

FlashBack!

CAME

WAVE
RIDE

THE RISE AND DEMISE OF KID MIRACLEMAN

What would you do if you suddenly found yourself in possession of infinite power?

If you were an ordinary guy, going about your ordinary life, working in a dead-end job you long ago ceased to care for, to bring home a lowly wage to help the upkeep of the small home you live in with the wife you long ago fell out of love with, would that acquisition of a power to set you above the gods change you? Would it change you for the better, or for the worse? Would you become a force for good, or evil? Benefit mankind, or destroy it?

And what would it cost your humanity?

In 1982, two men set about exploring this notion in a new comic strip. A young writer just starting to make waves would script, while a similarly neophyte artist would design and delineate the world they created together. The vehicle in which they chose to express their ideas was a revival of an all-but-forgotten British superhero. It would be the lead strip in a brand new magazine aimed squarely at readers who had grown up with—and perhaps outgrown—the weekly sci-fi comic *2000AD*. And it spawned a legend.

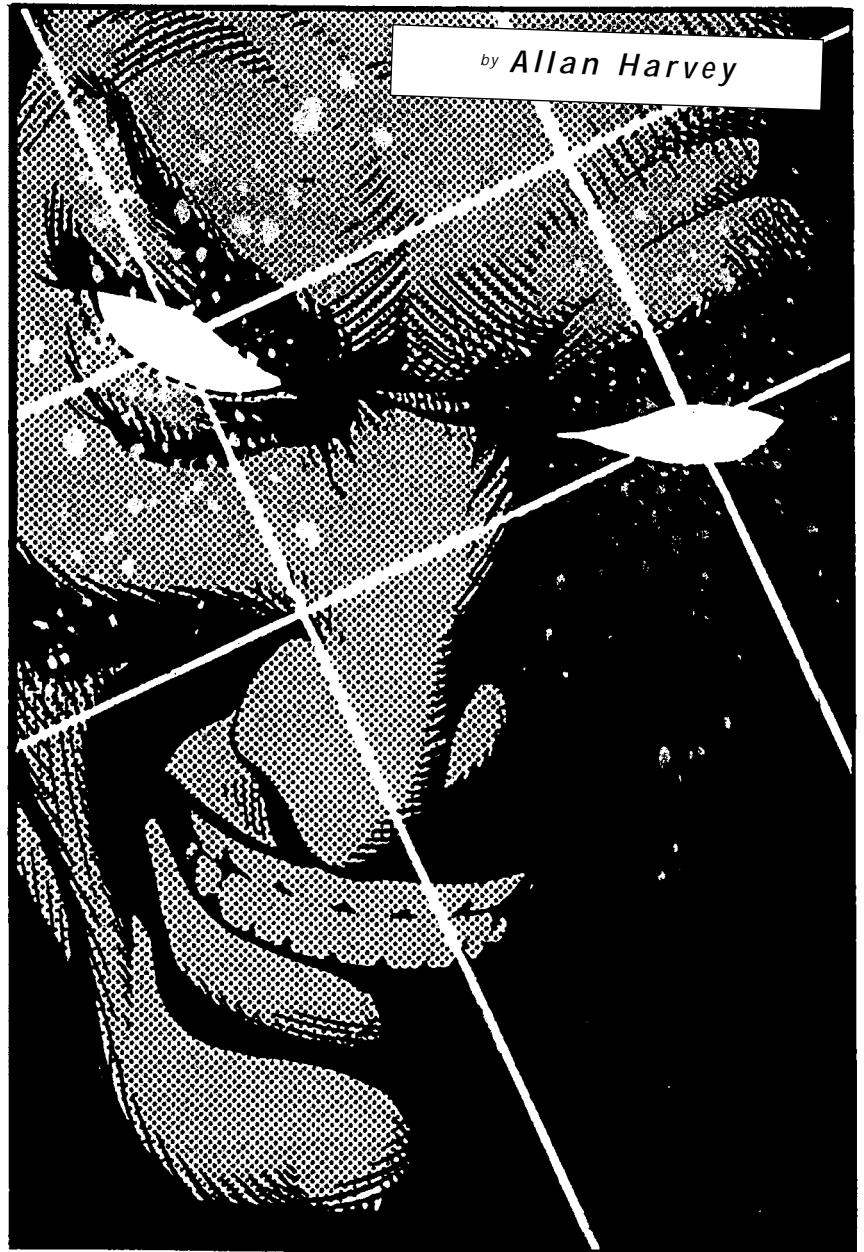
The magazine was *Warrior*. The young writer: Alan Moore. The artist: Garry Leach. And the name of the strip? *Marvelman*.

