

A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF
THE WEST COAST AVENGERS

A
West Coast
Thing

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AUTHOR OF EMPTY ROOMS LONELY COUNTRIES

**A
West coast
Thing**

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West Coast Avengers was a Marvel comic book published from 1985 to 1994 and was the first series I picked up from the very beginning. While my brother was a big X-Men fan, the West Coast Avengers was *my* team. There was something really special about being there to watch the team form and grow from scratch, rather than wade through the twenty-plus years of continuity that the X-Men had at the time.

I have decided to read and review every issue of *West Coast Avengers*. As I write this, I can already sense that this might be the stupidest thing I will ever do. But no matter! I'm committed to re-reading my *West Coast Avengers* collection from the beginning (some issues I haven't read in 25 years) and reliving the excitement and pure awesome that Hawkeye and the gang brought me month in and month out.

May Galactus have mercy on my soul.

- **Christian A. Dumais**



West Coast Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (September 1984)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roger Stern

Penciler: Bob Hall

Inker: Brett Breeding

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hawkeye gathers Mockingbird, Tigra, Wonder Man and Iron Man together for the first time. And before some of them can voice their concerns about being on the team, the West Coast Avengers compound is attacked by a mysterious figure.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Even though this is the first issue of the series, this one feels exceptionally heavy in the exposition. Everyone seems to be talking to one another for the first time in their lives, even though it's established they have known and worked together before. The use of a misunderstanding to provide the team with its first fight feels unnecessary and ultimately disappointing. On top of that, there's no cliffhanger, unless readers are meant to be on the edge of their seats wondering if Hawkeye will be able to finish pep talking the team to death.

Through all that exposition, team dynamics are being established. Mockingbird appears to have a secret. Tigra is insecure about being on the team. Iron Man is actually Jim Rhodes instead of Tony Stark, and the team is unaware of this detail, despite the fact that Stark doesn't stutter his way through conversations like Rhodes does here. And Wonder Man's conflict appears to be his inability to effectively hide how incredibly lame he is.

Speaking of Wonder Man, his powers include invulnerability and an overabundance of pockets. He

does have one cool moment where his body is so hot that water boils off of him when they try to cool him off. But then he immediately goes to his trailer (he's a stunt man on a movie set) and puts on the kind of costume a schizophrenic hobo would find on a shopping spree at Goodwill. And then to make matters worse, he sports porn sunglasses from the Seventies.

If I'm not mistaken, this particular costume is the first of many poor fashion choices Wonder Man will be making throughout this series.

I want to point out that Rom being on the cover was the coolest thing ever when I was a kid. And I'm fairly convinced that his floating head on the cover was designed solely for me to part with three quarters for the issue. I'm not sure I've ever forgiven Marvel for lying to me like that.

Maybe if Rom were never on the cover, I would never have picked this comic book up, and I wouldn't be spending my free time now re-reading all of these books. I'd be outside, with or without pants, running free, meeting people or doing whatever it is normal people do.

Yeah, it looks like this is going to be a long couple of years.

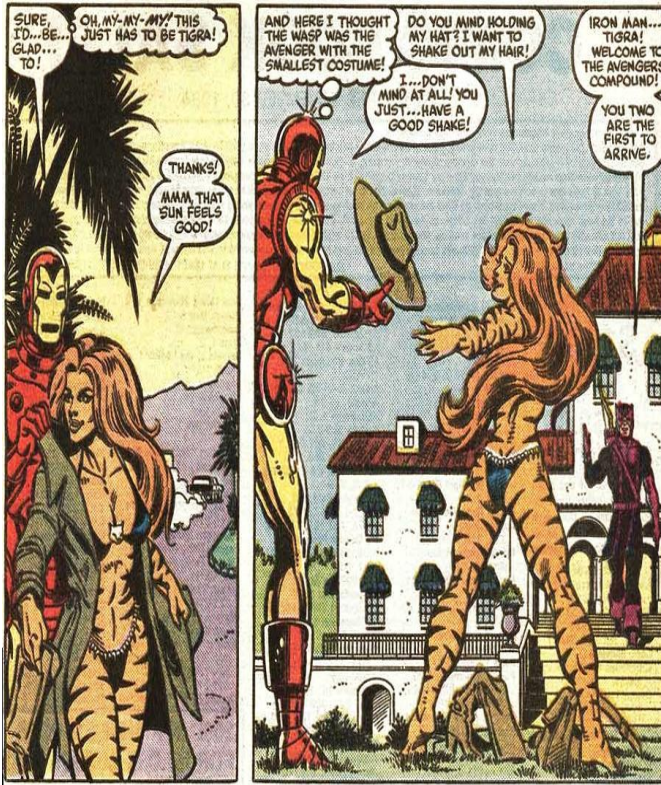
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

I'm going to have to roast this one. The absence of a major threat to kick things off is problematic and there's way too much standing around and talking.

Sorry, eleven year old me.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Really, Iron Man?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 2 (October 1984)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roger Stern

Penciler: Bob Hall

Inker: Brett Breeding

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Everyone practices working together as a team while Wonder Man has a run in with the bank robber known as the Blank. After the Blank escapes from Wonder Man, the team gathers to take down this low level nuisance once and for all. And finally, we get a brief look at the team's first serious threat to come.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue works a lot better than the first, that's for sure. Hawkeye, who was glowingly optimistic in the previous chapter, comes off as being horribly passive-aggressive this time around. He has one run in with Iron Man that feels petty (see below), but maybe that's Hall drawing Hawkeye to look angrier than Stern intended. Later, after Wonder Man's first meeting with the Blank, Hawkeye is trying to calm Wonder Man. He says, "What's eating you? Look, I can understand that you're unhappy that you let him get away..." This is interesting because Wonder Man didn't let him get away and I'm surprised Wonder Man didn't punch him right there.

I'm also not buying why Jim Rhodes feels he needs to keep his identity a secret, especially when Hawkeye keeps saying things like, "Remember that one time when we made out, Tony? Remember how hot that was?"

The Blank has all the Marvel trademarks of a bad guy. A down on his luck guy stumbles across an invention that provides him with a "slippery force-field". Naturally, he

decides to rob banks. And that's about as deep as it gets for the Blank. It is interesting to note that his origin is a cool inversion of Daredevil's origin.

The big high point of the issue is seeing Wonder Man moving by lifting the back wall of his house like a garage door, taking everything out of the house (not sure how he does this while holding the wall up), putting his things into one giant wooden crate made of the strongest wood in the world, and then putting the wall back down. Also of interest, books and fragile things go in the bottom of the crate and weights go on the top.

Anyway, this is the first time the team is working together to fight a legitimate threat that doesn't amount to a misunderstanding. How do they do? Not so bad, but there does seem like a lot of emphasis on their searching for the Blank instead of the actual fight. I suppose this is to help ground the story and show how things are different on the west coast (*This isn't your grandma's Avengers, kids!*).

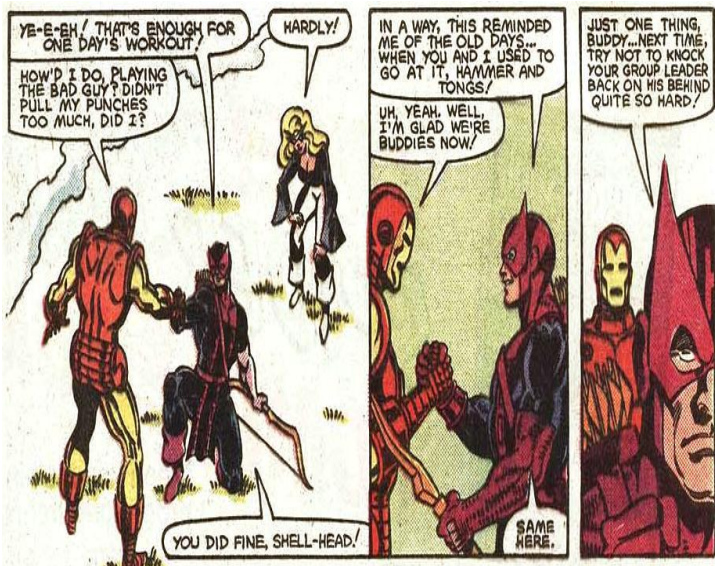
Most importantly, the ending introduces Graviton, who will be the big bad for the rest of this storyline. And the introduction shows a lot of restraint, ending with a final image that certainly works. Things look like they're picking up.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! The sophomore issue doesn't have the problems the first one did (stupid freshmen!) and the storyline has finally picked up some momentum.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Hawkeye can be a real jerk sometimes.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 3 (November 1984)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roger Stern

Penciler: Bob Hall

Inker: Brett Breeding

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The West Coast Avengers get a little downtime after rescuing Los Angeles from a freak snowstorm. But before they can enjoy their BBQ, Wonder Man and Tigra help Shroud resolve a gang matter that brings them face to face with Graviton.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The cover's not exactly accurate as only Tigra and Wonder Man (with the Shroud) have a tangle with Graviton, but that's no big deal.

The first thing that surprises me about this issue is how continuity heavy it is, as the snowstorm at the beginning of the issue ties in with events happening in *Thor* at the time, Wonder Man's exposition with Tigra brings up a lot of Avengers' history, Jim Rhodes' confession to Tigra is connected with events in *Iron Man*, and Graviton's exposition brings up past *Avengers* and *Thor* stories, as well as *Secret Wars*. Not that it's a problem, because the book does a great job in citing what issues to look up for the rest of the story, but I'd forgotten how these old comic books so willingly flaunted its own continuity.

That said, the introductory conflict (snowstorm) is a side effect of a story the book has nothing to do with and hadn't been hinted at before, and it disappears as suddenly as it appears. Right now, if we looked at all the conflict's the team has had, it would amount to a

misunderstanding, a fight with a hack villain, and a snowstorm that has nothing to do with anything.

I'm really starting to wonder why I loved this team so much.

Once the snowstorm is over, Hawkeye decides to have the first annual Avengers BBQ. Everyone is pretty pumped up about this except Wonder Man, who is still bummed out about letting the Blank get away coupled with his issues about being resurrected from the dead. All this has him wondering if he's really Avengers material. Luckily, Tigra is there to talk to him after Iron Man passes on the opportunity. And Tigra tells Wonder Man her own insecurities, all the while flaunting her half naked body in front of him, even going as far to show him her amulet that allows her to look like a normal woman. It sounds terribly dirty, I know.

From there, it's one coincidence after another which finally leads to Tigra, Wonder Man and Shroud confronting the Blank, and then finally Graviton. Graviton ends up double-crossing the Blank, as these villains do. And sends the Blank, Tigra and Shroud flying into the Pacific Ocean, leaving Wonder Man trapped under water in the pool. The issue ends with Graviton standing by the pool with two women in bathing suits as they watch Wonder Man drown. If you're interested, one of the women looks frightened while the other looks fascinated.

The cliffhanger doesn't really work, as we know Wonder Man is indestructible. So the possibility of Wonder Man drowning doesn't seem to be that threatening.

A couple of other things: I love the fact that everyone is in costume at the BBQ, and how Rhodes, as Iron Man, is stressing out on how to eat without revealing his identity. Speaking of, he does reveal that he's not Tony to Tigra, but does so by removing his glove. While I appreciate the whole "Obviously I'm not Tony because I'm black," it would've made more sense just to take off the helmet and, you know, say, "I'm not Tony; actually, my name's Jim." Also, considering the amount of insecurity on display here, I'm not surprised the Avengers sent these guys out west.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast and Roast! The writing here is a little awkward, especially in the exposition dumps. While I know it was how these stories worked back in the day, it feels like tire screeching decades later.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Iron Man caught red-handed?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 4 (December 1984)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roger Stern

Penciler: Bob Hall

Inker: Brett Breeding and Peter Berardi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Once reunited, the team comes up with a plan to rescue Wonder Man and stop Graviton once and for all.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue starts off strong with Tigra's dramatic appearance as she rises to the surface with the Shroud. From there, there's move pretty fast as the team decides to rescue Wonder Man...from the bottom of a pool.

Jim Rhodes finally steps up and announces to everyone that he's really Iron Man. It's a cool moment, but there's really no reason why this particular time is any different to reveal himself than before. I'm just thankful that he doesn't do the glove thing again like he did with Tigra. Hawkeye gets annoyed about all this, as he doesn't like the idea of working with an amateur Iron Man. But naturally, thanks to a convenient one panel flashback, Hawkeye ends up accepting Rhodes as Iron Man.

Now we get to the big plan to rescue Wonder Man and stop Graviton. It's strangely complicated and falls apart when you think about it too closely. But here goes: Tigra, pretending to be Madame Masque, and Hawkeye, dressed up as a hybrid of *Simon & Simon*, visit Graviton to see about consolidating the South California gangs. Madame Masque then flirts with Graviton and wins his trust. Just then, Iron Man appears and attacks. Graviton protects Madame Masque while Iron Man knocks Hawkeye into the bushes. Mockingbird, who has been

pretending to be a bartender in Graviton's pad (how this happened is not explained), appears and attacks. A dummy dressed like Hawkeye flies in on a rocket bike thing, which Graviton gets rid of easily. But the whole point of the dummy was to allow Hawkeye access to his costume and gear. While all of this is going down, Wonder Man has been slowly working his way to the top of the pool (Bob Hall really sells these scenes, by the way) and attacks Graviton.

So now the whole team is hitting Graviton with everything it has, particularly Iron Man who has a cool moment with an electric substation, until he's weakened. Tigra then reveals that she was really Madame Masque and punches Graviton in the face, and Hawkeye appears with some tranquilizer arrows, and he's finally down.

The thing is, it's made clear that Graviton has been drugged somehow, which is why the team had a shot in defeating him. I'm assuming that it was Mockingbird pretending to be Diane Chambers that did it. But if that's the case, why couldn't she just use a stronger drug that would've knocked him out completely, rather than just make his groggy? Then the team could've swooped in and spent the evening writing stupid things on his face with a magic marker.

Not the best plan in the world. But it did rescue Wonder Man from the bottom of the pool.

The issue ends with the team finally reunited at the BBQ. And Wonder Man and Tigra get creepy and all touchy-

feely (see image below) and Hawkeye making one of his overcompensating pep talks.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! Despite the over complicated nature of the team's plan, this is a fun issue. Every one gets a moment or two to really shine, especially Iron Man and Wonder Man. I'm happy to see the mini-series ending on a high note.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

There's nothing like a little awkward flirting while everyone watches...





Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 250 (December 1984)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roger Stern

Penciler: Al Milgrom

Inker: Joe Sinnott, Ian Akin, and Brian Garvey

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The return of Maelstrom brings together the Avengers of both coasts for their biggest fight yet.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

If you're wondering why we went from *West Coast Avengers* #4 to *Avengers* #250, it's because I'm following the instructions at the end of the mini-series, which kindly suggested I follow the West Coast Avengers here. So here we are.

The first thing I noticed about the issue is Al Milgrom's art, who has always been the artist I associated with *West Coast Avengers*. While I loved his art as a kid, it's a bit of a step down from Bob Hall's work in the mini-series.

Stern does a good job making the West Coast Avengers' appearance in the book make sense, as well as progressing the storyline he established in the mini-series. Though, if this issue were the first time I met the West Coast Avengers, I'd think they were just a group of insecure and whiny heroes.

Tigra and Wonder Man continue to be touchy. If they're in a relationship, it hasn't been mentioned at all, unless I somehow missed it.

There's really nothing to really say here. It's all pretty much by the numbers. Maelstrom appears. The teams unite. They fight Maelstrom and win. There's a small bit about Captain Marvel conquering her fears which is just an easy way to remove her from the board, just like every JLA story has to get Superman out of the way first.

If it weren't for the West Coast Avengers being here, I'd have no interest in reading this issue.

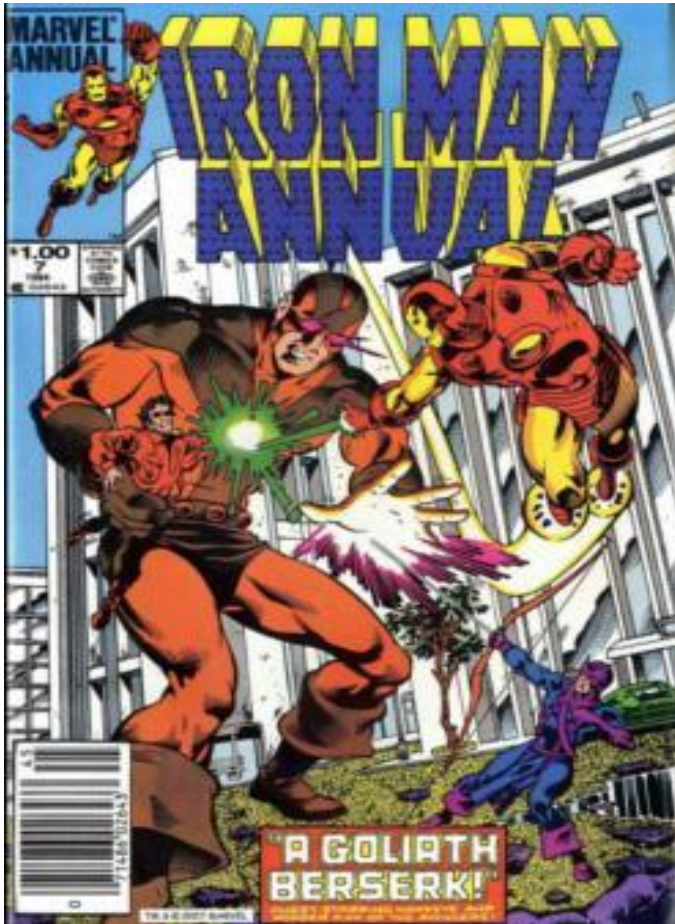
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast! For a big anniversary issue, this one falls short.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Iron Man: "I bet I can get everyone thinking the same thing. Am I right or am I right?"





Iron Man Annual, Vol. 1, Issue 7 (1984)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Bob Harras

Penciler: Luke McDonnell

Inker: Akin & Garvey

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Jim Rhodes is not only having a hard time pretending to be the real Iron Man with the West Coast Avengers but he is trying to live up to the name with the general public. A disastrous fight with Goliath only makes matters worse, and it'll take the help of Hawkeye and Wonder Man to make things right again.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This annual appears to take place between issues #1 and #2 of the *West Coast Avengers* mini-series.

The issue does a good job balancing Iron Man in context with his own series and where he is in the WCA series. The biggest problem is that Rhodes has a few natural opportunities to reveal his identity to the team (which would help resolve one of the major conflicts in the story) and he doesn't use them. We know he'll finally do it in *West Coast Avengers* Vol. 1 Issue #4, but when you put this story into context, it feels way overdue.

Tony Stark makes one appearance in the book (see image below) and he comes across as a real jerk.

Since I want to focus on the team, there isn't a lot to say. The team appears together at the very beginning, and later, Harras seems satisfied in only writing in the male members to help Iron Man.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! Not bad all things considered. I'd probably appreciate things more if I were reading the regular *Iron Man* title, but as a West Coast Avengers tale, it's pretty good.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

You're not my daddy!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (October 1985)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Penciler: Allen Milgrom

Inker: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hank Pym shows up at the West Coast Avengers compound to examine the recently captured Goliath (from *Iron Man Annual #7*) with a bag full of doubt and insecurity that'll make him feel right at home. Meanwhile, Iron Man, Wonder Man and Tigra are attacked by a bunch of robots which leads the team to discover that Ultron has returned. And just when you think it can't get any crazier, Man-Ape shows up to rescue Goliath.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

There's a lot going on here for the first issue. Not only does reading the previous mini-series, the *Avengers*, *Iron Man Annual #7*, *Iron Man* help in enjoying this story, but having a basic working knowledge of Avengers history is needed in order to see the story's big twist. On top of that, you find out that the story doesn't continue in the next issue, but rather a completely different mini-series, *The Vision and the Scarlet Witch*. Luckily, 11 year old Me didn't have a problem with this and ended up buying the entire run of said mini-series. Something I'll probably need to mention to a therapist one day. But we'll save that for next week...

Hank Pym showing up is cool, and considering all of his issues, he seems like a natural fit with the team. If the West Coast Avengers found themselves on a domestic

flight, they'd be paying a fortune in baggage fees. Mockingbird is the only one so far with only a carry on, and that's because her role is only *wife* to Hawkeye. A shame really.

The thing about Pym is he spends all issue telling everyone he's not an Avenger or a hero. Even though he keeps putting himself in situations where he might as well be. My favorite is when Ultron attacks Pym and Iron Man comes to the rescue at the risk of his own life. Pym warns him to be careful and Iron Man refers to Pym as an Avenger. So just as Iron Man attacks Ultron, Pym is muttering, "Don't call me an avenger." Really, Hank? That's the time to correct Iron Man, when he's saving you?

Iron Man's entrance in the book is cool, and it's Tony Stark again, which is a real shame. Tigra and Wonder Man continue to be all over one another. And apparently they aren't together (something I wondered previously), as Tigra pounces Pym when she first sees him; something Mockingbird notices right away. Speaking of Tigra, she unloads her problems to Mockingbird at the most inopportune time, and there's the usual "You're an Avenger now" pep talk. I love this pep talk because of how dismissive it all is to the problem at hand.

Iron Man: "I have herpes."

Hawkeye: "Don't sweat it. You're an Avenger, Tony!"

Iron Man: "You're right. I didn't think of that over the infinite burning sensation emanating from my groin with the power of a billion suns. Thanks, Clint."

Ultron's appearance in the book is pretty exciting and by the numbers for an Avengers story, but it's Man-Ape's sudden introduction in the book that has excited. Not because I like Man-Ape or his politeness in introducing himself before attacking Tigra (Tigra: "Okay, but who are y-" Man-Ape: "I am...the Man-Ape!") . I like it because his appearance is so bizarre and out of left field. Even his introductory dialogue is awesome: "Feline female, gaze upon him who embodies the spirit of the sacred white gorilla."

In fact, I'd like to use that in the future somehow. Maybe when I introduce myself on the first day of lectures. "Confounded class, gaze upon him who embodies the spirit of the sacred white gorilla." It might even help explain my gorilla costume.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast! This one is all over the place. I want to like it only because it's so ridiculously crazy, as if Englehart were testing the patience of his editor...or perhaps seeing if the editor was paying attention. But I'm afraid it's a terrible way to start the series.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Team Angst Assemble! They wouldn't have any of these problems if Oprah was made the sixth member...



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The Vision and the Scarlet Witch, Vol. 1, Issue 1
(October 1985)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Penciler: Richard Howell
Inker: Andy Mushynsky

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After quitting the Avengers, Vision and the Scarlet Witch decide to buy a house in New Jersey. And then they're attacked by zombies. And then...then...I honestly don't understand what happens next. It's a train wreck.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Though this is comic book about the Vision and the Scarlet Witch, this is West Coast Wednesdays after all, and we'll be focusing on the West Coast Avengers' involvement in the story. This will allow me to maintain the little sanity I still have.

Continuing from *West Coast Avengers #1*, the West Coast Avengers are frantically trying to find the Vision by telephone before the Grim Reaper does while recovering from their fight with Ultron. Wasp introduces some added self doubt to the mountain of self doubt the team has accumulated from the start by suggesting that since the Vision created the West Coast Avengers when he was in Evil Mode, perhaps their existence is a part of some grand evil plan. Hawkeye naturally protests and pep talks his way out of it.

Sadly, the team's involvement is minimal. It's mostly the Vision and the Scarlet Witch making out, fighting zombies and spouting terrible dialogue. In fact, there's a long scene where they are looking to buy a house. Now, one of the joys of comic books is for the reader to piece together the things occurring between panels, so if the

Vision said, "I'd like to buy a house" in one panel, I'd be perfectly content if the next panel had Scarlet Witch exclaiming, "I love our new home!" But no, we must read on to watch them look for a house with a real estate agent.

Part of me wants to go off on the horrible details of this book, but most of me wants to move on with my life.

I mean, today is my third wedding anniversary and I'm reading about a robot and a witch making out. And though they are married, there's nothing here particularly useful here that'll enrich my marriage. In fact, I can't shake off the feeling that my marriage is somehow weaker because I've read this issue.

The issue ends with the Vision finally returning Hawkeye's phone call. How's that for drama?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast! I can't believe I collected the entire run of the *Vision and the Scarlet Witch* mini-series as a kid. I'm beginning to suspect that eleven year old Me was insane and possibly stupid.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

How often does one get to see the Scarlet Witch do this?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (November 1985)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Penciler: Allen Milgrom
Inker: Kim DeMulder

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team unites with the Vision and the Scarlet Witch in New Jersey just in time for the readers to be overwhelmed with one flashback after another. Meanwhile, Hank Pym and Wonder Man are held captive by the Grim Reaper and his minions.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue continues from *The Vision and the Scarlet Witch #1*.

The Grim Reaper has a plan. He is going to copy the brainwaves of the Vision and Wonder Man, the latter of who is Simon Williams and the former whose brain is patterned after the brain of Simon Williams. For those not in the know, Simon Williams is the Grim Reaper's brother. Once the Grim Reaper has the brainwaves, he'll use Ultron's computer to get rid of the thoughts not common in both brainwaves, and then put said brainwaves into a zombie Simon Williams.

If I said any of this out loud, no one would ever believe I ever had sex.

Also, I'm pretty sure I've never typed the word *brainwaves* so much in my life.

There's a lot of serious brother issues going on here. On top of this is the whole Ultron calling Hank Pym "Dad" all the time.

My favorite part of the issue is when the team go to Simon Williams' mother's house who is still grieving the loss of her boy. And Vision steps up and tells her that part of her son is in his brain. After a panel of disbelief, they embrace, and Vision says, "I am not he--I will never be he--But I love you, mother! Forgive me!" Well done, Vision. She'll be having nightmares for weeks now.

The issue ends with Ultron attacking the Avengers in their quinjet, leading Hawkeye to yell out "Avengers assemble!" even though they're all standing right behind him.

Also, it should be noted that the 1985 version of the Iron Man armor made Tony look really fat.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast! Seriously, how many flashbacks can one comic book have? It's beginning to feel like a budget saving flashback episode from pretty much any Eighties sitcom you can think of. And this is the second issue of a new ongoing monthly? Yikes.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

What makes Wonder Man different than normal people is he's afraid of death! Deathly afraid!



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The Vision and the Scarlet Witch #2 (November 1985)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Penciler: Richard Howell
Inker: Andy Mushynsky

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After a long fight with Ultron, the West Coast Avengers find themselves captured by the Grim Reaper. They eventually escape and it's a giant brawl with the team against the Grim Reaper and his minions. All of this leads to Vision and Wonder Man confronting the Grim Reaper once and for all about his seductive skin-tight costume.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue continues from *West Coast Avengers #2*.

While this isn't a great issue, this is a huge improvement in the four part crossover story. The first thing that makes it so good is the lack of flashbacks. So when the action kicks in, it's fast and carries through until the last page.

Vision and Wonder Man get a moment to hug each other and affirm their love for one another. They try to get the Grim Reaper in on the brotherly love, but he decides to jump off a cliff instead. Personally, I don't blame him for this.

Anyway, there's more action in this issue for the team than there's ever been for the West Coast Avengers in their own title. I hope this changes soon.

At the end of the issue, Vision tells Scarlet Witch that it's time for them to have a baby. I mean, the issue basically

ends with Vision telling his wife he's going to make hard artificial love to her in the woods as soon as they get rid of the dead weight the West Coast Avengers. While I don't want to get into the whole theological debate over human-android relations (not *that* debate - *again!*), this scene in its own way is historic and would have a profound impact on both characters decades later.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! I admit it, I liked this one. Though, if you weren't reading *West Coast Avengers* at the time, I imagine this issue confusing the hell out of you.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Brothers don't shake hands! Brothers gotta hug!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (December 1985)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Penciler: Allen Milgrom

Inker: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After a lot of brotherly hugs, the West Coast Avengers leave Vision and Scarlet Witch in the mountains to have sex in the woods. On the way back home, Tigra feels like she let the team down and runs away in a hissy fit. And without trying, she ends up face-to-face with Kraven the Hunter. Hank Pym asks to stay with the team, but not as a member. All the while, the team is still searching for its sixth member.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The beginning of the issue continues from the events in *The Vision and the Scarlet Witch #2*. Luckily, this scene is brief and contains only one brotherly hand shake and one brotherly hug between Vision and Wonder Man.

Everyone gets a scene in this issue for the first time since the series started. Hawkeye and Mockingbird get to have a walk on the beach and a conversation that reads like it was written by someone who was never married. Wonder Man gets to be his Hollywood self again. Pym steps up and defines what his role in the book is going to be. Iron Man gets to air out some of his recent problems in front of the team. And Tigra gets a big old fight with Kraven.

The fight between Tigra and Kraven is divided into two parts and it's not bad. As the cover suggests,

Mockingbird and Hawkeye appear in the nick of time to save her and help to teach Tigra a lesson on team work.

The Thing's appearance at the end is also a lot of fun and a nice surprise (I didn't even remember it). In fact, between Kraven and the Thing, I really like how off the wall the book is willing to be with its guests.

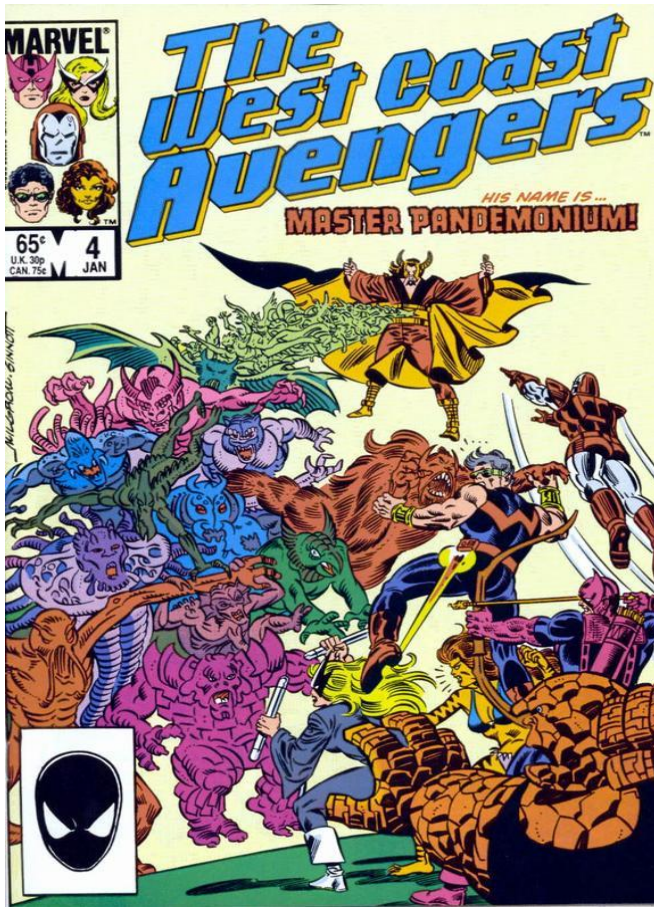
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! I'm happy to report liking this issue. I was beginning to think this would never happen. There's a good balance of action with the usual self doubt and angst that appears to be defining this series. And it has a fun ending too.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Now we know what Tony really thinks of Jarvis.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (January 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Penciler: Al Milgrom

Inker: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hawkeye won't take no for an answer when the Thing refuses to join the team. The sudden appearance of Firebird brings with her the first flashback sequence in two issues. The villainous Master Pandemonium attacks the Thing at a wrestling match and the team comes to his rescue. But is the team prepared to take down Master Pandemonium and his countless demons?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The beginning of the issue is a lot of fun with the Thing refusing to join the team. Englehart does a great job with Hawkeye in this scene, allowing him to be insistent without coming across as annoying. The dialogue between the members of the team is also good, even when the reader has to look past the fact that Tony Stark is hanging out at the pool in his armor.

Tigra makes a move on Wonder Man (meaning all the touchy stuff from previous issues wasn't my imagination - YES!), but he freaks out. Wonder Man ends up going on Johnny Carson to confess that he is guilty of embezzlement, a crime that probably had ten year olds across the country reaching for the dictionary. And Hank Pym gets a phone call from Ultron and IT'S COMING FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE! Actually, no, it's not. Sadly.

Firebird brings the issue's precipitating incident, but unfortunately for the reader, she's not all that

interesting. Luckily, Master Pandemonium makes up for her with an intriguing power set that brings a real challenge to the team with just enough of the weird to keep readers turning the pages. I mean, we're talking about a villain who has demons coming out of his sleeves. What's not to like?

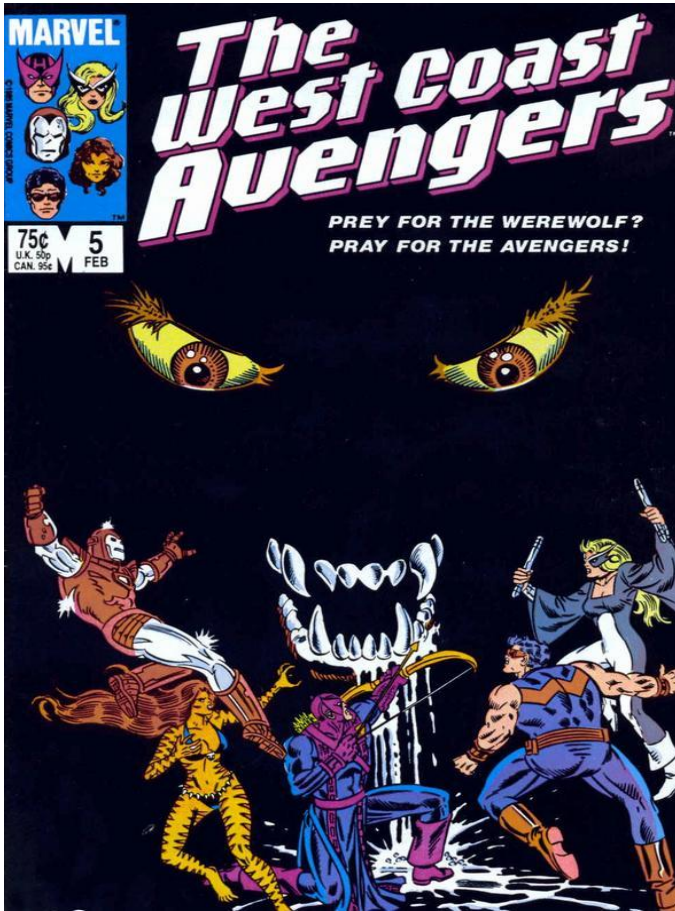
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! Yeah, I'm still digging this. It's wordy and it's more soap opera than it is action book, but this is why I loved the book when I was a kid.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Whatever I feel like I wanna do. Gosh!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 5 (February 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Penciler: Al Milgrom

Inker: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hawkeye has a meeting to yell at Wonder Man for confessing that he's guilty of embezzlement on the Johnny Carson Show. Tigra and Wonder hook up on the beach. Mockingbird and Hawkeye have a spat over their roles as teammates and spouses. Tigra and Hank Pym hook up in the living room. The team fights a werewolf. And Pym gets more calls from Ultron.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

There's a lot going on here. The story that's causing the most drama is Tigra's, which has been simmering in the background since the mini-series. The "cat" part of her is taking over more and more, which is why she's sucking face with half the team.

