also leaves a lot to be desired.

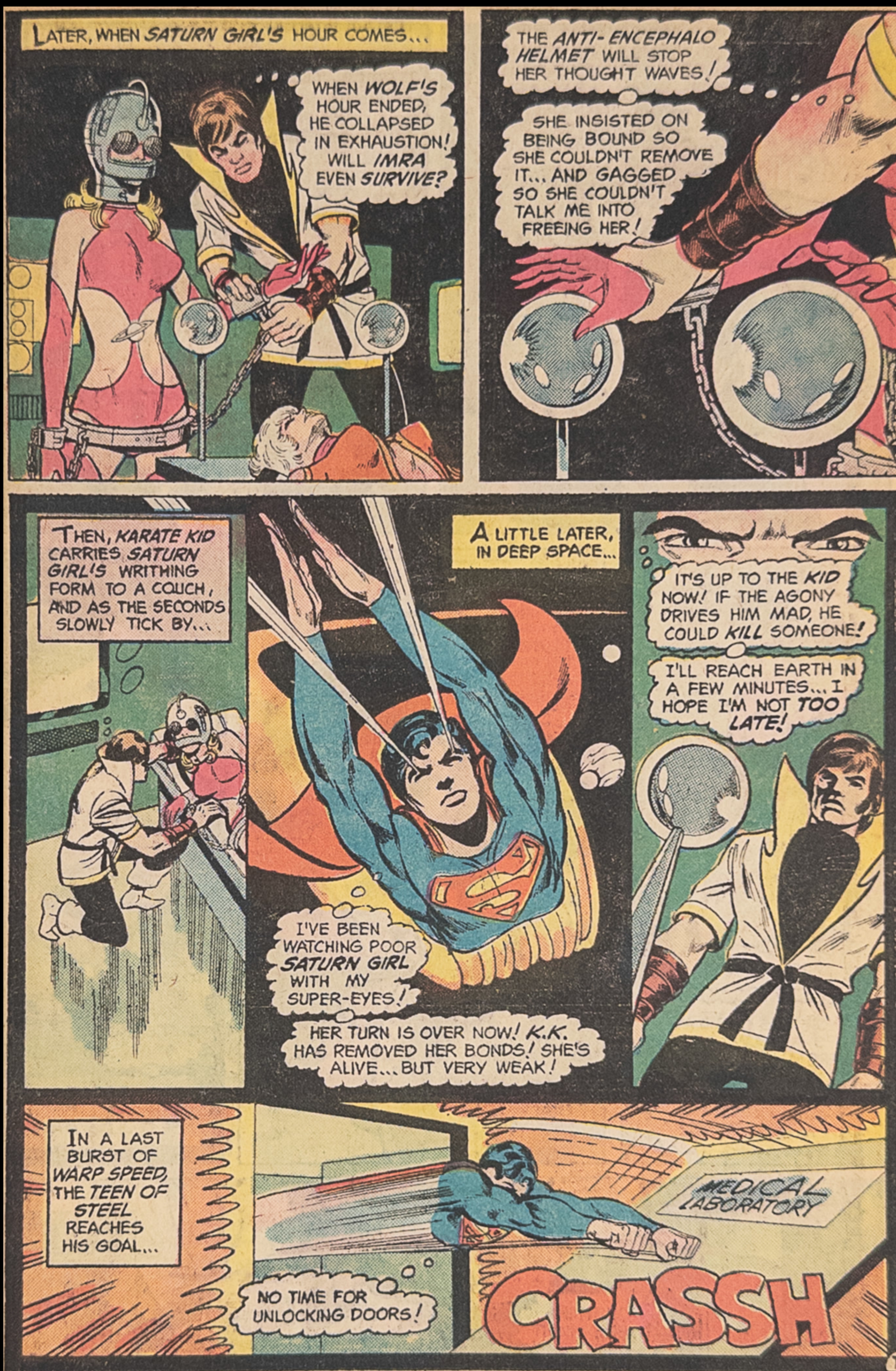
The backup, however, is incredible. Incredibly creepy and bad but still incredible.

It’s all about Brainiac-5 being really tired, and, wouldn’t you know it, he’s really tired because he’s made himself a fully functioning Supergirl android. He misses his 20th-century gal, you see, so he makes a new version of her.

Except he doesn’t know he’s made the android version, so there’s a bunch of bait and switch to get to the big reveal. It’s utter nonsense in terms of plotting—it’s hard to tell if Bates is trying to



"BRAINIAC 5'S SECRET WEAKNESS!", PAGE 3
 SUPERBOY #204 (DC COMICS, OCTOBER 1974)



"WHO CAN SAVE THE PRINCESS?", PAGE 7
SUPERBOY #209 (DC COMICS, JUNE 1975)



SUPERBOY #209

June 1975

Jim Shooter¹, Cary Bates² (script)

Mike Grell (artist)

Ben Oda¹, Joe Letterese² (letters)

Murray Boltinoff (editor)

The first story, from Jim Shooter and Mike Grell, opens with Princess Projectra's shuttle crashing as she attempts to land at Legion headquarters. Timber Wolf is there to save the day, complaining about "women drivers" the whole time. Karate Kid shows up in time for the Princess to stumble out of the shuttle and fall unconscious. They're sweethearts, so he's very concerned.

Turns out Projectra has a rare "pain plague," which causes terrible pain for a number of hours then passes. It's technically not fatal, except the pain kills you, so who cares if the disease doesn't. The Legion comes up with a solution—each Legionnaire will take an hour of the pain so it doesn't kill anyone, and Projectra will be spared.

They immediately find out the pain intensifies as the illness develops (so hour two's pain is worse than hour one's). They also discover the Legionnaire who takes the pain will lose control of their powers (and mind), attacking everyone around them. So it's all very dangerous. Good thing Superboy is flying across the galaxy at warp speed to get there for the final hour.

Even if it weren't poorly written and poorly illustrated, the story's also poorly plotted. A deus ex machina resolves everything, with every page bringing some immediately resolved problem to keep the story going. Shooter's sexism might be the move of a dick writer, but

be inventive and not clearing the bar or if the comic thinks so little of its readership—and then Grell's art... doesn't help. There are even panels where Grell's art goes from hot to cold as they're read, drawing attention to the deficiencies.

The first story's pointless and bad, and the second story's pointless, bad, and icky.

Though I did just realize Bates doesn't address whether Brainiac-5 admits to his teammates he's using Legion resources for his sex toys.

...

the rest of the story is just the moves of a bad one.

Cary Bates handles writing chores for the backup (with Grell returning and arguably much worse). Some tween has won a contest to spend the day with the Legion, complete with his own flight ring. Pay attention to the flight ring thing; it'll be "important."

First up on the tour is getting the mail, except this time someone has sent the Legion a "witch wolf," the most dangerous animal in the solar system (our solar system?) because it emits poison radiation and mind controls people's powers to backfire on them.

One by one, the Legion goes into the room with the witch wolf, and, one by one, it reverses their powers and knocks them out. Will the guest star tween somehow figure out what's going on, something the professional superheroes just can't intuit on their own? Most definitely.

And will he be rewarded at the end with the promise of sexual contact from the female Legionaries, their male colleagues cheering the lad on? Also, most definitely.

The comic starts and ends icky from the sexism. In between is bad writing from two different writers and tepid (and worse) art.

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SUPERBOY #212

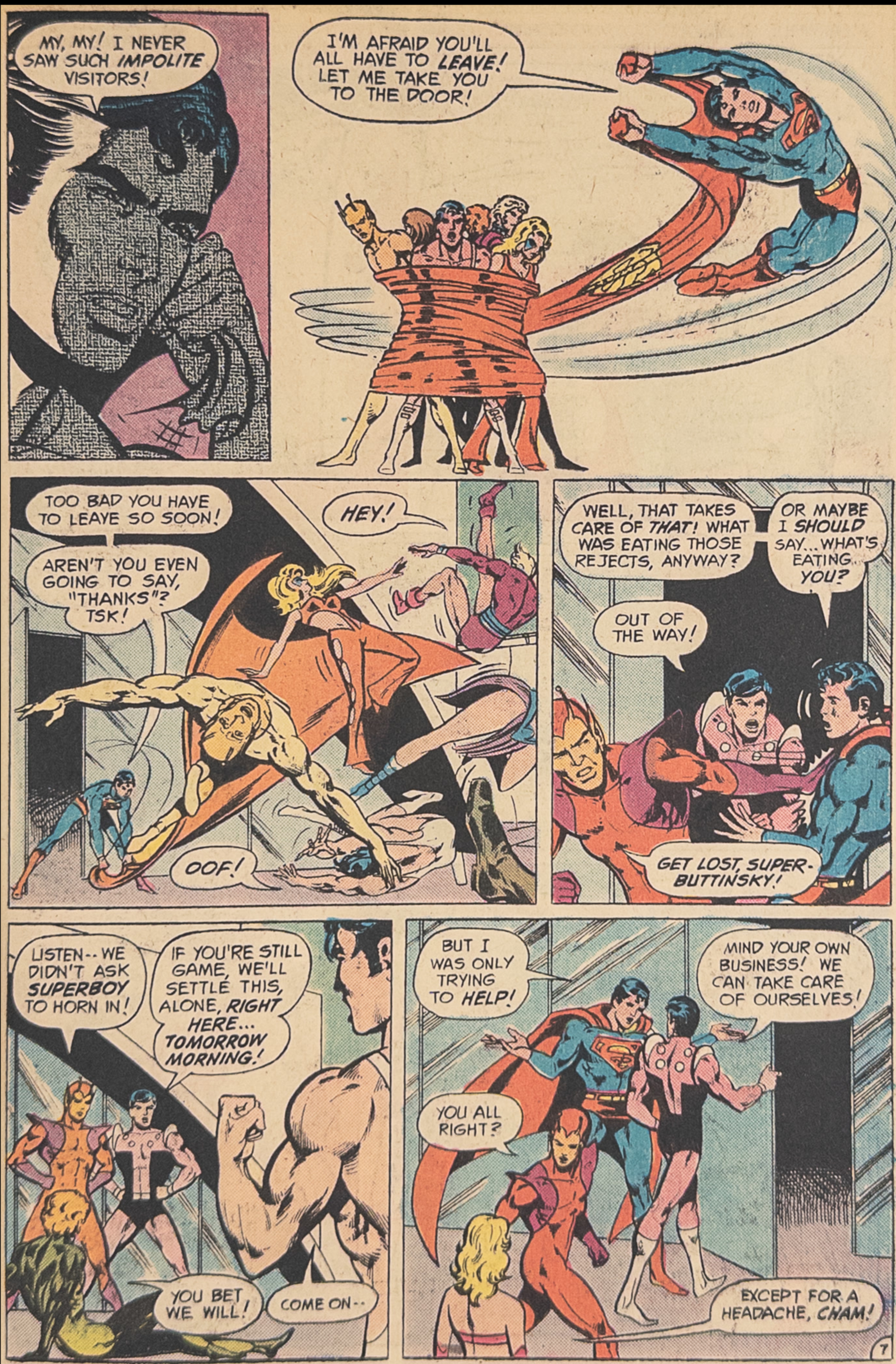
October 1975

Jim Shooter (script)
Mike Grell (artist)
Ben Oda (letters)
Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)
Murray Boltinoff (editor)

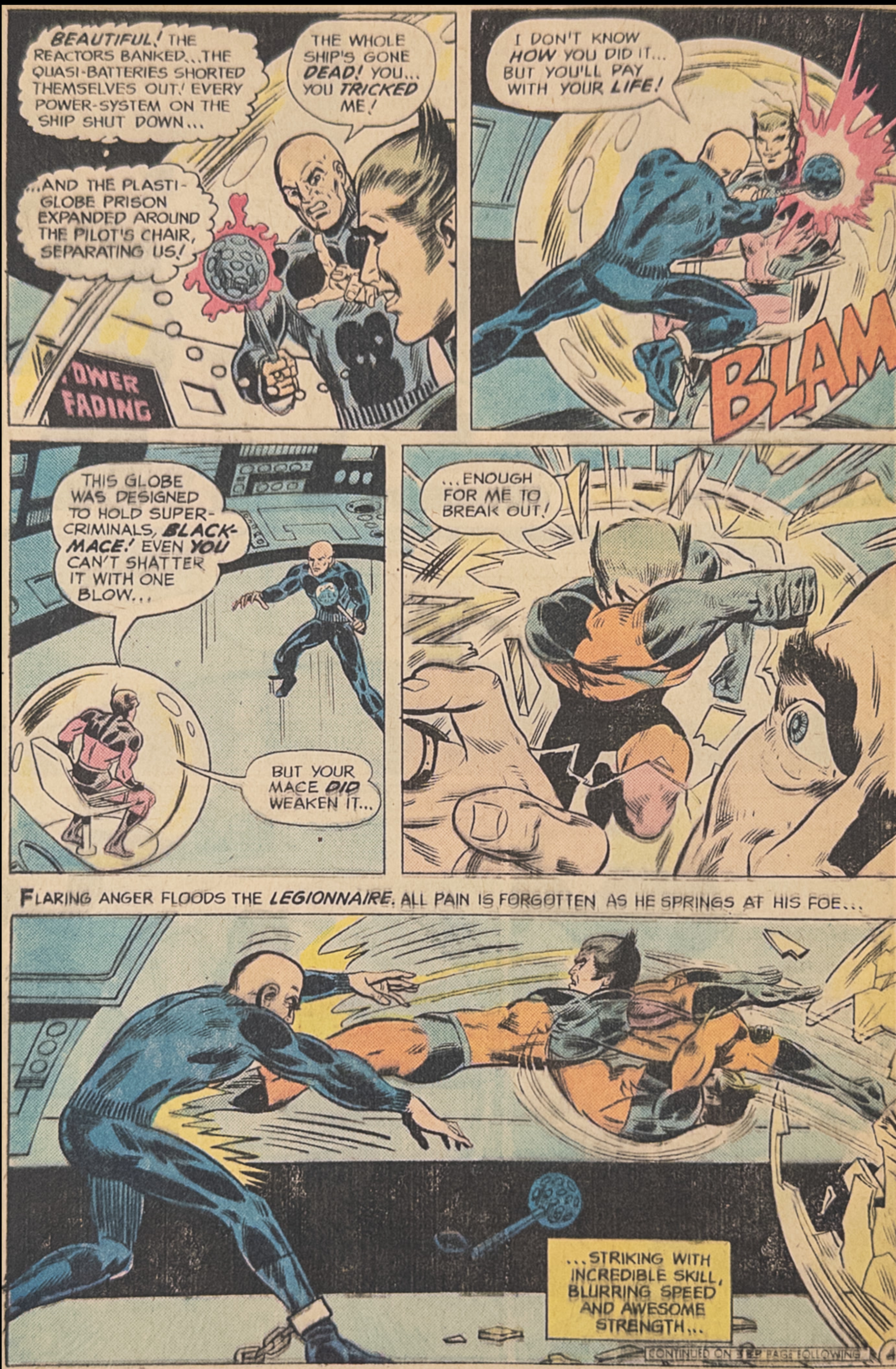


Jim Shooter and Mike Grell contribute both stories this issue and offer little quarter. Grell's art is slightly better than usual (or at least not as obviously deficient), and I guess Shooter could be worse.