To begin the story we have to take a brief look back in time. This will take us out of the normal time frame covered by *BACK ISSUE*, but is essential to aid our understanding of what comes later.

WITH ONE MAGIC WORD...

In 1940, comics publisher Fawcett launched the premier issue of *Whiz Comics* featuring its brand-new superhero creation, Captain Marvel. That first issue was actually marked #2, but this story is complicated enough without us getting into the reasons for that! Captain Marvel was the adult alter ego of young Billy Batson, who, upon shouting the magic

by Allan Harvey



Bad Boy

Kid Miracleman/Johnny Bates glowers evil. Art by Garry Leach.

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word "Shazam," was transformed into the red-suited superhero.

The wish-fulfillment element of a young boy with a magic word quickly made Captain Marvel a big hit, especially with younger readers. That his adventures also had an element of fun that perhaps other superheroes lacked further fed into his popularity. Soon, Captain Marvel was selling a million copies each month, and appearing in a whole line of comics along with Captain Marvel, Jr., Mary Marvel, and Hoppy the Marvel Bunny (don't ask).

DC Comics, rival publishers of Superman, were all too aware of Captain Marvel, and quickly took action to bring down the "Big Red Cheese." They sued Fawcett, claiming that Captain Marvel was nothing but a cheap imitation of their own Man of Steel. Fawcett counter-sued, and the court case raged for the next thirteen years.

Late in 1953, with the sales of comics falling across the board in the wake of government concern over their suitability for children (another long story), Fawcett admitted defeat and threw in the towel. They quickly wound up their operations and ceased publishing all their comics. And that should've been that.

It wasn't.

Far across the Atlantic, in England, publisher L. Miller & Sons had recently begun a line of weekly black-and-white comics reprinting Captain Marvel and Captain Marvel, Jr. stories. Although superheroes had never been terribly popular in Britain, these two comics were successful enough that Miller was faced with a dilemma when the news came that Fawcett was finished. Did he just cancel the titles and take a financial hit, or try to find a way to carry on? He chose the latter, and contacted Mick Anglo.

Anglo was a packager of comics. He wrote and drew comic strips, and employed a small studio of staff to produce material for a range of publishers. And he did it cheaply. Anglo agreed to create a new character to replace Captain Marvel in Miller's comics. The result was Marvelman.

In the last few issues of *Captain Marvel* and *Captain Marvel, Jr.*, readers were gradually introduced to the new characters in the form of small house ads. Finally, in *Captain Marvel* #24, and *Captain Marvel, Jr.* #24, readers were informed that the good Captains had done all they could and were off to a well-earned retirement, leaving their handpicked replacements, Marvelman and Young Marvelman, to continue the fight against crime in their absence.

The following week, *Marvelman* #25 and *Young Marvelman* #25 duly appeared in newsagents, and Captain Marvel was never mentioned again. Anglo had done his job well, and it seemed no one really noticed the change. Marvelman's adventures continued in much the same vein as his predecessor's, with Anglo and company producing witty and fun stories aimed squarely at younger readers. In 1956, a third title was added, *Marvelman Family*, which included a new character, Kid Marvelman.



In 1959, a change in the law allowed US comics to be distributed legally in the UK for the first time. Soon the floodgates opened, and the homegrown publishers lost out to the full-color product of their American counterparts. In an effort to cut costs and make the comics profitable again, Miller canceled *Marvelman Family*, and switched *Marvelman* and *Young Marvelman* to reprint-only monthly titles. By 1963, even that ploy no longer worked, and the comics ceased publication. Miller went out of business and the assets were sold off. And that should've been that.

It wasn't.

In 1971, DC Comics negotiated to buy the defunct Fawcett characters. But in attempting to return Captain Marvel to the newsstands, DC had a problem: Marvel Comics.

Marvel had grown to prominence in the years since the good Captain's demise, and it was Marvel that now owned the "Captain Marvel" trademark. As a result, DC was unable to use the character's name as the title of the book. So, the decision was made to use his magic word instead, and *Shazam!* #1, cover-dated Feb. 1973, appeared in December 1972.