Hank Pym spends a lot of the issue sulking, with one scene with Iron Man that's so heavy on shadows it's unnecessarily ominous. That said, the calls from Ultron add a nice layer of tension to the story, even though it amounts to a robot with daddy issues prank calling his creator.

The issue wraps up with a big fight with the werewolf, as the cover promises. Iron Man is taken out a little too conveniently (see below), but Wonder Man steps up and gets the job done, and in the process, wins back the public's support. Once the werewolf is down and all the coincidences are out of the way, the story ends with a clue that leads us to Tigra's cat people. And the book's

cliffhanger is Pym getting a call from Ultron...and he's *apologizing*?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast! Another good issue. There's a lot going on and now that the book is working on stories without crossing over into a different book entirely, everything's surprisingly focussed and engaging.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Nyuk! Nyuk! Nyuk!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 6 (March 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Art: Kyle Baker

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team, working with Dr Morbius, is trying to free Tigra of her cat-curse, even though Tigra isn't exactly sure if that's what she wants. Wonder Man gets a part in a big Hollywood blockbuster (with Arnold Schwarzenegger) as the public continues to adore him. With Iron Man healing from his wounds from last issue, Firebird and the Thing help out the team as they visit "The Land Within". Pym meets with Ultron who wants to be a good robot now. And returned with her cat people, Tigra comes to a decision.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The first thing that needs to be pointed out is that the usual penciler Al Milgrom does only the layouts for this issue, and the art is by, of all people, the great Kyle Baker. To say that the art is a huge leap forward is an understatement. Milgrom, as I've said before, is good, but it lacks a certain spark. Baker, on the other hand, really delivers with a lot of nice little touches.

That said, this issue brings back the overuse of flashbacks to tell the story especially in terms of feeding readers Tigra's history. Also, the cat people part of the story isn't really my cup of tea. In fact, it goes too far into furry fandom territory for my liking. The only points I can give it is how Englehart manages to connect the plot to the lingering Master Pandemonium storyline, as Tigra

agrees to find the villain and kill him in order to be free of her curse.

Wonder Man's storyline looks like a poor excuse to poke some fun at Hollywood, but much like how Mockingbird and Hawkeye's banter feels like it's being written by someone who's not married, the movie stuff feels like it's written by someone who knows nothing about Hollywood. And, really, *Arnold Schwarzbarger*? How is it that it's okay to name drop Johnny Carson, but not Arnold Schwarzenegger?

The Thing continues to be used in the book to good effect and Hawkeye's tenaciousness about him being on the team is also used well. Firebird is slowly coming into her own, and her desire to prove herself to the team is a nice touch.

Finally, Hank Pym's meeting with Ultron shows some promise, but it's so inherently silly that I'm waiting to see where it goes next before I judge it too harshly.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast for Baker's art. Roast for the disjointed story. One step forward, one step back...

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

I'm sure that's not what she meant, Tigra...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 7 (April 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Art: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team parties it up with the cat people while Hank Pym comes face to face with not one, but two Ultrons. It's up to Wonder Man to save Pym from being killed by his own creation.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Once again Al Milgrom takes a step back and does the layouts, and it's Joe Sinnott who comes in to do the art. Sinnott's style mirrors Milgrom (he's inked Milgrom's work before), and after last month's art by Kyle Baker, it's a bit disappointing.

Surprisingly, the Tigra story that dominated the last issue is more of an afterthought here. Hawkeye and the Thing have yet another fight over him being on the team, and Firebird gets all mopey in the background about not being considered for the team. Other than that, there's nothing going on here but wheel spinning.

The majority of the book is devoted to Pym and whether Ultron Mark 12 is really good now. Unfortunately for both of them, Ultron Mark 11 is back and he's still evil.

Through flashbacks, we learn how Ultron Mark 11 returned after his stint in *Secret Wars*. This is the one time where flashbacks are used effectively, but I wish

they had been spread out through previous issues instead of being dumped here. This way, when Ultron does contact Pym, readers are left wondering which Ultron it is. Or maybe that would have been too confusing for 1986 readers. I don't know.

Wonder Man really shines here when he's taking down Ultron. Unfortunately, to get to that point, readers have to get through two pages of Simon in Hollywood. When the action kicks in, it's pretty good though. And while the whole dynamic of Pym as father and Ultron as son is silly, Englehart finds just the right amount of pathos to make it work without it becoming maudlin.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Yeah, I'm on board with this. This book is cooking with gas now.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Man learns from all his mistakes, except his fashion choices...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 8 (May 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Breakdowns: Al Milgrom
Finisher: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team returns from their visit to Cat Land. Wonder Man brings them up to speed about his victory over Ultron. Mockingbird and Hawkeye fight it out, as married couples do with weapons, because she doesn't like the way he's ignoring Firestar. Speaking of Firestar, she calls upon her old team, the Rangers, to visit the compound. But things are not what they seem, as they have been possessed by one of Master Pandemonium's demons.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Firebird is proving to be more annoying than anything else. I appreciate the attempt at a Hispanic superhero - especially for 1986 - but between her visions and her praying, she's a character that's too reactionary to do much with.

The team seem pretty torn up about Pym's mourning of Ultron Mark 12. And Iron Man, who is only shown from afar, is the one to console Pym in his time of need. If previous issues are any indication, Tony is probably mentioning how he hooked up with Pym's ex-wife. Still though, it would've been nice to have at least one member of the team scratching their head at the idea of Pym upset over the loss of a robotic son.

It's interesting that Mockingbird and Hawkeye simply can't have a discussion about their problems. In this case, Mockingbird is annoyed that he ignores Firebird's efforts to join the team and focuses only on the Thing. This is perfectly reasonable. However, like most disagreements in the Marvel universe, they resort to physical fighting. It's also interesting that Mockingbird lunges for Hawkeye, he throws her off with his feet, and then they're both immediately going for their weapons, with Hawkeye SHOOTING AN ARROW AT HER! He manages to shoot two arrows at her before she KNEECAPS HIM WITH HER BATONS! He fires off one more, tackles her, and they start making out.

Argument over.

There's probably a lot of metaphorical sexual stuff going on, but really, do we need to go into this here?

We do?

All right, but it's important to establish the - WAIT A MINUTE! I'M NOT FALLING FOR THIS ONE AGAIN!

The issue's big fight is between the West Coast Avengers and the Rangers. Luckily, there's no misunderstanding going on here, but rather, the Rangers are possessed. The demon is connected to Master Pandemonium, so this side story with Firebird actually connects with the larger story and puts Tigra closer to making her decision on whether to kill Master P or not. I'll give Englehart

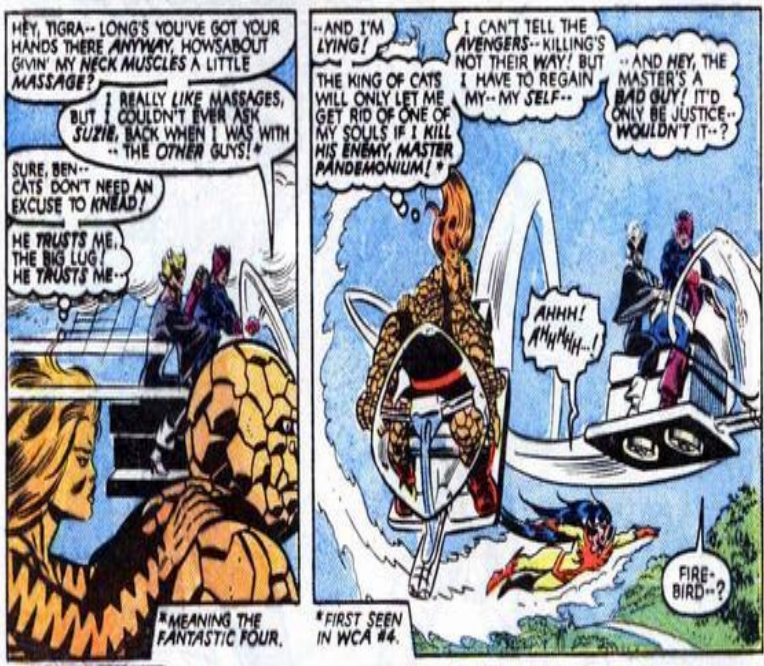
credit for keeping all the plates spinning even when it doesn't look like he's spinning.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Yeah, I'm on board with this. This book is cooking with gas now.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

All the Thing ever wanted was for a female teammate to give him a massage. That's not creepy at all...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 9 (June 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Breakdowns: Al Milgrom
Finisher: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

This it it! The confrontation with Master Pandemonium that's been six issues in the making.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Mockingbird goes undercover as a possessed-by-a-demon-Shooting Star from the Rangers to meet with Master Pandemonium with the intent for the team to swoop in when she gives the signal. However, the plan turns sour when Master P whisks her away to his hideaway (I'm sorry, it's "just--a place I enjoy!").

We haven't seen Mockingbird undercover since issue 4 of the original mini-series when she pretended to be a bartender for an overcomplicated plot to catch Graviton. This plan is a little more daring, especially since she's pretending to be a creature pretending to be a person. Something I'm sure S.H.I.E.L.D. trained her for.

We get Master P's origin in convenient flashback form and it's pretty intense. After a car crash leaves Master P upside down and without an arm, Mephisto appears and undoes his marriage...actually, no, but he does appear. And Master P agrees to give him his soul in order to save his life, and Mephisto rips an arm off a demon and then puts said arm on Master P. Mephisto being Mephisto then decides why just stop with one arm. Like I said, it's

surprisingly intense and carries a lot more weight than origins like, say, the Blank.

The team finally finds Master P and Undercover Mockingbird, but Master P's lair was designed by a James Bond villain and has convenient traps. But it's just a way to fill up some pages. What's important is that Tigra gets to Master P and has to make the decision on whether to kill him or not in order to become human again. And it looks like she was going to do it, but he gets away instead. So this is something that'll have to be resolved later.

The big news for this issue is that the Thing finally joins the team at the end, which leads to some interesting reactions (see below).

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Not bad. Master P's origin was a definite highlight to an otherwise light issue.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Tony Stark is a dick...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 10 (July 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Breakdowns: Al Milgrom

Finisher: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Thing joined the team at the end of last issue and by the second page of this issue, he's already gone missing. The team goes all out to find Ben even though it's clear he doesn't want to be found, and in the process, they stumble across Headlok and the Griffin, two foes who give the team a run for their money.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This story is a continuation of both the previous issue of *West Coast Avengers* and *The Thing* #36. It's also worth noting that the cover mentions nothing about the Thing disappearing, which is the whole point of this issue.

While the whole story is the search for the Thing, he appears quite regularly in the book wearing a trench coat and usually obscured in heavy shadows. At one point, he nearly bumps into Tigra who is looking for him. In fact, if I've learned anything from this issue, it's that California is about the size of a small trailer park.

The issue's big fight is against Headlok and the Griffin who were apparently hanging out on the beach waiting for the team to come along. My favorite moment in the fight is when the Griffin is beating on Wonder Man, and he takes a moment to exclaim, "What a great fight!"

Surprisingly, it's Mockingbird who ends up saving the day, but how isn't exactly clear.

The big news for this issue is that the Wasp informs Hawkeye that the six member limit no longer has to be followed, meaning that Firebird could also be a member of the team. But by this time, she's also hit the road in order to take a retreat.

At the end, the team find the Thing, who is hiding in shadows. And to see what happens next, all you have to do is read on below.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast, though it seems like an odd choice to spend months getting the Thing to join the team only to have him run off when he does. This smells of something editorial.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

The Thing does the whole "It's not you, it's me" break-up and we learn that Iron Man watched Battlestar Galactica...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 11 (August 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Breakdowns: Al Milgrom
Finisher: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Mockingbird, Hawkeye and Iron Man pay a visit to Nick Fury, which naturally leads to a fight with S.H.I.E.L.D. agents. Later, the three are attacked by Razorfist, Zaran and Shockwave for yet another fight. Meanwhile, Hank Pym is seeking out information about Master Pandemonium.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Again we have flashbacks, this time to recap Mockingbird's origin. The writing here is heavy on the exposition and everyone is talking like they just met each other for the first time.

The conversation between Nick Fury and Iron Man is particularly grating, especially when Tony still has his secret identity here. So Tony is referred to as "Iron Man's boss" even though it should be more than obvious to someone like Fury who's wearing the armor.

The fight with the agents is obviously just a way to fill up some pages, and it would seem that way with the fight with Razorfist, Zaran and Shockwave if it weren't for the issue's final panel which reveals that the villains were hired by S.H.I.E.L.D. That said, this information isn't meant to be particularly meaningful for this series, but rather to interest readers to pick up the S.H.I.E.L.D. mini-series which was coming out later. Once again, the storyline for WCA has been hijacked to facilitate yet

another series that won't benefit the book in the long run.

If this were a television show, this would be the budget saving episode they make before the grand finale. In other words, this was 22 pages of wheel spinning.

Booooo, West Coast Avengers! Booooo!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Not sure what the point of this issue was except to remind us that Mockingbird used to work for S.H.I.E.L.D. Not impressed with this one at all.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Because being second means being the first loser...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 12
(September 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Pencils: Al Milgrom

Inks: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Wonder Man introduces his new look to the team, and Hawkeye and Mockingbird use this opportunity to show off their new costumes too. Tigra still has some issues to deal with. And the team goes up against Quantum, Halflife and Zzzax...but are they a front for someone more sinister?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Wonder Man's new outfit is awful. Like I said from the very first West Coast Wednesday, he goes from one bad fashion choice to another. I'm not sure what they were thinking with green, yellow and red. It's just painful. If I were to ever write a comic book with Wonder Man, I'd do a retcon where I explained that Wonder Man's costumes were the result of a series of lost bets.

Luckily the changes for Hawkeye and Mockingbird aren't as dramatic, though I never cared for Mockingbird without pants. With Tigra wearing a bikini and now Mockingbird wearing what amounts to a one piece bathing suit, things aren't looking so good for the females on this team.

Tigra is still wrestling with her two souls and it's clearly a problem, but Englehart writes her in a way that makes her look more ridiculous than torn. For instance, within three pages, Tigra goes from seducing Wonder Man to Iron Man to finally making out with Hank Pym.

The issue's big fight is really nothing new, though Quantum, Halflife and Zzzax are different enough to keep things interesting. But the last page reveal makes it all worth it as Graviton - the original mini-series' big bad - returns. Hopefully things will really pick up in the next issue.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Yeah, I like it. Not crazy about the Tigra stuff, but the villains here were a change of pace for the book.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

West Coast Translator:

The Business = "Substitute teaching"

Look my age = "Dumber than ever before"

Real Avenger = "What were you thinking?"

Expert Opinion = "the opinion of a drunk"

Uh = "Butt, not penis"





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 13 (October 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Breakdowns: Al Milgrom
Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

On a floating rock ten miles above Earth, the team is trapped by Graviton and his allies, Quantum and Halflife. It's up to Tigra to save the day, but in order to do that, she'll have to overcome her cat side and become ordinary Greer Nelson. Meanwhile, Hank Pym's investigation into locating Master Pandemonium catches the attention of a demon.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

There's a lot of monologuing going on here. Graviton is getting his revenge from the last time the West Coast Avengers took him down. And because Englehart is writing, this means this is a wonderful opportunity to provide some flashbacks.

Why Graviton just doesn't kill everyone is beyond me. He's extremely powerful and even Wonder Man shouldn't be a problem for him. But he keeps everyone alive, with Iron Man and Wonder Man stuck to the ground, and Hawkeye and Mockingbird in some kind of electric jail cell. He keeps Tigra on a leash, however. Graviton, who understands Tigra's inability to control herself in catform, keeps Tigra close so he can make out with her in front of her friends (see below).

Graviton gets it wrong, of course! If I was Graviton, I would've made out with Hawkeye instead. You know, to show everyone who's boss!

Tigra is conflicted, especially when her cat-self is attracted to Graviton's power ("I could end up a goddess!"). So when the opportunity presents itself, she transforms to plain old Greer Nelson to keep things simple. But without her cat powers, she's essentially a woman running around in a bikini on a rock ten miles above the Earth.

No matter. Luckily there's a stupid guard she can knock out and steal his uniform. From there, through the magic of gossip, she manages to turn Quantum and Halflife against one another. They start fighting and all hell breaks loose, allowing the team to break free and save the day.

At the end, Greer tells the team that she's going to remain human most of the time and turn into Tigra when she has to. And now that she knows how easy it is to lose herself, she'll have to stay extra alert. Which is like saying, now that I know how easy it is to become addicted to this cocaine, I'll have to be extra alert when I snort some more later.

The issue ends with Pym being stalked by a demon as he explains that the team is needed in Kansas City. Why? Well, for that answer, it looks like we'll have to jump ship and check out *Avengers Annual #15* next.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Not bad, though the Tigra stuff is starting to get ridiculous. If Hawkeye was half the leader, he'd send her packing until she had her issues sorted out.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Legal nerd says, "I think you mean: *slandered* her!"





Avengers Annual, Issue 15 (1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Danny Fingeroth
Breakdowns: Steve Ditko
Finishes: Klaus Janson

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Avengers from both coasts meet in Kansas City for their annual baseball game. But just when the game was getting interesting, Freedom Force - made up of mostly reformed villains - arrives with a warrant for their arrest. After a long fight, the teams are taken out by Freedom Force and sent to a secret government base in the Rocky Mountains where they are accused of treason. They're sent to the Vault to await their trial where they are put into cells that leave them powerless. Spider-Woman, a member of Freedom Force, has doubts about the Avengers being under arrest and helps them to escape.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Oh, boy! Steve Ditko and Klaus Janson. Now there's a combination I never thought I'd see. That said, the art is more Janson than it is Ditko, but there are some panels where you can see Ditko's influence plain as day.

This annual amounts to 6 pages of both Avengers teams playing baseball, 16 pages of fighting, 6 pages of speeches, and 11 pages of additional fighting. And this is my way of saying that there's not a lot going on here. The issue feels stuffed, that's for sure, but it comes across as being more filler than anything of substance. Take the way the government decides to arrest the Avengers for treason based on the testimony of a mystery Avenger. One of the underlining mysteries in this story is who the traitor could be - it'll certainly be one of the big reveals in

the second part of this story - which makes it more strange why this part of the story is treated so casually in the first part. There's no weight. Just a lot of moments I'm confident Fingerioth felt would be cool on the page, but just falls flat when executed.

By the way, it's cool that the demon stalking Hank Pym at the very end of *West Coast Avengers #13* let him go on this trip to play baseball. Most demons portrayed in comic books are never shown to be this considerate.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. It tries, it really does, but this one's stuffed with too much nonsense to qualify as a good story. If this were a normal 22 page monthly, I'd probably be on board. But for an annual, it's a poor excuse for an event.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Sometimes the team overcompensates when Cap delivers a terrible speech...





West Coast Avengers Annual, Issue 1 (1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Breakdowns: Mark Bright
Finishes: Geof Isherwood

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The teams decide they need all the help they can get with the United States government on their tail. This allows readers to check in with Avengers from the past and present. And just when it looks like things are looking up, the traitor is revealed to be Quicksilver (though the cover probably gave it away earlier). Apparently he felt neglected and took it out on the Avengers. Or something like that. From there, it's Avengers fighting generic villains the Zodiac Cartel until the Vision flies in to save the day with hologram babies. Oh, hologram babies, *what can't you do?*

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

After escaping from the government, the members of both teams find the most conspicuous cave in America to hide in. It's here they try to work out who betrayed them and decide what to do next. The pages that follow is a nice way to see where previous members of the Avengers are in the current Marvel universe. There are a lot of interesting panels that probably worked in getting twelve-year-old-me to check out other monthly titles at the time.

While sharp-eyed readers will notice Quicksilver popping in and out of the background throughout the first part of the book (it would've been fun if they had done this in the previous issue), he makes his appearance known on page 10. The next page is his confession and the reasons for why he betrayed

everyone...and it doesn't make much sense. Quicksilver has always been a problematic character for Marvel (this has changed in recent years), and here it's pretty clear why: writers don't know what to do with him.

The biggest problem with the book is that the Avengers vs. the U.S. government is side-stepped and replaced with Quicksilver and the Zodiac Cartel vs. the Avengers. Chapters are purposely divided to create set pieces for selected members of both sides to fight one another. So when the conflict between Quicksilver and the Avengers is resolved, there's still the large matter of the U.S. government wanting the team for treason that is never mentioned again. In fact, within seconds after Quicksilver is taken off the table, Hawkeye immediately starts talking about continuing their baseball game. And while it's a cute way to wrap things up, it's painfully lazy.

How is Quicksilver dealt with, you ask? Well, I'm glad you brought that up. The Vision shows up with a magic ruby just when Quicksilver holds in his hand a vague weapon from the Australian government (don't ask) to destroy everyone. Using the ruby, the Vision is able to project the image of his children - Quicksilver's nephews - before Quicksilver's eyes. Basically, Vision says, "You claim to hate everyone, but can you possibly hate these two cute babies that couldn't possibly exist because their father is a robot?" This is, naturally, too much for Quicksilver, and he runs away screaming, "Enough!"

Which was exactly what I was thinking too.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast, but barely. This is certainly a step up from the previous part, but really makes no sense if you think about it for more than five seconds.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Ha! Ha! Ha! It's funny because the Avengers are throwing their weapons (one of them god-like) at Hawkeye...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 14 (November 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Breakdowns: Al Milgrom
Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

During a training exercise, Tigra's cat-side gets the better of her and she almost kills Hawkeye. She transforms back to Greer Nelson with the intention of quitting the team. Hank Pym stops her and reminds her that this is a new beginning, an idea he knows a lot about. Nelson confesses her love for Pym, but before they can get cuddly, the demon that had been stalking Pym previously reappears with a lot more of her pals and whisks them away. The rest of team go to San Francisco to team up with Hellcat and Hellstorm, who help them to get to hell to save Pym and Nelson. Along the way, they inadvertently team up with Master Pandemonium and end up stranded on a boat on the river of death.

I feel dumber for having written all that.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

I remember this cover well from when I was a kid. All the Marvel covers at this time had a head shot to celebrate Marvel's 25th anniversary. Not sure who did the cover for this issue, but Hawkeye looks pretty damn good.

The Master Pandemonium storyline officially makes no sense. Maybe there's some logic going on here and I'm missing it, but it looks more and more like Englehart was enjoying grandma's sipping sauce when he wrote this issue. For a storyline that's been building for nearly a year at this point, this feels tiresome rather than epic and exciting.

The Tigra plot is another thread that's way overdue for some closure. "I'm Tigra. I'm Greer Nelson. I'm Tigra but I can control it. I can't control it. I'm Nelson again but I want to be Tigra." Her uniform is also a major problem, because it barely works when she's Tigra, but as Nelson, she's simply Woman in Bikini.

Hellcat and Hellstorm are nice additions. Hellstorm does get to lecture ~~readers~~ Wonder Man about how there are many different Satans and devils in the Marvel universe, which doesn't work the more you think about it. But then again, this is a world where Norse gods roam freely, so whatever.

Pym and Nelson getting trapped in hell is mildly interesting. My favorite part is when demons are about to kill both of them and Hank apologizes to Nelson, and she replies, "It's all right...my life had become a living hell anyway!" Honestly, reading issues like this, I'm starting to feel the same way.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. The drama here falls flat, as Tigra's problems feel like they've overstayed its welcome. This issue is trying too hard to be too many things, and it doesn't help matters by not making any sense whatsoever.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Don't ruin Hank Pym's motivational speech with your stupid facts, Tigra!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 15 (December 1986)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team, along with Hellstorm, Hellcat and Master Pandemonium, are trapped on a boat...on the River of Death...in hell (work with me here!). Eventually, the boat arrives in Cat Land, but not before Master Pandemonium finishes telling everyone his origin story. Lots of storylines come together here as Tigra's fate is finally revealed and Master P finally gets what's coming to him.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

There's a lot going on in this issue, as Englehart is wrapping up some of the storylines that have been weaving in and out of this title since the mini-series.

The conclusion to Master Pandemonium's origin is as screwed up as the first part, with Mephisto being a real jerk. You see, Mephisto, not content with stealing his arms and replacing them with demons, also took Master P's soul and cut it into five pieces. Now Master P is on the ultimate scavenger hunt to retrieve his soul. Now that I think about it, Mephisto comes across as being rather terrifying here, and I realize that it's been a long time since he's been this way in the Marvel Universe. Lately he's more of an Easy Fix for writers to use rather than a monstrous force of evil.

The ship conveniently arrives in Cat Land. It's here where the team finally learns about Tigra's bargain to kill Master P for the Cat King. Naturally everyone takes this

pretty hard, especially Pym who can't quite get over the fact that she was planning murder while sleeping in his bed (see below).

The Cat People, like the cover suggests, remove the demons from Master P's body, making him a quadriplegic. Now it's up to Tigra to seal the deal and kill him...but, she can't! So the Cat King takes away her Tigra soul once and for all!

Eventually, it's up to Greer Nelson and the team to break out of Cat Land and make things right. In the process, Nelson wears Hellcat's outfit and takes down Balkatar and reclaims her Tigra soul, which for some reason, has strengthened in the king's care. Because Nelson is wearing Hellcat's suit, it keeps her human side intact and she is now Tigra with Nelson's soul.

If this doesn't make any sense to you, please do not cry. I read the issue and it doesn't really make any sense. Unfortunately, I did in fact cry like Matt Damon in *Good Will Hunting*.

The issue ends with Master P getting back 1/5 of his soul, threatening the team and jumping into the River of Oblivion, which is not to be confused with the River of Death. And because this is just another normal day for the West Coast Avengers, Hawkeye proposes they have a BBQ.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Okay, I'll let this issue go. I appreciate Englehart wrapping things up despite all the melodrama. Once you let go of logic and stop questioning every bad decision, the issue works well.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Take note, people, if you're sleeping in Pym's bed, it's only dirty thoughts, not murder.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 16 (January 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

While Tigra tests out the new-her in San Francisco by jumping off the Golden Gate bridge with the team watching, they have a brief run in with Tiger Shark. After catching him, Pym reflects on how he was one of the villains who got him to walk away from the superhero life back in the day. Before he can finish telling the story, Tigra decides to dump him with the finesse of an eighth grade cheerleader. With all this anger and frustration hanging over Pym, he helps the team to find and capture Whirlwind, Tiger Shark's partner.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The issue starts with Tigra jumping off the Golden Gate bridge to prove that she has control over herself. But she doesn't seem to care about the traffic accidents and mayhem she causes on top of the bridge as drivers assume she is another suicide jumper. Superheroes can be real jerks.

While Englehart does a good job balancing the large cast - and despite what the cover promises - this issue is really about Hank Pym. The appearance of Tiger Shark gives Pym the opportunity to flashback and readers why he is where he is today. Tigra then breaks up with him by convincing him to keep trying to score with her. This causes Pym to have a breakdown, but before he loses control, he reminds himself of how Quicksilver lost it during the recent annual.

And the last thing Pym needs is to be confronted by holographic babies.

With that in mind, he convinces the team to take on Whirlwind by giving them information on how to catch him. This, however, appears to be a cover so that Pym can confront Whirlwind. And why does he do this? Well, Pym confronts Whirlwind to...brag about the trap he's set on him. Whirlwind just takes this opportunity to tell Pym what a jerk he is (true).

The issue ends on a somber note with Pym looking out the window at the Golden Gate bridge while Tigra talks about why people commit suicide there.

[Insert dramatic music here].

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I like this one only because it's all over the place. The soap opera aspect of the book has been turned up to eleven as it looks like Englehart is ready to do for Pym what he did for Tigra last issue; that is, take him to the next level.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

It's not you, Hank, it's me. But don't stop trying to be with me...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 17 (February 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team heads to New Mexico to recruit Firebird, which brings them face to face with the villainous Sunstroke, Gila, Butte and Cactus (hey, the villains can't all be winners!), who are all working for - you guessed right! - Dominus.

Meanwhile, HANK PYM CAREFULLY PREPARES FOR HIS SUICIDE!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Well, Hawkeye finally wises up and decides to recruit Firebird to the team (though Tigra is still reluctant to have her on the team). The team goes to New Mexico and is confronted by four of the worst villains you can imagine. It's fights like this that helped establish the West Coast Avengers as a poor man's Avengers. Where is Kang? Where is Thanos? By this point, I'd be thrilled to see them taking on Batroc the Leaper.

The big twist with the issue is that Dominus sends the team back in time with one of Doctor Doom's time machines (how many of these things does he have anyway?). As the cover suggests, this event kicks off the team's "greatest adventure". Personally, I remember it as the adventure that never ended. Maybe it won't be so bad the second time. We'll find out soon enough. That said, what happens next has serious consequences for the team and will affect things for years to come, and was

even touched on in the recent issues of *Hawkeye and Mockingbird* by Jim McCann and David Lopez.

What really surprised me here was how Pym's suicide is handled, which at times is heavy-handed and other times thoughtful. For instance, the scene where Pym gives his final instructions to the compound's gardeners - a bunch of extras from *The Warriors* - is painful, but Pym's "final" conversation with his ex-wife Janet packs a nice emotional punch, a rarity in the book. I don't recall reading this specific issue, so I don't remember what 12 year old me thought about the B-plot where one of the main characters is taking care of any last minute stuff before he puts a gun to his head. I can't imagine being able to process the severity of what was happening.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm cool with this issue. There's a good balance between the two storylines with two nice surprise endings. Plus, it gave me one awesome West Coast Scene (of the week). Take it away, Bonnie "Prince" Billy...or Johnny Cash!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

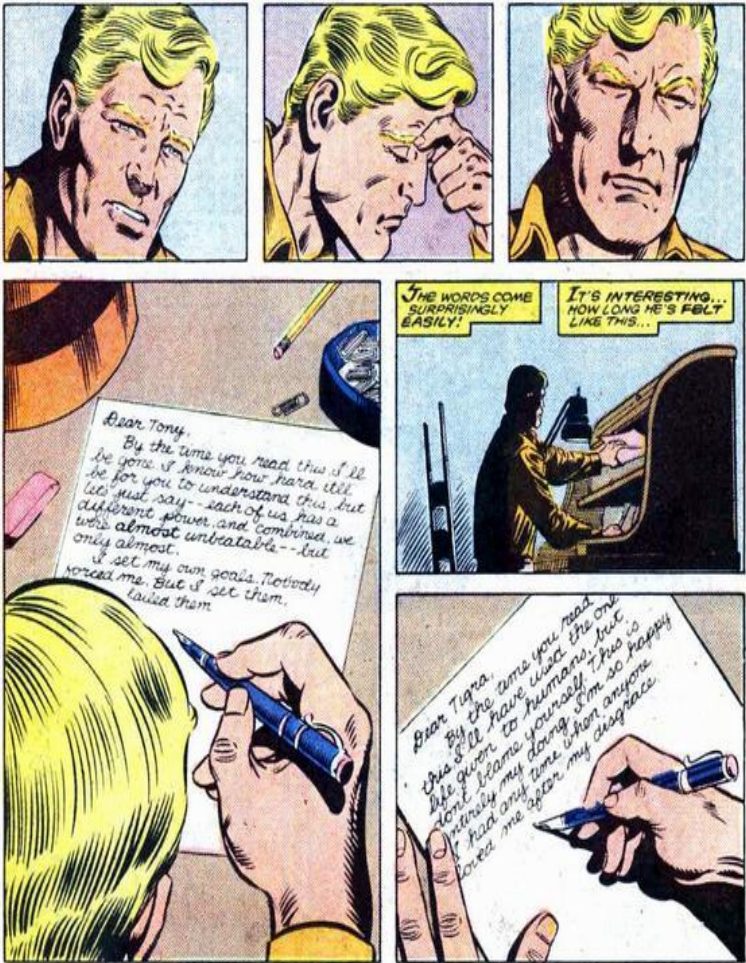
Well, you're my friend, and can you see?
Many times, we've been out drinking;
Many times we shared our thoughts.
But did you ever, ever notice, the kind of thoughts I got?



Well, you know I have a love; a love for everyone I know.
And you know I have a drive, to live I won't let go.
But can you see its opposition, comes rising up
sometimes?
That its dreadful imposition, comes blacking in my
mind?



And then I see a darkness,
And then I see a darkness,
And then I see a darkness,
And then I see a darkness.



Did you know how much I love you?
It's a hope that somehow you,
Can save me from this darkness.



Well, I hope that someday buddy
We have peace in our lives;
Together or apart,
Alone or with our wives,
And we can stop our whoring,
And pull the smiles inside,



HE CAN ALMOST SWEAR HE SMELLS HER PERFUME... THE PERFUME SHE WORE WHEN SHE FIRST WALKED INTO HIS LAB...