The first story is about a bunch of Legion rejects busting into the Legion headquarters and kicking the Legion's butt. Each of the rejects is from the same planet as their opponent and uses those same powers to overwhelm the Legionnaire. It's not until Superboy shows up the fight ends.



"LAST FIGHT FOR A LEGIONNAIRE", PAGE 7
SUPERBOY #212 (DC COMICS, OCTOBER 1975)



"TRAPPED TO LIVE-- FREE TO DIE!", PAGE 4
SUPERBOY #213 (DC COMICS, DECEMBER 1975)

Except then his teammates are mad at him for stopping them from getting their brains beat in. So they challenge the rejects to a rematch the next day. Little do the rejects realize the Legionnaires have a plan, and that plan is teamwork. You can beat the crap out of lots of people if you plan on how you're going to do it.

Not really sure **Superboy** is a morally virtuous comic book.

Anyway, the rejects once again pair off against their opposites, with a different result this time.

There's also a nonsense subplot about some cop coming to take away one of the Legionaries. He's

got a surprise (at least what Shooter considers a surprise) reason.

It's a bad story about a bunch of teenagers trying to beat up a bunch of other teenagers.

The backup is about Legion of Substitute Heroes member Night Girl trying to take down a common criminal gang; only the common criminals know her weakness-she doesn't have any powers in light. Thank goodness Shadow Lass comes along at the right time to save her, but they're still not powerful enough together to take out the regular human criminals with guns.

I don't think the crooks make any remarks about the heroes being girls and, therefore, lesser (though the first story does so), but Night Girl's boyfriend, Cosmic Boy, will make fun of her for being a girl superhero. He dumps her for it only to discover his replacement date is wanting.

Too bad the crooks decided to start killing Legionnaires—him first so he doesn't get mad at them for taking out Night Girl. Action, misogyny, and resolution ensue.

It's another unpleasant issue. Even when Grell may have an interesting idea for the panel composition, his detail work is bad. Not as bad as some of his figure work, however; in Grell's future, no one has rib cages when they fly. Or their rib cages are as high as their pectorals.

Doesn't matter; bad comic.

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SUPERBOY #213

December 1975

Jim Shooter (script)
Mike Grell (artist¹, pencils²)
Bill Draut (inks²)



Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)
Murray Boltinoff (editor)

Despite a poor opening, the feature's not terrible. I mean, Mike Grell's mid-forties-looking Superboy is always a thing, but otherwise—besides the incessant bickering between the Legionnaires—it's an okay story. Once you get past Superboy's introduction to the story, which is thankfully the worst Jim Shooter exposition we get in the whole story.

The introduction promises Ultra Boy cracking under the pressures of being a superhero, but it's actually something tied to a very specific trauma for Ultra Boy. The resolution to it entirely invalidates the introduction teaser, but whatever. It could be much worse.

The Legion's hanging out at headquarters when someone breaks in, getting past all their advanced defenses. It's the best thief in the galaxy; come to tell the Legion he's going to steal their miracle machine. Brainiac-5 accuses the thief of being a liar because Brainy's never heard of him.

The thief points out he's never been arrested or caught because he's the best, so how would Brainiac-5 have heard of him? Brainiac-5, being written by a Jim Shooter-level intelligence, has no rejoinder.

The thief transports out or whatever, promising to return, and the Legion has a fit about what to do next. They take a vote on destroying the machine, only to discover they can't destroy it anyway; it's too well-built. So they up the defenses and stand guard.

We still haven't had Ultra Boy cracking under pressure, by the way. We've got to wait for them

to try to track the thief down, running into a space dinosaur instead, and Ultra Boy hates space dinosaurs. Good thing the comic's called **Superboy** and Superboy can see across the universe.

There's nothing particularly good about the story, but there's also nothing particularly bad—Shooter made it through a whole story without any sexism—and while Grell's going to Grell, maybe it's worn me down by now.

The backup's similarly indistinctly “not terrible.” Also not at all good. Shooter scripts, Grell's on art with Bill Draut. Is Grell better with someone else inking? Not really. Draut makes the lines bolder, which isn't really Grell's problem. None of the body work is improved.

On a solo mission, Timber Wolf answers a distress call, but something else may be going on. To survive, Timber Wolf will have to use his smarts and knowledge of the Legion policy and procedure handbook.

So many thought balloons from Timber Wolf. None of them thoughtful, but also none of them filled with the character's usually sexism.

The comic's not so much not bad as inoffensive. It's still not anything good, but inoffensive is a good start.

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SUPERBOY #214

January 1976

Jim Shooter¹, Cary Bates² (script)

Mike Grell (artist¹, pencils²)

Bill Draut (inks²)

Ben Oda¹, Joe Letterese² (letters)

Bill Draut (inks²)

Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)

Murray Boltinoff (editor)



"NO PRICE TOO HIGH", PAGE 8
SUPERBOY #214 (DC COMICS, JANUARY 1976)

SORRY I STARTLED YOU, GENTLEMEN. I PROMISED MY COUSIN I'D WAIT A FEW MORE MONTHS BEFORE REVEALING MYSELF--

--BUT WHEN I SAW THE TROUBLE YOU WERE HAVING WITH THIS VOLCANO, I DECIDED I COULDN'T WAIT!

YOU CAN CALL ME **POWER GIRL**, WILDCAT. IT'S AS GOOD A NAME AS ANY OTHER, AND IT WON'T CONFUSE ME WITH MY COUSIN.

HIS NAME YOU ALREADY KNOW--

IT'S **SUPERMAN**.

WHOA, GIRL-- ONE STEP AT A TIME. WE DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE--NEVER MIND YOUR COUSIN!

YEAH... HOW ABOUT AN INTRODUCTION, SISTER?

SUPERMAN IS YOUR COUSIN? BUT--ALL OF HIS RELATIVES DIED ON **KRYPTON** YEARS AGO! *

IT'S A LONG STORY, FLASH--AND THERE'S NO TIME TO DWELL ON IT NOW. LOOK--!

HUH? HEY--WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!

*OBVIOUSLY, ON **EARTH-TWO**, SUPERMAN HAS KEPT **POWER GIRL**'S EXISTENCE A SECRET LONGER THAN HE DID ON **EARTH-ONE**. HONEST--NO LIE. --Gerry.

NOW THIS IS MORE MY STYLE! I'M A **BOXER**, NOT AN **EARTH-MOVER**!

WHY DON'T BOTH OF YOU BACK OFF-- AND LEAVE THIS TO ME?

UH-UH, WILDCAT. NEITHER YOU NOR THE FLASH CAN HANDLE THIS QUICKLY ENOUGH--

--NOT WHEN ALL I NEED TO DO-- IS THIS!

LADY, A MAN COULD GET TO HATE YOU.

C'MON, SPEED-STER--DON'T YOU KNOW FLATTERY WON'T GET YOU ANYWHERE?

WHOMMP!

Ah, yes, the valiant superheroes of the future... who are willing to sacrifice a little kid's life because they don't like him. Well, not all of them, but definitely Wildfire and maybe Karate Kid. Thank goodness Superboy (with his forty-five-year-old Grell features) is there to remind them they're not supposed to let innocent people die just because they're unpleasant.

The Legion's on an automated factory planet. The planet's been attacking ships trying to land, including one after the Legion arrives. Superboy saves the ship's pilot before the planet's lasers zap it. Turns out the pilot is an obnoxious little kid (who barely seems aware of the Legion, which ought to be interesting but isn't), son of the planet's owner.

Too bad the villain turns out to be a fired overseer who hates the planet's owner and would kill the kid at the first opportunity. So Superboy does his best to try to keep the kid safe, even as the kid thinks the heroes are just trying to cramp his style. Wildfire takes a different approach—let the kid die so the Legion can escape.

Maybe if writer Jim Shooter had a better moral compass, the story would read better; as is, the reader's supposed to identify with Wildfire but eventually agree with Superboy, who's actually not showing all his cards. So... the needs of the few only outweigh the needs of the many when you're playing with marked cards.

At the very least, there are a couple okay big action splashes from Mike Grell. They're usually cushioned with some strangely distorted human faces or whatever's going on with

Wildfire's helmet, but there are at least a couple okay visual moments.

The backup—Grell on pencils, Cary Bates writing, Bill Draut on inks—is about Brainiac-5 trying to help Shrinking Violet with a mental health issue. She's just had a nasty near accident with another Legionnaire in the gym—she almost got stomped on—and now she can't shrink any more. Brainy ignores Saturn Girl's "professional" psychiatric advice on how to deal with it and pushes forward with an extreme treatment.



It's a terribly plotted story—the first few pages are all talking heads about Violet's problems (talking about her, she's not conscious for it because she's so near her mental breaking point), then there's some setup of Brainy's treatment idea. But then the actual action of the story is barely a page and a half, and it's... about getting stuck in a big ball of wire.

Once again, Brainiac-5 doesn't seem very smart at all.

Overall, however, the issue's nowhere near as bad as its creators can get. Unless, of course, you

want your superheroes helping people instead of pushing them under busses.

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ALL-STAR COMICS #58

February 1976

Gerry Conway (editor, script)

Ric Estrada (pencils)

Wally Wood, Al Sirois (inks)

Ben Oda (letters)

Paul Levitz (assistant editor)

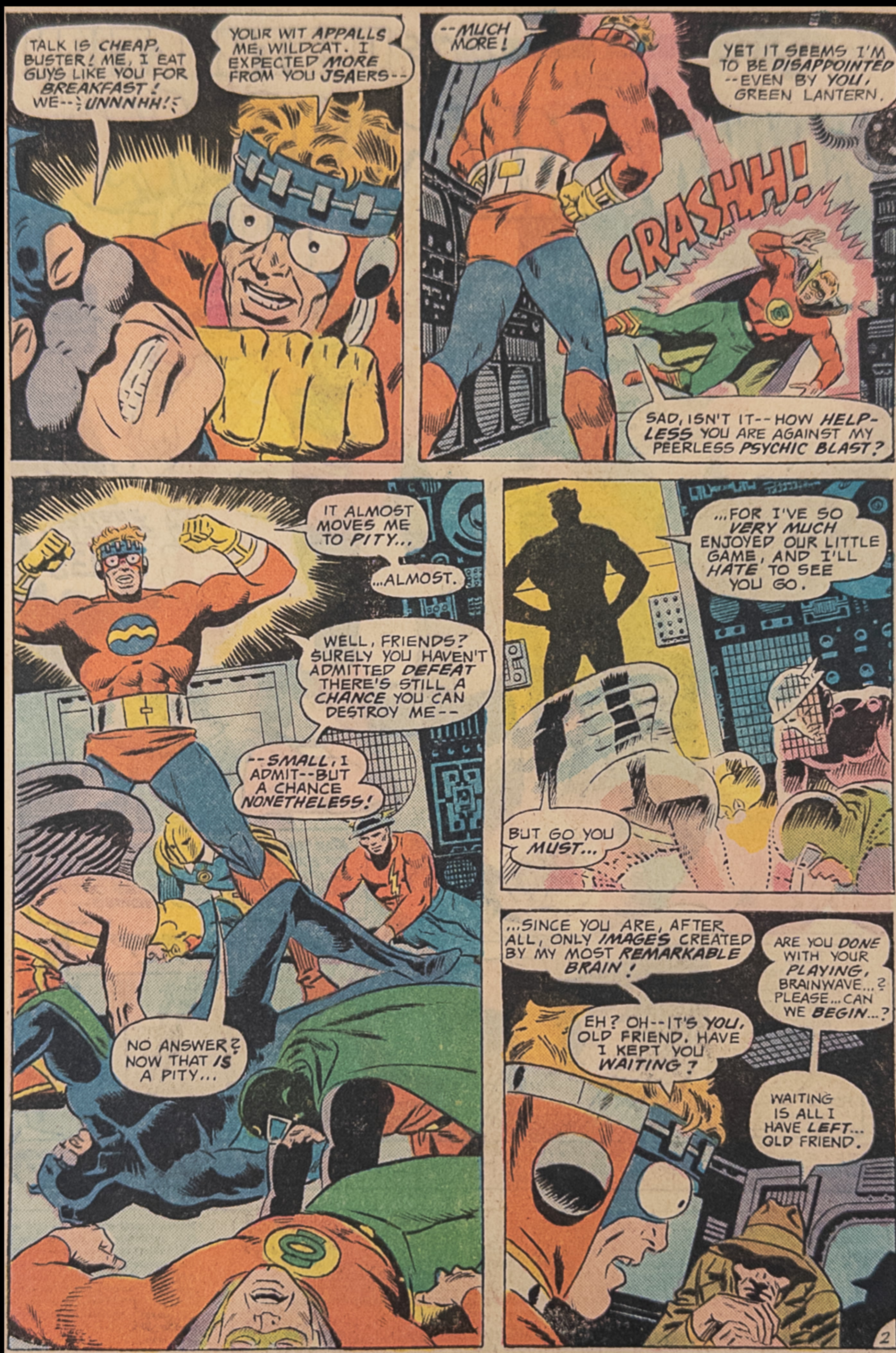
The issue opens with the JSA reading their email —no joke—and an anonymous sender telling them there will be disasters in three major cities: Seattle, Capetown, and Peking. The heroes split into pairs to investigate.

Seattle is Dr. Mid-Nite and Hawkman, except the action there begins with Star-Spangled Kid foiling a bank robbery. Once we get a bunch of Kid's thought balloons about his cosmic rod (literally a cosmic rod, not his... anyway), it's time for an earthquake. Hawkman and Dr. Mid-Nite see him trying to save people from above; Hawkman wants to help, but as Kid's psychiatrist, Mid-Nite, says if they help, it'll give Kid a complex.

