

By Sean McQuaid

mmertime is the boom time for comics sales, and a favourite time for major "crossover" events in which most or all of the characters from a comics company's line of ongoing titles interact in a massive storyline. These stories are usually touted as being of major significance to the company's ongoing continuity as a whole. Such series seldom live up to the hype, but one of the latest to come close is DC Comics' *Zero Hour*.

After roughly sixty years in business, DC Comics naturally has one of the richest, most complex continuities in the medium; as a result, they have produced some of the most impressive, epic-scale crossovers in comics, beginning with 1985's infamous *Crisis on Infinite Earths*.

*Crisis* chronicled a cosmic cataclysm resulting in the destruction and recreation of the universe. Though time, space, and all the other things we mortals take for granted were restored relative normalcy, there were alterations in time, so DC now had license to revamp "recreate" their characters with anything from new histories to a new costume. It was meant to provide the complex (and in some ways stagnant) DC comics line with a fresh start and a simpler, more accessible comics universe.

Alas, the best laid plans of comic book editors and other master criminals frequently go astray, and DC's kinder, simpler universe loved anything but. Many characters (including mainstays like Superman, Batman, Green Lantern and Wonder Woman) were successfully revamped with revised continuities, but DC editors didn't approach these renovations with any unified plan. Writers and editors revamped characters and rewrote histories seemingly whenever they felt like it for years thereafter, often contradicting other facts

in post-*Crisis* comics (Hawkman, for instance, had several contradictory post-*Crisis* incarnations). If anything, DC's continuity was more confused than before.

This mess inspired *Zero Hour*, a direct sequel to *Crisis* intended to clean up after its predecessor and definitively establish the state of DC's continuity, tying up loose ends and ironing out inconsistencies.

One of the perverse tidbits about the *Crisis* was the fact that virtually no characters remembered most of it when it was over apart from the fact that they'd been in a big fight and that numerous folks (notably Barry Allen, the Flash) bought the farm in the process. After all, time had been restructured. So our various heroes and heroines have no idea what's going on this time when some pesky residual temporal energies from the *Crisis* start acting up and time goes increasingly bonkers.

These leftover time-glitches conveniently explain goofs like the multiple Hawkmen and so forth, but they also spark a new crisis when good-guy-gone-bad Extant (formerly small-time DC hero Hawk and later would-be-world-conqueror Monarch) joins another, more powerful time-bender called Parallax in exploiting the time anomalies for the purpose of wiping out the universe again, but consciously editing its recreation this time to fix everything they perceive as wrong in the universe. In other words, they'd be... the ultimate comic-book editors! Spooky.

At any rate, everyone and their dog in the DC universe gangs up on our two wascally time-bandits to foil their plans and defend the universe's right to self-determination (or something like that-- actually, in the end, the remaining good guys seem to be bent on foiling Parallax more out of a sense of momentum than any pretense of occupying the moral high

ground since they end up restarting time with their own big bang, but I digress). Time and space are restored, and DC again has a clean slate for their characters to do with them as they will.

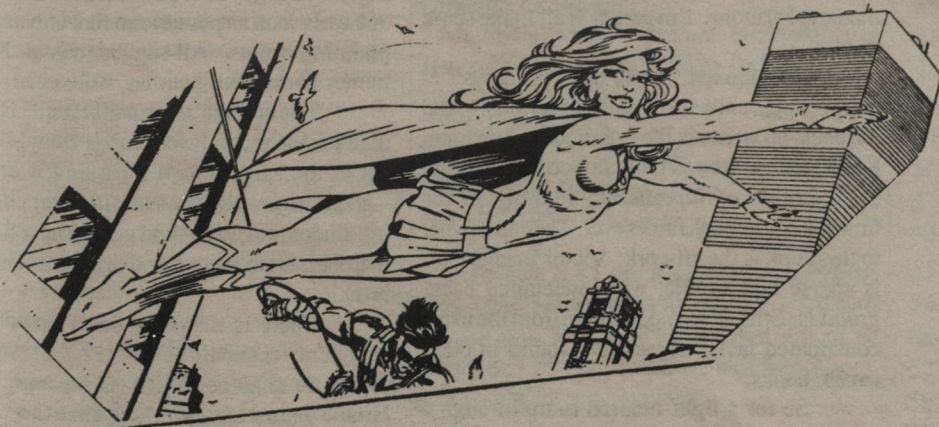
So, was it worth it? The series (five issues, numbered countdown-style from 4 to 0) is about as good as these mega-stories get (although it was a bit more rushed and less cerebral than *Crisis*), and it's worth a read in and of itself. Dan Jurgens (infamous architect of the "death" of Superman) writes and draws the whole shebang (with ace inker Jerry Ordway embellishing his pencils), and does a creditable job all around. The story is fast-paced and manages to maintain both a sense of drama and relative clarity despite the epic scale of the cast and the events. Even better is the Jurgens-Ordway artwork: clean, and well-detailed without resorting to the flurries of extraneous lines so prevalent in currently popular "realistic" art styles. The colouring is also pretty darn impressive, very rich and sophisticated for a standard format comic book.

Casualties are (by comparison to *Crisis*) relatively few and mostly insignificant (i.e. Rip Hunter and the Team Titans) with the exception of the Justice Society of America, comics' first superteam. Active from the 1940's to the present, the JSAs were one of the loose ends tied up herein, since DC decided it would stop cheating with the JSAs' ages (most of them were kept mystically young by various means) and reduce them to the geezers they should be by now, so as to be more realistic and avoid confusion with DC's younger heroes. Logical to be sure, but the JSA comes to a humiliating end herein (complete with several gratuitous deaths in their ranks) and serve as little more than cannon fodder for the sake of shock value. They deserved a much classier

finale than this, and should probably have been left in the limbo JSA writer Roy Thomas confined them to a few years back so they could go out with dignity. Their fate is really the only thing about *Zero Hour* that seems needlessly excessive. The identity and fate of Parallax are equally shocking (and a heckuva cool plot twist I won't spoil for you), but these plot points were essential to the story as a whole and served as a logical (albeit tragic) end for both the character and the series. *Zero Hour* ends with a bang, literally, but when the smoke clears it almost all makes sense.

The alterations in the reborn DC universe are worthy of an article in and of themselves since DC is unveiling its revamped line of titles with a coordinated effort this time around, during "Zero Month": all the DC universe titles published during the month following *Zero Hour* are #0 issues meant to serve as introductions to each title's characters. Some characters are old, some are new, some are slightly modified or unchanged, and others are completely revamped. Regardless, it's a great marketing gimmick and an accessible intro to DC Comics for fans both old and new (though without going into details in this space, be choosy: not all of the 40 "zero" books are necessarily good reading as either stories or primers).

A final note in *Zero Hour*'s favour is the fold-out, illustrated timeline chart thrown into the final issue at no extra charge, providing readers a definitive snapshot of basic DC chronology at a glance. It's the icing on the *Zero Hour* cake, and like the series offers you a taste of DC's slightly revamped comics continuity. If you've got the appetite (and the wallet) for the full DC smorgasboard, check out the various Zero Month books for a definitive look at the DC Comics line.



**COOL FASHIONS FOR STUDENTS**



Beautiful hand knit Sweaters  
(Direct from Ecuador)  
100 % Wool and cotton  
10% Student Discount

UPEI Breezeway, September 21-22 from 9-4

**AMOS & ANDES**  
IMPORTS