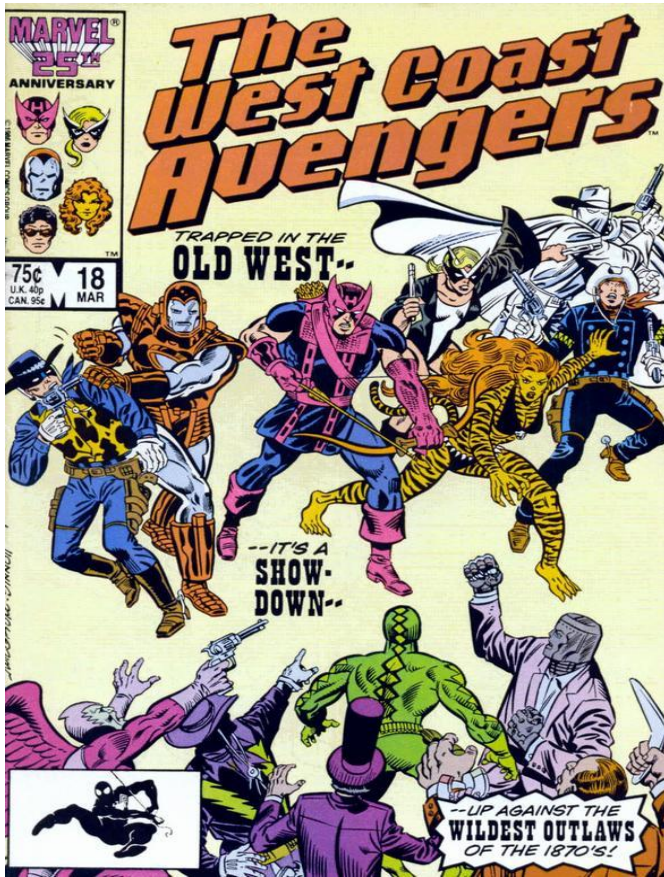


And light it up forever,
And never go to sleep.
My best unbeaten brother,
This isn't all I see.



Oh no, I see a darkness.
Oh no, I see a darkness.
(Oh) no, I see a darkness.
Oh no, I see a darkness.
Did you know how much I love you?
Its a hope that somehow you,
Can save me from this darkness.

- "I See a Darkness" lyrics by Bonnie "Prince" Billy.



West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 18 (March 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team got Marty McFly'd by Dominus and are now trapped in the old West with a time machine that can only go backwards. Before they can get their bearings, the Rawhide Kid, the Two-Gun Kid and the Night Rider show up which leads to a giant team-up in order to take down some good old fashioned super-villain outlaws. When it's all over, the team decide to go back further in time. And just as they're leaving, the Night Rider goes nuts, knocks out Mockingbird and takes her away, trapping her in the 19th century. Meanwhile, in the 20th century, Firebird stops Hank Pym from killing himself.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The beginning of the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" kicks into gear, but if you're a new reader picking this up, you might be scratching your head. Or maybe not, considering that there's an editor's note on every third panel telling you what issues you can read to catch up. As always, the book is continuity heavy to the point of distraction, with enough flashbacks (I mean, there are even flashbacks to the previous issue) and call-backs to make this feel like an episode of the *Golden Girls* where they're sitting around and reflecting.

Mockingbird freaking out about being trapped in the past is unnecessary and continues the trend of her role being more Wife than Hero. Iron Man and Wonder Man are suddenly trying to one up one another, which is something I think they'd be avoiding considering their

situation. The only one who comes out looking good is Tigra, which considering the last dozen issues is a shock.

Firebird, who is now La Espirita, gives Pym a giant pep talk to convince him to not shoot himself. In the process, she also convinces him to be the best hero he can possibly be, one that is true to his nature (as he's tried the hero thing four times now). This is setting the seeds - *finally!* - for Pym's return to the team after a year and a half of him playing a version of the Jarvis role, except this version liked sitting alone in the dark listening to his Air Supply records.

The fun part is seeing the team split into three groups, with members scattered across different centuries. What's the deal with the Night Rider thinking Mockingbird is a goddess and kidnapping her? Is going back further in time the best way to get back to the future?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. My instinct is to want to hate this issue, but I had a good time. Though it's continuity heavy, it is a time travel story after all.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Here, honey, let me calm you down with some needless exposition...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 19 (April 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

In the 18th century, Hawkeye, Tigra, Wonder Man and Iron Man meet Carlotta Valdez, a woman Firebird had a vision about way back in issue 6. Plus, Wonder Man's overconfidence puts Hawkeye in danger. In the 19th century, the Rawhide Kid and the Two-Gun Kid try to rescue Mockingbird from the Night Rider. And in the 20th century, Hank Pym continues his therapy session with Firebird.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Part 3 of the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" is here. And while the cover's double pun implies this might be a slow issue, it's actually pulling together story threads that readers probably didn't even know were there. While I often give Englehart a lot of grief about his writing, this issue is revealing a certain level of brilliance that can't be ignored. It's a shame it's taken so long to get here.

18th century: Hawkeye is devastated that his wife is trapped a hundred years ahead of him. His reasoning is a little dubious, as he feels he's taken away so much of her independence that she no longer knows how to work alone. Nice one, Clint. Wonder Man and Iron Man are at each other's throats, and it all comes to a head when they're attacked by some Spanish soldiers and Wonder Man's actions causes Hawkeye to be badly burned by a gunpowder blast. Once they find shelter in a nearby cave, they're found by Carlotta Valdez, which leads to the

usual "should we tell them about the future to avoid a horrible tragedy" conversation that every good time travel story needs.

Hawkeye comes up with a plan to give Valdez a note that she'll pass on to generations in hope that Firebird will eventually get the message.

19th century: The Night Rider has drugged Mockingbird to convince her to love him, as he thinks she's a goddess; one that belongs to "the son of the spirits". It doesn't make any sense even within the confines of the logic presented here, but we're supposed to go with it for the benefit of the story. The issues mandatory fight scene is between the Night Rider and the Rawhide Kid and the Two-Gun Kid, and eventually Mockingbird joins in to protect her new man. Also of interest, most of this story takes place in the same cave Hawkeye and the gang are staying in, and Mockingbird comes across one of her husband's arrowheads.

20th century: Firebird continues to help Pym by discussing his Pym particles. And while that sounds dirtier than I intended, sadly, it's not terribly exciting, and it feels like wheel spinning. We do learn that Hawkeye's message is in Firebird's family Bible. And this means Firebird - like most Christians on television - has never actually read the book since she's never seen the message. Nice one, Firebird.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Really not bad. I wonder how far ahead Englehart planned his storylines because seeds he planted 13 months before are starting to bloom. He's either some kind of mad genius or one lucky writer. Still though, there's something to be said about a team book that's more interesting when the team is separated...

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

The Night Rider's romance techniques would inspire fraternities for years to come...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 20 (May 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The story splits from three to four as we follow 1) Hawkeye, Tigra, Wonder Man and Iron Man from the 17th century to 2940 B.C.; 2) Carlotta Valdez in 1776 as Firebird's vision becomes a reality; 3) Mockingbird in the 18th century under the influence of the Night Rider's potion; and 4) Hank Pym and Firebird as they continue to travel down memory lane in the 20th century.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Part 4 of the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" continues with lots of jumping around through time.

We'll start with what's going on with Hawkeye, Tigra, Wonder Man and Iron Man. With Iron Man carrying a wounded Hawkeye and Wonder Man carrying Tigra and a time machine, the team flies over America, makes a pit stop in Philadelphia, and then flies over the Atlantic to Egypt. I don't want to get into how horribly uncomfortable and time consuming this trip must've been. Instead, it's important to focus on Wonder Man's evolution to Whiny Jerk. You know you have problems when Tigra is talking down to you. You might remember her as the woman who broke up with a man by telling him to keep trying to get her.

By the time their story ends, they're in 2940 B.C. and knocked out by an Ultra-Diode Ray that Rama-Tut took

from the future. If that sentence confuses you, don't worry, it's more confusing when you read the book.

Firebird's vision from way back when finally comes true and Carlotta is shot in the back, though her shooter is still a mystery. All of this is pushed aside to show the progress of Hawkeye's message (written in the previous issue) and how it eventually makes its way to Firebird's Bible. It's a cool idea in theory, but makes no sense. Englehart writes this as if the message suddenly appears in the Bible, like teleportation, instead of it being inside the book for a couple of hundred years. Because it makes no sense why Firebird would not have found this message already, especially when she says that the book has brought her comfort before. Which means she's 1) incredibly dense, 2) a liar and has never read her family copy of the Bible, or 3) stuck in a comic book where the writer doesn't understand how time travel works.

The Mockingbird storyline continues to be creepy in all the wrong places as she tries on a new dress. Um...yeah. That's her story for this issue.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Like I said previously, I like the multiple storylines, but there something to be said about a team book that's more interesting when the team is separated.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

WAHHH!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 21 (June 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Joe Sinnott

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The story splits yet again, this time from four to five as we follow 1) Hawkeye, Tigra, Wonder Man and Iron Man in 2940 B.C.; 2) Mockingbird in the 18th century still under the Phantom Rider's influence; 3) Carlotta's funeral in 1776; 4) Hank Pym and Espirita in 1987; and 5) Isabel, a 12 year old, in 1847. Plus, the introduction of Doctor Pym and Moon Knight!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Part 5 of the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" continues with lots of jumping around through time.

Hawkeye, Wonder Man, Tigra and Iron Man have been made powerless by Rama-Tut's Ultra-Diode Ray. To add insult to injury, they're forced to listen to Rama-Tut's pointless exposition. His elite guards takes the team to the Temple of Khonshu and leaves them alone. Hawkeye, fading in and out of consciousness, enters the Land of the Dead and meets the shining face of Khonshu, the taker of vengeance (wait, please, don't click away! Stay!). Khonshu offers to restore the team's life in exchange for fighting Rama-Tut. Hawkeye agrees, but only if he sends a message to his friends in the future.

Khonshu does send the message, to none other than Moon Knight.

The events in 1776 and 1847 is Englehart's continuation of showing how Hawkeye's message made it to the

future. I think I said everything I had to say about this last week.

Two-Gun and the Rawhide Kid catch up with Mockingbird. Two-Gun pretends to be Hawkeye as a way to get Bobbi to remember her husband. The usual fight ensues, but she finally comes around. And when she does, boy, she's rightfully angry.

Meanwhile, Hank Pym shows off some inventions to Espirita, mainly ROVER, a flying talking Pym-Mobile that shoots flames, acid and gases. And then he announces that he's now DOCTOR PYM! A superhero who wears a lab coat! This impresses Espirita enough to get her to make out with him. Go, Hank!

The issue ends with Dominus wondering if perhaps sending the West Coast Avengers back in time, rather than, you know, killing them, was a mistake.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. While it's corny as all hell, things are moving forward again.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

I'm guessing Simon is really Charlie Sheen.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 22 (July 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Kim DeMulder

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The story splits again, this time from five to six as we follow 1) Hawkeye, Tigra, Wonder Man and Iron Man in 2940 B.C.; 2) Mockingbird with Two-Gun and the Rawhide Kid in the 18th century; 3) Moon Knight in 1987; 4) Hank Pym and Espirita in 1987; 5) Isabel, now in 82 years old, in 1917; and 6) the Fantastic Four ten years ago.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Part 6 of the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" continues with lots of jumping around through time.

Before I get into this issue, it needs to be noted that Joe Sinnott isn't inking this one; instead it's Kim DeMulder. While it doesn't seem to be a huge change in style initially, on closer inspection the faces are much more expressive and the action sequences appear to be a tad more fluid than what we've seen before. Not sure if DeMulder stays or not, but this is a nice change of pace.

The issue kicks off with Mockingbird, Two-Gun and the Rawhide Kid finally confronting the Phantom Rider. After a fight that goes on much longer than it should, Mockingbird gets on a horse to chase down the Phantom Rider to end this once and for all.

The team in 2940 B.C. make their way into the Sphinx and immediately discover an unconscious Dr. Strange being carried away by robots. This is when the story gets

all *Back to the Future 2*, where the team's adventures are now happening simultaneously with previous adventures from other books, such as *Dr. Strange #53* and *Fantastic Four #19*. I'm an absolute sucker for this kind of stuff, so I'm completely down with this part of the story.

Moon Knight finally meets up with Pym, and after the obligatory fight, reveals that Espirita had never once opened her copy of the Bible! YES! I was right all along! By the way, I love how Hawkeye had Khonshu send a message to Moon Knight to let Pym know that he sent a message in a Bible. He removes Hawkeye's message from the book and Pym springs into action by calling the Fantastic Four to borrow their time machine. But Dominus already beat Pym to the punch and destroyed it.

[Insert dramatic music here!]

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. *Back to the Future 2*-like, bitches!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

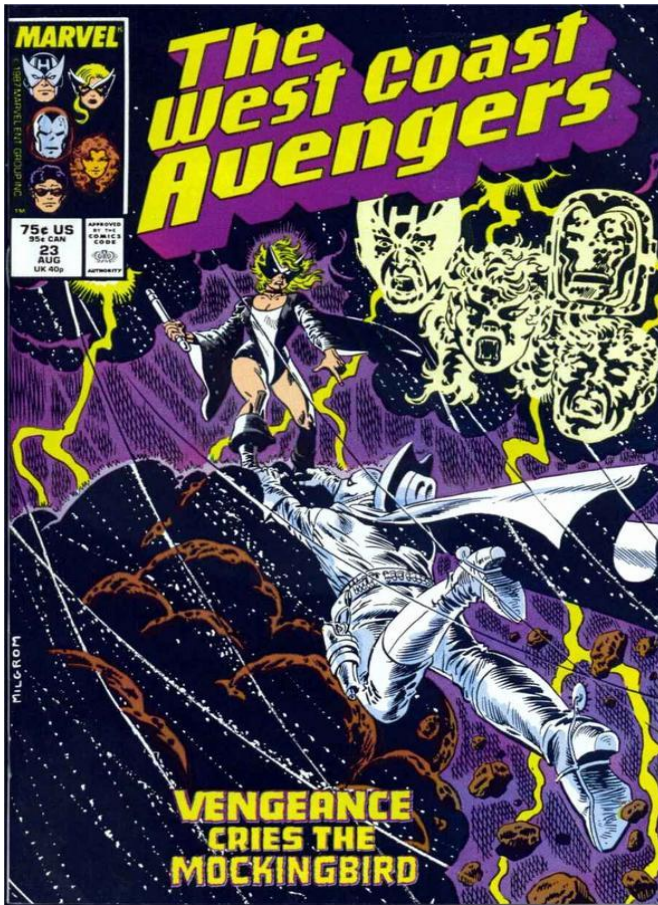
Two lame heroes converge in a wood, and I -

I rooted for the one with the ascot,

And that had made all the difference.



15



West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 23 (August 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Romeo Tanghal

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The story splits again, this time from six to seven (this never gets old!) as we follow everybody from the West Coast Avengers to Doctors Doom and Strange. This is it! It's Showtime!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Part 7 of the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" continues with lots of jumping around through time.

Like last issue, regular inker Joe Sinnott is not onboard this time. Looks like Romeo Tanghal is stepping in, and it's not half bad. I'm beginning to suspect that even though Al Milgrom is a competent penciler, his work comes across as being flat no matter who's inking him.

A surprisingly large amount of this issue is Pym working with the Fantastic Four to get the time machine working again to save the team. While it initially seems like a waste, there's a lot of work being done here to reestablish Pym as a valuable asset. It's a lot of fun seeing the Thing working with the team again, even though he's in severe mopey mode.

Moon Knight sulking around in the background while everyone else is hard at work on the time machine is also an interesting choice. Even the Invisible Woman seems put off by his presence ("That man wears mystery around him like a second cloak."). Luckily just when the Moon Knight's appearance in the issue seems pointless,

Englehart sees an opportunity for two pages of exposition recapping his origin. This is made even stupider by the fact that Moon Knight is simply reflecting on his origin and not sharing it with anyone.

In 1876, Mockingbird catches up with the Phantom Rider to get her revenge. This naturally leads to a dramatic fight where he tries to calmly explain why it was necessary to drug and seduce her. The fight ends with Mockingbird knocking him over a ledge. As he pleads for her to help him up, she reacts very unAvenger-like (see below) despite the fact that by definition she is avenging.

Once the time machine is ready to go, Hank, Firebird and Moon Knight jump back to ancient Egypt to get the team. There's a nice reunion with hugging and hair touching (the team's definition of intimacy makes Tony and Angela from *Who's the Boss?* look raunchy) and then they're off to 1876 to get Mockingbird. Hawkeye and Mockingbird are finally reunited (and to Englehart and Milgrom's credit, they make this scene work). Most importantly, when asked about the Phantom Rider, Mockingbird said that he killed himself.

The issue ends with the team heading back to the future to take care of Dominus, the lame villain who started this whole mess to begin with.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. A few surprisingly effective emotional moments make this issue work wonders.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

She knows how to let a man down easy...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 24
(September 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Back in their own time at last, the West Coast Avengers are determined to take down Dominus once and for all.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This is meant to be an epilogue to the West Coast Avengers "greatest adventure" but there's no reason why we can't consider this Part 8, especially when considering that Dominus was the one who introduced the adventure's conflict to begin with.

Like the last two issues, regular inker Joe Sinnott is not around. This time Mike Machlan is up, and honestly, it may as well be Sinnott, as there's pretty much no difference in the art.

Exposition is the name of the game with the beginning of the issue as Dominus lays out his ultimate plan to enslave the human race and take over the planet. Dominus proclaims that "it was simple as salt, once I destroyed the West Coast Avengers!" I love how the West Coast Avengers was the only obstacle in his plan, considering that they sort of just stumbled onto him by accident.

The big fight in the issue is the West Coast Avengers vs. an army of Cacti, which pretty much highlights a lot of the problems with this book. This is supposed to be about taking down Dominus, and here we are wasting

pages on fighting cacti and bad puns ("You always laugh at me, but my brothers and I will 'stick it to you' today!").

Iron Man and Wonder Man continue to go at it, and it's hard to find any sympathy for Simon. He's just clearly a jerk. I hope Englehart is going somewhere with this.

Moon Knight ends up being the issue's most valuable player! Dominus uses his "brain blasts" to render the team powerless. But thanks to Moon Knight's three different personalities, the brain blasts only make one of his personalities helpless, leaving Moon Knight with two other personalities to fight Dominus with. [I promise never to use *personalities* in a sentence three times again!] Who knew schizophrenia was so fucking awesome?

Mockingbird is happy to be back (my favorite quote from the book reads like a Lady Gaga lyric: "'I was a pretty 80's lady before we met, but I'm a real old-fashioned wife when it comes to loving my man!"), but clearly her involvement in Phantom Rider's death is weighing on her. Even Hawkeye notices it ("I'm intense right now --- but she's INTENSE!").

The issue ends with Wonder Man finding out that everyone hates his costume and doubting whether he wants to be an Avenger or not.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

But I'm slick! And I'm going to hug the crap out of you!





West Coast Avengers Annual #2 (1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Art: Al Milgrom

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's another annual, and that means it's time for the Avengers from both coasts to play a game of baseball. But before the West Coast Avengers can claim their victory, the Silver Surfer crashes the party and the East Coast Avengers inexplicably die. Now it's a race against time to bring the Avengers back from the dead!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The first thing the issue gets out of the way in the opening splash page is reveal Wonder Man's newest uniform. This completely cancels out the cliffhanger from issue #24, as we now know Simon has a new uniform and that he stayed with the team. In fact, when we first see Simon, he's getting ready to pitch a ball at Thor, and he says, "I've got my new uniform, and everybody's eyes are on me -- so now's my time to star!" At least we know he's still a douche.

Anyway, the Silver Surfer arrives because he heard the Elders want to kill the Avengers "for unknown reasons!" While he's explaining this to the West Coast Avengers, the Avengers die in the dugout (see below!).

The Silver Surfer takes the team to the Collector to get some answers. Turns out it was the Grandmaster who killed the Avengers, and the only way to save them is for the West Coast Avengers to drink "the most powerful poison [the Collector] has found", die, and bring the Avengers back from the Realm of Death.

Basically, the Collector convinces the West Coast Avengers to commit suicide. It goes something like this:

The Collector: "The only way to reach death is to die!"

Hank Pym: "I almost threw my life away once."

Hawkeye: "Okay, let's do it!"

Drink.

Die.

For whatever reason, Espirita does not die, which excited the Collector and now he wants to add her to his collection.

Meanwhile, in the Realm of Death, the Avengers meet up with the Grandmaster, who tells them that the Collector made a deal with Death to bring the West Coast Avengers there, and now the Avengers must fight the West Coast Avengers to save their lives. From here, the chapters are broken down into matches like Iron Man (WINNER!) vs. Captain Marvel, Wonder Man vs. Thor (WINNER!), Tigra vs. Doctor Druid (WINNER!) and so on. I imagine this was a fun exercise in who would beat who in a fight for the time, but it's so unnecessarily redundant, especially when the stakes aren't clearly defined.

Of course, all of the fighting was just a ruse for the Grandmaster to get Death involved, and because of this, he somehow wins the universe!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I'm a college graduate and I don't understand what I've just read.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

The Avengers die with dignity in the dugout!



5



Avengers Annual #16 (1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Tom DeFalco

Layouts: Bob Hall, John Romita Jr, Keith Pollard,
Marshall Rogers, Jackson Guice and Ron Frenz

Finishes: Tom Palmer, Bill Sienkiewicz, Al Williamson,
Bob Layton, Kevin Nowlan and Bob Wiacek

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's Part 2 of the *Dead Avengers in the Dugout Saga*. As the cover says, it's fifteen Avengers battling the Warriors of Death. Nuff said!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The Gamemaster has conquered Death herself thanks to the Avengers always thinking with their fists. And now he's created five Life Bombs that are scattered in various corners of the galaxy. When they go off, it's the end of everything with a new Big Bang. The Gamemaster, being the Gamemaster, creates a new game for the Avengers: this time, it's the Avengers versus the Legion of the Unliving (filled with famous dead Marvel characters!) in order to save life as we know it.

Right off the bat, thanks to DeFalco's exposition, the rules are clearly established and the stakes are laid out, something I don't think Englehart did a good job with in the previous annual. This issue's chapters are a lot like the other book, with random members of the Avengers transported to various locations and fighting against random members of the Legion of the Unliving. What makes the chapters particularly interesting is that each one is drawn by a different team of artists. So, for instance, with Chapter Two (Hawkeye/Thor/Doctor Pym!), you have the magic combination of John Romita Jr and Bill Sienkiewicz. Lovely stuff here.

Another surprise with this annual is how violent it is. Pym's death by impalement (by Nighthawk) is particularly shocking, as is the Wasp's death by the hand (yes, hand!) of Bucky.

That said, it all looks pretty hopeless until Hawkeye steps up with a game of chance that the Gamemaster can't possibly pass up (and, of course, Hawkeye cheats). Thanks to this, his distraction allows Death to free herself. She deals with the Gamemaster and then sends everyone back to life, back to reality, back to life, back to reality, back to life, back to reality, back to the here and now, yeah!

Sorry.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Some great dramatic moments brought to life by some amazing artists makes this annual spectacular.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Tigra, Tigra lost the fight
Despite She-Hulk's awesome might!





Silver Surfer #3 (September, 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Penciler: Marshall Rogers
Inker: Joe Rubinstein

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Silver Surfer comes to the Collector for answers only to discover that he's bummed out because his wife who died three million years ago from apathy has returned from the dead only to immediately die from apathy all over again. Stupid apathy! He meets up with Espirita, gives her a lift back to Earth, and then gets a severe beating from the Runner (not everyone's name can be a winner!).

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Well, this is fun. We're here because this issue ties in with both *West Coast Avengers Annual #2* and *Avengers Annual #16*.

This is another series I have fond memories of. I didn't remember that Englehart also wrote this title (he's certainly less loquacious here than he is with *West Coast*). I was a huge fan of Marshall Rogers (his Batman run back in the day is still a sight to behold), so I remember gravitating to the *Silver Surfer* because of his art. That said, Rogers' art here is a little muddier than I remember, which might be because of the inking and coloring. But there are some panels that are gorgeous (check out the final panel below for proof of that).

While there are a few plot strands at work here, I'm simply going to focus on Espirita's story in the book as it's an offshoot of the *West Coast Avengers*. When the Silver Surfer comes for the Collector for some answers,

he discovers Espirita has been trapped on his ship since the events from the annuals.

When the Silver Surfer gives her a lift back to Earth, she mentions that when he had first arrived on Earth many people believed he was the herald of the messiah. This leads to a brief conversation on god and the Force ("an energy that touches all of us"). Come on, like you wouldn't think the same thing!

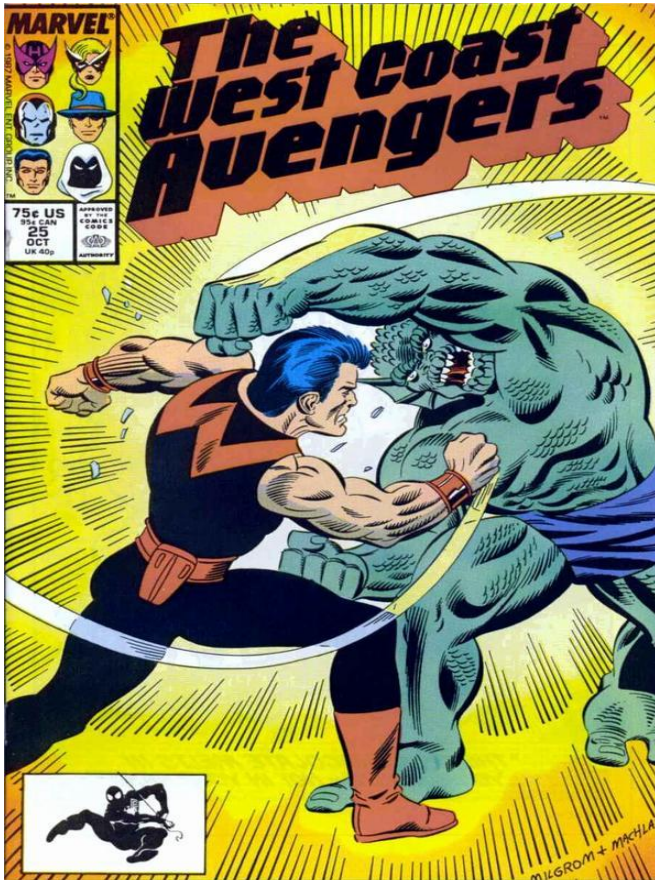
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. While it's not as lovely as I remember, this is a cool issue.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Preach it, Surfer!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 25 (October 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Pencils: Al Milgrom

Inks: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After spending a year traveling back, back, back in time in their regular series, and then dying in the summer annuals, the West Coast Avengers deserve a break. It's a return to business as usual for the team. And despite the appearance of the Abomination, this is a surprisingly low key issue.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

In many ways, this issue reminds me of those quiet baseball issues that Chris Claremont was so fond of doing with the X-Men on occasion, and maybe that's why I enjoyed reading this one so much.

Most of the issue is spent with Simon as his movie *Arkon IV* finally premieres in Hollywood. Simon remains his usual blowhard self as he wrestles with the decision on whether to remain an Avenger now that his movie career is taking off. And while the issue ends with him accepting his place with the team, the story's biggest reveal - thanks to a shoehorned appearance by the Abomination - is that Wonder Man may not be as indestructible as he thought.

I give Englehart a lot of crap for his overuse of exposition, but at least he's good at making everything that's ever happened in every Marvel comic book ever matter. Here, the events from the two annuals are not only referenced quite a bit, it appears that they will be relevant in the coming storyline, as the Collector's poison

that Wonder Man drank may have seriously affected him.

Hawkeye and Mockingbird spend the entire issue in a hot tub and sauna reconnecting after the big time travel storyline kept them apart. Mockingbird's secret is a big selling point now for the series, as she's struggling with the guilt for having to lie to her husband about letting the Phantom Rider fall to his death. This is the beginning of the wedge that will define their relationship for decades to come.

Tony Stark gets a small scene in to extend an olive branch to Simon in order to settle their feud, but Simon isn't home.

Pym gets in a scene with Espirita, confirming that even though he's back in the superhero game, he's still going to remain the team's bumbling, awkward idiot. He comes to her in order to tell her that he's not in love with her, which feels like something a high school student would write. And then awkwardly confesses that he's an atheist (see below). Despite that, I'm surprised to see such a confession in a kid's book from 1987. This scene takes place right after Espirita returns to Earth with the Silver Surfer, and it's clear that the events from the annual is pushing her character in a new direction.

Moon Knight makes an appearance to confirm his place on the team by meeting with Frenchy and telling him that, hey, it's not you, it's me. I just need some space to think things out a bit. I'll call, I promise. Hey, don't be

like that. Please. Don't make this harder than it needs to be, Christian. Could you keep it down? Your sobbing is making everyone look over here. Come on. Get off the floor. I...I should go now. Despite all this, it was a nice blind date.

By the way, where's Tigra? The box on the upper left of the cover suggests she's not on the team anymore. Did I miss something?

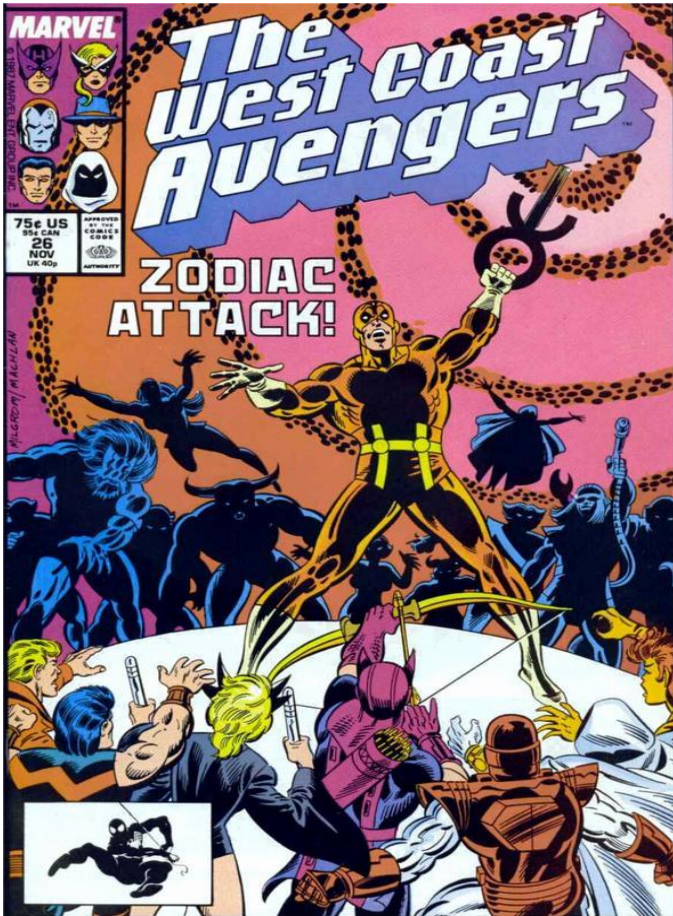
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast, because Englehart channels Claremont a bit. I feel like I should hate myself for acknowledging that.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Move over, Dawkins!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 26 (November 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Inks: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The evil Zodiac Cartel (last seen in *West Coast Avengers Annual #1*) convene to discuss a serious problem involving lots and lots of exposition and Life Model Decoys (LMDs). You see, the evil Zodiac Cartel (apparently not last seen in *West Coast Avengers Annual #1* after all) are being attacked from within and replaced by their LMDs to form an evil-evil Zodiac Cartel. The Human Taurus, the last survivor after being ambushed, comes to the *West Coast Avengers* for help in taking down the evil-evil Zodiac Cartel.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Part of my PhD work is looking at Grant Morrison's attempt to "wake up" fiction. Well, if comic books need to be "sufficiently complex" for it to become self-aware, the *West Coast Avengers* should have come to life a long, long time ago and taken over the planet. Englehart's stories are so needlessly complicated with continuity it's frightening. Plus his insistence on using exposition to the point of distraction and making every event - big or small - that happened in Marvel comics count (I know I praised him for this last week...uh...apparently I was drunk!) is becoming a serious problem for this book. The overuse of exposition and flashbacks is killing the story. Anytime it feels like the story is gaining momentum, someone decides to flashback the crap out of the reader. The first flashback takes place on the second panel of the second page, and the first page is a splash page!

If I'm understanding this issue right, the Zodiac Cartel meet because the West Coast Avengers recently fought their evil doppelgängers (LMDs), and since they've recently been freed from prison, they're concerned they may cause trouble for the real Cartel. But as this is being explained at the meeting, one of the members reveals himself to be the undead/alive LMD of Jake Fury (brother of Nick Fury). And the meeting turns out to be a trap as the evil-evil Zodiac Cartel attacks the evil Zodiac Cartel. The Human Taurus is the only one who escapes and he makes a run for the West Coast Avengers for help.

Taurus agrees to assist the team by promising to turn good once all of this is over. This is really Moon Knight's move, as he feels that "the moon's in Taurus -- and he and I both understand the power of the night sphere!" And if that makes any sense to you, then I encourage you to take a Moon Oath with Moon Knight sometime.

Oh, Tigra returns after being inexplicably absent last issue. It appears she was chasing squirrels in trees the whole time.

The evil-evil Zodiac Cartel come face-to-face with the West Coast Avengers while they're robbing a Breeder's Cattle Auction. Let that sink in for a minute. I mean, when's the last time the Avengers had to stop a robbery at a cattle auction? This is why the West Coast Avengers are so hardcore!

Hawkeye accidentally kills one of the members of the evil-evil Zodiac Cartel, and even though he knows it wasn't a real person, he's pretty torn up about it; which only makes Mockingbird's guilt for letting the Phantom Rider die worse.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Three words: Cattle Auction Robbery.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Scorpio isn't interested in having any Red Bull. He's high on life!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 27 (December 1987)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Evil-Evil Zodiac Cartel ambush Hawkeye and replace him with a look-alike android (or LMD) to infiltrate the team. Meanwhile Mockingbird contacts her old employer, Nick Fury, for some advice, which leads her to a startling confession.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!



The issue starts off with Hawkeye being ambushed by the Evil-Evil Zodiac Cartel (that is, they are the evil android clones of the evil Zodiac Cartel) as he's returning from seeing Wonder Man's movie for the 5th time...in costume ("The guy gets better every time I see it!"). After holding his own for quite a few pages, he's defeated by Scorpio with the help of the Zodiac Key, and then replaced by fake-Hawkeye (hereafter referred to as Fawkeye).

Fawkeye goes to the Avengers compound, and with the exception of passing up on a

message from Mockingbird he manages to go undetected.

My favorite scene is when Mockingbird contacts Nick Fury and interrupts him in the shower. I love how he has a large computer next to the shower with a video screen that apparently can come on at any time. It's like he's auditioning for a *Fury Gone Wild* TV show. Mockingbird asks him for some advice about lying to her husband, and he tells her to confess to Hawkeye once and for all. She takes the advice and immediately goes to confess. The problem is, she confesses to Fawkeye, who blows off the death of the Phantom Rider as if she accidentally overcooked dinner.

Mockingbird is annoyed that Fawkeye isn't making a big deal about her confession, so she punches him in the chest (as you do in marriage, I suppose). The punch makes a "clunk" sound, revealing Fawkeye to be an android! This leads to a big fight where Tigra and Mockingbird team up to rip Fawkeye apart limb from limb.