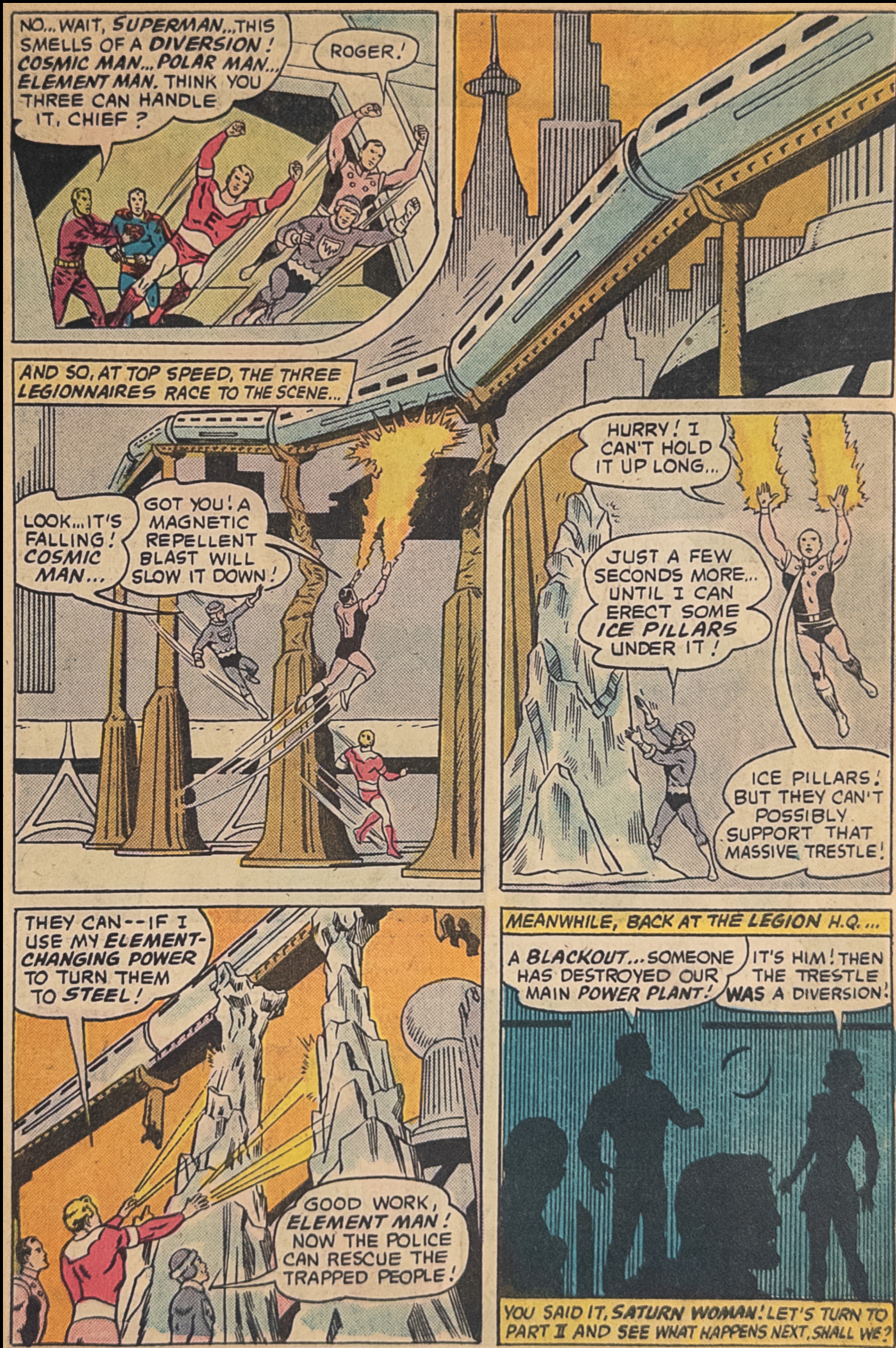
So they just watch as maybe people die because one superhero isn't enough for an earthquake.

In Capetown, Dick Grayson—oh, right, JSA is Earth-Two, which means everyone's older... kind of like they'd kept aging after WWII but not really because Dick Grayson's in his twenties, not his late forties—Dick Grayson's a UN envoy and he's there when a gas attack occurs. Dr. Fate and Green Lantern show up and do most of the work, with Green Lantern whining the whole time about how he's not very smart and he wishes he were smart.





"BRAINWAVE BLOWS UP!", PAGE 2
ALL-STAR COMICS #59 (DC COMICS, APRIL 1976)



"THE ADULT LEGION!", PAGE 12
DC SUPER STARS #3 (DC COMICS, MAY 1976)

Finally, in Peking, we get Flash and Wildcat arriving just in time to stop a newly appeared volcano. Power Girl gets there after a page, sealing up the volcano and explaining the conceit of the comic to the heroes—writer Gerry Conway has already laid it out at least once for the reader, so he’s really hammering it in with Power Girl’s exposition. What if there were three disasters and three young heroes who really did all the work while the JSA was powerless? Wouldn’t that make a great concept for a comic?

Having read the comic, no, not really. Especially not since Conway’s wordy exposition oscillates between vapid superhero worship and redundant griping. Wildcat, for instance, spends most of the comic throwing in some asinine remark. But the rest of the heroes are still at least a little pissy about... being superheroes. Maybe some of the disconnect is all of them ostensibly being grown-ass men in at least their forties, yet still utterly feckless. Or Conway just doesn’t have a comic so much as an idea for one.

Ric Estrada and Wally Wood are on art. Lots of weird body poses, particularly with the flying (and not just Power Girl, who Estrada makes sure to get her cleavage and her leggy legs in every panel), but it’s such a rushed story, it doesn’t really matter.

All-Star Comics—returning after a twenty-five-year hiatus (sort of)—is off to a soggy start.

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ALL-STAR COMICS #59

April 1976

Gerry Conway (editor, script)
Paul Levitz (assistant editor, plot assist)
Ric Estrada (pencils)



Wally Wood, Al Sirois (inks)
Ben Oda (letters)

All-Star slightly improves from last time, mainly because Wildcat has fewer opportunities to be a sexist prick. There’s a huge one at the beginning, so much of one the Flash comments on it (internally) and assumes his friend is upset about the disasters threatening the world when it’s just because a Power Girl is stronger than him.

But Wildcat, Flash, and Power Girl are away most of the issue, on a rocket to intercept Brainwave’s spaceship.

Instead, the action checks in with the other heroes—Robin, Green Lantern, and Dr. Fate; they get their scene, which reveals the villain is hypnotizing the heroes into believing regular people are his evil henchmen. In the very next scene, Hawkman, Dr. Mid-Nite, and Star Spangled Kid beat the ever-loving shit out of a bunch of henchmen. So either the bad guy had some real henchmen and some fake henchmen, which seems like a lot of extra work, or our heroes beat up a bunch of civilians.

Because despite writer Gerry Conway's inability to stop with the superhero worship thought balloons of most of the characters—and then the general exposition, too—he underwrites the book's action. But still somehow paces it really well. The issue's nowhere near a success, but it's got some good art (Ric Estrada and Wally Wood again).

It's also got some not-good art, and it's still weird how Estrada contorts Power Girl's cleavage and gams into every panel. Even when she's saving the world. Conway's going on and on about how it's so much more heroic because she's not Supergirl of Earth-One, and Estrada's drooling on the page.

Then there's the villain, Brainwave. He's got googly eyes. Googly eyes had been a craze by the time this comic came out; the creators must've known, yet still, they did googly eyes.

Much of the issue is spent with Brainwave. We get his recent backstory, just how it pertains to the current event, and then he's around a lot. When the action gets to him after the hero check-ins, it stays with him, which makes Conway's plotting even more successful.

The finale's way too purple in the exposition, but it's dramatic enough. It's mostly Dr. Fate talking, and Conway doesn't give Fate any personality, which makes him likable because everyone with personality seems like a dick.

Of course, Estrada and Wood have problems with Fate's helmet.

Baby steps.

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DC SUPER STARS #3

May 1976

Jim Shooter (script, layouts)
Curt Swan (pencils)
George Klein (inks)
Milt Snapinn (letters)
Mort Weisinger (original editor)
E. Nelson Bridwell (editor)

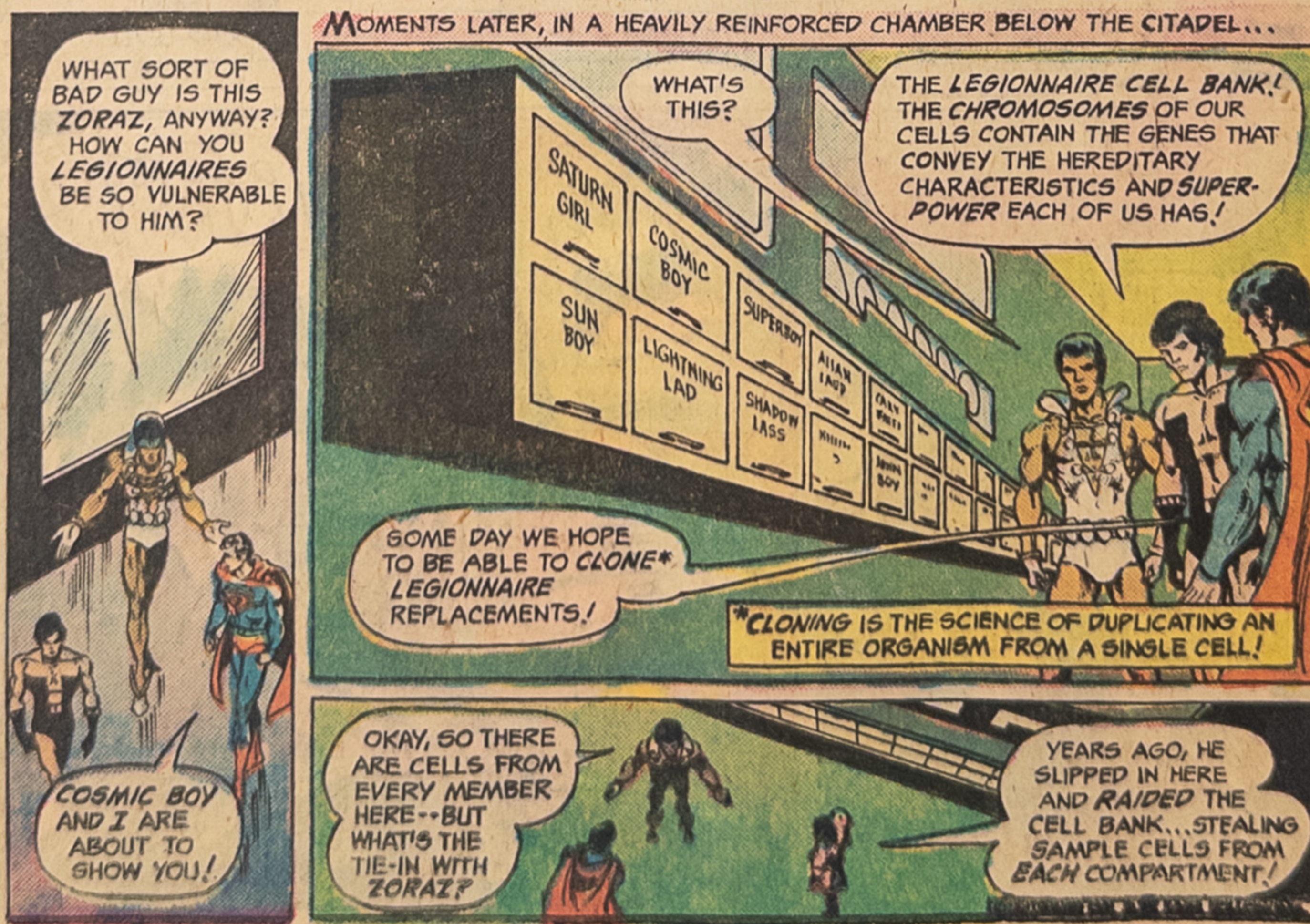
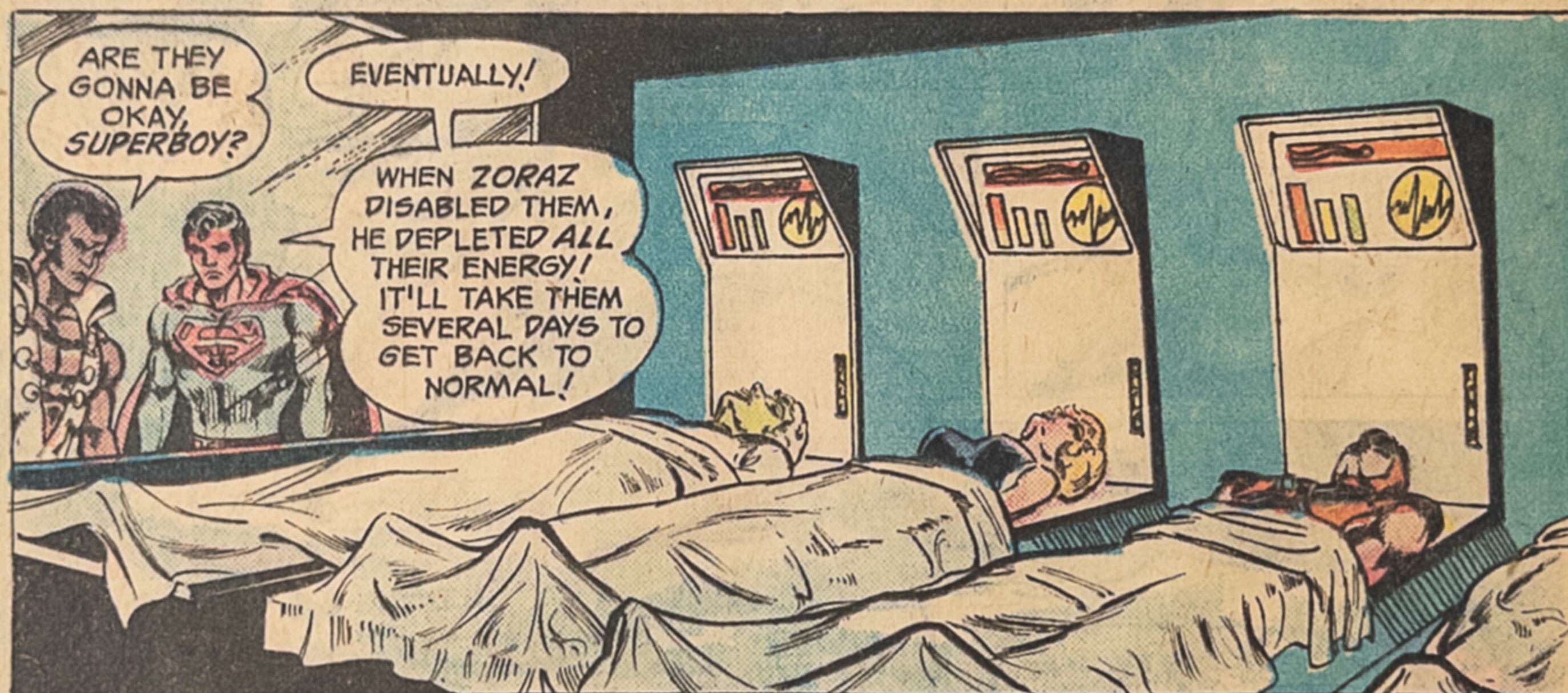
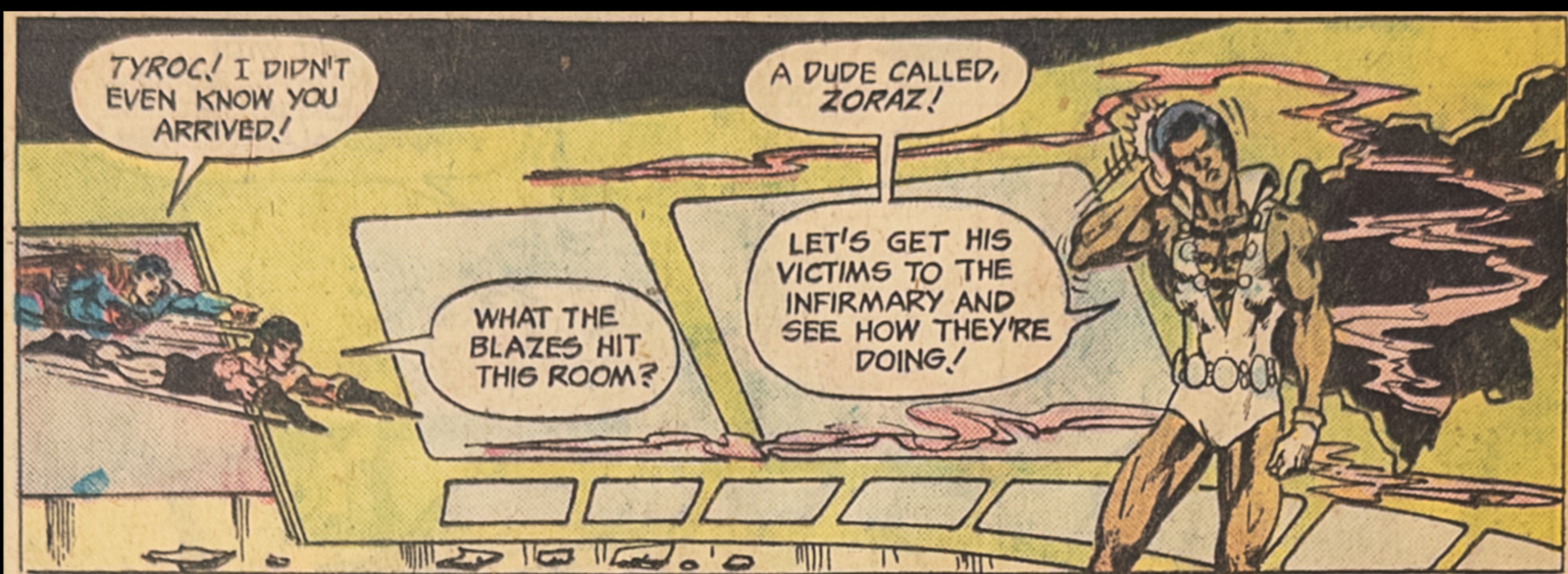
This issue of **Super Stars** reprints an eight-year-old **Adventure Comics** two-parter about Superman visiting the Legion a little further in the future, so they're all adults. The script is one of those infamous teenage Jim Shooter scripts, and, you know, it's not bad. I mean, it's heavy on exposition, but the story's mostly a tour of the future for Superman.