We Are Family

The splash to the Marvelman Family's first adventure, from Oct. 1956.

© Mick Anglo Studios.

WARRIOR

In 1981, Dez Skinn decided to put together a new magazine featuring the cream of the new British comics talent then being nurtured in the pages of *2000AD*. Skinn had been working in the comics industry as an editor for most of his working life, starting with the giant Fleetway/IPC, before branching out on his own with magazines *House of Hammer* and *Starburst*. In 1978, Stan Lee had approached him to head up operations at a revitalized Marvel UK, and for two years Skinn brought about a mini-revolution at the company. For the first time, Marvel UK utilized British artists and writers to produce unique adventures of some of Marvel's top characters.

Having left Marvel behind, Skinn christened his new magazine *Warrior*, and his own company, Quality Communications, would publish it. *Warrior* was to feature stories of non-standard heroic figures, largely defying classification. There would be some horror, some science fiction, some



© Quality Communications.

fantasy, some general weirdness, and, naturally, a superhero would front it.

Skinn was never slow to latch onto a trend, and anticipated the growing interest from the big comics publishers in the US for British talent. *2000AD* was making waves across the Atlantic, and Skinn's *Hulk Comic* and *Doctor Who Weekly* at Marvel UK, which had been largely filled with British-produced strips, had made the US parent aware of what was happening in the UK.

Skinn knew that it wouldn't be long before the US would come calling—and he wanted to be ready.

Warrior hit the newsstands in March 1982, straplined "The Magazine of Very Weird Heroes." Marvelman was represented on the cover by a silhouette and a question mark. Skinn was probably attempting to appeal to a few souls who might possibly remember that oh-so-obscure character.

Inside, Marvelman led the way as the first strip presented. And, for a first-time reader back in 1982, the strip was a revelation. Alan Moore and Garry Leach captured lightning in a bottle, and superhero stories would never be quite the same again.

The strip's main conceit—and Moore and Leach's stroke of brilliance—was to treat superheroes as they might actually be if they really existed in our world. The creators looked at the world outside their window and imagined a superhero in the midst of it. How would people react to such a being? What would it mean for government? For the law?

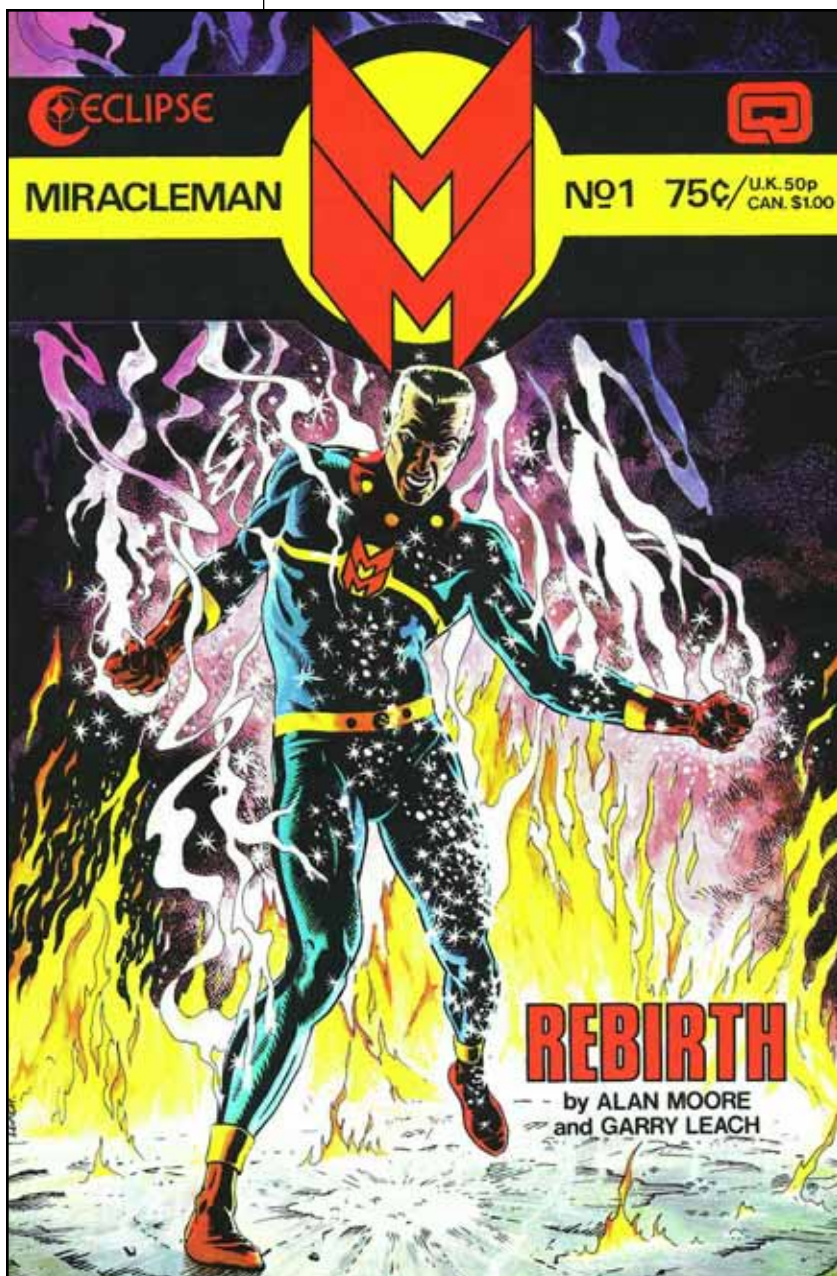
And, most importantly, who, or what, could oppose such a superhuman? For their answer to *that*, Moore and Leach delved into the goofy depths of the Mick Anglo years.