When Mockingbird goes to warn the team that they were infiltrated, we discover that Tigra is an android too.

[Cue dramatic music here!]

What else is worth mentioning? Well, Tigra makes out with Moon Knight ("Strange guy...but a new guy!" - apparently satisfying her one requirement to hook up with someone).

OH MY GOD! GUYS! It looks like Moon Knight might be the One!



WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. A cool cameo by a wet Nick Fury. And Mockingbird's emotional turmoil. Two ingredients to a successful issue.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

That is *funny*! Hawkeye never says no to a body massage!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 28 (January 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finishes: Dave Hunt

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team foils the Evil-evil Zodiac Cartel from robbing the Denver Mint which leads to a battle in Death Valley which leads to a battle to save Hawkeye and Tigra in the Realm of the Brotherhood. And all of this battling allows the Human Taurus to finally make his escape.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The West Coast Avengers foil the Evil-evil Zodiac Cartel's robbery at the Denver Mint. During the fight we learn that Scorpio is having a difficult time getting the Zodiac Key to do what he wants it to do. And though they escape, it's a close call.

Englehart uses this moment to allow Iron Man to dump some exposition on us about what the Zodiac Key is. Apparently, the key comes from the Realm of the Brotherhood where it thrived on conflict. Once the realm became too peaceful, the key was sent to our dimension because "this realm's got conflict to spare!"

Van Lunt, the Human Taurus, who has been pretending to be good in order to use the West Coast Avengers to clean up the Evil-evil Zodiac Cartel for him, tells the team that they're heading for Death Valley. We also learn in this scene that Moon Knight is able to use his knowledge of astrology to predict where the Evil-evil Zodiac Cartel will go next (a detail I suspect will be important later).

With both teams meeting face-to-face again for the last time, it's a brawl to end all brawls with lots of double crosses and betrayals (fake-Tigra finally reveals herself!) from both sides. Eventually, the Zodiac Key takes everyone away to its dimension, leaving the Human Taurus with an opportunity to make an escape.

Once in the Realm of the Brotherhood, the Evil-evil Zodiac Cartel instantly die as their "Zodiacal energy" doesn't exist in this dimension. The key, looking for a new conflict, directs the team to where Hawkeye and Tigra are fighting for their lives against the Brotherhood. But with the key now working with the Brotherhood, the fight becomes a stalemate because if the West Coast Avengers are defeated, the key has no conflict to thrive on.

The team is transported back to Earth by the Brotherhood with a stern warning that sooner or later, when they least expect it, the Zodiac Key will return. And just when it looks like this adventure is over, they discover that Van Lunt has escaped. And, boy, is Moon Knight pissed!

[Fade to black]

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I'm starting to hate myself for doing this every week.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Moon Knight and Iron Man have difficulty understanding Henry Miller's classic books.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 29 (February 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart
Layouts: Al Milgrom
Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Having escaped from the West Coast Avengers, the Human Taurus looks to create a new Zodiac Cartel, starting with the Shroud. But the Moon Knight is hot on his trail for breaking his Oath to the Moon. That's right! He broke the Oath to the Moon! This is fucking serious!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue is pretty much one long chase scene with the Moon Knight versus Taurus.

The issue starts off with Taurus meeting with the Shroud as he wants to rebuild the Zodiac Cartel. The Shroud can keep doing what he's doing in Los Angeles, and all he's got to do is change his name to Pisces. Luckily for the four Shroud fans out there, he likes his name just the way it is. At the end of the second page, Moon Knight appears and kicks off the issue's epic chase.

Devoting an entire issue to Moon Knight was a smart choice for Englehart because this gives us a chance to figure out just who this guy is and what his place is on the team. To be honest, I've never been able to wrap my head around Moon Knight as a character, and I'm confident I'm not alone on this, which is probably why he's never managed to carry his own book for too long (I have high hopes for Brian Michael Bendis' interpretation of the character!).

That said, considering that Englehart is the Master of Exposition, I'm surprised how he lets the action tell us who Moon Knight is rather than interrupting every page with an unnecessary flashback. In fact, the amount of restraint on display here is pretty shocking. I even had to double-check if Englehart actually wrote the issue.

The team appears in the middle of the issue when Shroud contacts them to let them know what Moon Knight is up to. Hawkeye is annoyed that Moon Knight is approaching this solo rather than with the team. By the time they catch up with him at the end of the issue, the chase has come to an end with Taurus trapped in a plane that's about to crash and Moon Knight needing to be rescued by Iron Man.

Moon Knight is immediately put on probationary status for not only failing to work with the team, but for "looking like" he was trying to kill Taurus. But this last part divides the team as Moon Knight, Mockingbird and Tigra believe that times have changed and that killing might be necessary in this "crueler world", while Pym, Hawkeye and Iron Man believe in the original ideals founded by the Avengers.

The issue ends with Moon Knight wondering why Mockingbird would be on his side with the final panel revealing the Phantom Rider standing on a mountainside watching the quinjet fly by.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. This might be the best issue of the entire run so far. A huge leap forward.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

This is not the God Squad, people!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 30 (March 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Al Milgrom

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After visiting the Vision, Scarlet Witch and their twins in New Jersey, Wonder Man is kidnapped by the Sligs, an alien race ready to conquer Earth. When the team arrives to help, they're each put to the test against the Examiner.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

First off, it should be noted that Englehart is not writing this issue. And it's none other than Milgrom himself who rises to the challenge to bring us our monthly dose of *West Coast Avengers*. He does a good job here with a couple of missteps, the biggest of which is revealing the issue's money shot on the cover.

The issue opens up with Wonder Man sitting on the couch with his nephews (by the way, they are just about the creepiest things I've ever seen) and reading them "The Blind Men and the Elephant" as Vision and the Scarlet Witch watch from afar. Luckily for us, we get to read the whole story with Simon, which means that this parable will be important later in the story (this is the comic book equivalent to the professor lecturing students on information that will be completely relevant later).

While this is an awkward way to start the issue, having all of these characters together again in the book is a nice way of acknowledging how the series got started way back when, and a good reason to check in with Wanda and the family.

Simon leaves New Jersey on the quinjet, showing us that while he can fly, he has no problem wasting fuel like the rest of us. On his way back to California, he's ambushed by robots and eventually captured.

As it turns out, he's been taken by the Sligs, an alien race looking to conquer Earth. Their angle is an interesting one, as it's common knowledge throughout the galaxy that Earth is protected by the Avengers and have taken down larger races like the Skrulls and the Kree, the Sligs hope to establish their reputation by doing what others couldn't and get a "propaganda boost."

Once the rest of the team arrives to save Simon, they're all thrown to a different dimension where they come face-to-face with the Examiner, who fights each member individually. His gimmick is also interesting, as the Examiner is destroyed after each fight, gets reassembled, and retains the knowledge of his opponents' strengths and weaknesses.

After everyone gets a shot at the Examiner, they're returned to their own dimension to gloat about defeating the Sligs. The Sligs manage to send the Examiner's data to their home planet before their ship explodes. For a team that is gung-ho about no killing, I'm surprised at how nonchalant they are about the Sligs' ship blowing up.

The information the Sligs get about the Avengers shows up as the "Composite Avenger" - just as the cover reveals. The Sligs are so shocked by this information,

they immediately call off their invasion. Simon surmises that the information the Sligs get will be distorted, just like the blind men with the elephant, even though he has no way of knowing one way or another. And in case you don't get that all of this is connected to "The Blind Men and the Elephant", Simon finishes the story with "But I'm just taking a shot in the dark here -- feeling my way **blindly**, as it were!"

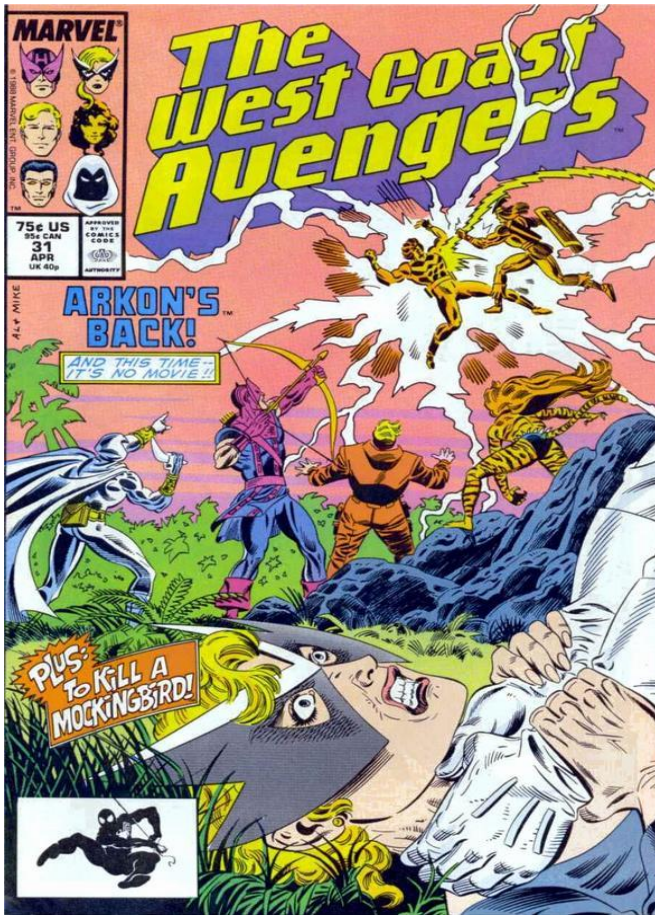
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast and Boast. Whereas the previous issue was a good primer for Moon Knight, this one does the same for the whole team. That said, some of Milgrom's writing tricks would've been shot down by the kid wearing the turtleneck sweater in every creative writing class in America. Enjoy your clove cigarettes while you can, Milgrom, because Englehart comes back next issue.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

If you defeat me, you must fight the Enquirer and the Globe.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 31 (April 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Arkon arrives to take down Wonder Man for having the audacity to be the villain in a movie based on Arkon's life. And while the team is distracted with that fight, Mockingbird is in the fight of her life against the Phantom Rider who's got only revenge on his mind.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The issue kicks off with the current Phantom Rider and Texas Twister (not seen since issue #8) inadvertently bringing Arkon, ruler of the extra-dimensional world of Polemachus, into our dimension. I'm noticing that a lot of the storylines in this book hinge on dimension hopping, from Zodiac Keys to the Sligs. Anyway, while Phantom Rider 1987 is 5 generations removed from Phantom Rider 1876, it appears his spirit is the same one that Mockingbird let die way back in the "West Coast Avengers Epic that Would Not End!" By summoning Arkon, Phantom Rider sees an opportunity to exact his revenge.

Moon Knight and Tigra get some make out time on the compound, but they're interrupted by a grumpy Iron Man who needs some alone time to think things through. Why he needs this exact spot is a mystery. Perhaps it's Tony's favorite thinking spot. Hawkeye comes to the rescue to see what the deal is with Iron Man being all grumpy and the conversation is poorly resolved in this week's "Scene of the Week" (below).

We find out later thanks to an emergency call from the Avengers that Iron Man had recently beat up Captain America (see Iron Man #228 - I won't be covering it here as it's not directly related to WCA) and that's why he's acting all dodgy. Hawkeye reminds everyone that Iron Man did ask him to trust him - twice! And when you put it that way, it's hard to argue.

But before they can do anything about Iron Man, Arkon shows up to take down Wonder Man. Apparently, it's "against the Polemachan code to create an image of the Imperion" and because Simon played a villain in Arkon IV (during the fight, Arkon is surprised to learn that there have been four parts!), he needs a good ass whooping.

While Simon and Arkon are going at it, Mockingbird sees the Phantom Rider, freaks out, and then abandons everyone to deal with it. Naturally, they fight (a lot of the moves mimicking the events from issue #23) until it's Mockingbird hanging off the edge of a cliff with Phantom Rider standing over her. But he doesn't let her die, as he feels she hasn't suffered enough as it is. He says "Happy trails, Barbara!" (not a joke) and rides off.

The fight with Arkon ends when Simon agrees to talk to the studio to not make anymore Arkon movies. Arkon, impressed by Wonder Man's honor, agrees and disappears back to his dimension.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. While I like where the Mockingbird storyline is going, the way Englehart uses meaningless fights to take up the page count (Arkon, really?) is a little distracting. But then again, that's American mainstream comics for you.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

"Let me break it down so you can't argue with me, Clint. Trust me. *Trust me.* Trust me. Trust me. Trust. Me."





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 32 (May 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Tony DeZuniga

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Wasp shows up to help the team out just when Mockingbird proposes the team take a break and go hiking in the Grand Canyons. But the team doesn't know that the whole thing is a set up for Mockingbird to confront the only living relative of the Phantom Rider.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The issue starts off with Wasp entering the West Coast Avengers compound and deactivating all of its defenses. While this might be a dramatic way to start the issue off, you have to wonder why she didn't just let the team know she was stopping by.

Janet is in town to see the team because she feels they're feeling pretty down for having to let Iron Man go last issue. But little does she know that the team is perfectly capable of feeling down about themselves with or without old shellhead. Her appearance also adds more soap opera to a series that's already overflowing with soap, as Tigra gets catty with Janet (see below), Simon reminds every one what a douche he is ("I figured [Iron Man would] always be here! He was the one I measured myself against--and if I decided after a while that I'd surpassed him, I still figured we'd test that out someday!"), and Pym puts his foot in his mouth without ever realizing it...



Wow. Am I the person who introduced that panel to the internets? If so, have I peaked? Will the rest of my life be downhill?

Mockingbird suggests that the team go hiking in the Grand Canyon. And so the team is off. On the way, we get to see Moon Knight get all jealous over Wonder Man's flirting with Tigra. The trip wasn't meant for the team, however, as Bobbi uses the opportunity to find the last living relative of the Phantom Rider. Now, she could've gone on this trip alone, mind you. Or she could've suggested a little alone time to go hiking off on her own. But that would be too simple for the woman who solves her marriage problems by punching her husband.

So when she reaches a specific point, Mockingbird casually drops some sticks of dynamite off a cliff where

Vetrigar, a gigantic mutated pre-humanoid, happens to be, I don't know, resting. He starts attacking everyone and Mockingbird uses this to make a quick escape. Moon Knight, however, sees this and decides to follow her.

Mockingbird finds Hamilton Slade, the great-great grandson of the Phantom Rider and professor of archaeology at the University of Nevada, at a camp on the other side of the mountain. Once she finds him, she proceeds to beat the living crap out of him, even though he insists he has no idea what she's talking about. And if it wasn't for Moon Knight, it's possible she would've killed him.

Hamilton's beating is pretty excessive and highlights a lot of the problems the book has regarding its attitude towards violence. That said, Englehart *almost* makes it work at the last minute when it's discovered that it wasn't a case of mistaken identity, that Hamilton was in fact the Phantom Rider. The problem is that Hamilton doesn't know it and he's suffering from blackouts when the Phantom Rider takes possession of him. So despite the twist that justifies Mockingbird's actions, she's still in the wrong because Hamilton is still innocent.

Moon Knight eventually covers for her, and Mockingbird tells Hawkeye that Moon Knight help free her when a boulder pinned her leg down. Upon hearing this, Hawkeye wants to make Moon Knight a full-fledged Avenger. The issue ends with Wasp noticing that something is amiss in Hawkeye's marriage.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Another miss. Wasp adds a new dynamic for the team, sure, but we haven't dealt with all the dynamics the team already had. Plus, the book is riddled with heroes making one ridiculously stupid choice after another. That's starting to get old.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

And do you expect the Wasp to do anything except sting, Hank?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 33 (June 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Just as the Moon Knight is to be inducted into the West Coast Avengers, Hank Pym comes crashing in with news that his first wife - long believed dead - may be alive. The team goes to Hungary and immediately get arrested. Pym and Janet are the only ones to escape, and it's up to them to save the team and solve the mystery once and for all.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue is so intense we're given two splash pages in the first three pages.

Things kick off with Moon Knight finally joining the team, but then Hank comes barging in all dramatic-like. Apparently Hank was "having fun -- hacking, on the computer!" when he discovered that his deceased first wife, Maria Trovaya, was no longer deceased.



Now, I don't know if this is new info about Hank or not, as I'm not a licensed Pymologist. I had no idea he was married before Janet. I always assumed he wore a white lab coat when he walked down the aisle with Janet.

We're given some flashbacks (and to Milgrom and Machlan's credit, they sell the Silver Age look with the art) where Hank meets Maria, falls in love and marries. For their honeymoon, they return to Hungary, where Maria and her father were once prisoners before they were forced to flee. Hank questions Maria about whether this is a good idea, but naturally he doesn't share his concerns until AFTER THEY'RE IN HUNGARY! Seconds after expressing his doubts, Maria is kidnapped and Hank is knocked out by thugs.

Hank gets a note saying that Maria has been killed, which makes Hank go all Liam Neeson on Hungary until he's eventually sent back to America. Once he's returned home, driven by the anger of losing his wife, he creates the gas that allows him to grow and shrink and become the Ant-Man!

And now he knows Maria is alive. So they make Moon Knight an avenger and off the team goes to Hungary.

While traveling by quinjet, Tigra uses the opportunity to hook up with Moon Knight. And readers are given a few more pages of flashbacks, this time detailing some of the early history between Janet and Hank, how she became the Wasp, and how they fell in love.

Once the team lands in Hungary, no sooner are they off the jet and they're under arrest (see below!). The team naturally resists and there's our big mandatory fight for the issue. Everyone except Hank and Janet manage to escape. So now it's up to our favorite divorced couple to save the team and unravel the mystery of Maria's death once and for all.

Following a lead to a prison, Janet and Hank break in and open up a state-of-the-art vault to reveal...Vision and Scarlet Witch!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Don't know why I liked this issue to be honest. All of the exposition and abundant flashbacks are here, but it's all fun. And big points for having the most accurate depiction of Budapest I've ever seen in comic books, talking apes and all!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Even Hungarians don't believe these guys are Avengers!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 34 (July 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hawkeye, Tigra and Wonder Man are released thanks to the American Embassy. Meanwhile Mockingbird and Moon Knight hook up with Hank, Janet, Vision and Scarlet Witch in a Hungarian prison. But there's more than meets the eye here as not only does Quicksilver appear, but the Phantom Rider himself.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Mockingbird and Moon Knight are considered criminals in Hungary because of their espionage ways, but the rest of the team are released. Hawkeye, Tigra and Wonder Man don't want their freedom. In fact, they don't want to play around. They don't want nobody, baby, part time love just brings them down. To show how much Hawkeye doesn't want their freedom, he grabs the nearest flag of Hungary and uses it to beat the crap out of the bad guys. He even goes so far as to turn the flag into a makeshift bow and arrow. And just when things look bad for our three heroes, the United States ambassador shows up and takes them away.

Once everyone is safe and sound at the embassy, they discover that their teammates are no where to be found. However, the Phantom Rider is there to offer his help. Apparently, he's got business in Budapest!

Moon Knight and Mockingbird are thrown into a cell with none other than Hank, Janet, Vision and Scarlet Witch. The cell is equipped with rays that disrupt

everyone's powers. And just when things get interesting, Vision decides to flashback to his origin for the sake of Moon Knight, even though anyone who's been reading this book knows this information already.

Suddenly Quicksilver appears! Apparently it was him who established this deliberate trap to bring everyone to Hungary. You see, he wants to become the King of the Evil Mutants. And he needs all those who pose a threat to him to be off the board. I think (let's be honest, if the West Coast Avengers are the ones in your way, you were never meant to be King of the Evil Mutants). He really just appears to gloat, reveal his plan, and then leave the team to escape.

Scarlet Witch has a brief moment of doubt about herself. If her brother can go mad, what about her? Luckily Vision is equipped with a thousand different pep talks and he uses one to defuse the situation (see below!). However, Mockingbird, upon hearing this, breaks down and confesses her big secret about Phantom Rider to everyone. Luckily everyone is supportive and lets her know that surely Hawkeye will see it the same way they do.

The Phantom Rider, in spirit form, hears the whole thing and returns to Hawkeye and the rest and tells them Mockingbird's big secret - only from his point of view, naturally. It's interesting that Englehart, a writer who has a knack of connecting dots and bringing things together pretty naturally when it comes down to it, decided to have all of this go down with the character in

Hungary. This is a secret that's been a long time coming and I'm surprised Englehart made the choice to take care of it here. Because it makes no sense that the Phantom Rider is in Budapest outside of the fact that the writer needed him there. If I had to guess, I'd say he moved this forward because of editorial.

By the time everyone is reunited, Simon, Tigra and Hawkeye are giving Mockingbird the cold shoulder. They're so disgusted with her that they can't help but verbally attack her while they're all being attacked by giant bugs ("Murderess!" shouts Wonder Man).

In the end, they all pile into the quinjet and make a break for it. Unfortunately, a missile hits the jet and sends them crashing down in...*Latveria* (who knew it neighbored Hungary? Guess where I'm going this summer?).

Does this mean after years of talking apes, disgruntled brothers, possessed C-listers, and clones that the West Coast Avengers is finally going to fight an A-level bad guy? We'll find out next week.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Again, I'm stuck not knowing why I'm enjoying this particular adventure.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

You're too strong to go mad, Wanda.

When the team is wrong, boy, they're **WRONG!**





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 35 (August 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Shot down by Hungary, the team crash lands in Latveria. Doctor Doom has kidnapped the team and wants them to be his allies for his war against his impostor. But this is Doom we're talking about, so his attempt to win the team over involves captivity and torture. He might've gotten away with it too, if not for that pesky Quicksilver who still has a beef against the team.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

I mentioned last week that after years of talking apes, disgruntled brothers, possessed C-listers, and clones that it looked like the West Coast Avengers were finally going to take on an A-level bad guy for once. And it looks like I spoke too soon. Unfortunately, this isn't Doctor Doom. Instead, this is a nine year old boy named Kristoff who believes himself to be Doctor Doom. Or maybe it's Doctor Doom trapped in the body of a nine year old? Actually, it doesn't matter - and it's certainly not going to be resolved in this series.

The issue starts off with Mockingbird and Hawkeye waking up with a nine year old Doctor Doom watching (see below). That's not creepy at all! Doom unloads the typical Englehart exposition which lets readers know that they should have read all their *Daredevil* comic books and they also should be collecting the current run of *Fantastic Four* (luckily for me, I was!). Anyway, Doom wants the team to join him in his battle against his maybe-impostor. While Doom reveals a lot of unsettling

details, Hawkeye responds with the most important observation of all: "I want to know why we're in such a fancy room!" That's why he's the leader, folks.

The rest of the team is in a dungeon and unable to use their powers. He also separates Moon Knight and Tigra in a "special chamber" in order to test their strengths and weaknesses, as he's never encountered them before. He threatens to study them "every way imaginable!" From the four panels shown, these tests include: 1) firing nine missiles at Tigra all at the same time; 2) shooting Tigra with endless strips of paper; 3) attacking Moon Knight with a stolen arm from Dr. Octopus; and 4) fighting Moon Knight with machines made of cardboard.

This is hardcore science, people.

While all of this is going down, Hawkeye and Mockingbird finally (FINALLY!) deal with the Phantom Rider's death. I'll paraphrase the conversation:

Hawkeye: You let him die.

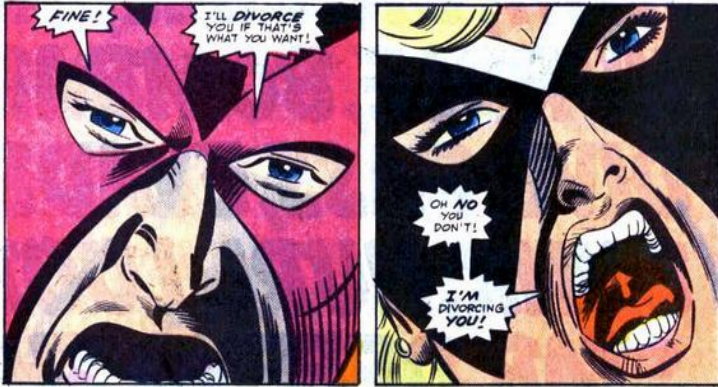
Mockingbird: Because he drugged and raped me.

Hawkeye: That's not what he said.

Mockingbird: You believe him over me?

Hawkeye: Yes.

And then it all ends with two of the most thought provoking and mature panels about divorce that I've ever read in a comic book.



The team ends up getting rescued by, of all people, the taker of vengeance, Khonshu. He appears to challenge Doom because he doesn't like the tests he's subjecting Moon Knight to. Doom gets all in his face, but backs down because Khonshu is the first person to actually address him as Doom and not an impostor.

Quicksilver appears later...because, why not.

Doom is just about to kill him when the team appears and saves the day. Quicksilver runs away. And Doom gives the team a ship to go back home. But they decide to go to Hungary instead. If you don't understand any of the motivation behind the sentences I've just typed, then you know how I feel having read the issue itself.

The issue ends with Doom watching the team walk away and making the following observation: "Why do Hawkeye and Mockingbird walk so far apart?"

Because Doom notices shit like that!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. It wasn't Doom. Or maybe it was. Instead of an epic fight with Doctor Doom, all it took was an Egyptian God to say, "Hey, baby, I respect you." Conflict resolved!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

I AM DOCTOR DOOM! I want to sleep with Hawkeye for a million dollars. I'm not kidding. A million dollars. The night would come and go but the money could last a lifetime. Think of it. A million dollars. A lifetime of security... for one night. Don't answer right away. **JUST CONSIDER IT! FOR I AM DOCTOR DOOM!**





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 36
(September 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After a break in Latveria with Doctor Doom, the team returns to Hungary to find out the truth behind Pym's first wife. Is she dead or alive? And more importantly, why is the team trying to kill Pym?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The issue kicks off with the team breaking into the Bratislava prison and everyone's in full exposition mode to help readers who blacked out while reading the previous issue. When they turn a corner, they come face to face with Quicksilver and the Voice, an old villain Pym fought years ago (*Tales to Astonish* #42) and not to be confused with the hit NBC show airing every week (check local listings for - WAIT A MINUTE!). The Voice has the ability to make everyone do as he says with his, yes, you guess it, voice!

Quicksilver's plan to take down the team, as he explained in the last two issues, is undermined in less than a page as the Voice takes over. This is Quicksilver's second attempt to destroy the team in two years and it's amazing that his plans are ruined before he even starts. He is truly a terrible villain under Englehart's watchful eye.

The Voice gives Pym a five minute head start to run and hide and then he's sending the team (under his control) to kill him. Imagine "The Most Dangerous Game" crossed with the West Coast Avengers and you know how the next few pages turn out. Pym takes out each member

one at a time starting with Hawkeye. Interestingly enough, he's particularly brutal with the women as he crushed the Scarlet Witch with an over-sized camera (yeah, it's dumb on the page too) and breaks Mockingbird's arm.

The issue's big shocker is that Pym's first wife Maria is alive. She's been hooked up to a machine to support her truck-sized brain that was expanded during scientific tests. She is doped up and can only communicate through a computer monitor. She gives Pym a big dose of exposition and then asks him to kill her. Pym naturally refuses and insists that he'll find a cure. It turns out that Maria can control people with her mind, so she undoes the Voice's control of the team and takes care of all the bad guys.

The issue ends with Pym leaving the team to take care of his wife. He also announces that he's Ant Man again! Janet and Hank have an awkward conversation where she acknowledges that since Maria was always alive, they were technically never married. Hank says, "That means we were never really divorced, either. Maybe the ~~time-I beat you~~ bad times don't have to count anymore."

It's amazing that any Gen-Xer who grew up reading this stuff can sustain a healthy relationship today.

The issue ends with this week's West Coast Scene (of the Week)!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm okay with this issue. Feels like Englehart is wrapping some things up as there are big changes for the team coming down the line.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Way to ruin the moment, Mockingbird!





West Coast Avengers Annual #3 (1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Gary Talaoc and Chris Ivy

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The High Evolutionary is getting ready to detonate a bomb that will make everyone on the planet mutate...you know, in order to save humanity! Now it's up to the West Coast Avengers and the...West Coast Avengers to save the day. Plus, ~~not one but two black superheroes~~ Black Panther and Giant Man!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

I have specific memories of getting this issue in the summer of 1988. I used to mow lawns for \$8 in the neighborhood. And as soon as I collected the weekly pay \$16-\$24 (depending on the week), I would ride my bike to the comic book store. I was really excited about *The Evolutionary War* which ran in all the Marvel annuals that year. I can remember the Saturday afternoon on the living room floor with my stack of comic books, savoring every issue, and *West Coast Avengers Annual #3* was at the bottom of the pile (I always saved the best for last!).

And here we are 23 years later and I have no idea why anyone in their right mind would be excited about this storyline. This issue reads well and it makes sense, but I think that's because I've been reading so much Englehart over the last year that I'm now able to relate to nonsensical ideas.

For the record, it takes nine pages for the team to finally show up in their own annual, and when they do, they're different thanks to the events from *West Coast*

Avengers #37, as Vision and Scarlet Witch have joined up, as well as Mantis. Speaking of Mantis, she doesn't say a single word in this story, even though Milgrom is



clearly drawing her speaking. What's up with that?

This is a two-part story with the first one focusing on Hawkeye, Wonder Man, Mantis, Vision and Scarlet Witch in Wakanda. This is standard stuff for a WCA annual, with the team discovering a problem, fighting a group of themed-villains (The Sensors...Sight! Smell! Touch! Sound! Taste! and Intuition!), and then falling short of victory so that the story can continue someplace else.

The second story is about Mockingbird, Moon Knight and Tigra in the Savage Land. This part feels a little more hands on to the bigger story running in the monthly book. Plus, it's the return of Dr William Foster as GIANT MAN!

I have to give Englehart credit for breaking the story into two parts, with each one focusing on a different team. He even ends each story at the same moment (using the same panel), something he wouldn't do in the monthly book, and here it feels special.

The issue ends with a bunch of pin-ups of each member of the team (the Hawkeye one is below) which string together to loosely tell a story. While it's essentially fluff, it's a cool little addition to the annual. That said, some of those pin-ups are little creepy.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Englehart playing around with the story's chronology helps to make this annual a winner.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

This pin-up offers a rare behind-the-scenes look at Hawkeye. And it's depressing!

Nothing says healthy like shooting an arrow in the upside-down picture of your ex-wife in your office.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 37 (October 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Layouts: Al Milgrom

Finished art: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Shout. Pep talk. Shout. Bitching. Fight. Exposition. End.

Help me.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The issue starts off in the middle of another blow up between Hawkeye and Mockingbird. There's a lot of yelling here, but at least they're not physically attacking one another as in previous issues. For Hawkeye, he has beef both as a husband ("You lied about it to my face!") and team leader ("I don't condone death as any answer for anything!"). And Mockingbird feels like she's been dragged into the team and forced to be someone she's not. After a brief time out where the men give Hawkeye a pep talk on marriage (even Vision gets in on the action) and the women give their support to Mockingbird, Bobbi quits the team. Her decision to leave is made worse when Tigra and Moon Knight, both with their own views on killing, step forward and quit too.

Mantis shows up and brings with her the issue's mandatory fight. Because of her alien martial arts, she's able to give the team a run for their money (but really, at this point Webster could show up and give the team a decent challenge) as she takes out each member one by one. Thanks to Hawkeye's quick thinking, he flees the scene and finds the Voice (one of the bad guys from their

previous Hungarian Adventure) hiding in the woods. Of course, Mantis was under his control.

As it turns out, Mantis has lost her memory and needs the Avengers to help her figure what's she been doing for the last year. She went to the Avengers in New York first, but discovered that they were no longer there. Thankfully, a police man guarding the Avengers mansion was possessed by Englehart Exposition and was able to give her way too much information, thus sending her to California to join up with that other team. Hawkeye immediately accepts the mission, no questions asked.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. This one just doesn't work. The fight seemed like it was shoehorned into a story that clearly deserved a lot more emotion. It's amazing how a book known for being a soap opera pulls back when it finally has emotional material worth mining.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

If you or someone you love suffers from Englehart Exposition, please get help.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 38 (November 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: D.G. Chichester and Margaret Clark

Penciler: Tom Morgan

Inker: Dave Hunt

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

While the new team flies off to solve the mystery of Mantis' amnesia, Wonder Man reflects on the old days with the original members of the team and how awesome ~~last week~~ those times were - like the time they fought a heavy metal singer from another dimension. How awesome was that?!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue is a big deal. This is the first issue of the monthly series not written by Steve Englehart. While I know Al Milgrom wrote issue #30, I still consider him to be one of the Founding Fathers of this book and you don't feel Englehart's loss when Milgrom steps up. And speaking of Milgrom, he's no where to be found either. Tom Morgan is the artist this time around and his art is simultaneously a step forward and a step back, as it moves the book to a more modern art style, but Morgan stumbles when it comes to telling a clear story. Also, there's a disconnect with the art from the first and last pages and the rest of the book, making me think that there's an artist that went uncredited here. What makes it even more frustrating is that it looks really familiar (anyone know?).

All that said, it's clear this is an inventory story with a prologue and epilogue added in to make it feel like it belongs in the series. And it's pretty awful.

Like, I-miss-Englehart-so-much-it-hurts-awful!

What is this one about? Well, after a quick shot of the new team posing uncomfortably in the quinjet, Wonder Man goes into maximum flashback mode to show readers an adventure with the old team that was never meant to be seen. How bad is it? Well, the bad guy is the Defiler, the lead singer of a heavy metal band called Corruption of Innocence, who happens to be from another dimension. He opens up gateways to his dimension that sucks in his audience enabling the Defiler to use their energy to become crazy strong.

This issue feels like an editor gave the writer a list of things considered "cool" and to somehow incorporate it into the story to make the WCA hip. There is a large emphasis on heavy metal, particularly the "hardcore scene". The point of view character (mostly) is a cool teenager named Mike who ends up saving the day. And Pym's big rescue moment happens thanks to his giant skateboard. After over 40 issues of old school Avengers thrills and excitement (if you can call it that), this story feels more jarring than reassuring.

There's not a lot else to say about this issue. It's awful at pretty much every level.