Eventually, after the rest of the Legion assembles, we find out someone is wrecking Legion property, and Brainiac-5 can't figure out how it could be happening. Thank goodness Superman's there to remember a factoid to reveal the whole story, something Brainiac-5 presumably should've known.

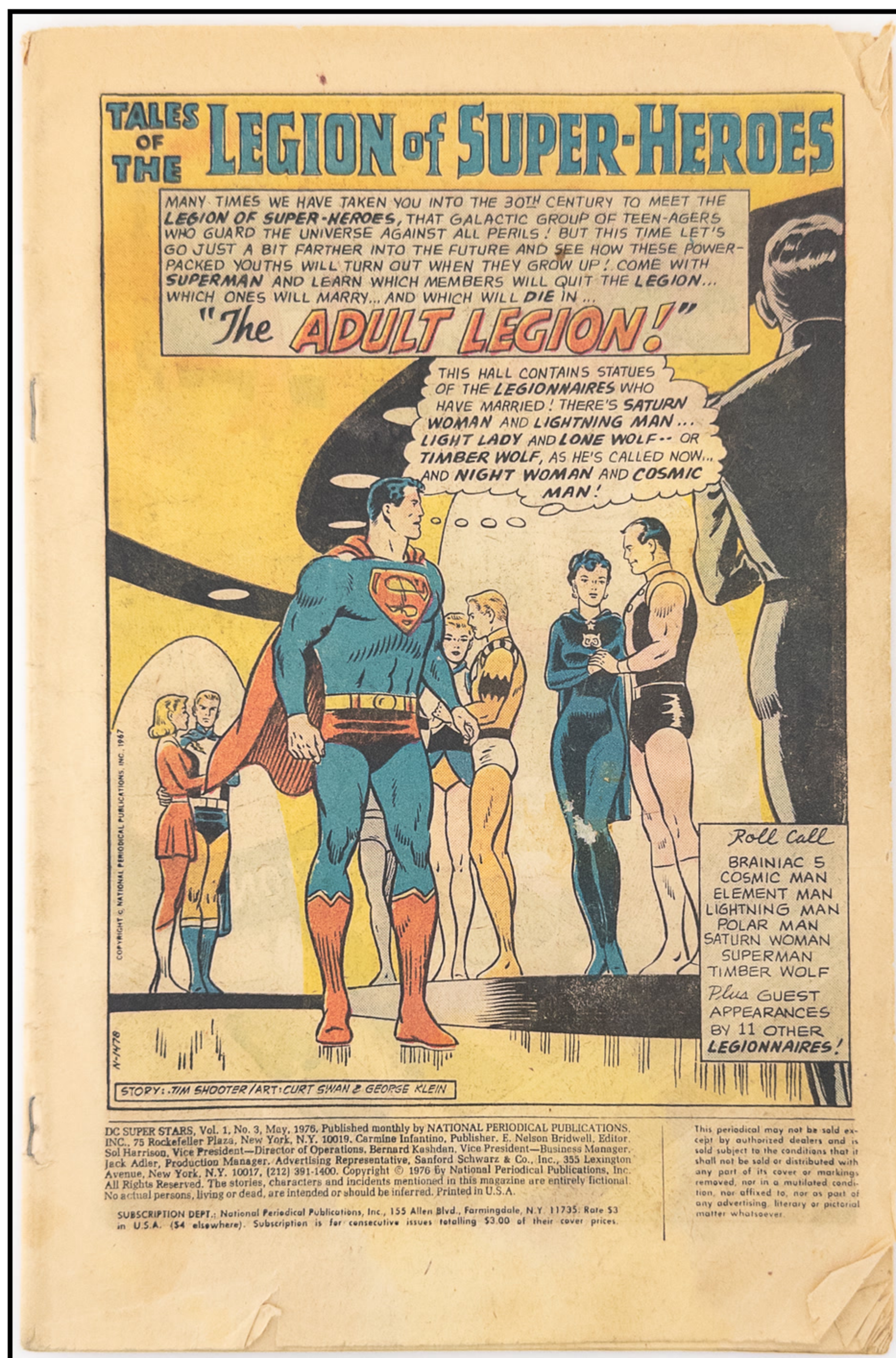
Superman's tour is all quite genial and pleasant. The art from Curt Swan and George Klein is charming and energetic. Swan's always at least solid, with some fantastic panels on occasion.



"VULCAN: SON OF FIRE!", PAGE 4
ALL-STAR COMICS #60 (DC COMICS, JUNE 1976)



"THE SECRET VILLAIN THE WORLD NEVER KNEW", PAGE 8
SUPERBOY #218 (DC COMICS, JULY 1976)



The second part of the story reveals the returning villains who engineered all the drama the first time around. Superman, however, doesn't get to participate. Instead, various adult Legionnaires go to remote destinations to fight supervillains in order to free a fellow Legionnaire. Shooter does all the math on the hero and villain's superpowers, somehow canceling one another, or maybe something in the environment. It's thoughtful and thorough without being particularly entertaining or creative.

But there's also the Swan artwork to keep things moving smoothly. Shooter doesn't have a single

bump in the issue. Not even the bewildering finish, which features the adult Legionnaires needing help and getting it from an unlikely pair of guest stars. Presumably, there's a story behind the cameos.

Overall, it's an entertaining read. It gets a little long at times—even if you're curious about adult Legionnaires, they're rarely in it for more than a panel or two. Those cameos never add up; at least in the second half, the story's got some urgency. Despite part one's villain being more dangerous than anyone in the second half, the future tour sets a relaxed pace. Superman solving the mystery is very relaxed, too. Shooter keeps multiple details from the reader in these stories, just to surprise in a couple of pages. It's lazy, but... Swan mostly covers it. And at least those abbreviated scenes move a little faster.

The stories are decent enough Silver Age DC Comics. Not Swan's best work (and I'll never know on Shooter's) but it's a successful enough, engaging enough two-parter.

...

ALL-STAR COMICS #60

June 1976

Gerry Conway (editor, script)
Keith Giffen (layouts)
Wally Wood (pencils, inks)
Al Sirois (inks)
Ben Oda (letters)
Paul Levitz (assistant editor)

It's a few weeks after last issue (and adventure) and the doldrums of being a superhero have sunk in. The issue opens on a rainy day at the JSA brownstone, with Power Girl challenging the Flash to a race. Wildcat's busy having anger management issues about television while Star-Spangled Kid wonders what's wrong with him.

Flash will excuse away Wildcat's behavior (again). It's annoying as if writer Gerry Conway had to include some nonsense excusing of it, which just makes Flash seem like he's full of it, too.

But they won't be bored long, because new villain Vulcan attacks them. Vulcan looks a little like a Jack Kirby character; he's got a New God headband, for instance. The art this issue is Keith Giffen and Wally Wood; Giffen doesn't change Power Girl's outfit or anything, but he doesn't emphasize her, well, bare flesh the way Ric Estrada did the last couple issues. It's a welcome change.

Even if Conway's dialogue for Power Girl constantly has her making remarks about women's liberation, usually in reference to some dude not being into it. Conway's also the editor on this book, so clearly, he's not getting the guidance he actually needs. Particularly given the tangents the comic goes on.

So, the new villain is attacking the brownstone. Then we cut to Green Lantern's office woes (his newspaper's running out of money). Dr. Fate shows up—in civvies just to drag it out a few more panels—to collect Green Lantern so they can go to a top-secret Army briefing.

About Vulcan.

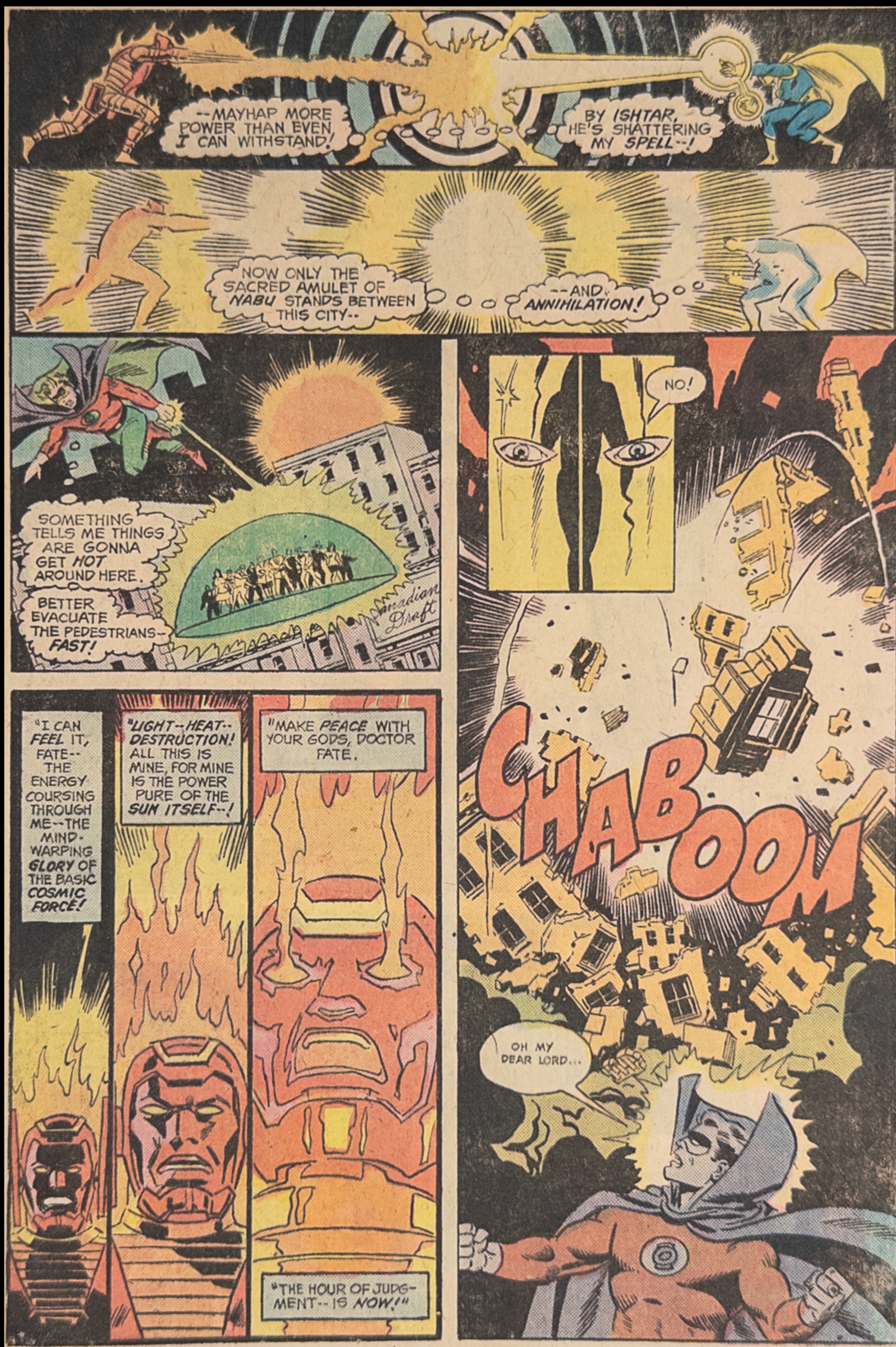
There's a flashback about Vulcan; he's a JSA-worshipping astronaut who cracked under the pressure of actual space travel, killing his crew mates, then becoming a fire creature. It's simultaneously a little and a lot.