As *Warrior*—*Marvelman* and *V for Vendetta* (another Alan Moore-scripted strip) in particular—made waves, DC Comics dispatched then-editorial director Dick Giordano to the UK to meet with British artists and writers and offer them work in US comics. It wasn't long before there was a British invasion of comics talent to the US, somewhat resembling the British invasion of musical talent twenty years before.

With that interest, there came pressure to have the *Warrior* and *2000AD* material reprinted in the US. Eclipse Comics made a deal with Dez Skinn, and many of the *Warrior* characters began to appear—for the first time in color—in a variety of Eclipse titles from 1985.

Marvel's legal department made sure that Eclipse would not be able to use *Marvelman* as the title of his own comic, so rather than go the DC route and name the book after Marvelman's magic word, "Kimota," Eclipse and Alan Moore re-christened the character *Miracleman* for the American audience. The strips were re-lettered and logos redesigned for the reprint run.

Miracleman #1 (Aug. 1985) featured a brand-new cover by Garry Leach showing *Miracleman*'s dramatic rebirth. Inside, the book opened with a reprint of a Mick Anglo-era *Marvelman* Family strip from 1956. For this version, the strip was partly rewritten by Dez Skinn and Alan Moore, to help pave the way for the *Warrior* material.



"I'm back!"

Cover to Eclipse Comics' *Miracleman* #1 (Aug. 1985). Art by Garry Leach.

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"A DREAM OF FLYING"

"A Dream of Flying" starts the *Warrior* reprints. Indeed, later, when collected, the whole first story arc was named after this first chapter. Michael Moran has nightmares where he sees himself as a superhero being caught in a nuclear explosion aboard a space satellite. He sees his friends destroyed as he falls to Earth, and he wakes up screaming.

With a thumping headache, Mike is reluctant to go to work as a freelance reporter covering the opening of Larksmere nuclear power station. His wife Liz comforts him. On the way to Larksmere, Mike ponders his dream and how strangely real it seemed. Once at the plant, he is caught up in violence as armed terrorists appear and threaten the crowd of protesters who are picketing at the gates.

Inside, the terrorists reveal that their aim is to steal plutonium from the plant and offer it for sale to terrorist organizations across the world. Hearing this, Mike's headache flares worse than ever, and he collapses. A couple of the gunmen drag him outside. While semi-conscious Mike sees a sign written on a glass door, he's on the wrong side, so the sign appears reversed. The word "atomic" attracts his attention: reversed, it's "cimota." It seems familiar. He whispers it.

And he explodes.

The gunmen are part-blinded and thrown backwards by the blast. Standing in their midst is a large blond man in a blue-and-red costume, with an MM legend on his chest. "Me?" says the man, "I'm ... Miracleman. I remember now..."