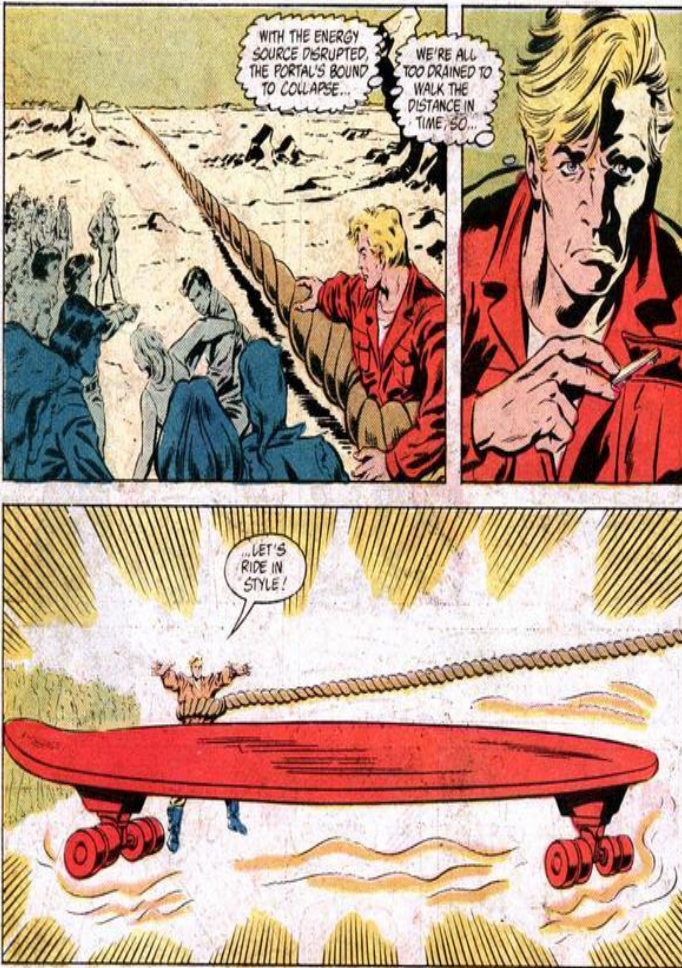
Shame on you, fill-in issue! SHAME!

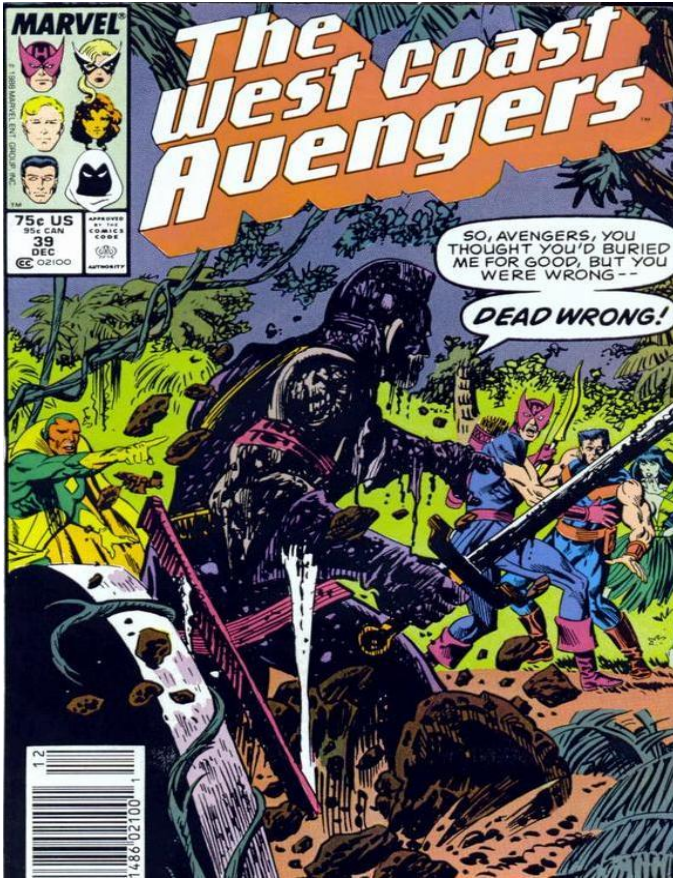
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. This one is awful. This might be the series' low point. Luckily for Englehart, he's no where to be seen.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

OMG! HANK PYM IS SO COOL!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 39 (December 1988)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Steve Englehart

Penciler: Al Milgrom

Inker: Parker

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After a few detours, the team is on the hunt to solve the mystery behind Mantis' amnesia. The case takes them around the world from New Jersey to the temple in Vietnam where Mantis grew up. Once there, the answer is finally revealed. But what does the reanimated Swordsman have to do with it?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This issue continues from both the previous issue and the annual, and it kicks off with the Quinjet going out of control and threatening the lives of everyone on board. The pilot is Hawkeye, and he awkwardly confesses to everyone that he lost control of the jet while he was talking to the East coast crew and they mentioned his ex-wife's name. You'd think that this would be a problem that the team should probably deal with considering that 1) their leader has unresolved marital issues that he needs to sort out, and 2) these said issues are putting the team in harm's way; but all of this pushed to the side so that Vision and Scarlet Witch can go check on their children in New Jersey.

The best part about the Hawkeye and Mockingbird split is how it completely screws the East coast team. Hawkeye tells the Avengers they're on their way to help fight the High Evolutionary, but once he learns that Mockingbird is going to help too, he decides not to go. Naturally, he doesn't contact the team to tell them this. Mockingbird, on the other hand, thinks that since she

contacted the Avengers to let them know about the threat of the High Evolutionary, they'll be calling the WCA to join them and so she doesn't want to help the Avengers. This means that the Avengers are now stuck fighting the High Evolutionary while waiting for two teams to back them up that'll never show. Astounding!

Anyway, we check in on Mockingbird and her crew at Newark airport fresh from their adventure in the annual. Giant Man has tagged along for the ride. Speaking of Bill Foster, he exits stage left in order to find Hank Pym and maybe help him cure his recently discovered not-dead first wife. Once he's out of the picture, the Phantom Rider inexplicably appears to torment Mockingbird. He takes down everyone, and it's up to Khonshu to save the day. The Phantom Rider rides off at the sight of the Egyptian god chasing him, and so this story will continue another day.

After stopping off to check on Vision and Scarlet's Witch's kids, the team goes to Mantis' home to find some clues. The only thing they do learn is that she's been sucked into a scam with Columbia House and is being sent CDs she didn't order every other week. I mean, the advertisement clearly said I'll get 10 free CDs and all I have to do is order 2 more whenever I wanted. And now I'm being sent all of these albums I don't want every. fucking. week! What the fuck, Columbia House!?! Why are you doing this to me? I'm only 15 years old!

Ahem. Sorry about that.

The team ends up in Vietnam at a temple where Mantis grew up. There they find the grave of Swordsman, an Avenger who died in the line of duty back in the day. After he died, the Cotati, an alien tree creature, reanimated Swordsman's body and used it to, as Wonder Man says: "get it on with a living human woman." Naturally, the Swordsman rises from the grave again and fights everyone until he stabs Mantis with his sword (not a euphemism) to reveal that Mantis isn't human, but another alien tree creature. Once dead, the real Mantis crawls out of Swordsman's grave and unloads the mother of all Englehart exposition flashbacks.

Sigh.

The fundamental flaw with this issue is that Englehart is clearly wrapping up the storyline for Mantis (one that's been hopping to other Marvel books at the time, such as *Silver Surfer*). The problem with that is no one cares. Mantis' presence in the WCA has been peripheral at best and to waste so many pages on her story in this book feels gratuitous.

Interestingly enough, as this issue marks the first anniversary of *West Coast Wednesdays*, this appears to be Steve Englehart's last issue on the title.

I know I've given you a lot of grief over the last year, Englehart, but you'll be missed.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. What a mess! Not as bad as the last issue, but this one highlights most of the problems Englehart brings to the book. That said, I'm wondering if he got to wrap up his run on the book in the way he wanted to. I'm willing to bet, no.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

The West Coast Avengers will consider anyone to be a member!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 40 (January 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Mark Gruenwald

Penciler: Al Milgrom

Inker: Al Milgrom

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After Mockingbird captures a Frankenstein-like character called the Digger, the Night Shift seeks revenge by attacking the West Coast Avengers at their compound. Meanwhile, Mockingbird and her crew break into the Night Shift's lair.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

With Steve Englehart out of the picture, it's none other than Mark Gruenwald at the plate. With Gruenwald on board, you know right away that he's simply filling in, as he was one of Marvel's most dependable fill-in writers back in the day. This isn't meant to slight his efforts here, because all things considered, this is a pretty good issue that not only moves along the drama that's been building in this series for the last year, but also connects a dot that's all the way back in the first issue of the original mini-series. In other words, this is the exact opposite of the inventory story from issue #38, which I'm still recovering from.

The issue kicks off with Mockingbird leaping from a building to confront Digger. This Frankenstein-like character is first seen burying people to their necks in the middle of the road in downtown L.A. with concrete. No, I don't think you understand me right. He's using a shovel, scooping up concrete, and burying them up to their necks. Now this isn't chunks of broken concrete, but rather magical dirt-like concrete that packs around

the victims like dirt would. This makes me wonder if Al Milgrom, our faithful WCA artist, has ever been outside.



She stops Digger by taking away his shovel (seriously, he's really upset when she knocks his shovel out of his hand!) and takes him to the police station.

Digger, however, is a part of the Night Shift, a group of monster-themed crime fighters, who are lead by none other than the Shroud. When word gets out that Mockingbird got Digger arrested, the Night Shift want revenge and decide to attack the West Coast Avengers, not knowing that she's no longer a member of the team.

The Night Shift arrive at the West Coast Avengers compound in two large hearses and immediately attack the bungalow where the servants live, kidnapping Yolanda, the scantily clad member of the maintenance staff.

Mockingbird, Tigra and Moon Knight decide to attack the Night Shift's headquarters only to find it empty. Luckily for them, the Night Shift was nice enough to leave a note for the Shroud letting him (and them!) know that they were going to see the West Coast Avengers.



Mockingbird being Mockingbird, she decides not to warn the team, making this the second time she's put Avengers in danger because of her pride.

The rest of the pages are filled with your obligatory fight scenes where Hawkeye and Vision are outmatched by the Night Shift until Wonder Man shows up to save the day. I've noticed that Wonder Man is this team's Superman, and because of his power set, writers need to work out a way to remove him from the story so that there can be an

illusion of tension. In this issue, Wonder Man was simply at a Hollywood party. Well played, Gruenwald.

Eventually, the Shroud shows up to whisk the Night Shift away, and the story ends with Hawkeye and him having a discussion about tactics and leadership. You know, man stuff!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Nothing mind-blowing here, but Gruenwald makes the story, no matter how ridiculous, work.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Mark Gruenwald brilliantly captured how women talk in real life.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 41 (February 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Tom DeFalco (plot) and Ralph Macchio (script)

Penciler: Tom Morgan

Inker: Tom Morgan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Mockingbird and the gang, with the help of Daimon Hellstrom, go to the University of Nevada to perform an exorcism on Dr Hamilton Slade, the man unknowingly possessed by the Phantom Rider. But things get out of control fast as two Phantom Riders appear, as well as the ghost of Khonshu...and Lord Seth's army?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Yet another new creative team shows up on the book after Steve Englehart's departure. Tom DeFalco and Ralph Macchio jump in to create a story that's clearly designed to catch most of Englehart's spinning plates. And like Gruenwald in the issue before this, they do a good job in moving things along while being respectful to what's come before. Tom Morgan returns after his one issue run (issue #38). He's credited for doing all the art here, but I'm willing to bet there were other inkers involved because the style changes from page to page. Whereas his previous work in the book looked more like what was to come in the Nineties, this time he looks like he's channeling Al Milgrom.

Mockingbird, Tigra, Moon Knight and Daimon Hellstrom arrive at the University of Nevada to confront Dr Hamilton Slade, the great-great grandson of Lincoln Slade, the Phantom Rider who drugged and raped Mockingbird back in the 19th century (WCW, the sentences you make me type never fail to amaze!). The last time Dr Hamilton Slade showed up in issue #32,

when Mockingbird spent pages beating the living shit out of the poor man (of interest, according to this issue, that event happened only a few weeks before). You see, Slade is possessed by the spirit of the Phantom Rider, only he doesn't know it. Hellstrom wants to perform an exorcism to remove the spirit once and for all.

Things are more complicated in this issue for a couple of different reasons. One, Moon Knight has been possessed by the spirit of Khonshu since he joined the team. And two, the shoehorned Lord Seth and his powerful army are fighting against...apparently everything, and they believe that Khonshu "could rally [their] demoralized enemies to a resumption of hostility against [their] legions," and so they need to kill Khonshu. This motive is so flimsy, even Englehart would weep with joy.

When Hellstrom does the exorcism, it's discovered that two Phantom Riders are residing in Hamilton Slade's body, and they don't like one another. One of the aforementioned PRs is Lincoln Slade and the other is Carter Slade, the great-great uncle of Hamilton, and apparently Carter is a good Phantom Rider. And so all hell breaks loose as two Phantom Riders start to duke it out. To make matters worse, Hellstrom frees Moon Knight from the spirit of Khonshu and Lord Seth's army appears out of nowhere to attack everyone.

If this sounds like a mess, that's because it is. Everyone is fighting everyone. When it's all said and done, Carter Slade, the good Phantom Rider, enters Hamilton and tells Mockingbird that he'll spend the rest of his life

making amends for the evil Lincoln caused. And Khonshu, separated from Moon Knight, leaves Earth to battle Emperor Seth, leaving our heroes demoralized and confused. This issue ends with Moon Knight and Mockingbird walking away from the team they formed after walking away from the team, leaving Tigra in the woods with Hellstrom to lament and cry.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. My instinct here is to dislike this issue, but I appreciate DeFalco and Macchio's attempts to wrap things up and set up the pins for the new writer coming up.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

My exorcism may cause you slight discomfort!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 42 (March 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Scarlet Witch wakes up in her bed at the West Coast compound to find her husband, Vision, is no where to be seen. She knows something is amiss, but before she can tell the team, Ultron attacks. And things get worse from there...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Here we are for John Byrne's first issue of the *West Coast Avengers*. Byrne taking over the title was a big deal for me when I was young because it meant that the book was finally going to get the quality it deserved. In a lot of ways, I felt that Byrne's participation in the series meant that the WCA was finally legitimate after years of missed opportunities.

And does it hold up? Absolutely.

For the first time, this book feels like an Avengers book and not a bad *New Warriors* spin-off. Everything - from the introduction of the individual members to the appearance of Ultron - has gravity; something that's been missing from the book since the beginning.

Wanda wakes up to find Vision missing and she leaves the bungalow to see where he went. She knows something is wrong, even if she can't quite articulate why. Now, the marriage between Wanda and Vizh is one of those things either you're on the bus for or not, and I have to admit, it's always bothered me. I get that love

between a synthezoid and human is one of those things that works in a comic book, and I can deal with that, but I can't reconcile with the juvenile nature that their marriage has been portrayed. This is something that's common in comic books, where relationships tend to be written by people who appear to never have had one.

In the first two pages of the book, using numerous captions filled with some nice honest observations, Byrne makes the marriage work and even feel real without hitting the reader over the head.

Hawkeye's introduction in the book (see below) is also effective, showing off what makes him so awesome in only a few panels, which is a far cry from the whiner that's been haunting the book for years now. Tigra's intro starts with a dream where she is stalking and murdering a prey, and she wakes up devouring her pillow. It's clear her bloodlust and animal nature is getting the better of her again, but with Byrne's use of dream imagery, it's conveyed by showing rather than telling (Englehart's tried technique). Even Wonder Man's entrance in the book is a step up with him going full force against Ultron.

The only one who gets the shaft here is Wasp, but I'd argue that it's because her place in the Marvel universe is clearly established, whereas the WCA needed people to be reminded.

The issue's biggest question mark is Hank Pym suddenly being back at the compound. There is no mention of his

first wife or whether or not that plot had been resolved or not.

That said, there is a load of exposition running through the book, focusing on the origin of Vision from the days of the original Human Torch to more recent events, but I'd argue that since this is a storyline about Vision, this isn't gratuitous.

Anyway, Ultron shows up and it's a big throw down between him and the team. However, it's discovered that he isn't the real Ultron, and thanks to Pym's shrinking particles, a small Wonder Man enters Ultron through the open mouth and then expands, bursting Ultron apart from the inside. Byrne's clear art makes it all vivid and exciting.

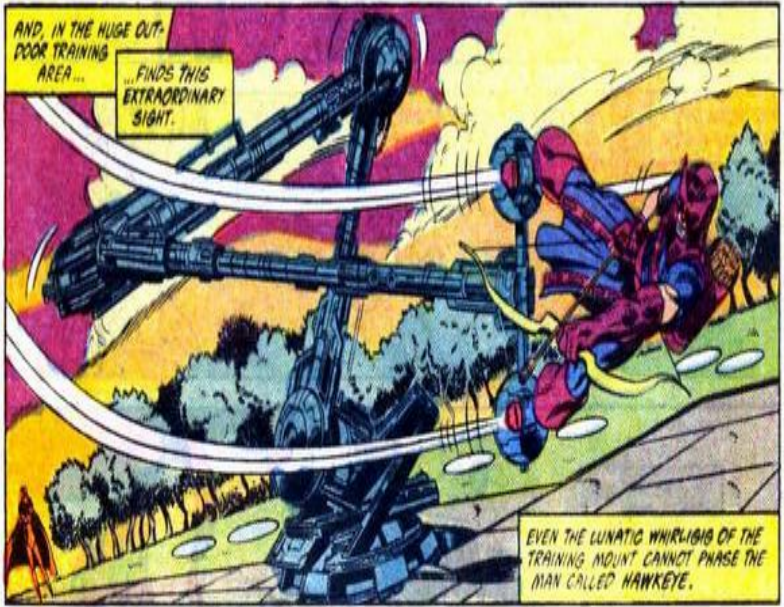
Ultron's appearance is merely a distraction, as Pym discovers that a computer virus has erased all record of Vision in their database. And for that to happen, that means it had to be one of their own. And the issue ends with the appearance of the traitor: Mockingbird!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. With one issue, Byrne turns the book around from being a joke into a legitimate A-level book.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

With one panel, Hawkeye is cool again...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 43 (April 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Mockingbird explains her betrayal and gives the team the info they need to spring into action and rescue the Vision. But will Scarlet Witch like what she finds?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Mockingbird tells her side of the story regarding her role in the Vision's disappearance. It turns out she was depressed and lost after what went down between her and Hawkeye. She was approached by S.H.I.E.L.D. to help create a contingency plan in the event that Vision were ever to snap and seize control of America's nuclear arsenal (as he did a while back). It was all supposed to be theoretical, but after giving them all of the info they needed, Mockingbird discovers that things are not as they seemed. When she quits, she's taken captive and put into what she believes to be a KGB maximum security cell. It was the Russians all along! After a few weeks, she makes her escape and returns to the West Coast compound to warn the team, but, as we already know, she's too late.

Naturally, the team isn't thrilled with Mockingbird helping people to kidnap and detain an Avenger. Hawkeye isn't shy about making his anger known.

Byrne makes a misstep in reconciling the previous issue's cliffhanger with Mockingbird saying she betrayed the team to this issue's explanation of her being duped. It's

even directly addressed by Scarlet Witch, in which Mockingbird answers, "I was...upset. Embarrassed. I've been played for a fool. And when I came in on all of you - - I realized I was too late -- realized it was all my fault... Well, maybe it was something about seeing Hawkeye again. Seems like he's always had the power to make me say the wrong thing...like 'I do.'" Not only does this feel like a weak excuse to justify the transition, it's also unnecessarily harsh. And while Hawkeye had been written by Englehart to be one dimensional in terms of why they're separated, this feels like the pendulum swinging way too far in the other direction.

It seems that Pym is back to accidentally referring to Janet as "darling" at inopportune moments. For the second issue in the row, Byrne has disregarded the storyline with Hank's previous wife. Interesting.

The team jumps in the quinjet and heads back to the base from where Mockingbird escaped. There are two scenes regarding Hawkeye's inability to effectively lead the team; once when Janet tells Hank what to do, and another time when Hank takes charge. Hawkeye even notes it mentally ("I was in charge again for about half a second there."). Anyway, the team gets into the base and splits up. Wanda and Bobbi discover a technician wandering the hall and Bobbi threatens to kill him with one of the 57 ways she's been trained to unless he gives them the location of Vision.

Wasp infiltrates a cell block in the base and makes a startling discovering which isn't shown. The governess

who is watching Scarlet Witch's twins is frightened by something which isn't shown. And the issue ends with Wanda and Bobbi finding Vision, only he's been completely taken apart in an excellent two-page ending. That's three cliffhangers to spring from for next issue. Not bad.

Also worth noting is how the issue continues the brief history of the Vision told through flashbacks that ran through the previous issue, because no WCA book would be complete without some good old fashion exposition.

The book's dramatic jump in quality is making it extremely hard for me to find something to make fun of. Come on, Byrne! Work with me here.

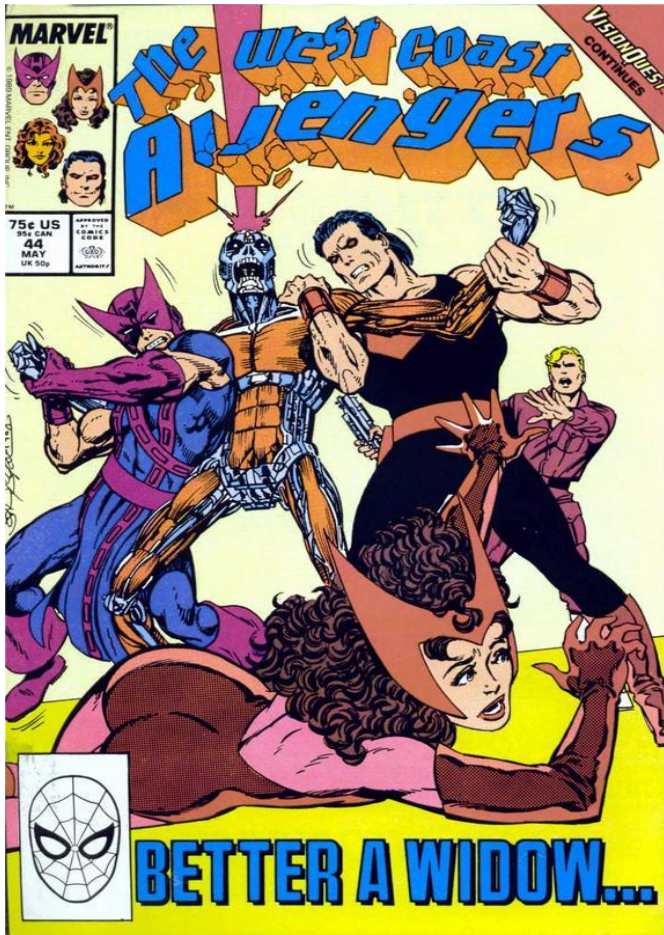
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. A bit of a step down from the previous issue, but still miles above where the book's regularly been for years.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Hawkeye is not interested in your apologies.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 44 (May 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The teams find Vision, but it turns out he's been completely erased thanks to a joint effort by nearly all of the world's security networks. Things aren't looking good and it's about to get a whole lot worse...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Three issues in to Byrne's run on West Coast Avengers, I've noticed that each issue opens with a splash page with a close up of one of the members (#42 was Wanda, #43 was Clint and #44 goes to a destroyed Vision). A nice touch.

It's learned that the people who kidnapped Vision aren't KGB, rather they're a group of people from different world security networks who've come together to make sure that Vision can never be a threat to humanity again. They've not only tore him apart, but they've completely erased his memories. And thanks to their computer virus back at the West Coast Avengers' compound, even Vision's back-up files have been destroyed.

Just when you think it couldn't get worse for Wanda's husband, it turns out that Wasp had discovered Dr. Horton, the creator of the original Human Torch, locked up in the facility. As we know from the flashbacks that's been running through this storyline, Vision's body was originally that of the original Human Torch. However, when Horton enters the lab to see Vision spread out on

the table, he makes a startling revelation: the body on the table isn't his work.

Hawkeye is still wandering around the facility looking for answers and comes across Tigra going all feral on a bunch of workers. When she sees Hawkeye, it's clear she doesn't recognize him and attacks him too.

Of interest, we have a one page scene of a mysterious group of people at Absolom College in Texas, where they're trying to decide on "a suitable subject." You can tell that these people are evil because the scene is set in Texas. There's a large monitor that ends up revealing over 40 heroes from the Marvel universe before coming to Scarlet Witch, who they agree is the best candidate. What makes this page so significant is that in one page Byrne manages to connect the West Coast Avengers with the greater Marvel universe - X-verse and all - in a way that's never really been done before in the series. It's a small touch, but an important one.

Anyway, the team packs up all the pieces of Vision and heads home. Pym points out that while the whole operation to kidnap and deprogram Vision is bad, because it had the approval of the government, there isn't a whole lot they can do except register a complaint. So the team returns home with egg on their face, but not before Wanda uses her powers to nonchalantly destroy the entire facility, probably killing hundreds of government workers in the process. I hope they send her a bill for damages.

When they return to the compound, Wanda sees that the governess watching her children had activated the panic button. She runs over to her bungalow to find Miss Bach in a state of panic as she confesses that the twins had just vanished at the blink of an eye while giving them a bath. Wanda barges into the bathroom to find the twins sitting in the bathtub as if nothing had happened. Wanda doesn't appreciate Bach's "sick sense of humor" and terminates her employment immediately, because the daughter of Magneto and the wife of an android couldn't possibly imagine that maybe something is amiss with her children.

The issue's fight scene comes in the form of a reactivated Vision, who looks more like a product of Skynet than the lovable guy we've come to know over the years. He knocks Pym out and gives the rest of the team a run for their money until Pym wakes up and deactivates him. This is a by-the-numbers kind of fight.

The issue ends with the team discovering that the government has now sent them a new member as a way to avoid future interventions, and it is none other than U.S. Agent! Because Captain America would be too good for this team!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Another good issue with lots of mysteries being introduced.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Are you Sarah Connor?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 45 (June 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team isn't thrilled by the arrival of its newest member - U.S. Agent - which leads to a dramatic departure of one of its founding members. Meanwhile, Pym has Vision up and running again, but his humanity is completely gone. Only Wonder Man has the power to make Vision whole again and...he won't?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Things kick off with Hawkeye telling the team how much he dislikes having the U.S. Agent around, with U.S. Agent standing right there in the room. He not only feels slighted as the leader of the team, but he doesn't like taking orders from the stinking government. Mockingbird is the one to remind him that the team exists because the government sanctions it, which he doesn't take too kindly to (interestingly enough, this has never been properly addressed in the book itself). When U.S. Agent flatly tells Hawkeye, "I'm now an Avenger. Period." he takes a swing at the second-rate Captain America. After being thrown across the room and humiliated in front of his own team, Hawkeye storms out and quits.

Scarlet Witch hires a new governess for her children. And she manages to lose the twins in less than a minute.

Pym finally gets Vision up and running, but to Scarlet Witch's dismay, she discovers that he's unemotional and lifeless - LIKE A FRAKKING TOASTER! Pym explains to

her that while they have his memories restored, there's one vital element missing...

The dramatic climax of the issue hinges on a scene between Wanda and Simon. Since Pym can use Simon's brain patterns to restore Vision completely, Wanda is shocked to discover that Simon has refused. She confronts him on the beach near the compound. Simon recaps his origin for Wanda, where we see through handy flashbacks how Simon's brain patterns were used previously to give Vision his soul, only back then, Simon didn't have a choice in the matter. And now, confronted with the ability to create the Vision again, he can't do it because he chooses not to. It's an interesting angle to explore, but it doesn't make a lot of sense unless there's more going on that we don't know about yet. Naturally, Wanda takes it pretty hard, and not only slaps Simon across the face, but then proceeds to literally drop a mountain on him. Simon pulls himself out of the rubble and then flies up, releasing a scream "from his very soul" that can be heard as far away as San Francisco, until he reaches space and the vacuum turns him silent.

When Wanda returns to the compound, she discovers U.S. Agent screaming at Vision to put some clothes on. He complies by manipulating the molecular structure of his old shredded clothes and makes himself appear dressed. However, he refuses to keep the old Ethiopian flag colors he wore so proudly for years, and instead keeps a bleached look. "If I am to be called 'The Vision,' is it not logical for me to look the part?" he says, "Spectral...unearthly..."

The issue ends with Pym confirming that the Vision's body is in fact not the same one used by the original Torch, which Wanda takes very badly. We don't see this though, as he's reflecting on this scene with Janet in the hallways of the compound. They stop in front of U.S. Agent's room to hear him talking to somebody, and the readers get to see him having a conversation with framed photographs of his dead parents.

Nope, that's not creepy at all.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. With emotions running high, there's plenty of good material to work with here, which makes for a surprisingly strong issue. And no mandatory fight scenes!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

U.S. Agent can't handle the sexy!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 46 (July 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne

Penciler: John Byrne

Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's the introduction to the Great Lake Avengers! What more needs to be said?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

We start things off by seeing the Great Lake Avengers in action as they deal with a hostage situation. We get to see all the members - Big Bertha, Flatman, Doorman, Mr. I, and Dinah - in action and see what they're capable of. And honestly, despite the cheesiness on display, they're not too shabby.

Clint hears about the Great Lake Avengers on the news in a hotel room and considers springing into action to see what they're all about when there's a knock on the door. It turns out to be Bobbi, who's been looking for him for three weeks since he quit the team. And this is where things get interesting, as Byrne does something pretty amazing. He has Bobbi and Clint (almost) talking to one another like adults. It's been a long time coming, and Bobbi finally said some things that should've been addressed a long, long time ago. It's such a refreshing change after months of the characters being written like four year olds.

U.S. Agent continues to make changes within the team by threatening to introduce a proper meal schedule when he discovers - thanks to the snitch cook Mrs Heyges! - that the team doesn't usually eat more than a slice of orange and toast. Before he can go into a rant about the

importance of proper nutrition, Tigra comes barging into the kitchen in order to catch a mouse. Since she's in cat-mode, U.S. Agent tries to calm her down by giving her a good old fashioned slap across the face (see below). U.S. Agent is stunned to learn - again, thanks to the snitch Mrs Heyges! - that Tigra's been regularly eating mice. "Something has to be done about this!" he shouts.

Meanwhile, Hawkeye and Mockingbird create a diversion in Milwaukee in order to get the Great Lake Avengers' attention. Hawkeye says, "Many don't know that I'm a regular visitor, but Milwaukee has certainly had its share of visitors. The French missionaries and explorers were coming there as early as the late 1600's to trade with the Native Americans." Naturally, everyone thinks he's pretending to be Hawkeye and not the real deal, which establishes the motive needed for this issue's Fight Scene.

During the fight, Mr. I jumps off a building's ledge and seemingly falls to his death. Bobbi freaks out because this reminds him of the Phantom Rider's death. Luckily for her, the I in Mr. I is for "Immortal"!

Once everyone agrees that they are who they say they are, everyone regroups at Big Bertha's place where Hawkeye tells them that "this midwest team isn't such a bad idea . . . with the proper management...my management...this could be a heckuva team!"

The issue ends with Wanda stepping out of a pool and receiving a mysterious letter from a Texas company

offering to help her with Vision. I'm sure only good will come from this.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Byrne continues to be on a roll here, which is a surprise because I remembered this issue being a whole lot sillier.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Face it, Tigra! I just hit your jawbone!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 47 (August 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Feeling abandoned by her own teammates, Wanda steals a quinjet with the Vision to meet with the only people she believes can help her husband. Due to the absence of Admiral Ackbar, Wanda doesn't know that she's walked right into a trap...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Of interest, the book is now called *Avengers West Coast*, and considering how Byrne has elevated the book into a proper Avengers book, it makes a lot of sense. Though, if I remember right, this doesn't last for a long time.

Wanda pleads with Pym and a visiting T'Challa (the Black Panther himself!) to restore her husband back to normal. Pym tells her that they've done everything that can possibly be done, while T'Challa - having not met the Vision since he's been humanized - doesn't notice anything different about him. This causes Wanda to storm out of the room, completely ignoring Wonder Man who's trying to get her attention.

Speaking of Wonder Man, I jumped a little too soon a couple of weeks ago regarding Wonder Man's decision to not transfer his brain patterns to the Vision. His excuse, while interesting, didn't really hold much water. But here, he confesses to Janet that the reason he won't help the Vision is because he's in love with Wanda. Janet admits that she always suspected, much to Simon's surprise. Byrne basically spells out that the reason Vision

was capable of loving Wanda was because he was echoing Simon's feelings. Now what's Wanda's excuse?

U.S. Agent is still trying to crack the mystery of Tigra. He goes to her bungalow to see what's up with her and ends up having to chase her through the woods in the compound. Once cornered, Tigra tries to seduce U.S. Agent (another wonderful recurring theme for Tigra), and if not for the perimeter alarm going off, filthy unAmerican sex may have transpired.

The alarm went off because Wanda had stolen one of the quinjets with her husband. Using deception and the stealth shield, the team believes she took Vision to Grosvenor Memorial Hospital in Seattle (because everyone knows their android health care is fucking amazing!), but in reality she went to Texas, to the people who sent her that mysterious letter at the end of last issue.

Wanda meets with Jeremiah Random, Dean of Robotics at Saunders College, who has agreed to help Vision. But naturally, it's all a deception. After they walk away from the quinjet, it's immediately destroyed. You see, the real intent to get both of them there was so that they could kidnap Scarlet Witch. But luckily for them, the quinjet's destruction sets off an alarm on the East Coast, springing Captain America and She-Hulk into action.

Wanda is put into a room (called The Assimilator!) where she's unable to use her powers without hurting herself. Random comes up on a big screen gives the

typical Eighties "Mutants are taking over and we intend to be a part of the action" speech. She's confused, but she doesn't have time to think about it because the room begins filling up with black biological ooze until it engulfs her completely.

The issue ends with yet another governess (the third since Byrne came aboard) losing Wanda's twins. You'd think that Wanda might suspect that something was up when the same thing happened to two governesses, but, you know, that would be rational.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. The storyline is moving along nicely. This feels like a legitimate Avengers book for once.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

It's amazing Silver Surfer never broke character during Wanda's Punk'd episode.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 48
(September 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Captain America and She-Hulk arrive in Texas to find out what's going on with Scarlet Witch and Vision. While everything looks kosher, their instincts tell them that something's wrong. And something is wrong, seriously wrong...and her name is Scarlet Witch!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Things start with a flashback to five million years ago as we see the beginning of life on Earth in the Marvel universe, and what looks like the microscopic start of the Big Bad. All of this is being filtered through the Scarlet Witch's head as the bad guys are doing a memory reconstruction, and they expect her to be up to date within the next 72 hours. Turns out, because Wanda is "a classic mutant type" and she's vulnerable due "the present upheaval in her emotional life," she's the perfect candidate to be assimilated.