Then Green Lantern and Dr. Fate go to confront the bad guy, and the comic's over. It's so oddly plotted, especially since the Army briefing scene

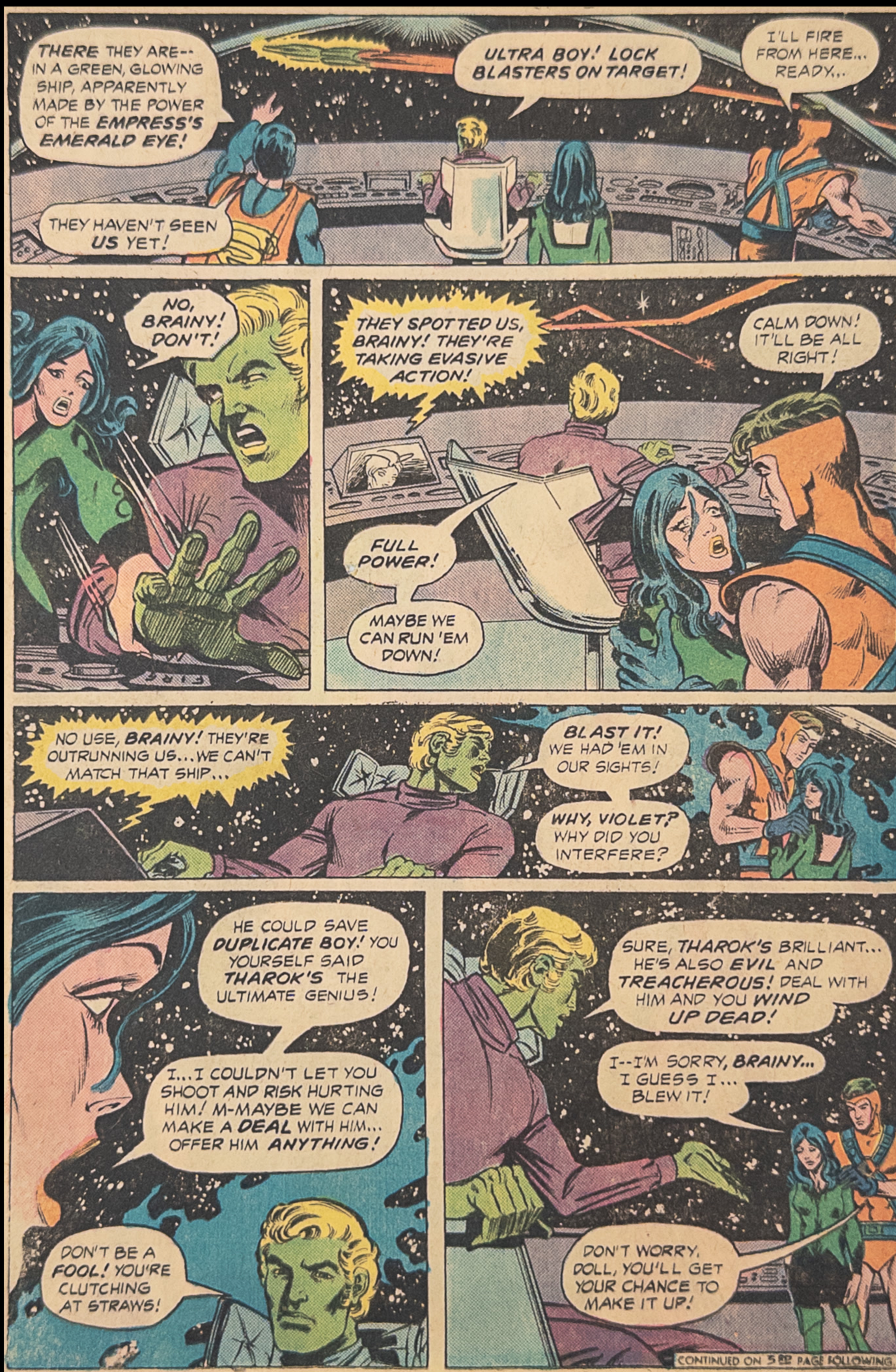


was mostly connecting the dots to the first scene with Vulcan. It might've made more sense if... the JSA headquarters had some kind of alarm system to alert the other members of the attack.

As far as characterizations go, Power Girl and Dr. Fate stand out the most. Wildcat's played for (bewilderingly targeted) laughs, Star Spangled Kid is bland, Jay Garrick's full of shit, and Green Lantern's a buzzkill and a half. Power Girl's at least sympathetic—even if Conway's not convinced she's experiencing misogyny at every turn, he's still writing it for her to experience—and Dr. Fate's flat but competent.



"HELLFIRE AND HOLOCAUST", PAGE 5
ALL-STAR COMICS #61 (DC COMICS, AUGUST 1976)



"THE PLUNDER PLOY OF THE FATAL FIVE", PAGE 7
SUPERBOY #219 (DC COMICS, SEPTEMBER 1976)

Who knew competent superheroes were so much to ask for?

Not much better than the previous outings, but a little.

• • •

SUPERBOY #218

July 1976

Cary Bates (script)
Mike Grell (artist)
Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)
Murray Boltinoff (editor)



This issue features Tyroc's formal admission to the Legion, which will be handled entirely in long shot. Given it's the ostensible point of the whole issue—the story's about Tyroc's last test before membership—the abrupt finish is a little disconcerting. Except it shouldn't be unexpected considering the rest of the issue; writer Cary Bates aims the reader's attention at some very specific scenes and details, all meant to distract from the subterfuges going on (or to emphasize them).

Of course, more on Tyroc might not be better. Bates has the Legion discussing their new member—a being from a “black race” they discovered somewhere on Earth—who thinks the Legion's a tad white. Bates makes sure the white Legionnaires explain to one another (certainly not Tyroc) how they can't possibly be racist because they have blue-skinned aliens on the team or whatever. It's trash, and the less of it, the better.

The issue opens with some Legion rejects leaving headquarters dejected once again. Is it important? You know it. Bates seemingly is using it as a way to introduce Tyroc to the story; he's flying away. A scene later, he will teleport himself back to headquarters and say he's doing it from the shuttle parking lot. All of the action in the issue relates to the Legionnaire's individual powers, and Bates is showcasing them, but these showcases aren't... good. Or compelling. They're not even the most visual. Like everything else in the issue, they're perfunctory.

Tyroc has brought all his gear to move into Legion headquarters, but his admission ceremony gets interrupted by secret supervillain

Zoraz. Zoraz has all the Legionnaires' DNA, so he can counter their powers. He can hide out in the HVAC system in headquarters, and they can't find him.

Because Legion defenses are only as good as the story requires.

After taking out all the Legionnaires around Tyroc, Superboy and Sun Boy show up to fill him in on the villain's backstory, then explain since he's the newest member and his DNA isn't on file, Tyroc will have to take down Zoraz.

The reason the Legion has DNA is so they can clone Legionnaires after the Legionnaire has been killed. It's a throwaway line, but... maybe deserves some attention. Not in this comic, of course.

We'll get some filler—mainly with the Legionnaires watching their teammates canoodle on the closed-circuit video cameras, which can't pick up the villain in the ducts anywhere. Then it's Tyroc's turn for some action.

Then, it's time for some more action after a reveal or two.

The action's not good, the characterization's not good, Mike Grell's art isn't good (at times it seems downright unfinished). The comic could be worse but there's certainly nothing to recommend it.

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ALL-STAR COMICS #61

August 1976

Gerry Conway (editor, script)
Keith Giffen (layouts)
Wally Wood (pencils, inks)
Al Sirois (inks)

Carl Gafford (colors)
Ben Oda (letters)
Paul Levitz (assistant editor)

Writer Gerry Conway likes deus ex machinas so much, he flies one in on a spaceship for this issue. The issue's got multiple comes and goings, like there was only so much time each hero got in each subplot. For instance, when the deus ex machina lands, the only superhero going to intercept is Power Girl, ducking out on another scene.

She ducked out just after Mrs. The Flash came to the burned up headquarters from last issue and told Jay it's time to come home because he's not young anymore. It's very strange. Especially



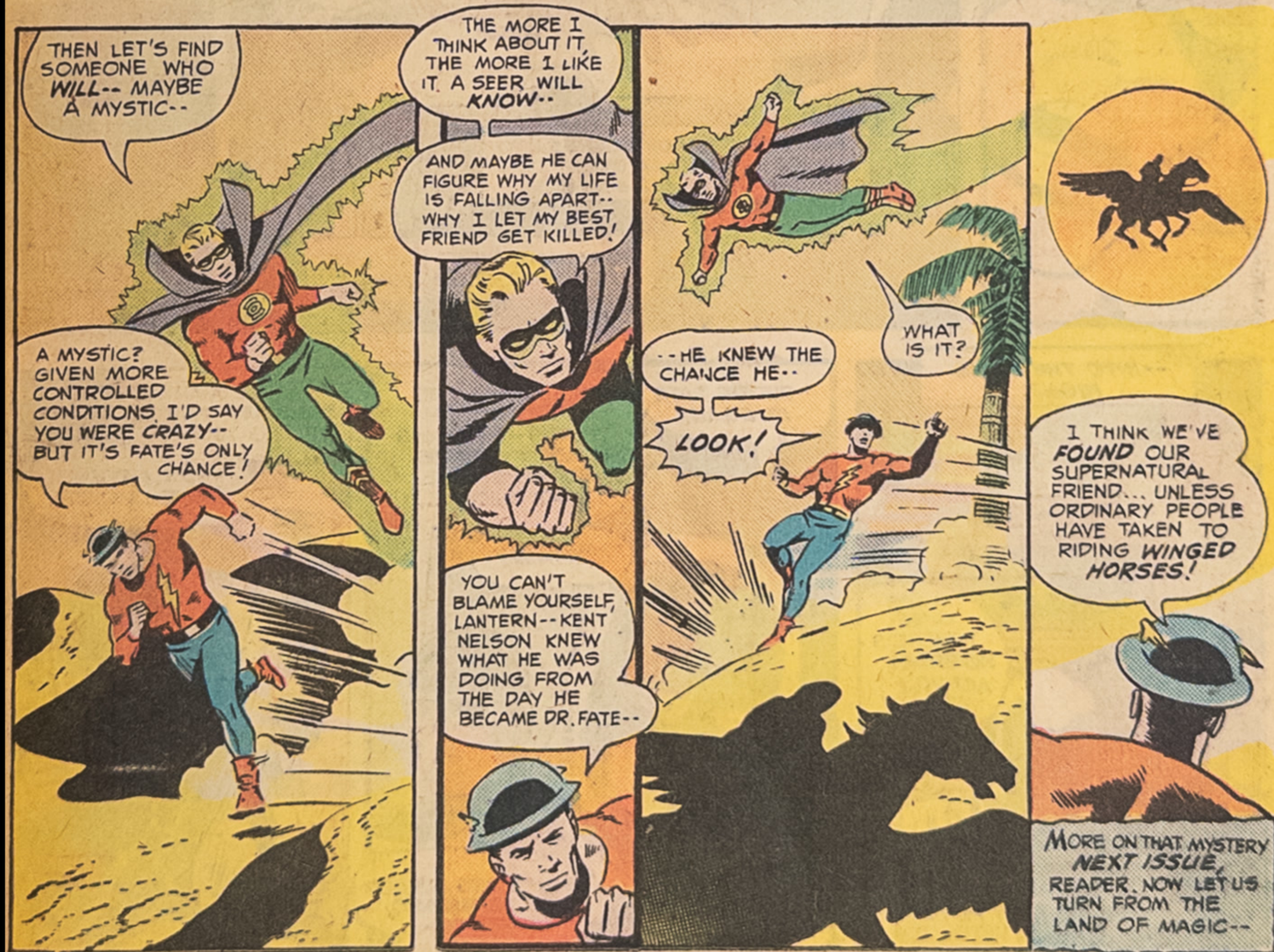
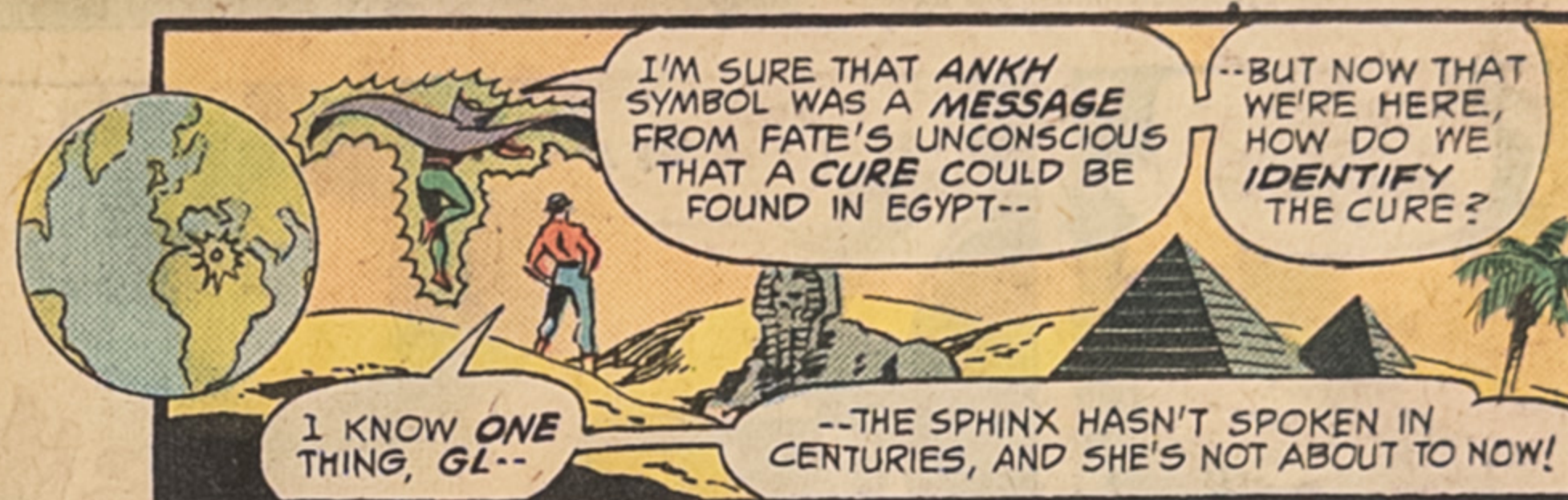


"WHEN FALL THE MIGHTY", PAGE 10
ALL-STAR COMICS #62 (DC COMICS, OCTOBER 1976)



AS FLASH AND GREEN LANTERN STAND ON THE SCORCHED EGYPTIAN SANDS, STARING AT THE SPHINX AND SEARCHING FOR THE ANSWER TO A RIDDLE.

THE RIDDLE WHICH CAN SAVE DOCTOR FATE'S LIFE!



"THE DEATH OF DOCTOR FATE", PAGE 7
ALL-STAR COMICS #63 (DC COMICS, DECEMBER 1976)

since other heroes then arrive to bring the numbers back up.

The majority of the issue involves the JSA trying to take down Vulcan, having discovered he's the rogue astronaut gone mad with power. Or maybe he went mad first; doesn't end up mattering. Conway must've decided even though the **All-Star** heroes are a bit squarer than their Earth-One counterparts, the comic's going to get unexpectedly and unnecessarily dark from time to time.

There's oddly more internal griping from Green Lantern this issue, too. It's like Conway's got his various character personality bits to get in—Star-Spangled Kid going on about his cosmic rod, Wildcat being a shallow bully, Power Girl (usually accurately) finding misogyny everywhere. Alan Scott, the Green Lantern, is a petulant man-child narcissist who cannot stop thinking about himself. Even when Dr. Fate runs into trouble, Green Lantern centers himself entirely in the panic.

There's some setup for next issue with Hawkman's alter ego's museum-related subplot. And Dr. Mid-Nite shows up to do some doctoring, but also do be the only one with x-ray (close enough) vision. Conway's got everything very neatly arranged, even if all the details are bland.

Power Girl does get a relatively decent solo mission intercepting the spaceship and its pilot. There's a multi-page punch-out with penciller Keith Giffen doing some elaborate page layouts. Wally Wood keeps up on the finished art, of course, but when Giffen actually gets to do a busy, creative page, it works out.

It's not a particularly compelling read, however. Giffen's few pages of Power Girl versus space invader, which has panels ranging from the most sci-fi superhero comic fight to a journey through the mind, are very welcome. Except there's no pay-off because the timer's gone off, and Conway's ready for the next batch of characters.

Despite saving the planet every other issue, the book doesn't seem at all necessary.

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SUPERBOY #219

September 1976

Jim Shooter (script)

Mike Grell (artist)

Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)

Murray Boltinoff (editor)

Ken Kaczak (suggestion)

Without getting effusive, this issue might be one of artist Mike Grell and writer Jim Shooter's best **Superboy** collaborations. There's only so much wrong with it; they both keep the comic packed and moving, and none of the Legionnaires are exceptionally crappy.