More of the gunmen arrive and fire at Miracleman, but the bullets bounce off. He smiles and claps his hands together. The sonic boom floors all his opponents.

He blasts up through the ceiling and flies into space, excitedly thrusting his triumphant arm. Against the backdrop of Mother Earth, he shouts, "I'm Miracleman ... I'm back!"

In the next chapter, Miracleman comes home to Liz. She's shocked by the superhero in her home, and initially finds it hard to believe it's really Mike. He finally convinces her, and the pair sit down as Mike tells his tale. As a 14-year-old, he'd had a vision of a giant called Guntag Borghelm. Borghelm claimed to have discovered the key harmonic of the universe—a word that will bestow godlike power when spoken. The word was "Kimota." When Mike said it, he was transformed into Miracleman.

As the years passed, Miracleman fought crime and all manner of peculiar criminals, both human and monster. Later, he was joined by another young chap, named Dicky Dauntless, who, when he said Miracleman's name, was changed into Young Miracleman, whose costume was the same as Miracleman's, but red. Later still, Johnny Bates arrived, and, though he was very young indeed, he too was transformed, becoming Kid Miracleman. His uniform was bright yellow. Together they were the Miracleman Family. Their nemeses included Young Nastyman and the fiendish Doctor Gargunza.

Liz laughs at all this, but Miracleman's smashing his hand through the floor silences her.

More from Moore and Leach

(top) Mike Moran is plagued by dreams of his mysterious former life. (bottom). The evil Bates is revealed. Art by Garry Leach.

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He then tells her of the time when, in 1963, the Miracleman Family discovered Gargunza's space fortress. Approaching it, Miracleman felt compelled to hold back and realized something was wrong, but it was too late. The "fortress" was actually an atomic bomb, and, as he fell, Miracleman saw Dicky Dauntless torn apart by the explosion—he momentarily appeared to be two people crushed together.

Mike had woken in the Suffolk Marshes two months later, with burns and multiple fractures. He had no memory of his life as Miracleman. Until now.

As Liz continues to listen, elsewhere a man is watching a television report of the events at Larksmere. A photo of what appears to be a flying man is shown. The man smashes his fist into a table. "He's back!" he shouts. "Back to spoil everything!"

The next morning, Liz wakes next to Miracleman. They've clearly had a night to remember. The phone rings. Liz answers as Miracleman changes back into Johnny Bates, the former Kid Miracleman. He'd seen the news reports and decided to get in touch. He's now the head of Sunburst Cybernetics.

As Mike and Liz arrive at Sunburst, it gets cloudy. A storm is brewing...

Bates welcomes the couple. He reveals that, after the explosion, he hadn't lost his memory—but had lost his powers. Believing the others dead, and as an ordinary 16-year-old, he'd gotten on with his life. Liz finds him sexy and magnetic, but Mike thinks he's changed.

Out on the balcony, alone, the two men talk. Mike reveals that he'd like to believe Bates' story, but he can't. He knows Bates is lying. Suddenly fearful, he pushes Bates over the edge of the balcony. Just as Mike suspected, Bates doesn't fall—he rises into the sky and crackles with malevolent power. Johnny Bates is not human. He survived the explosion intact and has spent the last eighteen years as a god—he's not about to let Mike spoil his fun!

All of the above appeared in just the first issue of *Miracleman!* The fact that the strip had originally appeared in such short chunks in *Warrior* meant that the story really moved along at a clip. In order to give *Warrior* readers a degree of satisfaction, something momentous had to occur in each installment, so, once collected, the story of Kid Miracleman's battle against his former mentor takes on an added urgency.

Above all, this is a strip that shows how comics scripting has changed over the years. Today, in an age of "decompressed" storytelling, what once took Moore and Leach just a single issue would fill a six-issue miniseries.

MIRACLEMEN AT WAR

Miracleman #2 features another new cover by Leach, and reprints a further three chapters. As Liz flees, Bates slaughters a secretary who happens by with a tray of tea. In a very graphic scene, Bates explodes her head with "heat vision." It's too much for Mike Moran, and he whispers his magic word, "Kimota."

Miracleman leaps at Bates, and their momentum carries them through a smashed window, and on down past dozens of floors to ground level. The impact barely fazes them, but Bates blasts Miracleman with his eyebeams. The older man's skin burns.