Captain America and She-Hulk arrive at the "robotics department" in Texas where Wanda is being held captive. They meet Mr. Random, who tells them that the Scarlet Witch had already left after dropping Vision off for Robotic Preschool.

There's a brief interlude with Starfox flying to Sirius IV (also a planet from *Doctor Who*) to find his grand-niece, who had been previously lost in time. Once there, he stumbles across Lady Nebula who had just made a discovery that will make her "more powerful than my

grandfather ever was!" I'm guessing this'll be important later.

Another interlude involves Ann Raymond, a woman in a homeless shelter in Denver, who appears delirious and needs to get to Los Angeles. Through handy exposition, it's learned that no one knows anything about her except her name, and that she's apparently distraught over a newspaper headline that reads "Avengers Confirm Vision is Not Torch." Why this would be a major headline in a newspaper is probably the greatest mystery of all.

Vision meets with Captain America and She-Hulk and in his own logical robotic way tells them that he has no idea where the Scarlet Witch is. While they have no reason to doubt Vision, they instinctively know that something is wrong. Later, when they're given a tour of the robotics facility, they decide to return later that night...UNANNOUNCED!

Hank and Janet visit Professor Horton, the creator of the original Human Torch, to get confirmation regarding the Vision's origins. He confirms that the Vision's body is not the same as the Torch. Hank reminds everyone that Vision's origins were confirmed by Immortus, the Master of Time, a villain who has deceived and tried to kill the Avengers dozens of times in the past. Little do they know that Immortus is watching this very conversation from his Escher drawing house, and he confirms that he did indeed lie while talking to himself loudly like any good bad guy does in the comfort of their own home.

Random accelerates the assimilation process for Wanda because of Captain America and She-Hulk snooping around. Even though this is dangerous, they have no choice. And when it's done, it appears successful. So successful, that Random enjoys some good old fashion villain dialogue of his own: "The genetic barrier has been breached. Soon we shall be able to abandon the dead end street of humanity. And then homo-sapiens will go the same way as did the dinosaurs before them!"

Side note: I learned the term homo-sapiens from Marvel comic books. It was a term that made me feel intelligent when I used it in conversations at the age of 14. Now I realize I must have sounded like a pompous ass.

Once Wanda is alone in her room, she thinks about her father, Magneto, and how he always wanted to destroy the human race. And while she was always against this, she now feels it's not too unreasonable. "Now I see that he was right!" she thinks to herself.

Captain America and She-Hulk break into the fake robotics place at night. Their conversation through this process is strange, almost as if everything they're saying is a sexual innuendo. But maybe that's me. Anyway, they finally get to Wanda who is all Dark Willow, and kicks their asses in just a few panels.

Things end with Hawkeye and Mockingbird training the Great Lake Avengers, and Bobbi getting a distress signal from a quinjet. Hawkeye sees this as an opportunity and sets off to take his new team out to save his old team.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm liking this. With Immortus, Captain America and She-Hulk running around, this book feels Avengers-like and the threats, no matter how ridiculous, feel serious.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

And I approve...if you know what I mean!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 49 (October 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: John Byrne

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Great Lake Avengers show up to save the day in Texas. Are they ready? Because even the bad guys aren't what they seem.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Byrne breaks the pattern of having a close-up on an individual member of the team in the opening splash page with this issue, as we open the book to see a picture of an unconscious Captain America and She-Hulk under some rubble. Also of interest, the art here is all Byrne, as inker Mike Machlan is no where to be seen here.

Hawkeye and the Great Lake Avengers are flying to Texas on Big Bertha's private jet. Hawkeye is annoyed that the plane isn't moving as fast as a quinjet. It's worth noting that Mockingbird is back to calling Clint "lover" at the ends of her sentences.

Wonder Man, Wasp and Pym return to the West Coast compound from their trip to see Professor Horton. There are a lot of questions that need answers because of the discrepancies in the Vision's origin story. Pym wanders off to do Science Stuff, leaving Wonder Man and Wasp to have another discussion about Simon's love for Wanda.

Pym questions his butler to determine if he ever noticed Wanda acting strangely. We discover that the West Coast Avengers' answer to Jarvis is Carlos, who looks like a young Elvis in a Mariachi suit.,,



I never noticed Carlos' presence in the book before or after this, so I can only hope that someone like Brian Michael Bendis can bring him back in the modern Marvel universe as soon as possible. Anyway, Carlos is giving up the goods when Tigra comes racing past.

Pym chases Tigra into the woods where she attacks him. Because she can't be reasoned with, Pym shrinks her down to Smurf-size and catches her. But what to do with her?

Back to Texas, we see Captain America and She-Hulk waking up in a cell. It turns out, Cap used his shield to absorb the impact of the rubble, and both of them have

been pretending to be unconscious in order to get more information. Unfortunately for Cap, She-Hulk has been assimilated as well, and immediately attacks him.

Vision realizes that he's been unattended to for over seven hours, which is "inconsistent with the alleged purpose for being here." So he starts exploring and comes across the Great Lake Avengers as they're about to land in the area. Vision notes that "Midwest Avengers" makes a whole lot more sense than "Great Lake Avengers" and Hawkeye is quick to point out that he didn't name them.

It turns out that the reason Captain America can't be assimilated is because of the Super Solider serum running through his body. We also learn here that the origin of the single-celled creature from millions of years ago is the real big bad, described as a "passenger" (now we know where Dexter got it from!). This consciousness resides in all of humanity, while dormant, it is making certain decisions that alters the destiny of civilizations. And because this passenger abandoned dinosaurs back in the day, they became extinct. And now, it wants to jump ship from humans to mutants in order to survive, meaning that humans will be dead before long. All things told, it's not too shabby a villain, but not the kind of big bad you bring back every three issues or so.

The Great Lake Avengers arrive and it's a big old throw down between assimilated college kids and Mockingbird and She-Hulk and Big Bertha. Mister Immortal gets past all the chaos to find the assimilator, the place where the

passenger's consciousness resides. He's warned not to enter due to the intense radiation field that protects it, but he assures them that "dyin' is what I do best!" A few minutes later, everyone "wakes up" and is no longer controlled by the passenger. It's learned that Mister Immortal broke the containment wall of the assimilator before he died, which is what pretty much saved the day.

It's decided since all of this happened through mind control, no one will be arrested. Wanda expresses some concern about having the memories of the passenger still inside of her, and what happens if the thing leaves humans for mutants like it planned? Vision explains that he's not programmed for all this philosophical hocus-pocus, but luckily Captain America steps up to give everyone a pep talk.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Still on board with Byrne's interpretation of the book. Even the Great Lake Avengers are a cool addition.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Don't permanently damage the college kid, says the woman kicking him in the face.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 50 (November 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne

Penciler: John Byrne

Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The mystery of the Vision is finally revealed when the original Human Torch returns.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Ann Raymond, who first appeared a couple of issues back in the homeless shelter, is now in the West Coast Avengers compound. She is the wife of Thomas Raymond, who was known as Toro, the partner to the original Human Torch. Through some flashbacks, we learn that Thomas had died after the Mad Thinker had drugged and brainwashed him into thinking he was the original Human Torch. While under control of the Mad Thinker, he gets into a battle with Namor, who frees Tom from the villain's control, and Tom sacrifices himself in order stop the Mad Thinker from escaping. Now that she knows that the Vision wasn't originally then Human Torch, she was hoping that the details surrounding her husband's death were also wrong.

While Ann is telling her story, Wanda has a complete meltdown and threatens to leave "forever" with her husband. Also, it's worth noting that Janet refers to Hank as "love" and "lover" throughout the issue. Looks like Pym's first wife has been completely ignored, unless it was addressed in another book somewhere.

Pym contacts Namor to get his side of the story and he confirms everything Ann told them. While the team is trying to figure out what to do next, they discover that

Pym, after shrinking Tigra, had locked her up in a tiny cage in his lab while he finds a solution to help her. U.S. Agent mentions that he had seen Tigra acting weird before, but never reported it. This sets Simon off on U.S. Agent as he explains that since he's now an Avenger, it's his duty to communicate with his teammates.

Pym talks to Wanda and Vision to further discuss the discrepancies in the connection between Vision and the original Torch. This conversation is basically a way of using conjecture to retcon the moments where concrete links between the two were previously established, and honestly, it works.

We get a one page interlude with a Mr. Preston who wants to be left alone in his Hollywood office. And it turns out he's none other than Master Pandemonium!

The team arrives at the grave of the Human Torch and before you know, he's up and alive, as most people do in the Marvel Universe. After a brief chase between Wonder Man and the Human Torch, the flaming hero returns to the ground and shakes hands with Vision, thus letting us know once and for all that they are not the same.

Back at the compound, the team gives the Torch his old costume (and it appears that he strips down and puts it on in front of the group) and invite him to join the team. He's so overwhelmed with emotion, he starts to cry. He says he's just got something in his eye, but he's reminded by the Wasp that it's the Eighties and men can totally cry now!

Interestingly enough, 21 years after the Eighties have ended, I never stopped crying.

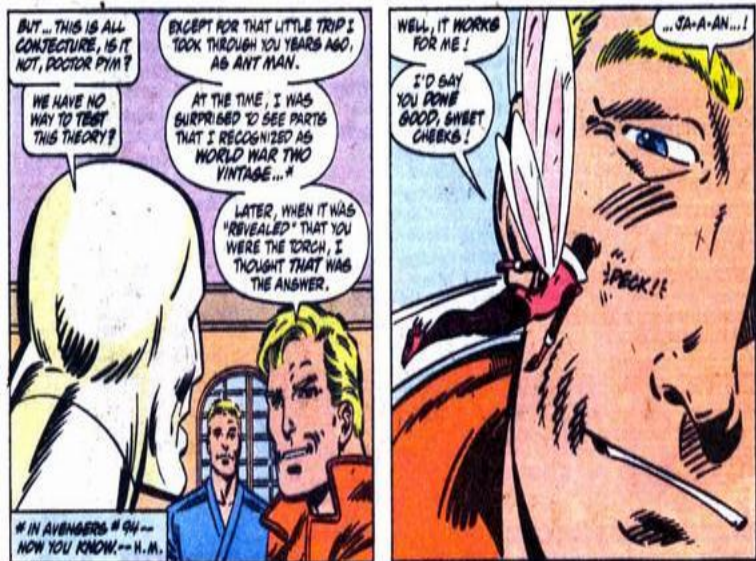
The issue ends with the return of Iron Man.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. A little too talky for a milestone issue, but there's enough important events happening to keep it interesting.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Janet is easily impressed.





West Coast Avengers Annual #4 (1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writers: John Byrne, Mark Gruenwald, Fabian Nicieza and Peter Sanderson

Pencilers: John Byrne, Amanda Connor, Mike Manley, Gavin Curtis and Mark Bagley

Inkers: Terry Austin, Christopher Ivy and Keith Williams

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The West Coast Avengers annual is a part of the "Atlantis Attacks" crossover that ran through all the Marvel annuals in 1989. This is Chapter 12 where the Deviant High Priest of Atlantis is setting things up to bring back the Serpent God named Set. And as the cover says, he'll need seven brides to do that...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

I'm putting this annual here because it's mentioned a couple of times that this takes place right after issue #50.

The first chapter is written and drawn by Byrne, with inking done by Terry Austin (who was always Byrne's Jerry to his Ben). It's a smart move because it relates directly to things happening in the regular book and has the same writer/artist steering the story. In fact, that's kind of rare, isn't it? It should also be noted that the regular book was working on a bi-weekly schedule at the time too.

While this is a completely different story, it is interesting to see the parallels between this crossover and the *Fear Itself* event which recently wrapped up. Set the Serpent God is an Elder God, older than the Asgardians, who is set to return and subjugate Earth. Even Thor expresses a lot of concern about Set's return. Anyway, Set needs seven brides to come back. While in *Fear Itself*, the Serpent is freed from his underwater prison, releases

seven (that magic number again!) magical objects across the globe, and sets Asgard running out of fear. While in no way is this suggesting that FI writer Matt Fraction lifted anything from AA (and who would?), it is worth pointing out that these kinds of stories, no matter the talent working behind the scenes, tends to follow a specific structure.

Anyway, the seven women from the Marvel Universe who are kidnapped to be the seven brides are: Marvel Girl, the Invisible Woman, Andromeda, She-Hulk, Storm, Scarlet Witch and Dagger. They've already been kidnapped in their respective annuals by the time this chapter begins.

While both Avengers teams scramble to rescue their teammates, some of the women have to fulfill specific tasks for Ghaur, the Deviant High Priest who's set on bringing back...Set. While the women are conscious about their actions, they are helpless in doing anything to stop it. She-Hulk and Andromeda find themselves deep in the Atlantic at the Altar of Neptune's Wrath where a piece of Set's immortal soul is trapped, and it's up to She-Hulk to free it. However, the giant Leviathan might have something to say about this!

Marvel Girl and Invisible Woman are in Chicago where they must break into a museum to steal the Lens of Power.

The Avengers show up to rescue a whaling vessel which sent out an SOS due to a giant sea creature attacking the

ship. In actuality, the vessel just happens to be caught in the middle of a slugfest between She-Hulk and the Leviathan. The Avengers jump in to help, but once Iron Man is close to She-Hulk, she attacks him as well. Despite the team throwing their best at the creature, it's Vision who saves the day by passing through the monster until he enters its heart, forcing it to pass out. Iron Man is forced to stun She-Hulk and brings her back to the team.

Andromeda used She-Hulk's fight as a distraction for her own getaway and returns to Ghaur with the fragment of Set's lifeforce.

When She-Hulk wakes up, the team is unable to subdue her as she feels compelled to return to Ghaur. Finally, it's decided to just let her go and they'll track her telepathically. She-Hulk leads them right to Ghaur's underwater lair where things turn into a big old fight, leading to matches such as Captain America against Storm! Wonder Man breaks the Lens of Power which Ghaur needed Dagger to use to bring Set back, and all looks like is won until Ghaur gets Scarlet Witch to use her reality altering powers to bring Set back.

The chapter ends with a giant splash page of Set rising up out of the water, with Ghaur screaming, "The age of human-kind is forever at an end!"

Bummer.

Mark Gruenwald's chapter in the annual is essentially She-Hulk and Wasp sitting in a theater and rating the male Marvel heroes from 1 (which "barely qualifies the guy for manhood!") to 10 (who is "godly in his hunkiness!"). This is filler at its best, but it's also an uncomfortably tragic misfire filled with enough cheese to drown a pizza.

Gruenwald returns for another chapter called "The Last Good Soldier", a short story focusing on U.S. Agent. It's basically him parachuting on an island and fighting a bad guy for 8 pages, but it works thanks to his internal monologue which does a good job in letting readers know who is behind the mask, and more importantly, what separates him from Captain America. Nothing here to write home about, but it's serviceable and certainly light years ahead of rating hunks.

Then Fabian Nicieza steps in and gives us "So What Are You Going to Do After You Conquer the World?" which is a short story about Firebird. I swear this was put in to remind readers, in case they've forgotten within the two previous chapters, that this is in fact a West Coast Avengers annual. Firebird stumbles across a few soldiers from Atlantis who have found themselves trapped in the desert for days without water. They talk. They fight. They come to an understanding. And she sends them on their way. To Tahiti, as a matter of fact.

That last one was punishment.

The issue ends with the 12th chapter of a tale told by the Watcher about the Serpent Society from another Earth that is so convoluted and confusing, even a Marvel kid like me can't make heads or tails out of it.

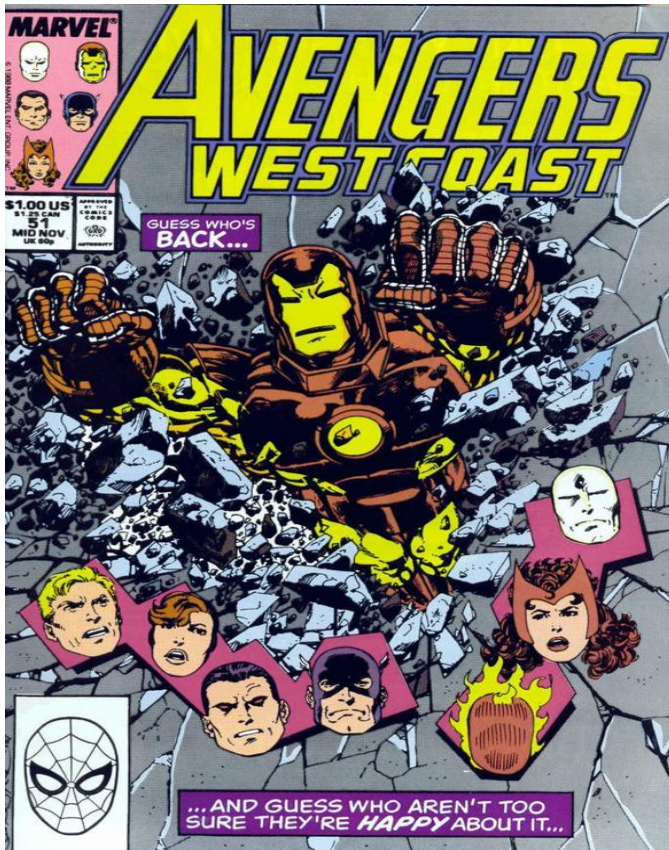
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast, but barely. And that's only for Byrne's contribution to the book. The rest, with the exception of the U.S. Agent story, is awful. This annual is a throwback to the good old days when the West Coast Avengers was awful, which feels a lot more jarring after months of Byrne steering the ship.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Warning: Cousins and ex-husbands are not eligible to have their hunkiness rated!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 51 (November 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Iron Man has returned to the team, but the team's not thrilled about it one bit. Before they can give him the cold shoulder, Master Pandemonium attacks the compound and kidnaps Wanda's children!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

As mentioned above, things kick off with Iron Man's return to the West Coast Avengers, continuing last issue's dramatic cliffhanger. There's a lot of resentment towards him based on what's been happening to the character in his own solo book. Apparently, Iron Man has killed someone, and there's an uncertainty about who's inside the suit. Readers know that it's Tony Stark, but because of circumstances not made clear in this issue, he's now dependent on the suit and he's unable to let anyone know his identity. Byrne does a good job here filling in the details about Iron Man since his departure from the team without giving away specific details for those who want to pick up *Iron Man* to see what's really going on.

This is a day of reunions at the compound, as Scarlet Witch (who is sounding more and more like her father) and Vision are greeted in their bungalow by Agatha Harkness, who you might remember having burned at the stake the last time we saw her. She admits later that everyone knows that "none of the traditional means of executing those accused of witchcraft would work on a real witch." When Wonder Man hears this, he replies

(and I'm not joking here): "She's right! There was even an episode . . . of Bewitched . . . that made the same point." Thanks, Simon, for that insight.

Harkness confronts Wanda to tell her that the reason her children have been disappearing lately is due to the simple fact that during moments of distress when Wanda isn't thinking about the children, they cease to exist. Wanda takes the news with a lot of denial and disbelief, and before she can come to terms with Harkness' news, our old friend Master Pandemonium makes his big entrance.

It's been a while since we've last seen Master Pandemonium in the series. The goofy villain with a surprisingly insidious origin is probably one of the best original bad guys this series has had to offer, and Byrne really sells the visual demonic aspects of the character in ways Milgrom couldn't. His appearance gives us our obligatory fight scene with Iron Man stepping up with the team to take out an endless supply of demons that are overrunning the compound. But all of this is merely a distraction for Master Pandemonium to confront Wanda and kidnap her twins.

Wanda doesn't take this turn of events lightly. When the team regroups to consider their next course of action, she doesn't take kindly to their inability to react quickly. When Janet suggests that maybe the twins weren't kidnapped, but rather they simply disappeared like before, she slaps her down (see below).

Harkness opens up a portal that takes the team to Master Pandemonium's realm. Once there, the seemingly peaceful landscape turns out to be alive and attacks. The issue ends with the reveal of the twins having morphed into Master Pandemonium's demonic arms, making him "unbeatable."

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. It's great to see an old villainous face back in the book. With Byrne working his magic, this feels like old fashion issue of the series, but seriously upgraded in terms of quality.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Hey now, Wanda! That's Hank's thing!



20



West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 52 (December 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Mike Machlan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team confronts Master Pandemonium in his lair to save the lives of Wanda's kidnapped children, but things are, as usual, not what they seem.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Byrne appeared to have a master plan with the Scarlet Witch, Vision and their twins the moment he came on board this title, and this issue looks to be where he was headed all along. With her marriage to Vision seemingly undone, Wanda is now more like her human-hating father than the sweet-natured woman we've come to know over the years. Now it's just a matter of figuring out what to do with her children. And this issue puts an end to them once and for all...well, for a decade at least.

Master Pandemonium is more powerful than ever now that he's absorbed Wanda's children. It turns out, the twins were parts of his missing soul (you know, the one Mephisto broke into a bunch of small pieces and were physically represented by the creepy star-shaped hole on Pandemonium's stomach?), and now his powers have increased a thousandfold. He manages to take out the team fairly quickly, and Byrne is clearly having a lot of fun with the more surreal, demonic aspects of this fight inside Master Pandemonium's dark lair.

The issue's first twist is that Master Pandemonium's missing soul isn't really his. Mephisto didn't tell the truth all those years ago, which is pretty shocking coming from

the self-professed Prince of Lies (why would anyone call themselves that?). The soul Master Pandemonium has been collecting all of this time is actually Mephisto's soul, which had been shattered during his fight with Franklin Richards (the son of Reed and Susan of the Fantastic Four).

Agatha Harkness transport the Human Torch to the fight with the final two pieces of ~~Master Pandemonium~~Mephisto's soul (though it's not clear where exactly these fragments came from). He offers the pieces in exchange for the team's safety; which doesn't make a lot of sense considering how powerful Master Pandemonium has become and he clearly has the advantage. Master Pandemonium reclaims the pieces; however, there is still a hole in his stomach which sucks him inside out like a collapsed star. Once he's out of the way, Mephisto makes an appearance to acknowledge that Master Pandemonium's soul (which is really Mephisto's, see) has been restored to Mephisto.

Harkness's cat, Ebony, who has been wandering around in the background throughout the issue, then transforms into a giant beast and attacks Mephisto. The battle is so horrifying, we only get pieces of what's going on through the team's disgusted faces and horrified observations.

Eventually the team is returned home. Harkness tells everyone that the twins have been erased from reality and when Wanda wakes up, she will not have any memory of their existence. The team isn't pleased with

his development, but they seem to understand it's for the best.

OR IS IT?!



The issue ends with the above panel which comes out of nowhere. The book has finally caught up with the *Atlantis Attacks* crossover that was published three months before, and then it's jumping into another crossover, *Acts of Vengeance*. Marvel doesn't have a good track record with monthly books being shoe-horned into a major crossover event. So the odds are stacked against Byrne if he's going to be juggling two in one book.

Tune in next week to see if he pulls it off...

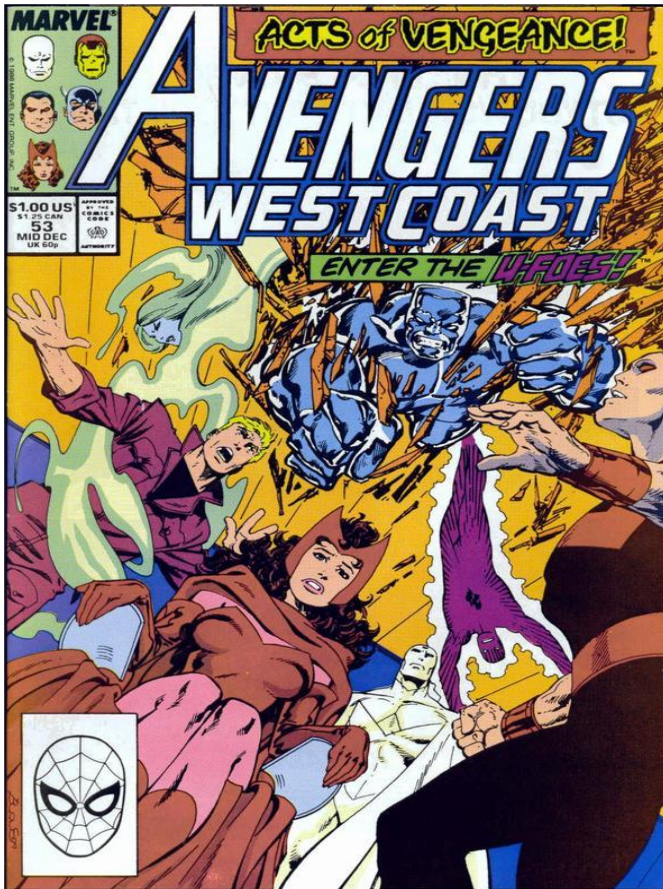
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. A lot of exposition going on here, but Byrne's art makes it fun and easy to swallow.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Man plays a sick game of Hide-and-Seek with his nephew.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 53 (December 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Keith Williams

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

As the team tries to deal with a comatose Scarlet Witch, they're attacked by the U-Foes. But is this small attack a preview of something bigger? Something big enough to become a huge crossover event?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

After a long successful run on the title, you knew that John Byrne had to stumble sooner or later. The bad news is that it's finally happened, the good news is that it's really not his fault as the book is suddenly recovering from the *Atlantis Attacks* crossover (which ran in all of the annuals in 1989, including *West Coast Avengers Annual #4*) while at the same time being pushed into the *Acts of Vengeance* crossover (which ran throughout many Marvel titles between December 1989 to February 1990). Byrne does his best here to make it all work, but it's an unfortunate mess.

The issue kicks off with Magneto declaring "The plan proceeds!" as villains do. It turns out that many of the villains across the Marvel universe have banded together to attack our favorite heroes. What sets this plan apart from the countless times this has happened before is that they're purposely sending villains to fight heroes unfamiliar with their powers and abilities. And this is the core of Marvel's *Acts of Vengeance* storyline. It's a rocky start for the issue, as Magneto is speaking with an unnamed accomplice who is the one who instigated the idea. Unbeknownst to Magneto, this unnamed

benefactor is actually Loki, and while Magneto feels like he's the one in charge, it's clearly not the case.

Magneto's introduction sets the stage for *Acts of Vengeance* to enter the book. By the time we check back in with our heroes, they're in the living room at the compound dealing with a comatose Scarlet Witch who is recovering from the events in the *Atlantis Attacks* crossover. It's a weird thing to put into the book because they could have simply said that she was still recovering from what Harkness did to her at the end of last issue instead of making readers feel like they've walked into a movie halfway through. This is page four and we're knee deep in two separate crossover events, neither of which had been mentioned in the book before - with the exception of *West Coast Avengers Annual #4*, but that was published four months before.

Wonder Man agrees to finally give Vision his brain patterns so he can finally return to normal. Vision, however, declines and informs the team that he'll be returning to the east coast.

Immortus makes an appearance in the book (as he has done in previous issues) as he continues to watch Scarlet Witch from afar. It seems that she's to play an important part in events to come. This is interesting for me because despite the fact that the book is wading in the waters of two crossovers, Byrne is still planting the seeds for future storylines in the monthly title. And while I applaud this, it only makes this issue feel more convoluted than it

needs to be. This is beginning to feel more like Englehart's work again.

Then suddenly, the U-Foes attack. The team is caught off guard and there's enough mention that they've never fought the U-Foes before to justify the whole point of *Acts of Vengeance*. But when you're reminding the reader of how unpredictable this all is, it feels even sillier. The team is fighting new villains with unfamiliar power sets all of the time. And they just fight. They don't stand around telling one another "there's no telling what might happen."

The issue ends with Wasp, Pym, Vision and Scarlet Witch (now alert) heading east to see what the deal is with the lack of communication with the other team. Pym says he's got "a bad feeling" about what's about to happen, thus reminding readers that what we're reading is a Big Deal.

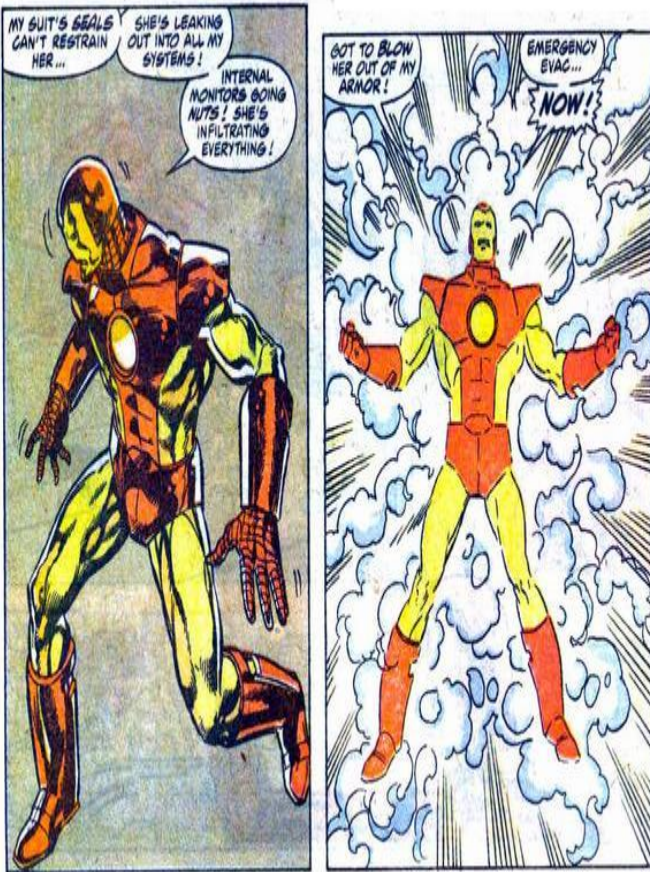
You know, a Bigger Deal than all the Big Deals the book has been dealing with since the beginning.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Looks like Byrne has fallen victim to editorially mandated storylines and its sadly tarnished a nearly perfect run with the book. Somewhere in the shadows, Englehart is laughing maniacally.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

"Got to blow her out of my armor" is scientific gibber gabber for something you wouldn't understand.





Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 312 (Mid-December 1989)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Tom Palmer

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Avengers' Hydro-Base has been destroyed, forcing the Avengers to regroup in the sub-basement ~~at their mom's house~~ in Avengers Park. Before they can assess all the chaos happening across the nation, Freedom Force pays a visit, and unfortunately for our heroes, it isn't a friendly house call.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

I'm jumping over to the regular *Avengers* title this week to continue our look at *Acts of Vengeance* which took over the Marvel books during this time. When we last left off, Pym, Wasp, Vision and Scarlet Witch left the West Coast compound to return east to see what was happening with the other team. It's worth pointing out that this issue is written by Byrne as well.

With regular members of the Avengers occupied with their own problems related to the event, it appears that if the West Coast team hadn't jumped over, we'd be reading a solo Falcon book. In fact, it's worth noting that Wasp, Pym, Scarlet Witch and Vision have pretty much taken over the corner shot on the front cover.

Things start off with the team in the sub-basement (the basement under the basement? Because the Avengers just couldn't just have a basement, they needed something mightier!) where there are lots of TV screens showing off lots of chaos and destruction. Wasp asks, "Has the whole world gone mad?!?" And Pym calmly

reminds her that, no, the whole world hasn't gone mad, just America. Oh! Thanks, Hank!

Scenes like this interest me in comic books as I never quite understand how heroes would get unnerved by this kind of imagery, as it's something they encounter every single day. These scenes only happen in event books (as they did in the recent *Fear Itself*) to remind readers that, unlike the time Earth exploded last week, this time It's Fucking Serious. This is a lot like in *Bad Boys 2* when one of the main characters eloquently says "Shit just got real," implying that all the death and destruction we've been watching for the last 90 minutes were insignificant. And as these kinds of Event books grow bigger and bigger, you'd think that it would be easier to convey the doom and gloom of what's happening, when in actuality it becomes much harder.

Anyway, we cut to all the major villains sitting around the table and planning the Big Plan. We have Kingpin, Mandarin, Magneto, Red Skull, Doctor Doom and lots more. Loki is secretly orchestrating all of this as a man named Lackey (yeah, Loki isn't good at the whole disguise thing). While the plan to take down all the heroes might be effective, the villains have a difficult time getting along, namely Red Skull, a big time Nazi, and Magneto, a big time Holocaust survivor. Honestly, this is probably the most refreshing part of this entire issue and shows a little consideration in the main story line.

Back in the basement (sorry, sub-basement!), the Super-Power alert goes off! Apparently the Avengers have an alarm that rings whenever someone with super-powers enters Avengers Park. Yeah, I know, that's pretty dumb. How exactly does that work? And how come the West Coast Avengers never got one? Because that would've helped them out every time someone broke into the compound, which is every other day. It's Freedom Force, which was the 1990's answer to today's Thunderbolts. As Pym points out, they're "composed of known criminals recruited to serve out their time as government agents." Thank you, exposition. The three members of Freedom Force who arrive are Blob, Pyro and Avalanche.

Freedom Force's arrival is anything but official, however. In fact, they're part of the whole don't-think-about-it-too-much-*Acts-of-Vengeance* plan to make heroes fight villains they're unfamiliar with. This is even highlighted when Falcon asks what do they know about Freedom Force, and Pym replies, "Not as much as we should, Falcon." We are, of course, ignoring the fact that Pym and Wasp fought Freedom Force back in *Avengers Annual #15*.

And so our big fight begins. For the purposes of dramatic tension, Freedom Force give the team a run for its money. It drags on way longer than it should, and it isn't until Captain America arrives and announces that Freedom Force is not there on the behalf of the government that it all ends. The issue wraps up with the team standing around in the debris wondering what's going on with Lackey watching from afar laughing.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Not feeling it here. While I liked what was going on with the villains, the parts with our trusted heroes felt too much like wheel spinning.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

So to you other villains all across the land, there's no need to argue: Red Skull just don't understand!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 54 (January 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Paul Ryan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

With the team split up in opposite sides of the country, it's up to Wonder Man, U.S. Agent, Iron Man and Torch to deal with the Mole Man's attack on Los Angeles.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

After last month's awful issue where Byrne had to juggle two major crossovers while still setting up the pieces for his own future stories, it looks like the book is back on track. In fact, it looks like Byrne is having fun again. And if you need evidence of that, you can see it immediately with the playful homage to *Fantastic Four* #1 on the cover.