I mean, they're still crappy. Lightning Lad's ableist and Colossal Boy is only nice to the girl he likes when he thinks her boyfriend is going to die so he can get some action. And then Brainiac 5 is a bloodthirsty, callous creep most of the time.

But other than those characters, it's all reasonably solid. Lightning Lad barely has anything, and Brainy becomes background. Colossal Boy's thing recurs (and gets the last word), but it's amidst a lot of action.

The Legion's nemesis team, the Fatal Five (there are like twenty Legionnaires and five bad guys,

and the bad guys keep them busy), is pulling a series of heists throughout the galaxy. They're stealing android parts, experimental goo, toxic gases, and a planet fragment. One of the Fatal Five—Validus—is a super-powered giant who can tear up planets. Comes in handy for this exact story.

Shooter splits it into three parts. The first part has the villains striking and almost killing non-Legionnaire but still superhero future teen Duplicate Boy, leading to his girlfriend asking Brainiac 5 for help and kicking off the whole thing with Colossal Boy, too. Brainiac 5 has given up hope on saving Duplicate Boy, so he's

ready to kill the Fatal Five whenever the opportunity arises.

Now, one of the “charming” aspects of the comic is Superboy wondering what the heck is going on with his teammates. He'll practically stare through the fourth wall, trying to get the reader to pay attention to the weirdness going on around him. It happens a few times this issue, including for that goofy last story beat.

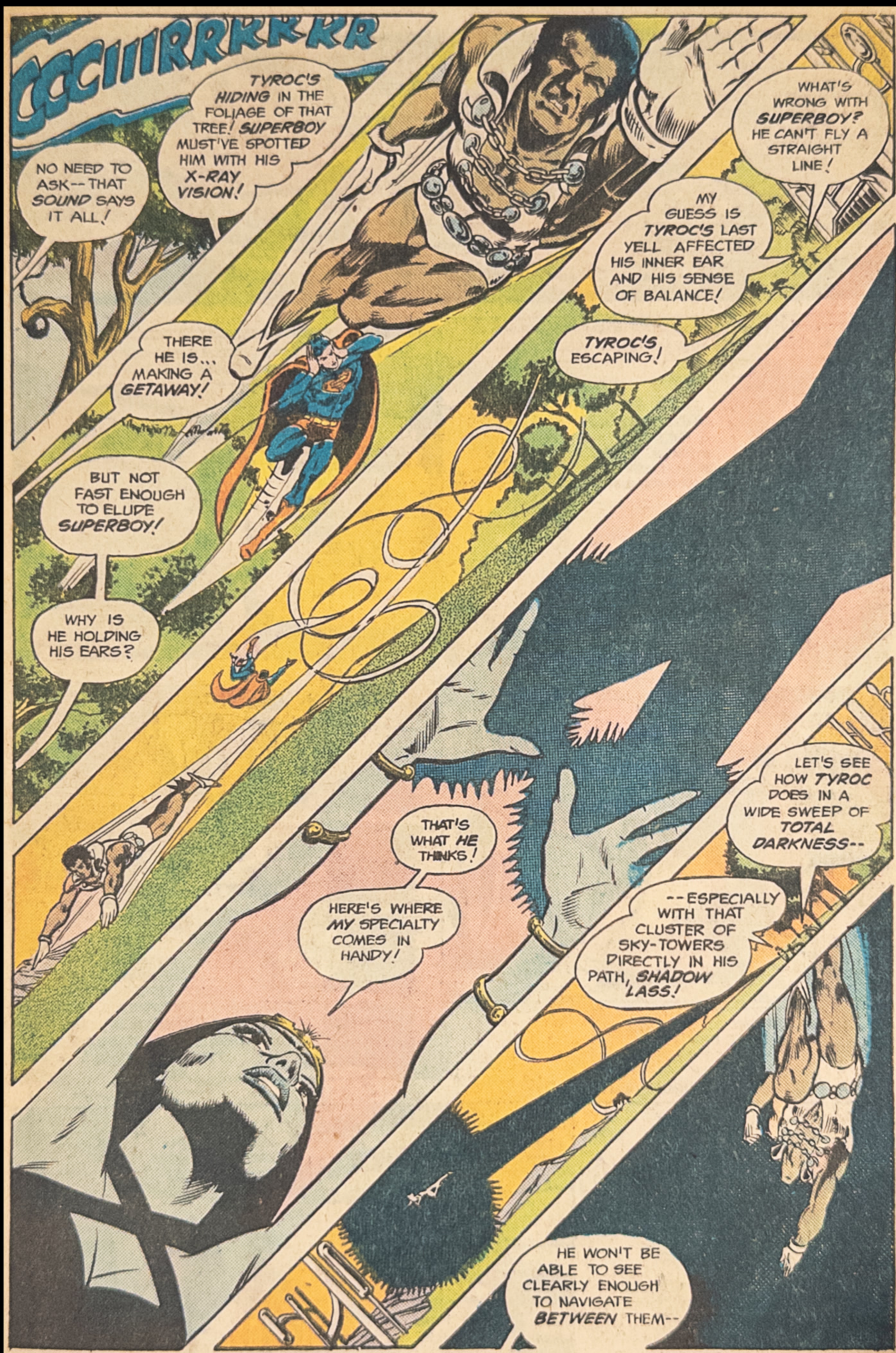
The rest of it—the Legion splitting into pairs so they can fight the Fatal Five—is all right. There's some silly stuff; Emerald Empress has the major hots for Superboy, but without, you know, good writing. And they always talk about her deadly gadget, which is called the Emerald Eye. It's a silly name, made even more ridiculous how they keep referring to it by the full name. Often with a possessive (the Emerald Empress's Emerald Eye). Even when they do a whole bit about Validus being a literal infant (with props), the Emerald Eye business is still sillier.

Now, despite Shooter and Grell keeping things moving, it's not like it's a good issue for Grell. His facial characteristics continuity is nil, and you'd think he'd be better at scaling between characters (Colossal Boy and Validus versus the normal-sized folk). However, some of Grell's more design-oriented moves work better, and they don't demand much attention.

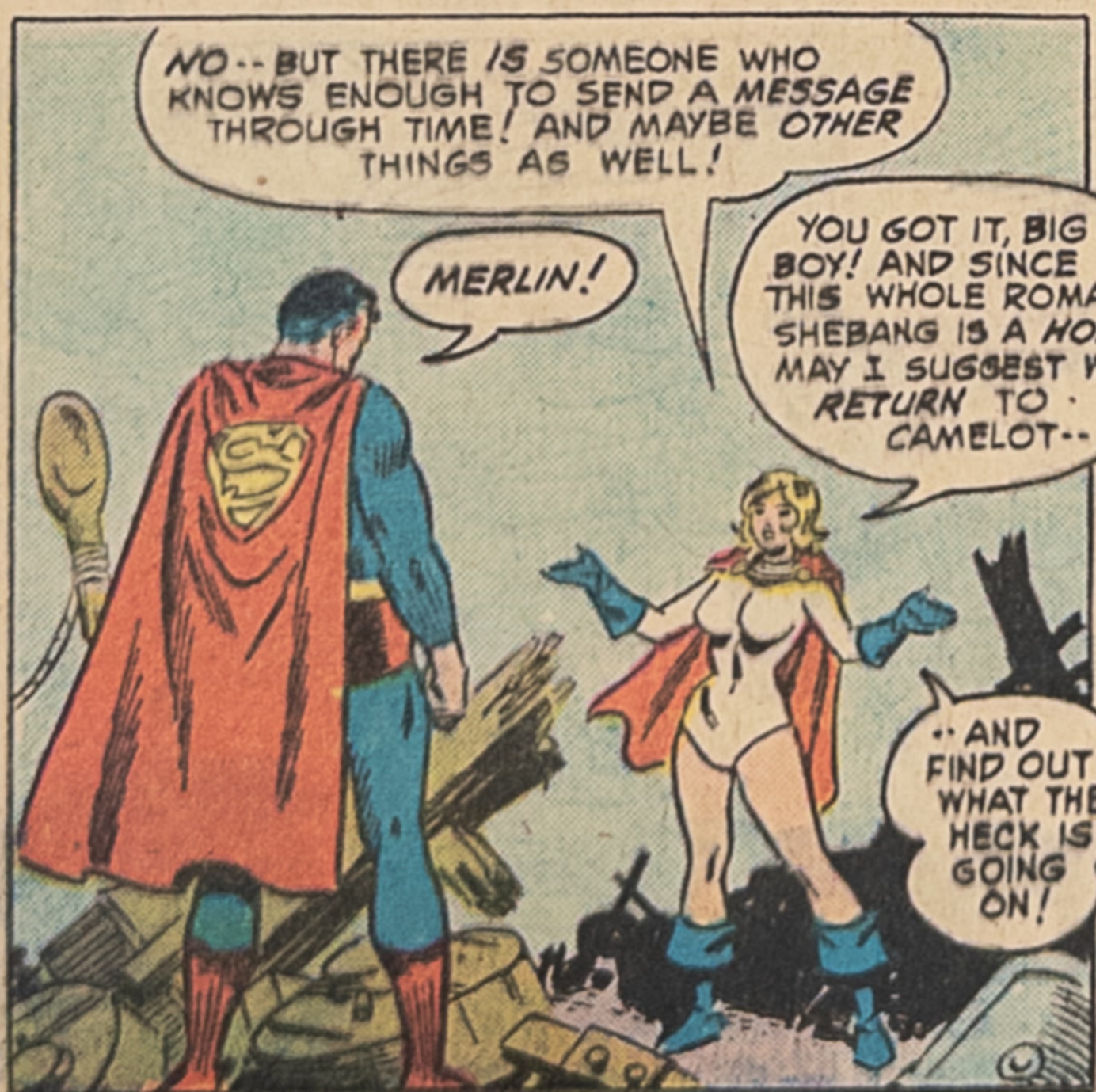
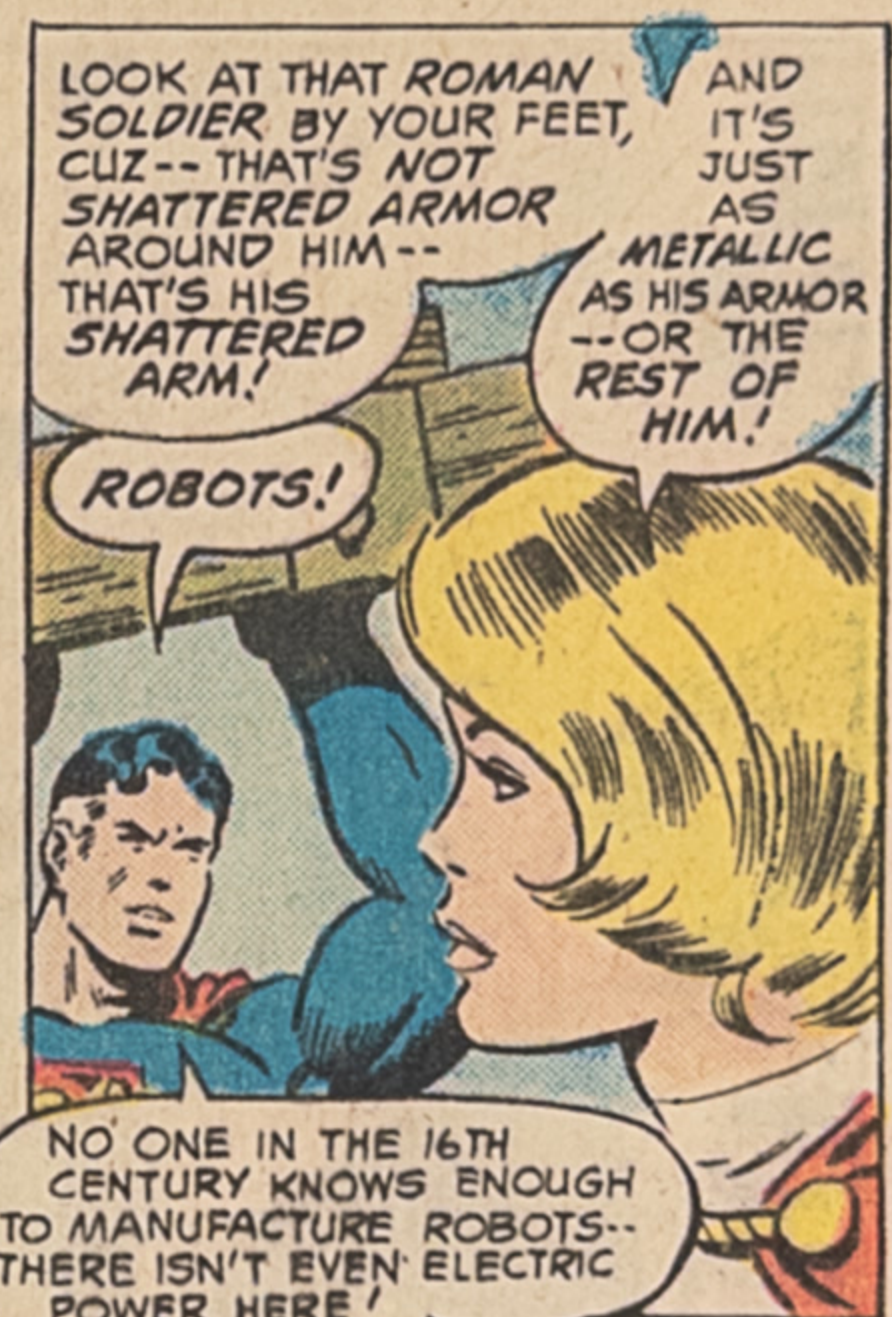
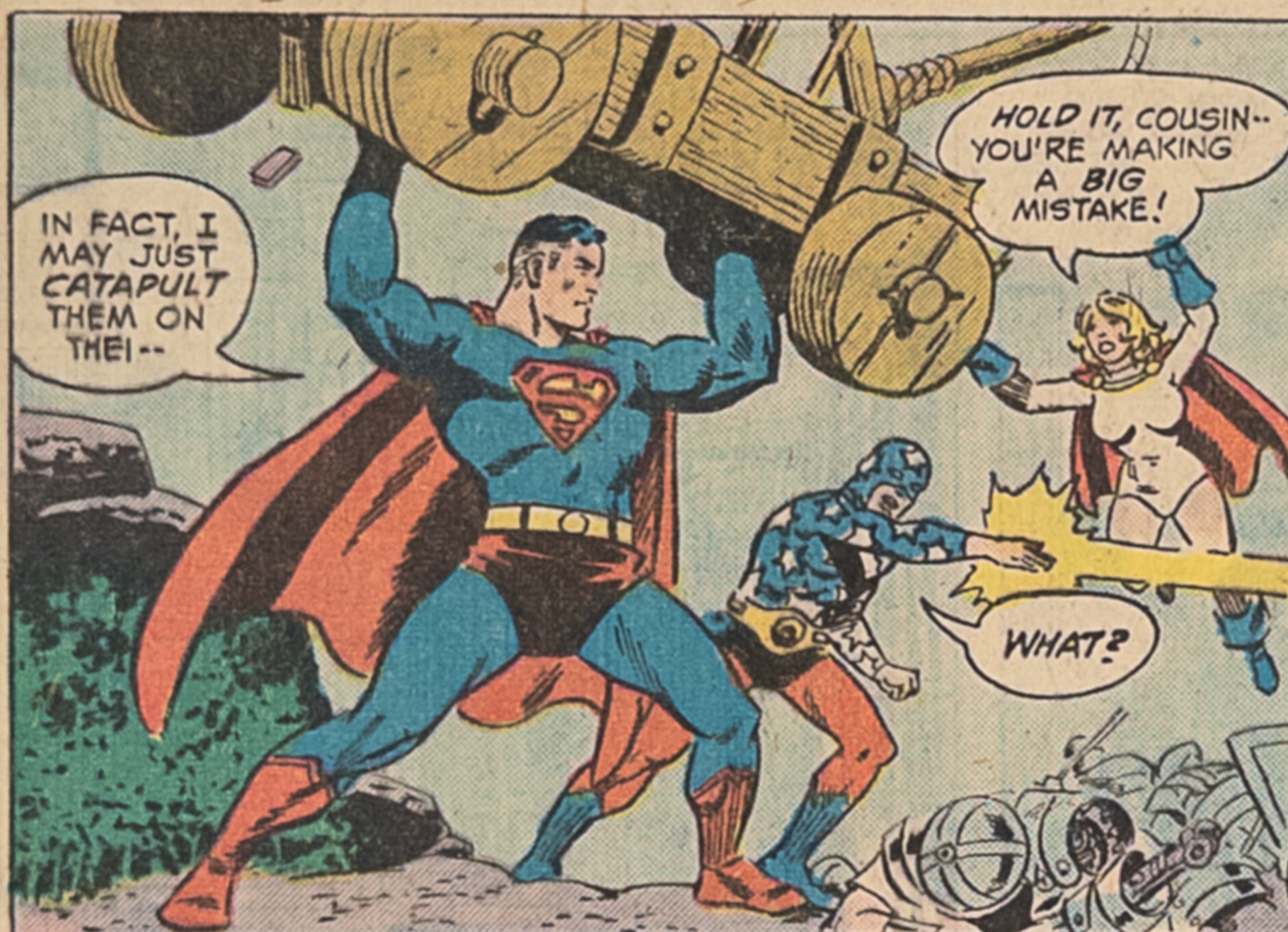
The issue feels rote, but it's a (relatively) okay routine.