In another chilling moment, Bates picks up a passing toddler and hurls him into the sky while taunting the child's mother. Miracleman flies after the boy at supersonic speed, catches him, and returns him to his mother. The woman, horrified, calls Miracleman a monster and flees.

The superhero smackdown continues, brutal in its intensity. Bates concentrates positively charged ions from the atmosphere and throws a lightning bolt at Miracleman, felling him. He then hurls him into the ground at mach 3.

And he smiles.

It was at this point that artist Garry Leach admitted defeat. His meticulous attention to detail meant he'd been struggling with deadlines for some time. In an effort to get back on track, it was agreed that someone else should be brought in for a few chapters to help Leach get back on track. Alan Davis was already working with Alan Moore on the monthly *Captain Britain* strip at Marvel and seemed an ideal choice. Somewhat reluctantly, Davis agreed to come on board.

Davis was from a different artistic tradition than Leach. Whereas Leach was inspired and influenced by the more photorealist artists such as Al Williamson and Angelo Torres, Davis was solidly in the Jack Kirby/Steve Ditko mold, and his art pushed the exaggerated action up a notch.



Sidekicked

A panel from the brutal fight scene from *Miracleman #2*.

Art by Alan Davis and Garry Leach.

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Liz is driving for her life. Suddenly, Bates is standing in the idle of the road in front of her and her car smashes into him. He is unmoved. He throws her clear, and as Liz watches, he crushes the car with his bare hands. He lifts the mass above his head as he prepares to bring it down upon Liz's head.

Miracleman arrives and punches Bates into the sky.

A super-boxing match ensues as punch after punch is thrown. It's soon clear that Bates has the upper hand, and Miracleman is sorely wounded. As he continues to be battered, he realizes that it's no good: Bates is just too strong, his eighteen years in super-form have made him unbeatable.

Miracleman falls to the ground.

Bates can't resist one last kick as he gloats. "I'm going to finish him off! Me! His adoring junior protégé! Me, Kid Miracleman... ..an."

There is a sound of thunder as Bates, having accidentally said his trigger word, is transformed back into little Johnny. The boy looks confused and quivering as Miracleman staggers over to him ready to deliver a death blow.

But he can't do it. Bates is now just a small boy, jabbering incoherently. The eighteen-year power build up just released has shattered his mind. Although he once more says Miracleman's name, he doesn't transform.

Miracleman grabs Liz and flies from the scene, leaving little Johnny Bates to his fate.

COMIC BOOK DREAMS

"A Dream of Flying" has an unusual structure. Its major villain has already been defeated, yet the story is only halfway through. The plot continues on after this seeming climax and begins an investigation into the real origins of the Miracleman Family. It's ultimately revealed that Mike Moran, Dicky Dauntless, and Johnny Bates were involved in a top secret experiment run by Doctor Emil Gargunza and funded by the British government.

Technology from a crashed spaceship was used to create super-bodies, which were then placed in an other-dimensional "infra space." These were linked to Moran and the others, and the super-bodies could be swapped for their human bodies by use of secret trigger words. Fearful of what these super-beings might do if they were let out into the world, Gargunza had them kept unconscious and he filled their dreams with stories and characters inspired by comic books. As such, all the Mick Anglo-produced strips are explained away as the dreams of the super-folk.

Finally, under political pressure, the experiment was wound up. Miracleman, Young Miracleman, and Kid Miracleman were woken up and sent on a mission to destroy Dr. Gargunza's orbiting space platform. As we saw at the start of the story, the platform is actually an atomic bomb designed to destroy the super-beings once and for all.

It's a fine story. While it may not stand up as well today, and perhaps seems a little over-familiar, that's merely because it was so influential. The notion of superheroes being treated in a "realistic" manner started here with Alan Moore and Garry Leach. And while it's often Moore who gets the lion's share of the credit, it's largely Leach's art that set the style and tone of the strip from the very start.

Leach's photorealistic style was, then, about as far away from standard US cartooning as you could get. He drew real buildings, real cars, real people. Miracleman is not depicted as a musclebound god, he's a slim, perfectly proportioned Paul Newman look-alike. He's "super" because of the way he carries himself. Normal people are diminished in his presence because he has a godlike air about him: He just is superior. And Leach, with his extraordinary artwork, manages to convince us of that. Similarly, Leach's depiction of Johnny Bates is a chilling portrayal of what might happen if a thoroughly evil man was to be granted ultimate power. Bates is a man who knows exactly what he is, and revels in it.