The Mole Man attacks Los Angeles with his surplus army of monsters. Wonder Man and Iron Man are the first to respond, with Shellhead taking out the first giant monster by lifting it up and dropping it in the Pacific.

Pym and Wasp are returning home on the quinjet after the events in *Avengers* #312 with a comatose Scarlet Witch. When last we saw Wanda, she was giving Vision one of her creepy uncomfortably long hugs in Avengers Park, and since then she's fallen unconscious (the third time in a few issues, by the way). Pym and Wasp can't seem to wake her up. But none of that matters as the quinjet is attacked by one of Mole Man's three-headed flying monsters. The monster destroys the quinjet easily. Our heroes are about to crash in the mountains, but at

the last minute the quinjet stops just inches off the ground. Before Pym and Wasp can figure out how that happened, Pym uses his Pym particles to shrink the monster down to a manageable size. Wasp goes to get help and we can see Magneto hiding in the shadows, thus answering how they managed to survive the crash. It turns out, he was protecting his daughter.

Meanwhile, Torch and Wonder Man confront the Mole Man to find out what's going on. He claims that the Avengers had attacked him and he is only defending himself. Torch tries to convince the Mole Man that he's mistaken, that this is all some kind of misunderstanding, but the Mole Man will have none of it. Wonder Man steps up and says he will no longer defend himself. He says that he knows the Mole Man's staff "is full of all kinds of electronic doohickeys and enough power to fry a small herd of elephants" and that he's not going to stop him from using it on him.

The Mole Man attacks Wonder Man again and again with his staff (which apparently packs enough power to hurt Simon) and Wonder Man takes the beating, much to the Mole Man's confusion. Finally, the Mole Man considers reason and decides to withdraw, not pleased that he was duped.

The issue ends with the West Coast Avengers having a video conference with the Avengers, and they determine that something larger is going on, leading Pym to make an unavoidable conclusion (see below).

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. And we're back. This is a fun issue that doesn't feel like a crossover was pushed into the book. This is more like it!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

What makes this day different than any other?





Avengers, Vol. 1, Issue 313 (January 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Tom Palmer

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Avengers are recovering from the destruction of their main headquarters when the Mandarin (now with convenient nipples on his armor!) decides to pay a visit!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The three Avengers teams (West, East and Great Lakes) communicate with a one-eyed Jarvis in the ~~Bateave~~ Avengers Park sub-basement. Everyone is a little uneasy by how the public has suddenly turned on them. Hawkeye tells everyone that the Great Lakes Avengers are ready when they're needed, while the Avengers have to do an inspection of the recently destroyed hydro-base, along with Wonder Man and Vision.

Meanwhile, Mandarin shows up at Avengers Park to continue the damage Freedom Force started last issue. The park is surrounded by protesters who want "NYC for Real People!" Before the police can pepper spray the protesters, Mandarin starts nonchalantly killing officers and soldiers.

Doctor Doom, watching Mandarin on a video screen in a secret lair, is annoyed at Mandarin's actions. He claims that he has "the fighting sense of a novice in a nunnery." Harsh words, indeed, Doom. Red Skull enters the room and he starts laying out insults at Doom. This doesn't please Doom one bit, and they have a throw down,

leading Red Skull to shoot Doom. Luckily, Kingpin comes in and starts giving a verbal smack down to both Doom and Skull.

Vision and Wonder Man arrive at the park to take care of Mandarin when the Wizard flies in and gives the two of them a run for their money.

Thousands of miles away, a comatose Scarlet Witch (her new default setting) is being taken care of by Agatha Harkness. She senses that something is wrong and steps outside of their bungalow at the compound. Suddenly, the home begins to shake and is hurled into Earth's orbit. Once there, Magneto appears. He then wishes his daughter a good afternoon, because, hey, that's just common courtesy.

Captain America, Black Widow and Hellcat show up to bring Mandarin down. It's a pretty good fight with lots of punching, scratching, and sexist remarks, until Thor shows up and gets all Hammer Time with Mandarin. The Wizard and Wonder Man continue their fight, which ruins Mandarin's plans, so he uses the Wizard as a decoy so that he can escape. The Avengers catch the Wizard who basically tells them that he's fallen into his clever trap.

The issue ends with the bickering villains discovering that Doctor Doom was actually a good old fashion Doombot, meaning he was never a part of their plan to begin with. Twist!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Not a fan of this one at all. Too much going on and, despite the nature of the crossover, it feels like they're just throwing villains out to fight the team without any rhyme or reason. And while there's some progress with the main villains (probably the most interesting part of this whole story), this feels like wheel spinning.

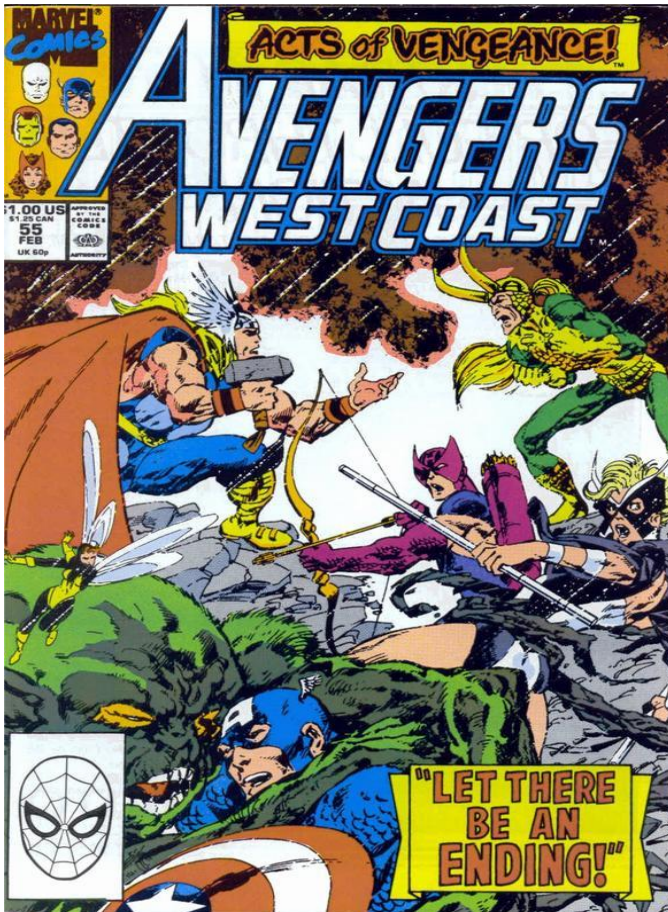
WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

I see your racism...



And I raise it with sexism!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 55 (February 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Paul Ryan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team learns that Loki is behind the recent alliance among their worst villains. When they confront Loki to turn the tide, the trickster refuses to go down without a fight!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Now this is certainly more like it. If the beginning of this storyline had half the fun as its ending, this would be a fantastic crossover. That said, *Acts of Vengeance* just didn't work. Luckily for us, Byrne steers the ship to a strong finish while setting up the West Coast Avengers' next big threat. I even like the story's title "Let There Be an Ending!" which feels like something a disgruntled and tired editor or writer would come up with.

Thor tells everyone that it's his half-brother, Loki, who is responsible for the recent attacks and destruction. This comes as a surprise to everyone as they thought Doctor Doom was in charge, even though the recently captured Wizard insists he's the one in charge. Before they can question the Wizard, he escapes from his cell using a miniature teleportation device he had hidden in a false thumbnail (like most of us do!).

The Wizard arrives back at the villains' secret headquarters where everyone is dealing with the fact that Doctor Doom had never been a part of their alliance, that it had been one of his Doombots all along. When Lackey (Loki in disguise) learns that the Wizard had just

teleported there from a cell at the Avengers' headquarters, he freaks out and reveals his true identity to everyone. All the villains are shocked by the reveal. Kingpin sees this as an opportunity to exit stage right.

Wonder Man returns to the compound to see the Scarlet Witch's cottage missing. Harkness tells him that the cottage was hurled skyward. U.S. Agent appears to tell them that using the automated tracking system, he's discovered that the cottage is orbiting Earth (why would you put a tracking system inside a cottage?). Wonder Man wants to jump into action immediately, but it's U.S. Agent who insists that they take a space-rigged quinjet and "do it by the numbers, with cool heads." Cool heads or not, as soon as they're in space, Wonder Man flies to the cottage when it suddenly explodes.

Just as Loki predicted, Thor and the Avengers were able to track the energy signatures from the Wizard's teleportation device and begin an attack on their secret base. It turns out, however, that they've been operating out of the Isle of Silence, where Loki had previously been imprisoned, and where Loki has complete control over its environment. The heroes launch a full attack against Loki, but between the monsters, living plants and strong winds, they're forced to fight for their lives against their surroundings. So it comes down to a battle between Thor and Loki, which is handled effectively and quickly. Thor uses his hammer to create a pit for Loki to fall in and then he closes the ground above him like a giant door, trapping Loki "under a million tons of Earth" (so the Isle of Silence is on Earth?).

Hank and Janet return to the compound. Janet decides to check in on everybody's favorite comatose witch, but finds a bruised and battered U.S. Agent instead. He warns her to get away, but it's too late. The issue ends by revealing the Scarlet Witch, sporting a new outfit and haircut, stating that all of her powers are finally unleashed.

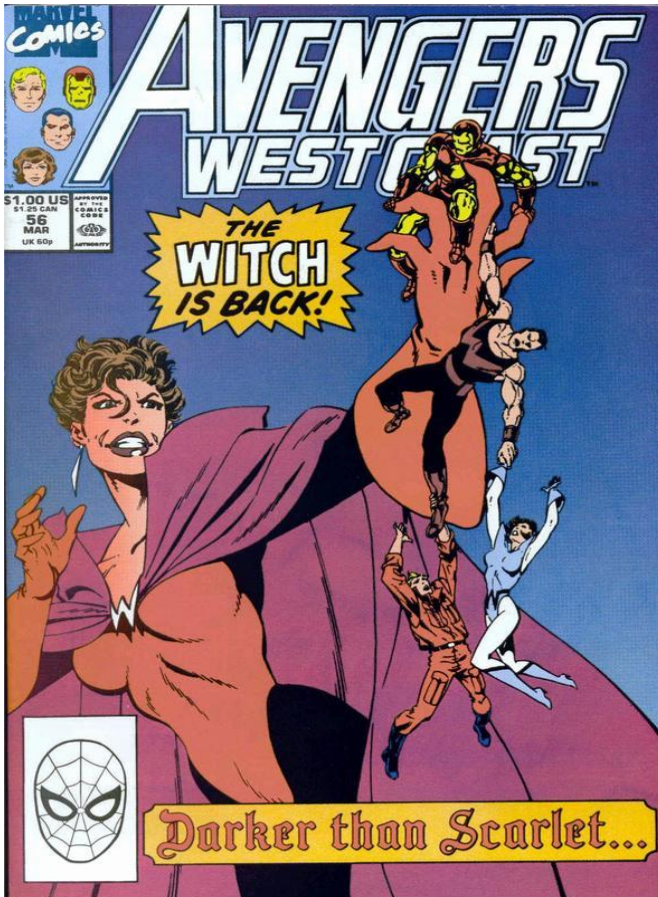
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. And we're back on track. Crossover or not, this is the quality I've come to expect with Byrne on the title.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Falcon says it best...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 56 (March 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Paul Ryan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Scarlet Witch is back, conscious and all! But now she's not only more powerful than ever before, she's turned evil thanks to the help of her emotionally distant father, Magneto.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Things kick off with Scarlet Witch gloating about her new powers and how she's been denying herself for too long. She's keeping Agatha Harkness, U.S. Agent, Wasp and Wonder Man hostage, hovering over the ground in a force field of some kind. There's no reason for her to do this, mind you, but it provides the perfect opportunity to dump some much-needed exposition for the readers.

Wasp thought Wonder Man had died in the explosion from last issue, and Wanda informs everyone that he had died and she brought him back to life (meaning, an exploding house is all it takes to kill Wonder Man?). Wanda tells everyone that with her new powers, she could even reshape the universe at will. And then to make sure we all know how evil she's become, she molests Wonder Man (see below) in front of everyone.

Hank Pym decides to finally check in on Tigra, who he Pym-particled seven issues back, only to discover that she's escaped from her cage. We learn that Immortus, who is watching everything, is the one who released her, as he's manipulating everyone as the Master of Time.

The Torch flies over the compound to help find Tigra when he sees a motorcade pull up in front. When he approaches the men getting out of the car, they inform him that the team is being evicted.

Pym finally makes his way to the Scarlet Witch's cottage. A mysterious guest appeared before to fill him in on what's been happening. He sees Wanda holding everyone hostage through the window, and things get worse when Magneto enters the room. Pym shrinks down a wall to make a surprise entrance. He tries to give Wanda the benefit of the doubt, but once he realizes that it's too late, he pulls out a gun to take her down. Honestly, this is the most interesting and noble Pym's been in this series ever.

This is why it's a shame when just as he's about to take Wanda down, Quicksilver (who was also the aforementioned mysterious guest) appears and knocks him out. He's thrilled to be reunited with his father and sister, and declares that they are "Masters of the World!" Uh oh, it's not looking good for our heroes.

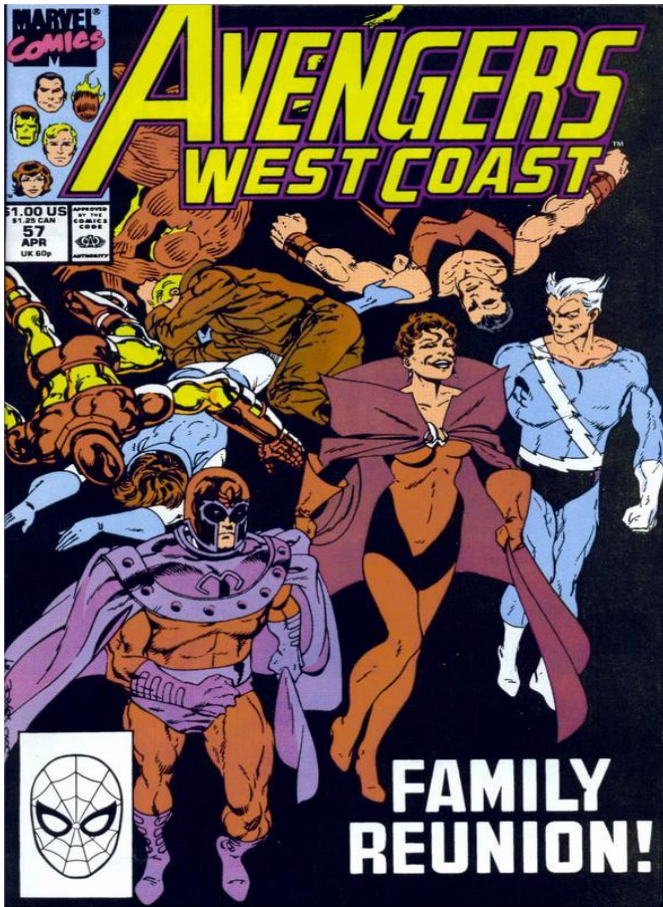
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm back to officially loving the book again!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Nothing sexual about this at all...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 57 (April 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: John Byrne
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Paul Ryan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team suffers a serious defeat against the newly turned Scarlet Witch with her father Magneto and brother Quicksilver. When the bad guys flee to Asteroid M, the team gets the chance to regroup and attack again. But the second time isn't always the charm...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

We start right where we left off last issue, with an unconscious Pym at the mercy of the villainous trio. Magneto is the one who keeps showing restraint and not causing bloodshed unless there's absolutely no choice, which appears to disappoint Wanda. It's the Human Torch who comes to save the day, but he's clearly outmatched. Wanda tries to deactivate him with her powers, but Pietro stops her, claiming that he thought Wonder Man was about to break free (we know, of course, that Quicksilver is helping the Avengers and is playing along with his family for his own reasons). Magneto decides that enough is enough and he transports them out of the cottage towards his Asteroid base in space. On the way, they run into Iron Man who is easily taken down by Wanda. Of interest, Magneto tries to save Iron Man, but due to Iron Man's use of anti-magnetic agents in his armor, he could not stop his free fall.

Iron Man, much to our surprise, does not die. While Wanda's powers deactivated Tony's automatic systems,

that didn't stop him from deploying a good old fashion parachute to save the day.

The team regroups and makes a plan of attack. It's off to space in the quinjet. Wasp is the first one off to do some recon as the quinjet (invisible from all forms of detection devices) hovers near Asteroid M. When they lose contact with Janet, the team immediately jumps into action by simply punching their way inside Magneto's base. Naturally, they don't have a chance. U.S. Agent is bound by scraps of metal. Human Torch is deactivated by Wanda. Janet is revealed to be unconscious in a handy jar. Magneto then traps everyone inside a large metal ball made from scraps from their destroyed quinjet and transports them back to their compound. Wanda is upset by this, as she just wants to kill them. Magneto reassures her that he could've killed them all twice today, and no team would be foolish enough to attack them a third time.

Well, the joke's on Magento, because *foolish* is what the West Coast Avengers is all about!

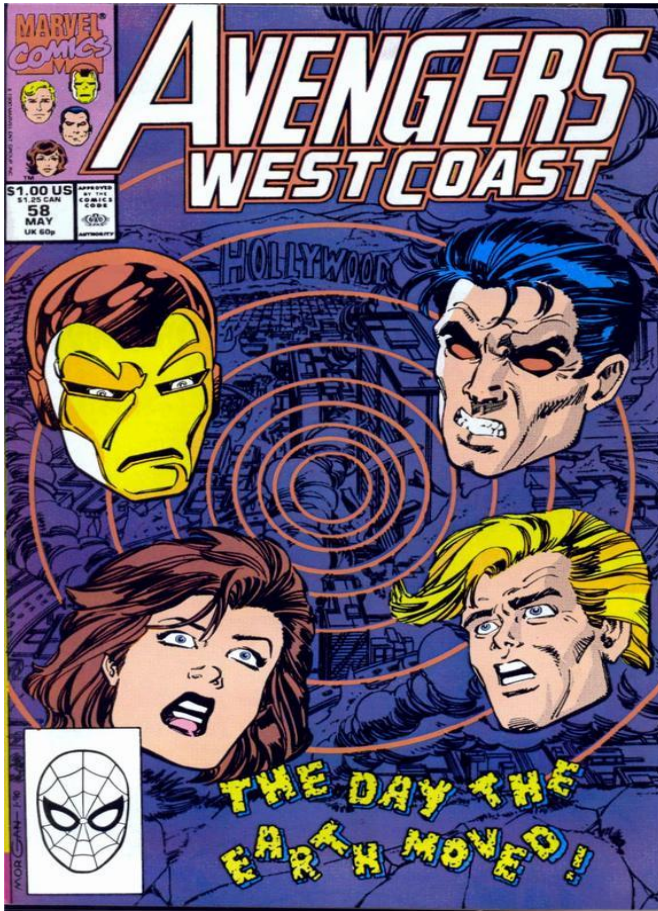
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. This is good work, with each member getting enough time to shine. Byrne knows these characters and he's done a great job balancing out the large cast.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

This is why no one ever takes you seriously, Simon!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 58 (May 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Fabian Nicieza

Penciler: Tom Morgan

Inker: Randy Emberlin

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team returns to Los Angeles after suffering the defeat of Magneto, Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver. And before they can figure out what to do next, the city suffers a horrifying earthquake.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

"The Day the Earth Moved" probably disappointed a lot of readers. Not only does it not continue the big throw down between the West Coast Avengers and Magneto, but it seems that John Byrne has departed the book. Fabian Nicieza has taken over the writing and Tom Morgan returns (issue #38) to do the art with Randy Emberlin.

The story starts with the introduction of Vibro who "can manipulate tectonic plates and cause the very Earth itself to upheave." When we first see him, he's attacking the Department of Urban Development in Los Angeles. Even though he's apparently angry to begin with, he's even more angry when he discovers (from a convenient document lying on the floor) that the department has allowed substandard construction to continue in the city. He's furious because if an earthquake happens in L.A. there will be a lot of deaths, so in order to teach people the stupidity of their ways, Vibro decides to make an earthquake.

Listen, if we can accept Pym's flaws, we can roll with Vibro's logic.

The team returns to the compound straight from Magneto's defeat. The earthquake has already begun by the time they land. The team springs into action to help the city, much to Wonder Man's dismay, as he wants to immediately return to Asteroid M and save Wanda.

In perhaps one of my favorite moments in the book, Hank orders the gardener Ramon to do the following things: 1) Bring the unconscious bodies of the Human Torch and U.S. Agent inside, 2) hook up said bodies to life support, and 3) monitor all broadcast channels. Ramon is new to the book. He's not to be confused with their Elvis-like butler Carlos. We can only assume that the compound's hired help is trained to do everything, from cleaning the pool to landscaping to dismantling Ultrons.



Pym treats the gardener like an active member of the team. I can not stress enough how awesome this is.

According to the ever reliable Wikipedia, his full name is Ramon Trigo, and he's supposed to be the groundskeeper. Whatever his job, I sure hope his pay is good. Also of interest, this is his only appearance.

Most of the book is watching the team work together and use their unique abilities to save the people of Los Angeles from this devastating earthquake. It's all heroic and fine, but it's not terribly effective.

The story doesn't find it's dramatic center again until the team learns of Vibro's involvement (thanks, Ramon the gardener!) and confronts him, Wasp is the one sent to confront Vibro, who is napping while wedged between two shelves. He's been slowly storing energy, allowing it to build, and now it's time to release it. Wasp warns him that he's needs to stop or the team will have to do Pym's "final solution" which might kill Vibro.

The final solution, as it turns out, is Pym using his particles to close the fault. This requires "more concentrated mass manipulation than he has ever attempted before." In fact, it could kill him. It's pretty intense (see below). In the end, Pym closes the fault, apparently crushing Vibro, and the day is won.

Wonder Man, who has been moaning about not being able to save Wanda all issue, is so moved about all the hope in Los Angeles, that he learns to be more hopeful

and patient. And so the story ends with the team springing into action to continue their rescue efforts in the city.

Is it dusty in here? No. No, it's not dusty in here one bit.

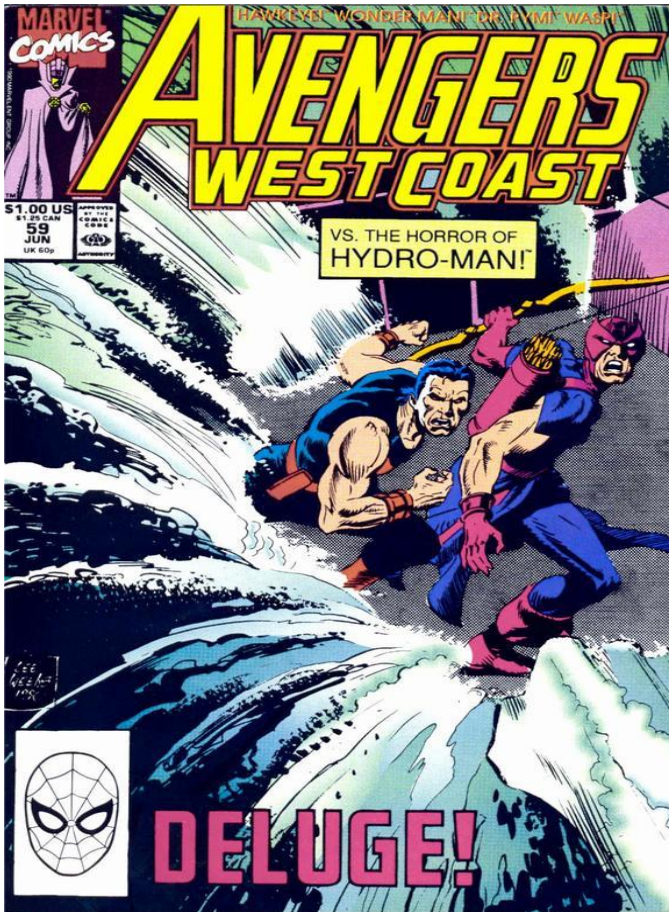
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast and Boast. Despite the best efforts of Nicieza and Morgan, there was no way they could succeed here. This is the equivalent of interrupting a Harry Potter story to have an afterschool special where Hermione learns the dangers of using amphetamines. I'm with Simon: What about Wanda? That said, Nicieza created Ramon Trigo. A character so amazing, I want to write poetry about him until I get Shakespeare's elbow.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Hank Pym and Vibro play a game of "It's Not Your Fault!"





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 59 (June 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Danny Fingeroth

Penciler: Gary Hartle and Brad Vancata

Inker: Chris Ivy and Brad Vancata

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hydro-Man is given the gift of intellect from a mysterious ally and he uses his new abilities to take on the West Coast Avengers...because that's what you do when you get all smart.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Looks like John Byrne's departure took some people by surprise because the dreaded inventory issue has once again surfaced on this title. Danny Fingerhuth does an okay job, all things considered, but the book continues to spend time telling a side story when readers want to read the bigger story they're purposely ignoring.

A giant tidal wave is pushing through San Remo, California. And even though this is a completely horrifying moment, citizens are collected enough to notice that the wave that's about to consume them is coming from the opposite direction of the ocean and that it sounds like it's laughing. The wave (neither old or new) is actually Hydro-Man, and we're seeing the tail end of his bank robbery.

When we next see Hydro-Man, he's having a drink at a bar on the beach and enjoying the money he stole. Like most bad guys, when he's not on the job, he wears an awful red cowboy hat and keeps his bag of money open next to him at all times. Anyway, he overhears some people talking about how stupid he is. And though he's angry, he agrees with them. This is when he's

approached by a stranger in a suit that touches his head and allows him to realize his potential. Hydro-Man is initially disorientated, but he realizes that he's "got the knowledge to realize [his] greatest dreams!"

What's his greatest dreams?

Apparently it's to fight the West Coast Avengers.

He takes some hostages and demands the team come "battle him."

Hawkeye and Wonder Man go ahead to fight him, telling Pym to stay behind because "It's just Hydro-Man. The guy's so dumb I bet he'll have knocked himself out before [we] get there."

Of course Hydro-Man turns out to be a force to be reckoned with. Pym does eventually show up to help his overwhelmed partners, but even he's no match for the smarter villain. And just when Hydro-Man's about to kill all of them and make a name for himself, the mysterious stranger in a suit shows up, reveals himself to be Loki, and then takes away Hydro-Man's powers. Loki doesn't mind Hydro-Man tormenting the Avengers, but only Loki gets to actually kill them.

Stupid again, the team are able to defeat Hydro-Man in a few panels. He then tells them that he planted a bomb that'll do a lot of damage unless he's released. The team struggles to figure out whether they should release

Hydro-Man or not, but he ends up telling them where the bomb is anyway.

In one of the most powerful twists ever, THE BOMB IS UNDER THE WEST COAST AVENGERS' POOL!

The team arrives at the pool. Pym gets into his scuba gear to get the bomb. However, the technology is too advanced for the man who can shrink and enlarge anything with particles of science he created. Hydro-Man no longer remembers how to deactivate it. Wonder Man finally steps up and says to give him the bomb when



The issue ends with the funeral of Hawkeye, Pym and Wonder Man (making this the second time in a few months where Simon is killed by an explosion). Janet is asking the philosophical "Why?" as other Avengers try to console her (including an intense U.S. Agent). Immortus shows up and reveals that what we've been reading is a "divergence" in the time stream, which means that this whole issue is an incredibly boring *What If?*.

This reveal also explains the issue's continuity problems, such as Hawkeye's involvement in the story, as he's been MIA with the Great Lake Avengers; Wonder Man's lack of interest in rescuing Wanda; and Loki's return so soon after being "killed" in *Acts of Vengeance*.

Brad Vancata does the art for the last two pages and it's clear this is where the inventory issue ends and editorial begins. Not a complete stumble, all things considered, but it's too little too late.

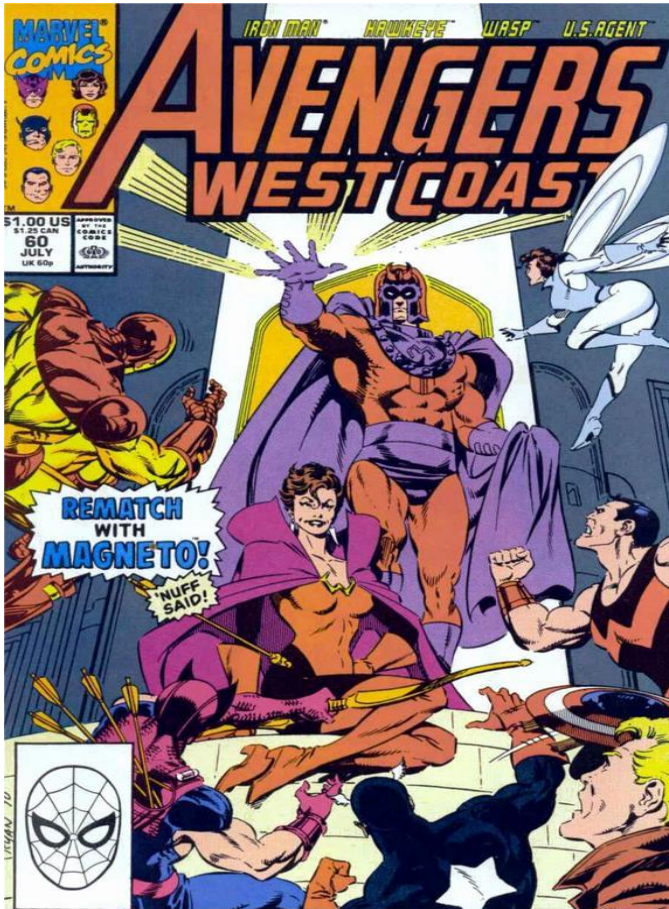
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. A serviceable West Coast Avengers story that would make more sense as a back-up in an annual rather than another month of wheel-spinning.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Give me that bomb that's going to explode THIS VERY SECOND!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 60 (July 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's been three months for readers but only a few hour for the West Coast Avengers to finally get their act together and go after Magneto. This is it! The fight readers have been waiting for!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Roy and Dann Thomas step in to finish the massive storyline that John Byrne put in motion before he left the book. Paul Ryan comes aboard with Danny Bulanadi to handle the art. And honestly, it's not bad. The writing appears to be taking a few shortcuts to get to specific points quicker, but that's forgivable after all the running in place readers have been subjected to.

It's Friday, November 22, 1963, and John F. Kennedy and the first lady are in a motorcade in Dallas. Lee Harvey Oswald is about to pull the trigger and change the world when Agent Corrigan shoots him in the head from behind. Just when it looks like Kennedy has been saved, another shot is fired from another location and the President is killed. One of the observers on this fateful day in Dallas is Immortus, who is there to eliminate the last of the divergences so that he can reclaim his title of Master of Time. Now his endgame is set in motion...

When we first see the team of Wasp, Pym, Iron Man and Wonder Man, they're is still cleaning up the mess Vibro's earthquake made from issue #58, meaning that it's only

been a few hours since Magneto defeated them on Asteroid M. This information helps to reemphasize what a ridiculous waste of time issue #59 was. Anyway, the team helps to save a bunch of people from the crumbling Point Vicente lighthouse. Working together, thanks to the arrival of Hawkeye and U.S. Agent (apparently healed from his battle with Magneto), they stabilize the lighthouse and rescue everyone from danger.

On Asteroid M, Quicksilver is concerned about the Scarlet Witch's increased powers, which is a mystery even to Magneto. The master of magnetism wants to get his plan in motion, the final clash between mutants and humans, by manipulating the Earth's weather (like Ming always does!). Sadly, this version of Magneto doesn't quite fit the merciful villain Byrne was working with.

Quicksilver protests, revealing that he's against his father's plan, leading to a clash between the two. Scarlet Witch steps in and breaks Quicksilver's leg. Quicksilver reveals that he's had a particle-Pym-ed Lockjaw in his pocket the whole time (and people give Mitt Romney grief over putting a dog on the roof of his car, imagine being stuck in the skintight outfit of a runner for hours at a time) and uses the dog to teleport them all into a trap where the West Coast Avengers are eagerly awaiting their rematch.

This scene doesn't make a lot of sense. For this plan to work, Pym and Quicksilver had to agree on a specific time for all of this to go down. No one knew that there would be an earthquake or that Magneto would learn of

his son's betrayal. Quicksilver teleported them away because if he didn't, he was surely going to die. Either way, we have to assume that Pym finally told everyone of Quicksilver's involvement and the plan they made way back when, and then they all stood around at the agreed spot where Quicksilver would appear for hours, days, whatever.

Magneto is thrown off his game pretty early on in the battle as it's taking place at Ocean World at the Atlantis exhibit (aren't all the best fights there?), where the team had previously "de-metal[ed] things in a hurry." On top of that, Scarlet Witch, just as she's about to kill Wasp, is suddenly thrown into a trance, surrounded by an impenetrable force field of some kind. Magneto flees and is chased by the team until Iron Man pushes him into an oil refinery smokestack. Once inside, the two clogged the smokestack, forcing it to explode. Iron Man casually mentions that Magneto vanished in a burst of flames, and then the team makes an awful, awful joke about it (see below!).

Once back at the compound, everyone is confused by what is happening to Scarlet Witch. Before anyone can figure anything out, Immortus appears, reveals that they've all been pawns in his game, and that Scarlet Witch is now his queen.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Despite taking a couple of short cuts (Quicksilver tipping his hand too soon, the trap that makes no sense)

to get everyone in place and Magneto's characterization being off, it's not the train wreck I was expecting with Byrne being off the book. But then again, this is only the first issue...

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

After nonchalantly murdering Magneto, the Avengers try out a new battle cry (with the help of the reader!):





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 61 (August 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Immortus transports the West Coast Avengers to Limbo where they face off with the Legion of the Unliving. Meanwhile, Agatha Harkness finds out what Immortus' plan is all about.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

While Roy and Dann Thomas get the writing credit, it should be pointed out that there's a "special thanks" to R.J.M. Lofficier, who was the wife of French science fiction writer, Jean-Marc Lofficier. I don't know what her contribution to the story was, but I figured since someone at Marvel felt it pertinent to give her thanks on the opening splash page, I should at least mention her here.

And we're off...