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"THIS LEGIONNAIRE IS CONDEMNED!", PAGE 5
SUPERBOY #222 (DC COMICS, DECEMBER 1976)



"YESTERDAY BEGINS TODAY!", PAGE 11
ALL-STAR COMICS #64 (DC COMICS, FEBRUARY 1977)

ALL-STAR COMICS #62

October 1976

Gerry Conway (editor, plot)
Paul Levitz (assistant editor, script)
Keith Giffen (layouts)
Wally Wood (pencils, inks)
Al Sirois (inks)
Carl Gafford (colors)
Ben Oda (letters)
Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)

If the scripter weren't Paul Levitz, I'd almost wonder if he were making fun of (plotter and editor) Gerry Conway's take on **All-Star** to this point. JSA chairman Hawkman comes off like a dipshit; Superman is the only adult on Earth-Two, except maybe Hourman, who spends his guest appearance thinking about how unheroic superheroes have become.

Because they're acting like Conway's still writing them.

The issue opens with everyone trying to save Dr. Fate, who's near death from last issue. They use Star-Spangled Kid's cosmic rod on him while trying to play his internal monologue for his teammates to hear (or actually see). But all they discover is the Ankh, which reminds Green Lantern Dr. Fate's big into Egypt and magic and stuff and maybe there's a better way to save him than cosmic rod life support.

Though at some point, Star-Spangled Kid will pass out off page and stop providing the life-maintaining energy, and presumably, Fate still doesn't die. But we don't spend any real time on it because Hawkman's too busy being a dipshit.

Hawkman sends Green Lantern and Flash to Egypt, tells everyone else to mind Dr. Fate, then heads home to get into bed with his good lady



wife and maybe, just maybe, play around with the giant ancient Lemurian sorcerer he's got encased in amber. Too bad the amber melted and the sorcerer kidnapped the good lady wife (and killed Hawkman's treacherous assistant curator).

At that point, Hawkman immediately sounds the all-JSA alarm—which did not go off in any of the issues where they were saving the actual planet Earth (two)—and recalls Superman to duty. They all meet up at headquarters, where Wildcat and Power Girl have been bickering, and Hourman has been embarrassed to be in a union suit with such unprofessionals.



Hawkman then whines at the assembled heroes about them not caring enough about his kidnapped wife—one of them has the gall to point out Dr. Fate’s in trouble, too—before everyone just goes along with him. They go to Tokyo, where the sorcerer has Mrs. Hawkman in inter-dimensional suspended animation.

The people of Tokyo are paralyzed and lying prone on the street. When the JSA arrives, Hawkman tells everyone to concentrate on what’s important—his wife—and ignore the civilians. Superman reminds them to do the opposite, actually.

I don’t think Levitz is having a laugh at Conway’s expense. I think they’re still playing it straight. But good grief, they’re all a bunch of twerps except Superman and—so far—Housman.

Interestingly, Levitz doesn’t continue Conway’s characterization of Power Girl as a vocal proponent for women’s lib. She’ll mouth off to the fellows, but Levitz plays it like she’s just a brat. He also makes sure the old men leer at her and talk about it.

Speaking of old men... Golden Age Superman. Wally Wood—over Keith Giffen layouts—draws Superman like he’s got an almost static head shot every time. Still brings life to it, but it looks like he’s following some style guide from 1943. It’s a vibe.

The issue moves well enough thanks to the energy in Giffen’s layouts and Wood’s contributions. It’s not like there’s a particularly high bar to clear for **All-Star** to make par.

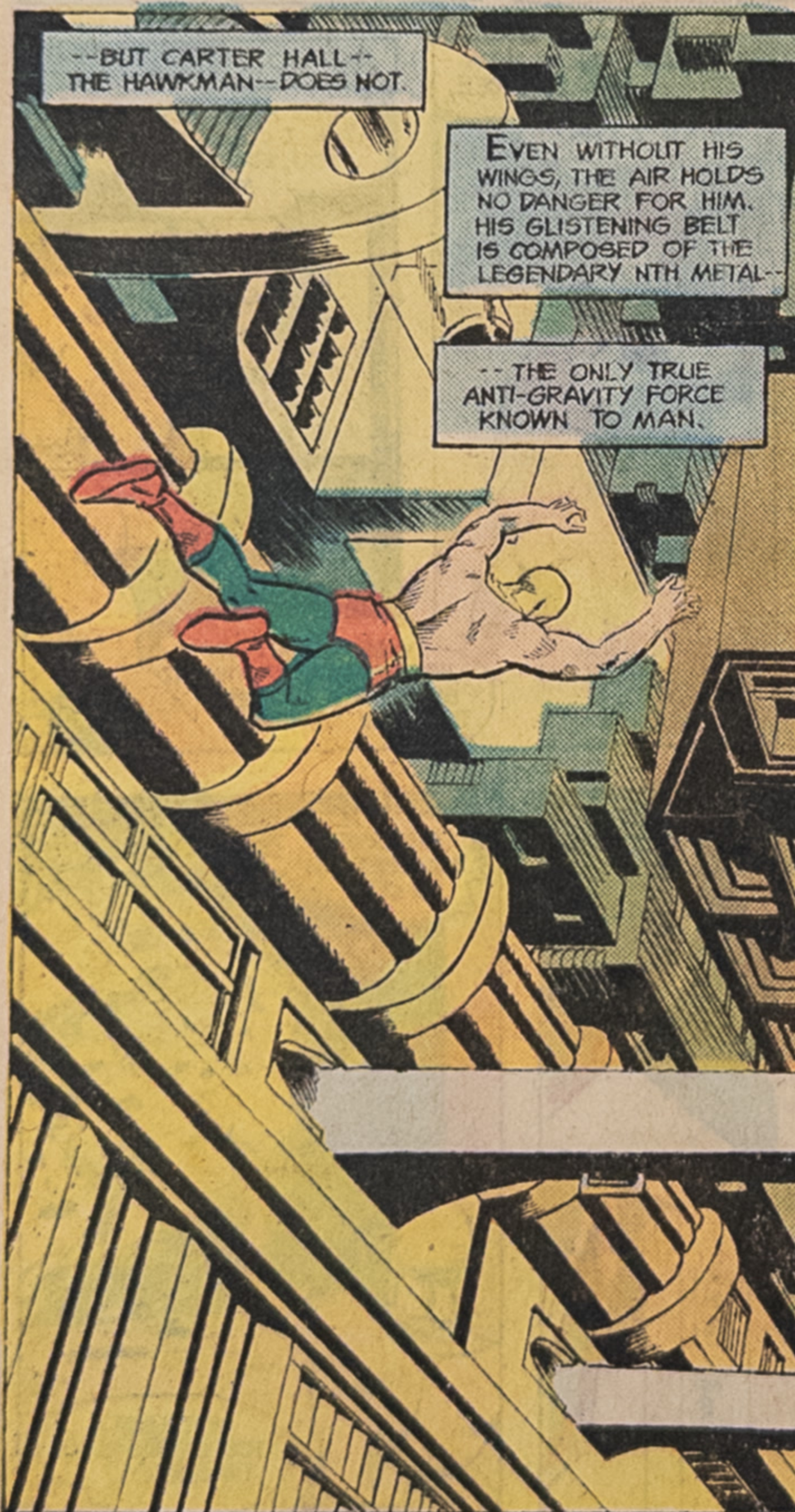
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ALL-STAR COMICS #63

December 1976

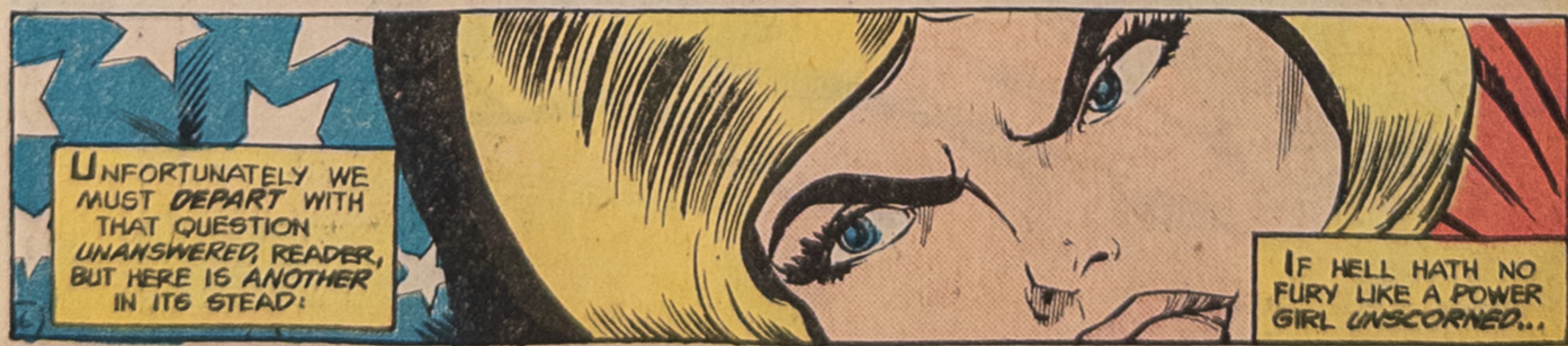
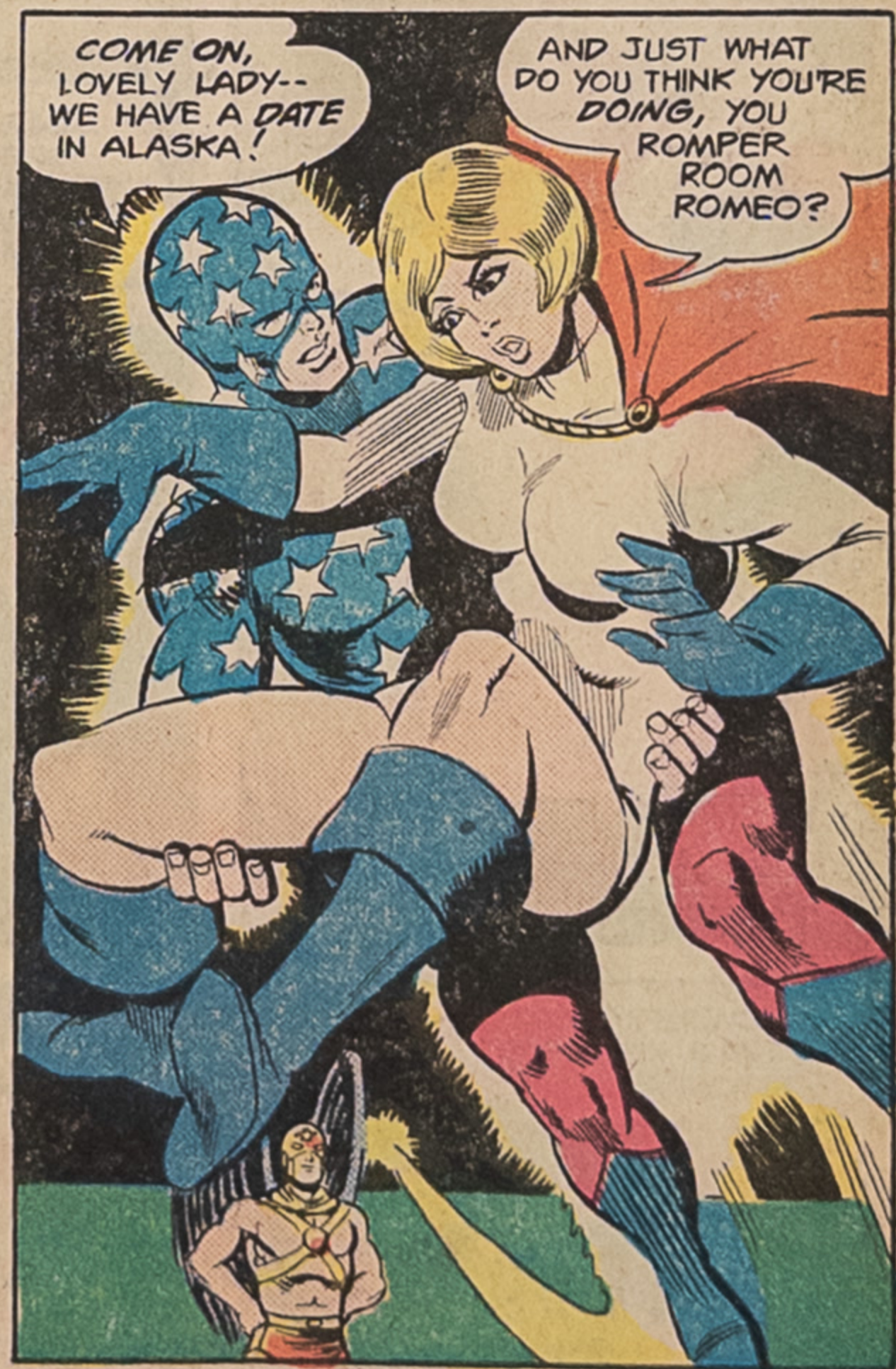
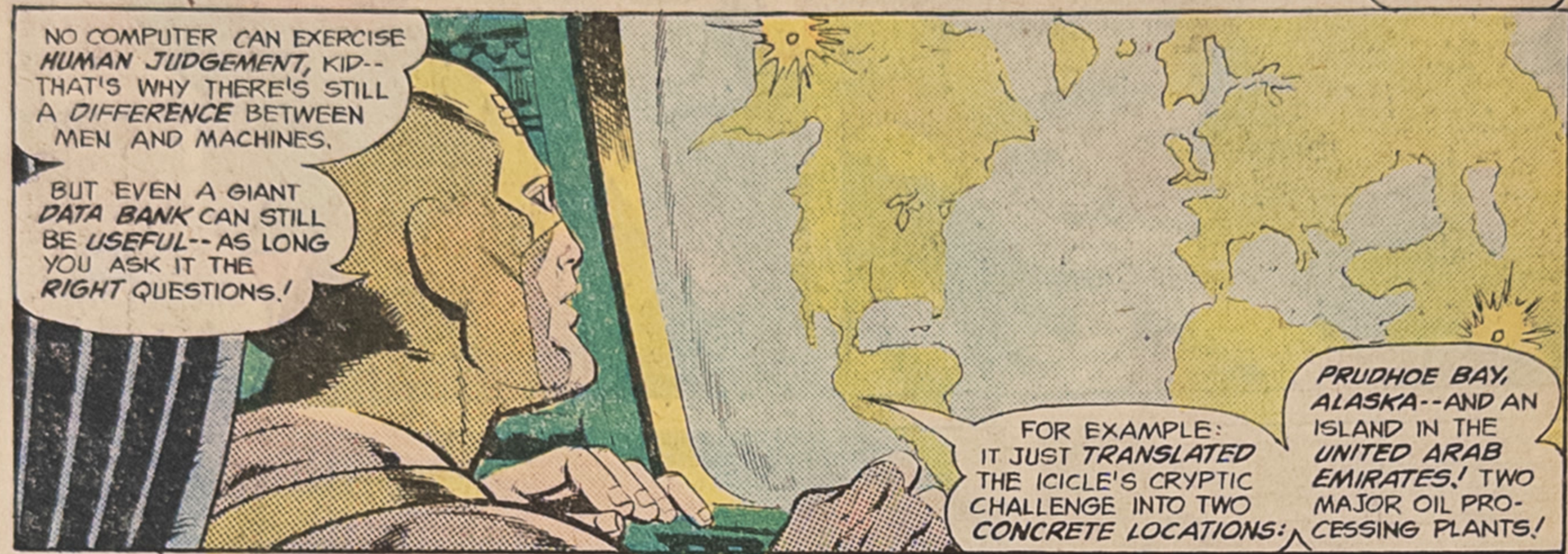
Paul Levitz (assistant editor, script)
Keith Giffen (layouts)
Wally Wood (pencils, inks)
Al Sirois (inks)
Carl Gafford (colors)
Ben Oda (letters)
Joe Orlando (editor)