It's not hard to imagine that Alan Moore was inspired to even greater heights by his collaboration with such a remarkable artist. Moore, of course, went on to collaborate with the similarly gifted



Name Calling

On the verge of victory, Kid Miracleman accidentally says his trigger word. Art by Alan Davis and Garry Leach.

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Dave Gibbons on their masterpiece *Watchmen*, possibly the finest graphic novel ever produced.

Miracleman continued on, with Eclipse ultimately publishing 24 issues before it succumbed to bankruptcy in the mid-1990s. "A Dream of Flying" was followed by a second book, "The Red King Syndrome." That story wound through *Miracleman* #4-10 (Dec. 1985-Dec. 1986), and is somewhat let down by inconsistent art. It starts off strongly enough, with the ongoing reprints from *Warrior* with art by Alan Davis (who had been persuaded to stay on the strip beyond his initial commitment). However, once the *Warrior* material ran out, Chuck Beckum (nee Austin) was brought in by Eclipse to delineate Moore's scripts. It was not a good match. An issue reprinting Mick Anglo strips interrupted the flow of the story further, and then Rick Veitch arrived to conclude the story. *Miracleman* #9 included a controversial scene where Liz and Miracleman's daughter is born in graphic detail.

Throughout "The Red King Syndrome," Johnny Bates continued to make sporadic appearances. He was an inmate in a mental hospital, initially near comatose. He later regained some independence, though the spirit of the evil Kid Miracleman speaks to him in his mind, goading and taunting him. But Bates remains resolute: He won't allow KM to escape.



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“OLYMPUS”

If Book Two was a disappointment, *Miracleman* Book Three, “Olympus,” is an incredible return to form. After some years away from the strip, Moore was firing on all cylinders, and was joined by his old *Swamp Thing* collaborator, John Totleben, for a remarkable story that ran in *Miracleman* #11–16 (Jan. 1987–Dec. 1989). It is possibly the ultimate superhero story: If you’ve ever wondered what might happen to the world if superheroes suddenly appeared, this is Moore’s answer.

And it’s not pretty.

Largely in flashback, “Olympus” tells the story of the final battle between Miracleman and Kid Miracleman. Bates has partially recovered and is under medical supervision in a care home. The marriage between Liz and Michael Moran is in the process of irretrievably breaking down—she resents his time as Miracleman, fearing that he’s

losing his humanity. Meanwhile, the aliens from whom the Miracleman technology was gleaned arrive on Earth. And, finally, Miraclewoman, another remnant from Gargunza’s experiment, has made herself known.

Two alien factions, the Qys and the Warpsmiths, are fighting an endless war. They enlist Miracleman’s help in deciding what to do about Earth, given its current, relatively backwards state. When he returns home from the literally senses-shattering Qys homeworld, Miracleman is stunned when Liz leaves him. Then his baby daughter, able to talk since the moment she emerged from the womb, flies off into space to seek her destiny.

A broken man, Michael Moran climbs a hill, removes his clothes, and buries them with a note. He says his magic word. It will be for the final time. For intents and purposes, Michael Moran is dead.

At the care home, Bates is bullied and, finally, raped by a group of thugs. It’s too much for him and he succumbs to his inner demon. As tears roll down his cheeks, he whispers, “Miracleman.”

His rapist is left as a pair of disembodied legs; the others are blinded by the transforming blast. One attacker has his head ripped off; the others suffer far worse. The one nurse at the home who had shown Bates compassion is spared, and sinks to her knees in relief. Then Bates returns and kills her: “They’d say I was going soft, wouldn’t they?”

Miracleman #15 (Nov. 1988) is as perfect a vision of Hell as has ever been depicted in comics.

Bates is free.

He goes on a killing spree and destroys London. Survivors run through a literal hail of falling hands and feet as Bates carves his way through the population. Bodies hang from the face of Big Ben; flayed skin hangs from washing lines; decapitation is the order of the day. And at the center of it all is Bates, smiling beatifically, splashing through rivers of blood.