Paul Levitz takes over the full writing gig, no longer only dialoguing from a plot, and... well, at least there’s not all the misogyny. Otherwise, there’s not much improvement. It’s definitely somewhat different—we get lots of heroes standing around moping about how they can’t possibly be heroes when there’s so much against



CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING

"THE MASTER PLAN OF VANDAL SAVAGE", PAGE 10
ALL-STAR COMICS #65 (DC COMICS, APRIL 1977)



"INJUSTICE STRIKES TWICE!", PAGE 6
ALL-STAR COMICS #66 (DC COMICS, JUNE 1977)

them. Dr. Mid-Nite quits, and so does someone else (who's quit at least once before in **All-Star**, with Levitz using it for the same story beat again). And the whole thing is supposed to be about how Dr. Fate's on death's door.

If only there were a deus ex machina to resolve it. Unexpectedly, it comes a page after filler about Green Lantern and the Flash being in Egypt—at Fate's subconscious request—to find a cure. There's also a silly bit with Flash making fun of “mystics,” even though Dr. Fate's a literal sorcerer and Green Lantern has a magic ring. It's not so much the internal logic of **All-Star** not making sense, it's Levitz not even acknowledging it should.

The issue opens with a big fight scene involving Hawkman, Wildcat, Solomon Grundy, and the Fiddler. The Fiddler has brainwashed Wildcat into beating Hawkman to death. Despite the promises he's killed him, Hawkman is, in fact, fine. The exposition goes on and on about Wildcat's fatal fists, but apparently, he didn't do much actual damage. As the fight resolves, we find out in addition to Wildcat misunderstanding how killing Hawkman (or anyone) works, we find out the JSA has been operating under the assumption Superman and Power Girl are dead from last issue.

They are not.

Wildcat then makes it sound like they just let Superman do all the actual work and wait to see what he's come up with. With all these heroics on display, what can the rest of the issue hold? Not much aside from the aforementioned moping about not being heroic like in the old days, some oddly static fight scenes (with nice

detail from Wally Wood, just not a lot of energy).

The various stakes of the issue—including the supervillains trying to kill the JSA—either get punted or resolved off-page. Hawkman's “Real Men Could Save Their Wives” arc is another page-burner. Levitz hasn't got any actual material, just gristle.

The various setups for next time don't promise much, either. More mysteries, more supervillain plotting, presumably the same contrived plotting.

Levitz doesn't distinguish himself as the solo writer yet. And doesn't do anything to imply he will.

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SUPERBOY #222

December 1976

Cary Bates¹, Jim Shooter² (script)
Mike Grell¹, Michael Netzer² (pencils)
Bob Wiacek¹, Bob Layton² (inks)
Jack C. Harris (assistant editor)
Murray Boltinoff (editor)

Mike Grell gets an inker for his pencils on the feature, but Bob Wiacek doesn't bring anything to improve on them. In fact, the figures might be worse. Some of the close-ups, from certain angles, are better than usual for Grell. Not so the rest.

Cary Bates contributes the script, which has Tyroc rampaging around Metropolis, angry the Legion doesn't want to move its headquarters to his island. Even without the later clarifying details, it's an incredibly thin setup. We get the science police complaining to the Legion, the Legion revealing Tyroc's having a tantrum, and

then the Legion going after him. They catch up to him at a park, where they capture him.

Not the end of the story by a long shot because then the Legionnaires show up at the jail with another suspect and a whole story about how Tyroc has been framed. If only it weren't a way for Bates to kill two pages before wiping the stakes and loosing Tyroc back onto the unsuspecting populace. What could be causing the Legion's latest member to break so badly? Just hang on for two more narrative feints, and Bates will explain everything!

The remainder of the story is then Bates backfilling on the reasoning for a bunch of other details throughout. The whole thing's set up to have the reader, the public, and some of the Legionnaires convinced Tyroc isn't Legion material (seriously, he was the first Black guy on the team, and they gave him this story). It's unremarkably bad, except in the historical sense. And to see how an inker can somehow make Grell's figures worse. Superboy goes from having a bulky torso and skinny legs to a skinny torso with skinny legs.

Jim Shooter, Mike Nasser, and Bob Layton contribute the backup. Superboy, Timber Wolf, and Lightning Lass are going to a faraway planet for some celebration. The president of Earth couldn't be bothered to attend. On the way, they watch their favorite superhero movies starring Questar, who will also be at the ceremony.

I assume Shooter didn't know he'd be following up a feature with a multiple narrative switchbacks, so when he does two of his own... well, it rounds out the issue overall, I guess.



The art's not as good as the feature, which isn't a particularly high bar, but either Nasser or Layton doesn't understand how fingers look. There are other things they don't understand, but not knowing how fingers look...

It's a particularly bad finish for Superboy, too. He comes off like a callous prick.

The feature's tedious and unrewarding. The backup's more of the same.

...

ALL-STAR COMICS #64

February 1977

Paul Levitz (dialogue, co-plot)
Wally Wood (pencils, inks, co-plot)
Al Sirois (inks)
Elizabeth Safian (colors)
Ben Oda (letters)
Joe Orlando (editor)

Wally Wood takes over the full art duties and eighty-sixes Power Girl's cleavage window, making **All-Star** immediately feel a little more grown-up. Helping set it back—writer Paul Levitz now makes special time to gripe about

Power Girl being too into women's lib and not gracious enough to the men around her.

Otherwise, the majority of **All-Star's** ongoing problems get a respite. There's still the whining—Hourman whines about how no one needs him, Green Lantern whines about how no one cares about his money troubles—but there's also time travel to Camelot and a big reveal at the end.

In the present, Star-Spangled Kid has turned his cosmic rod into a belt, which doesn't really feature in the story at all. Other than Kid pissing off Power Girl because he does something nice but she can't appreciate how men are, actually, just trying to help her. Levitz takes the time to point out her personality defects after these moments, which is cruddy but now expected.

Superman—who last issue promised he was retiring (again) from the JSA—rejoins this issue (he's back at headquarters for some reason too, even before rejoining). It works out because Wood clearly enjoys doing Golden Age Superman in “modern” comics. Quotations for modern because they really lean into the Camelot time travel for a bit, complete with slight costume changes.

They're back in the past because Flash and Green Lantern show up at JSA headquarters with Shining Knight, who they discovered in Egypt while looking for Dr. Fate's cure (Dr. Fate's recuperating off-page). Presumably, original series writer (and editor) Gerry Conway had a different development in store for the Egyptian sojourn, but Levitz uses it to send the team into the past; the Romans are attacking Camelot, which is ahistorical (Camelot being



historical could just be an Earth-Two thing, right?).

After that whining from Hourman and Green Lantern, the team heads back, fighting some knights before ending up at the castle for their briefing with Merlin and Arthur. Despite being a seemingly essential guest star, Shining Knight disappears around this point. He's definitely not there once the heroes realize something else is going on.

Specifically, Power Girl notices something else is going on, bringing it to her cousin Superman's attention. Now, if Golden Age Superman is the *crème de la crème*, why doesn't he notice it? Because he's too busy crying havoc. One wonders if editor Joe Orlando was ever once concerned with internal consistency. Again, probably not.

The Wood art is nice, even when he's brushing over plot holes (or creating them himself).

All-Star's not exactly good, now, but it's majorly improved.

Also doesn't hurt Wildcat is nowhere to be found.

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ALL-STAR COMICS #65

April 1977

Paul Levitz. Paul Kupperberg (script)
Wally Wood (pencils, inks, plot)
Al Sirois (inks)
Elizabeth Safian (colors)
Ben Oda (letters)
Joe Orlando (editor)

I spoke too soon. Paul Levitz is back to solely dialogue this issue, with artist Wally Wood contributing to the plot. Presumably, then, it was

Wood's idea to do this issue of *The Legendary Justice Society of America in All-Star Comics with the Super Squad* as a Golden Age Superman comic. Some of the other heroes get page time, mostly Star-Spangled Kid it works out, but it's just a Superman comic. Only it's Superman as icon, not character.

The issue opens with Power Girl and Superman breaking free of Vandal Savage's force field bubble to find themselves—apparently—in the far future. Now, they're not in the far future (it's never clear where they are, actually, maybe something else for next issue... Levitz promises two other things already), but it doesn't stop



Superman from destroying a bunch of robotics while Power Girl tries to figure out what's really going on.

Power Girl isn't around long; well, she's not around and conscious long. Savage's plan involves sapping Kryptonian life energy to replenish his immortality, and he takes her down first, charging himself up so he can handle fisticuffs with Superman.

Meanwhile, the rest of the JSA—now imprisoned in Savage's future place—get free, one by one, and try to help Superman and Power Girl. The Flash starts back in Camelot times, going to the future and the distant past, in an excuse for Wood to do some trippy time travel art. It doesn't serve any narrative purpose otherwise. At least Green Lantern moping about losing his business because he was too busy being a selfless superhero like a chump will be relevant next issue.

I mean, promises, promises.

Hawkman gets a decent all-action sequence after being so annoying a few issues ago. Merlin—in Savage's future—frees Hawkman, who quickly frees Star-Spangled Kid and gets himself a fresh set of hawk wings. Now, Flash was talking to King Arthur in the past, which means for whatever reason Savage brought Merlin along. It's never clear whether Savage actually needs Merlin's magic—maybe just for the time travel—because he's big into robot armies.

Star-Spangled Kid's new cosmic converter belt is silly and looks like a wrestling belt, which may be better than the cosmic rod in terms of giggles but still strange energy.

The cliffhanger promises next issue will have something to do with the now three-issue old Injustice Society subplot. And Shining Knight gets a mention. Not an appearance, but a mention.

All-Star Comics is incredibly uneven—Wood's art this issue, for instance, isn't as good as the previous one, even though he does seem invested in the Superman in a **Flash Gordon** future stuff.

But a handful of neat visuals don't a comic make.

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ALL-STAR COMICS #66

June 1977

Paul Levitz (script)
Joe Staton (pencils)
Bob Layton (inks)
Elizabeth Safian (colors)
Joe Orlando (editor)

If I take back the things I said about Wally Wood being mid last issue, can he come back retroactively and save me from Joe Staton and Bob Layton? We can keep Paul Levitz finding his sexism towards Power Girl and embracing it: turns out he needed Star-Spangled Kid to creep on her like a lech.

But Levitz does get a couple points for Earth-Two (maybe not when Gerry Conway was writing the book, incidentally) no longer having an apartheid South Africa. The exposition also mentions superheroes started on Earth-Two in the forties, not the fifties; maybe the extra ten years ground out the fascist, racist trash.

Anyway. Back to Joe Staton and Bob Layton. Staton's figures are often bewildering, and

Layton inks into the “curve.” There are a handful of okay close-ups, including Bruce Wayne (who seems to be a character Levitz might actually want to write; time will tell), but the bodies—and especially the extremities—are bad; real bad.

Levitz opens the issue in a flash-forward so he can wrap up the cliffhanger from last time (no Shining Knight, again; his agent obviously told him to stay away from **All-Star Comics**), which basically means Superman going off on his own so he won’t just save the day. Before Superman leaves, Power Girl is not nice enough to him, and she regrets it. However, she does not regret

whining there are too many male heroes for her to compete with.

These character moments are nowhere near the most unpleasant. Star-Spangled Kid gropes her and gets away with it, then at one point pervs on her instead of saving Wildcat. It’s a lot. Especially since Kid’s in the silly power belt (and also, the colorist at one point gives him white outside undies), he’s just a creep—and Levitz’s lead character on that plot line.

The story has the JSA trying to save Hourman and Wildcat; the reunited Injustice Society has captured them. Injustice Society’s been after the heroes for a few issues now, starting during Conway’s tenure, and one has to wonder if their motivations were always the same. Levitz hasn’t got a lot of time for them. They’re disposable, easy-to-defeat villains, especially once Dr. Fate comes back.

Levitz also seems to like writing Dr. Fate, who he characterizes as taking over the human host with no concern for its well-being, even having Mrs. Dr. Fate plead with Fate not to leave. It’s an all-right bit.

All things considered.

The ending sets up (adult) Robin coming back into the book--maybe—while Power Girl, Kid, and Wildcat (the book’s most obnoxious grouping, presumably worse now) going on an adventure together.

Swell.

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