Miracleman, Miraclewoman, and a Warpsmith arrive. They drop Buckingham Palace on Bates, but he shrugs it off. Miraclewoman is swiftly defeated and cast off into space with a punch. Bates is teleported into the very structure of Marble Arch, but destroys it and escapes. The battle rages on.

Bates appears in an all-black mockery of his Kid Miracleman supersuit. He goes one on one with Miracleman in all-out war.

The Warpsmith, Aza Chorn, realizes that the secret of the Miracle beings power is that they are surrounded by a kind of force field. Indestructible. The only way to defeat Bates is from within. Using his warping powers, Warpsmith teleports a lump of stone into Bates’ brain.

Still, he won’t fall.

Torn apart by Bates’ power, Warpsmith tries once more before he dies, and teleports a steel girder through Bates’ chest. He screams in pain.

Somewhere deep inside, little Johnny Bates seizes his opportunity and forces his way to consciousness, saying his magic word one last time.



London Falling

Kid Miracleman creates Hell in London in *Miracleman* #15. Art by John Totleben.

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In the midst of the devastation, Miracleman finds Johnny Bates, human once more. The wrecked and bloodied form of Kid Miracleman has returned to infra space, and Bates is whole. He begs Miracleman to help him find some way to stop him from ever changing back into his evil persona. Miracleman promises him that he'll never have to suffer again.

And, gently, as he comforts the sobbing Bates, Miracleman crushes the boy's skull.

The deed done, Miracleman screams out in anguish as he cradles the dead child.

The coda to all this comes in *Miracleman #16* (Dec. 1989), Alan Moore's final issue. It tells of Miracleman rebuilding London with the help of Miraclewoman and the Warpsmiths. He sets forth creating a new world order, a world where humans can be made superhuman; where the dead can be reborn; where traditional government is replaced; where war and crime become things of the past. The super-beings remove all nuclear weapons from Earth and destroy them. They re-seed Africa. They repair the hole in the ozone layer.

All manner of miracles are wrought in their name, and a utopia is built with the tacit complicity of the world's population. They see that what is being done is benevolent, and to the benefit of all mankind. Soon, Miracle-babies fly the skies, their mothers having been impregnated by the gift of Miracleman.

Miracleman sees all that he has done from his perch atop Olympus, a miraculous structure towering miles above London, and he finds that it is good. Below, in a lowly dwelling, Liz Moran sobs for Miracleman's lost humanity...

With both Alan Moore and John Tottleben working at the top of their game, "Olympus" is one of the most remarkable stories ever published in comics. It's complex, intelligent, and thoroughly readable. Drawing on the experience of having written *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta*, as well as the previous *Miracleman* material, Moore was able to give full rein to this, his ultimate rumination on the nature of the super-being.

We see the corrupting nature of superpowers from two angles: Bates is destroyed by his power as he loses his humanity in a typical bad-guy manner, but Michael Moran, too, loses his humanity by becoming a god. Although he's benevolent, and working to create a utopia on Earth, it's at the cost of everything that made him a man.

Across the 16 issues scripted by Moore, you can see just how far the *Miracleman* characters had come: from the extremely goofy, child-friendly super folks in primary colors of the 1950s, to god-like beings that live far above humanity, both figuratively and literally. In some ways, reading this series is a little like looking at the recent history of superhero comics.

In the Silver Age, superheroes were heroes simply because they were good people who had other people's best interests at heart. By the mid-1980s, that was thought to be rather too simplistic a view by the new breed of comics writer. Superheroes began to be made a little more human, possibly too human—frailties and all. These days, all too often, superheroes are motivated by self-interest. This change was, in part, influenced by Moore and Leach's early *Marvelman/Miracleman* tales. It's possible that, without *Miracleman*, there'd be no *Ultimates*, no *The Boys*, no *Supreme Power*. Warren Ellis' *Authority* stories build on Moore's work to present a superhero team



that declare themselves the ultimate authority on Earth, though Ellis is, of course, a little more cynical than Moore.

They say that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. With that in mind, at the end of "Olympus," Moore leaves us to ponder the ultimate question: By creating what is essentially a worldwide dictatorship, has not *Miracleman* behaved just as badly as Kid *Miracleman*?



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Headline

Kid *Miracleman* and his former mentor battle to the death in *Miracleman #15*. Art by John Tottleben.

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end