After appearing in the background of the book for over a year, Immortus finally comes face-to-face with the West Coast Avengers. And it doesn't look good. Not only is Wanda unconscious (her default setting for the last 12 issues) but she's surrounded by both a force field and an extra-temporal shield for good measure. The helpless team is forced to listen to Immortus' exposition. When the team finally attacks, Immortus - concerned that the team will pursue him - transports the entire team with him to Limbo. Yeah, that didn't make sense either in the book.

Of interest, the Thomas's are writing the team as a bunch of petty teenagers just like Englehart did back in the day. It's almost like they've devolved since Byrne stepped off the book, which is a real shame. Hawkeye gets jealous when Wasp refers to Pym as a "leader and founding father" and then later makes a snide remark to Wonder Man about his Hollywood career.

The issue's big fight, as promised on the cover, starts when the Legion of the Unliving enters the picture. I love how Iron Man describes them through the voice of a writer trying desperately to make sure no reader can be annoyed by any contradictions in the Legion's membership: "The membership may change - but the concept's the same! Immortus conjures up the shades of *those thought by the Avengers* to be among the ranks of the unliving! And then commands them to do his bidding!" U.S. Agent reminds everyone not to hold back as the Legion of the Unliving aren't really alive. You see, the Legion of the Unliving are dead. In case you haven't figured it out yet, they're not alive.

And so everyone fights. A lot of this reads an awful lot like *Avengers Annual #16* where the Avengers fought, you guessed it, the Legion of the Unliving. In fact, Hawkeye fought the exact same person.



From Avengers Annual #16



From West Coast Avengers #61

A stunning eight pages of the book are given to Agatha Harkness as she attempts to figure out Immortus' master plan by interrogating his three-dimensional doppelganger (don't ask!). Immortus decides to reveal his plan by starting at the very beginning of his life. And so readers are treated to pages worth of excruciating Englehart-style flashbacks that keeps circling the answer to the mystery without ever saying it. Finally, the cliffhanger has Harkness finally realizing what Immortus' plan is in a poorly constructed splash page with awkward dialogue to match ("While your Legion of the Unliving vanishes back into blessed oblivion all around us --- I realize, at last, just what that plan is!"). Meaning readers will have to wait another whole month

before getting answers to the story they've been patiently reading for over a year.

But you only need to wait another week.

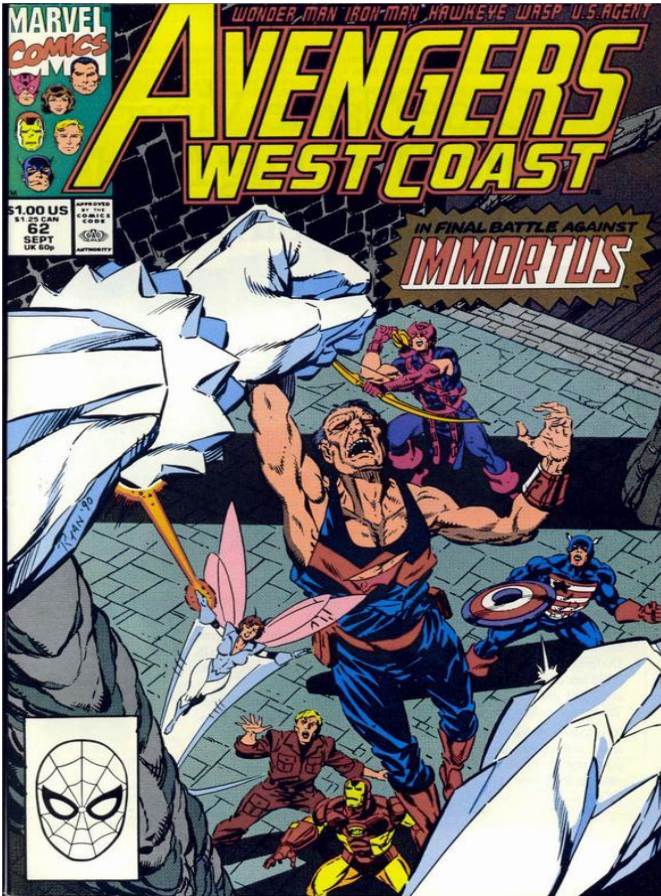
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. This is all info-dumping with intermittent uninspired fights. We're back to Englehart levels of exposition and it's not pretty.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Man is like Lennie...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 62
(September 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

This is it! The conclusion to the storyline that started way back in issue #42. The team finally confronts Immortus to save the Scarlet Witch from intermittent trances.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

After wasting an issue fighting the Legion of the Unliving, the West Coast Avengers are face-to-face with Immortus at last. Before punches are thrown, Immortus answers some questions with the Power of Exposition. It was Immortus who reverted Vision to an android incapable of loving Wanda. It was Immortus who made Wanda's twins disappear. All of this was done because Scarlet Witch is a nexus, a rare being who belong equally in all possible timelines. And Immortus needs her so he can protect and control the centuries under his dominion.

Finally, the team has had enough of all the big words Immortus keeps using. So do what they do best and start punching!

Tempus, Guardian of Castle Limbo and Warrior Slave (really, who would declare this?) appears out of nowhere and grabs Wonder Man. Tempus' touch makes Wonder Man age rapidly.

Agatha Harkness, having learned Immortus' plan at the end of last issue, travels to limbo using Immortus'

doppelganger (stop thinking so hard and roll with it). Once in limbo, she uses her astral body to communicate with Wanda, still in her trance. The team is taking a heck of a beating from Tempus, whose timestorm is forcing the members to relive their most fearful and deeply buried memories. Harkness is doing everything she can to convince Wanda to reject her powers. Immortus senses that something is amiss and realizes Harkness is there. He attacks, just as Tempus is about to kill the West Coast Avengers, and just when it looks like there's no hope left, Wanda wakes up and saves the day by rejecting her powers.

The Time Keepers then appear. They are the ones who designated that Immortus watch over the time between 3000 B.C. and 4000 A.D. It turns out that while Immortus may have handled things poorly, he really was trying to make sure that nothing bad was going to happen to the timestream. And Wanda being a nexus was an important part of that plan. The Time Keepers give Wanda's rejected powers to Immortus, who is transformed into a motionless statue - the very fate he had planned for Wanda.

I'm skipping over the part where U.S. Agent decides he wants to arrest the Time Keepers and attacks them with his shield. And Hawkeye helps him out by shooting off an arrow. The West Coast Avengers have historically been over their head since the book began, and this scene just makes them look stupid.

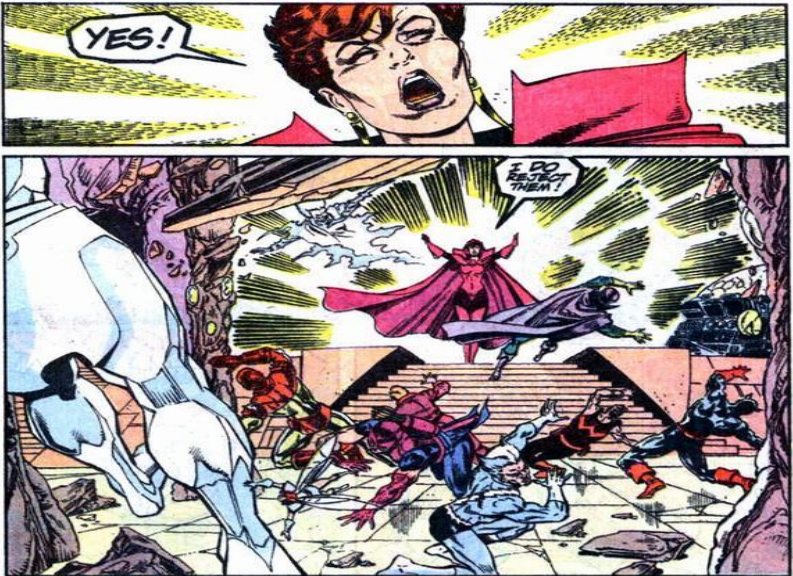
The Time Keepers returns the team to their home. Hawkeye immediately falls asleep, creating one of those freeze shots you'd see at the end of an episode of CHiPs with everyone laughing while the captain shakes his head (this part played by U.S. Agent).

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I'm confident that this ending isn't even close to where Byrne was headed, and it's amazing that the Thomas's manage to make this half as coherent as they did. Still, it's a mess through and through...

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

No one rejects quite like Wanda...





West Coast Avengers Annual 5 (1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy & Dann Thomas/Rob Tokar/Gary Barnum/Dwayne McDuffie/Carrie Barr

Penciler: Jim Fry/Jim Reddington/Brad Vancata/Grant Miehm/James Fry

Inker: Keith Williams/Jim Sanders/Chris Ivy

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Terminus Factor - Marvel's big summer event - continues in this annual. Plus, lots of back-up stories! One could argue, too many back-up stories.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

“When Titans Trash”

The first story picks up right after the events from the last issue (#62) with Pym reactivating the original Human Torch after his battle with the Scarlet Witch and Magneto. After getting him (and the readers!) up to speed, Quicksilver runs in the room to inform everyone (including Machine Man who is inexplicably present) that there's an emergency. Hercules is in San Francisco "battling hordes of metallic beasts he calls Termini." And they're off!

When we see the threat of the Termini for the first time, Hercules is at the scene unloading a ton of exposition on the reader. Since this is the fourth part of a five parter running through the annuals, I admit it's appreciated for someone who won't be reading the other books. However, when he starts describing things that are happening in the panel, it unfortunately reveals that penciler Jim Fry isn't exactly doing his job at 100%. Anyway, it seems there are two Termini fighting one another, one claiming to be the other's "son". That's as deep as this is going to get.

Pym comes up with a plan involving mirror lenses, but he doesn't bother to let anyone know what's going to happen. He ends up buying the team a few minutes as the Termini separate, believing they following each other when in fact they're following light-mirages. However, because Pym didn't tell anyone what was going on until the last minute, they lack the coordination to make any impact in the few minutes they have. Eventually, everyone is knocked out of the game except Iron Man and Machine Man.

Eventually "Father" Terminus beats up "Son" Terminus so badly that he shrinks down enough to be swallowed. Once consumed by "Father" Terminus, he explodes, then expands into one giant composite Terminus. He then walks off, and...the team lets him go.

The story ends with the Avengers, having been briefed by Iron Man, trying to figure out how to attack Terminus because the last time the West Coast team saw him, he was "stalk[ing] off due east." It seems like since the bad guy was heading east, the West Coast Avengers just assumed it was the other team's problem now. Amazing.

“Media Watch”

The second story is a parody of *Nightline* with Ted Koppel. The whole story is told with talking heads on TV screens. This is a device that was used to great effect in Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, and it had been imitated so much by the early Nineties that it had become a joke. It's clear that "Media Watch" is filler, and

there's not a lot to say about it except that it's terrible. When you write a story full of talking heads, it would help if you had a good ear for dialogue.

“Tanks for Nothing”

What would a West Coast Avengers annual be without an awful story with Firebird? In this one, Surf - three mutant Atlanteans - break into Marine World to free some whales. Firebird, who was minding her own business watching the whale show when Surf arrived, calls the team into action. By the time Pym, Wasp and Hawkeye arrive, Firebird had contained Surf. Once everyone is in one place, we have our obligatory fight. But wait...it seems that Surf only wanted to help the whales. They have no way of knowing that these tanks are there to protect the whales, not harm them, as Pym explains. When Surf asks why the whales have to perform for food, the team falls silent with guilt.

Okay, this is not good. Yeah, the message is good, but I already knew all this thanks to *Star Trek IV*. Leave it to Firebird to ruin an already awful annual...

“Don't You Daaare Miss It!”

Wonder Man convinces the Hawkeye, U.S. Agent, Iron Man and Vision to take his place for a personal appearance at a Monster Truck Show. Once there, no one is impressed except for U.S. Agent who can't believe they got in for free. As the show goes on, Doctor Goodwrench appears. It turns out that he's a mutant with the ability

to converse with machines and since has become the world's first mechanical rights activist. He wants everyone to stop abusing the trucks.

Doctor Goodwrench takes control of the machines, including Iron Man's armor, and starts attacking. Vision, however, is able to get through to the Doctor by informing him that the trucks and tractors are unable to communicate. Doctor Goodwrench breaks down into tears as he realizes that if Vision is correct, that means he's crazy.

This is probably the best story in the issue, and a lot of that has to do with Dwayne McDuffie's writing. It's clear he understands how ridiculous the premise of this story is and decides just to have fun with the characters. And it works. In fact, this is the closest the team's been to the Justice League International - another team book I was enjoying at the same time - in terms of humor and character interaction.

“Honey, I Shrunk the Hyperatomic Anti-Proton Cannon!”

Pym freaks out because he's lost his Hyperatomic Anti-Proton Cannon, which he shrank from 16 feet long to half an inch. And now he's tearing the room apart trying to find it. The rest of the team helps him out, while Wonder Man - whose high density could set off the cannon - is forced to stand still and eat a bowl of chips.

While the team frantically tries to find the cannon, Wonder Man finishes his bowl of chips. Unknown to him, the cannon was at the bottom of the bowl. He swallows it and it explodes inside of him. The story ends with Wonder Man saying, "Uh, I think I found it, doc!"

My favorite bit is how they inform me at the beginning of this story that it takes place between issues #53 and #54. Because this story is so important it's paramount that I know where it fits in continuity. But now I wonder why Wonder Man didn't show any of the effects of swallowing the Hyperatomic Anti-Proton Cannon during his fight in issue #54. Why?! WHY!?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. This one is awful, awful, awful.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Iron Man is jealous!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 63 (October 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

With the team recovering from the onslaught of events involving Immortus and Terminus, our heroes finally have a little downtime. That is, until the Human Torch disappears and comes face-to-face with the Living Lightning.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

We start off with Wanda in bed surrounded by her friends while Doctor Sanford informs her that she needs a few more days rest. Why the team is trusting one of the world's most powerful mutants to be diagnosed by a normal physician instead of someone like Mister Fantastic is really never addressed. Maybe they're trying to save money.

Quicksilver gets into a tiff with Doctor Sanford outside when he asks him if Wanda will ever regain her powers. Sanford innocently responds that he doesn't know as he's never treated a mutant before, which makes Quicksilver angry. Luckily, Hawkeye is there to break things up.

U.S. Agent is conflicted about his orders from the government to watch the team and his enthusiasm for being a part of the Avengers. He wants to tell everyone how proud he is to be an Avenger, maybe even apologize for coming off too strong before, but then he walks away, thinking everyone's looking down on him. It's a one page scene, but it's probably the best thing anyone's done with

U.S. Agent since he arrived in the book. Finally, readers can tell that there's something real going on in his head.

Wonder Man is still struggling with his feelings for Wanda. He calls Vision to see if he wants to come and see his wife, but Vision reminds Simon that he's not the same android he was, and he has no memories of his time with Wanda. This leads to some Wonder Man angst with just the right amount of unnecessary property damage (see below).

The Human Torch was in Pym's lab recovering from his fight with Terminus (*West Coast Avengers Annual #5*) when he suddenly wakes up with a wild look in his eyes and flees by melting a hole through the roof. Pym, Wasp and Mrs. Raymond (the Human Torch's partner Toro's widow) jump into ROVER and begin searching for our flaming hero.

The Human Torch, flying over Orange County, is trying to figure out his place in the world when he hears about a "glowing man" causing problems on the radio. He immediately springs into action and comes face-to-face with the Living Lightning. The Living Lightning makes short work of the Human Torch. By the time the rest of the team comes to his aid, he's on his back recovering. He tells Wasp that he's a "has-been," but he learns that he's fully capable of being a hero in the modern world, only he needs to learn the value of team work. And so, with the help of Pym and Wasp, the Human Torch is finally able to defeat the Living Lightning.

And with that, this After School Special comes to a close.

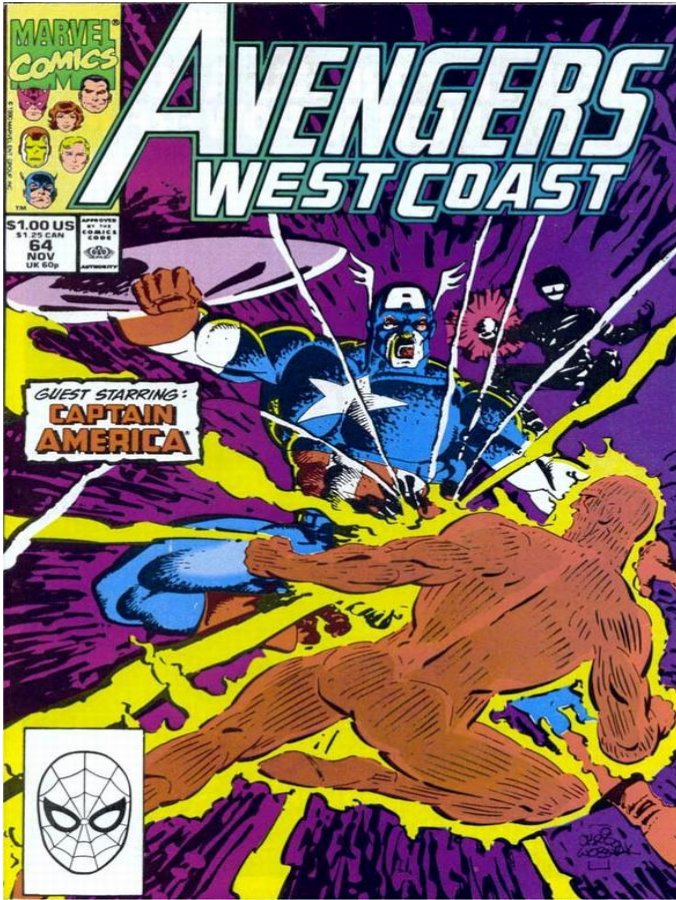
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. We finally have a decent issue. Despite the fighting, there's enough downtime to get in some needed character development that's been absent in the book since Byrne left.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Melodrama!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 64 (November 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Terry Kavanagh
Penciler: Chris Wozniak
Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Captain America's old partner Rick Jones is in trouble and he springs into action to save him. This leads him on a collision course with the Human Torch, the Great Lake Avengers and...Superman?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Looks like we've stumbled onto another dreaded inventory issue. Chris Wozniak's pencils are a real change of pace for the book - a cross between Todd McFarlane and Michael Golden with a little Art Adams thrown in for good measure. I probably loved the hell out of this in 1990, but today, while it has its moments, it just doesn't work for me. I do remember Wozniak's work over in *Justice League* in the early 90's and enjoying it quite a bit.

Captain America gets a video message from Rick Jones as he's being attacked by a monster. When he traces the message, he discovers that it came from the West Coast Avengers compound. When the Human Torch investigates, he learns that the message was actually relayed from the compound from somewhere in the midwest. He sends Captain America the coordinates who immediately springs into action. Later, the Human Torch realizes that the coordinates were actually another relay station and that Captain America could be walking into a trap.

Captain America arrives at an amusement park. In a fun house, he's attacked by a bunch of robots (one of them is, interestingly enough, dressed as Superman). Eventually, he ends up in a Tunnel of Love where he's confronted by the creature that attacked Rick Jones. The creature takes Captain America's shield.

Eventually, the Human Torch meets up with Captain America in a wax museum full of replicas of Marvel heroes and villains that have come to life. During the fighting, Captain America believes the Human Torch to be a doppelganger (thus satisfying the misunderstanding that'll lead to our heroes fighting). Just when they figure out that they're fighting a friend, the Great Lake Avengers appears with their own misunderstanding. It turns out that they received a message from Captain America saying that he needed their help to get his shield back from a fake Captain America. This is like a Marvel version of *Three's Company*.

Once everyone realizes who everyone is, they come to understand that the whole thing was a big set up to steal Captain America's shield. Luckily for them, Captain America figured this out earlier and switched his shield with one made out of wax.

The villain of the story is actually a high school kid named Stevie, who had come into possession of the Mystic Ruby of Cyttorak (the same thing that gives Juggernaut his strength) which he calls his "lucky red rock." It turns out that he simply wanted Captain America's shield to impress his class during Show and

Tell. The issue ends with him being humiliated in front of his class and getting ready to do something horrible to them with the Mystic Ruby of Cyttorak.

There's also a hint that Stevie's story is meant to continue somewhere else. Anyone know if that ever happened?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. For an inventory issue, it's not too terrible. The story moves at a quick pace and the art is fine enough (Wozniak is clearly having fun with all the cameos from both Marvel and DC universes).

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

It's the Captain America/Joker fight fans have waited all their life for.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 65 (December 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Grim Reaper has returned from the dead to prey on the living like a vampire. When Wonder Man confronts his brother, will he be able to make him see reason? Or will the Grim Reaper make his point?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Simon visits the grave of his older brother Erik. Simon talks out loud about his feelings, and we get a recap of their relationship and Erik's evolution to big brother to the villain known as Grim Reaper. As soon as Simon leaves the cemetery in his quinjet, Erik's grave bursts open with the Grim Reaper shouting out, "Free at last!"

Nekra appears and informs him that she revived him because she was in love with him. And for him to stay alive, he'll need to kill someone with his scythe once every 24 hours. The cemetery groundskeeper sees the two of them and yells at them for being there after dark. Nekra tells Erik that this will be his first victim. But Erik kills Nekra instead, absorbing her life force, and becoming the "walking personification of death!"

At the compound, Hawkeye and U.S. Agent finally come to blows, but they're interrupted by Quicksilver, Scarlet Witch and the returning Wonder Man. Once the commotion dies down, Wanda and Simon are left alone. Wanda is worried about the fact that her powers still haven't returned. Simon, seeing an opportunity, asks her

out for dinner. She's about to decline, but she sees his sour face, and agrees to go on a pity-date for tacos.

Meanwhile, at an abandoned military bunker on the coast, a group of Satanists are in the middle of some serious business when the Grim Reaper enters and starts hacking away. Willie is the first Satanist to die (see below!). The more the Grim Reaper kills, the more powerful he becomes. One of the Satanists survives and she stumbles out of the bunker, crosses the street, and conveniently enters the Mexican restaurant Wanda and Simon are eating at.

Simon goes to investigate and is confronted by his brother. They start fighting. And when the Grim Reaper's scythe touches his brother, Simon begins to absorb Erik's lifeforce. Simon is disorientated by all the dark energy from his brother. And Erik is in desperate need of another victim before he dies...again. The Grim Reaper escapes, and Simon vows to find him. Because every drop of blood Erik spills will be on Simon's hands.

The issue wraps up with Hank and Janet on a road trip. They're stranded when their rental gets a flat tire and head to a farm to get some help. Please remember that this is the guy who has previously saved the world using a only a rope and a skateboard, and he's apparently completely useless when it comes to a flat tire.

It turns out that the farmers are really androids. This is learned when they inexplicably explode. Hank and Janet are shocked and they decide they need to get back to L.A.

immediately. As they leave, we discover that Ultron 13 is watching the whole thing from his secret robot lair.

Ultron is back. And so is the Grim Reaper. Man, it's like the old days again.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm on board. This feels like an Englehart issue, only without all the Englehartness. Don't get me wrong, it's still too convenient and silly, but it's at least fun. Plus: Pity Taco Date! You don't see that in Marvel comics anymore.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

No, not Willie too!





Avengers Spotlight, Issue 38 (November 1990)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: June Brigman

Inker: Doug Hazlewood

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Tigra disappeared from the main *West Coast Avengers* book a while ago after Hank Pym shrunk her, and now readers finally see what she's been up to all this time.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

We're taking a bit of a detour this week. You see, Tigra returns to *West Coast Avengers* in issue #66 (we'll be looking at that next week), but her return to humanity was actually dealt with outside of the series in *Avengers Spotlight* #38. The events of this issue take place immediately after Scarlet Witch was rescued from Immortus (*West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #62) and while the Avengers are battling Terminus (*West Coast Avengers Annual* #5).

First off, I need to mention June Brigman's art. I remember her work on *Power Pack* back in the day and liking it quite a bit. Her work here is good, but it feels like it belongs in a Vertigo book than a Marvel book. That's not a complaint though, as it's a refreshing change of pace from the work I've been reading for the last two years recapping these books.

An old woman is feeding the cats in the park when a peculiar orange cat wanders over and starts eating. Because her eyesight is poor, she doesn't notice that this is no ordinary cat. Of course, this "cat" is Tigra, a member of the West Coast Avengers, who had recently

been overcome by her cat-side, and later shrunk down by Hank Pym.

A loose pitbull arrives and begins killing the cats. It has Tigra in its jaws when she begins fighting back, eventually killing it. However, she's wounded. The old woman takes her to the vet, where they decide to put her down. The vet is just about to push the needle inside of her, when Agatha Harkness arrives and rescues Tigra.

Back at the compound, Harkness uses Pym particles to return Tigra to her normal size (luckily Pym's equipment is easy for everyone to use, including witches). She talks to Tigra, trying to get her to remember who she was by recapping her life story. She informs her that while she was cured by the Cat People, because she has two souls, it was inevitable that her cat-side would eventually gain control.

Using a spell, she conjures Balkatar, an emissary of the Cat People, hoping that he'll be able to save Tigra. The emissary turns out to be Tabur, who quickly knocks Harkness out. It turns out that he's the King of the Cat People, and he's been searching for Tigra for a long time because...he wants to have sex with her. Tigra asks, "You...want to legitimize your rule...by mating with the heir of the Cat People's first Tigra?" And Tabur responds, "That, too, I suppose...but mostly...I just want to."

Yeah, that's not creepy at all.

| He's just about to ~~rape~~ make his first move when Harkness' cat Ebony attacks Tabur. Once he realizes that he won't be mating with Tigra, he decides he needs to kill her instead. Tigra puts up a good fight, but eventually Tabur gets the upper hand. Just then, Harkness uses Tigra's amulet to cast a spell in order to remove Tigra's cat soul and then pushes it inside of Tabur, forcing him to transform into a normal cat.

Harkness informs Tigra that she's now capable of switching from her human form to Tigra with the amulet, and her cat-side will no longer control her. And now that she's back to normal, they decide to have some cookies.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I'm digging the art, but this story is a painful way to get Tigra from Point A to Point B as quickly as possible. Plus, I'm not a fan of the whole Cat People aspect of Tigra's origin. Actually, now that I think of it, I'm not really a fan of Tigra. Her origin is too convoluted, and no matter how complicated writers make her, she's still Garfield in a bikini.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 66 (January 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan/Rick Levine

Inker: Danny Bulanadi/Keith Williams

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After Pym reveals the robot farmers they discovered last issue, he sends the team out to investigate what could be behind it. Hawkeye, Quicksilver and Tigra wander off on their own and accidentally stumble upon Ultron 13's secret lair. Unfortunately, Ultron 13 is ready for them!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Iron Man and U.S. Agent are at the scene of malathion spraying protest where a helicopter is about to dump a whole bunch of the chemical on the protesters. U.S. Agent resents being at the scene, feeling that they're all too stupid to get out of the way. Iron Man uses his repulsor rays to stop the spraying, but accidentally puts the helicopter in jeopardy. While he's rescuing the helicopter, U.S. Agent finds himself in a fight with the protesters. One of them is covered in metallic rashes, and tells U.S. Agent that there have been secret night sprayings, and they've caused his unusual skin condition.

When they return to the compound, they discover that Tigra is officially back on the team. And the writers waste no time having her aggressively hit on U.S. Agent.



I always assumed that Tigra's flirtations with men was part of her cat-side taking over, but we learned last week (*Avengers Spotlight* #38) that Agatha Harkness cured Tigra and this is no longer an issue. Now in the Thomases' hands, this means that Tigra is naturally this aggressive. Frankly, it's a characteristic I find troublesome.

In a meeting, Pym and Janet reveal the disassembled pieces of the robot farmers they discovered last issue. Pym thinks that it has something to do with the food supply, and U.S. Agents wonders aloud if there's any connection with the secret nighttime sprayings of malathion. Hawkeye tells him to get serious, and they once again start fighting. Pym suggests that they split up and investigate different farms in the area, as well as look into the sprays U.S. Agent mentioned. Wonder Man freaks out and refuses to participate after he destroys the table. He wants to hunt down his brother, the Grim Reaper, who is wandering around the city killing people.

He feels that the robots shouldn't be a main priority. Failing to be reasoned with by the team, he storms out of the room, destroying the doorway as he leaves. In the last six issues alone, the property damage Wonder Man has inflicted on the compound should be enough to have him thrown off the team.

While the team follows Pym's lead, Hawkeye - despite making fun of U.S. Agent's idea - decides to check out the secret malathion sprayings for himself. Plugging data into the computer, he notices that the sprayings (how he got this info is unclear) are all in one area, and at the very center was the site of last summer's tunnel fire. Hawkeye doesn't feel that this is a coincidence. Just as he's about to enter the tunnel, Quicksilver and Tigra appear, and confess that they've been following him since he acted so strangely back at the compound. And by strange, we are to assume that it's strange that Hawkeye would be able to connect any of these dots on his own before Pym.

Once inside the tunnel, they stumble upon a giant insidious lair that would make any James Bond villains tear up and are immediately attacked by robots. They make short work of the robots, until out of the shadows comes Ultron 13, who takes all of three of them down easily. When our heroes regain consciousness, they're in a glass tube. Ultron 13, a robot not above revealing his plan out loud, tells them that he's the one who's been spraying the area at night. His plan is to turn everyone into robots who'll become 4 billion extensions of Ultron 13.

And, of course, he's already sprayed our heroes! Oh no!

There's a small backup called "...that Shall He also Reap!" written by Roy Thomas with art by Rick Levine and Keith Williams. This story shows Wonder Man confronting the Grim Reaper in a dark alley in L.A. They fight, naturally, but it's basically a stalemate, as both are unable to hurt the other. Eventually Mandrill - the brother of Nekra, who the Grim Reaper murdered last issue - shows up to get some revenge. The Grim Reaper kills Mandrill quickly enough and absorbs his lifeforce. The Grim Reapers tells Wonder Man that he's going to let him live so he can suffer every time he hears about him killing another person. Once he feels Wonder Man has agonized enough, he'll come and kill him once and for all. And with that threat, he jumps down a sewer hole and exits the story. Something I should've done way before this.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast for the main story. Roast for the backup. The main story has enough character drama to keep things interesting and alive, but the backup is wheel spinning at its absolute worst.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Man reminds you that No means No.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 67 (February 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Hawkeye, Tigra and Quicksilver are turned into mindless robots. And Ultron-13 makes a surprising ally.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Ultron-13 reveals his big plan to Hawkeye, Tigra and Quicksilver, who have been captured and are trapped in giant glass tubes. Ultron-13 just doesn't understand this thing called life, which is why he's using his robotize spray to turn humans into mindless robots (or "andrones"). Soon there won't be one "flesh and blood human being left upon the face of the earth!" Ultron-13 then robotizes his three prisoners.

While all of this is going down, the Grim Reaper stumbles upon Ultron-13's secret lair and hears of the robot's evil plan. He tries to stop Ultron-13 because a world without human beings would mean death for the Grim Reaper. However, he's subjected to the mental waves being broadcast from Ultron-13's artificial brain. Ultron-13 is fascinated by the Grim Reaper's recent transformation and his scythe. Using his eye beams, he performs surgery on the Grim Reaper and fuses the scythe to his body. This impresses the Grim Reaper and he agrees to work alongside Ultron-13.

Hank and Wanda go to UCLA to use the university's super-computer, much to the annoyance of Dr Falk (a random professor/scientist who doesn't like super-heroes using their equipment). Pym figures out that the

metallic flakes on the spray victims from last issue might be reversible; in fact, a specific kind of light might do the trick, only he doesn't know which one. Before he can find more answers, the robotized Hawkeye, Tigra and Quicksilver attack. They knock out Pym and start destroying the equipment. Dr Falk is not impressed by this.

U.S. Agent, Iron Man and Wonder Man show up to stop the drone versions of their teammates. But the fight doesn't go well at all. With the team running out of options, Pym finally wakes up and tells Iron Man to hit them with light. He activates his uni-beam and uses different lights until the infrared begins to affect the drones. They can't figure out how to reverse the effect of Ultron-13 's robotize spray. Iron Man keeps hitting them with infrared; however, since there's an infinite number of frequencies, it could be years before they figure out which one can save their teammates.

Once Wanda hears about luck, she struggles to use her powers for the first time since her time with Immortus. Just as Iron Man's uni-beam is about to give out, Hawkeye, Tigra and Quicksilver revert to human. Everyone is happy, especially Wanda who now has powers again. However, it's not all good news, as Hawkeye's hand is still metal. When questioned, Hawkeye, Tigra and Quicksilver don't remember what happened to them or who was responsible for their transformation.

The issue ends with Ultron-13 revealing that his master plan to change humans to robots will begin at the Rose Parade...which doesn't sound dramatic at all.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. This one doesn't work for me. And really, the Rose Parade?

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Hawkeye used to be *all* metal until he sold out!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 68 (March 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team learns that Ultron-13 is behind the mystery spray turning humans into andrones. But will they be able to stop him from releasing his robot spray at the Rose Parade?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The issue opens with a splash page of the team crashing into Ultron-13's secret lair in the Metro Rail tunnel. It's a strong start, but it poses a serious problem. In fact, I had to make sure I didn't accidentally skip an issue by mistake, because the last issue ended with the team still unaware of who the bad guy was and where his secret lair was. And now, here we are with the team knowing the who and where. On top of this, there's absolutely no mention of how they came to connect the dots. Weird. The book has a habit of relying too heavily on coincidences and plot holes, but this one is particularly problematic.

The team takes down a group of silent andrones at Ultron-13's lair, including a child drone that takes U.S. Agent by surprise by simply speaking. Ultron-13 is nowhere to be found, of course. And before they can find any clues to his whereabouts, one of the andrones activates the auto-destruct sequence. The team escape from the tunnel just in time, only to be confronted by a police officer trying to write them a ticket (see below).

Wonder Man stays behind at the destroyed lair because he senses his brother, the Grim Reaper, is there. Once they meet, Wonder Man learns of Ultron-13's plan and the Grim Reaper's alliance with him. The Grim Reapers vows to help Wonder Man stop Ultron-13 in exchange for freedom and the ability to kill one person a day to maintain his strict diet. Wonder Man reluctantly agrees. Though to be honest, he didn't negotiate hard enough. You could've talked him down to half a person a day, Simon, if you were a real hero.

Hawkeye, who is still half robot thanks to Ultron-13's robot spray, tries to escape the compound, creating an unnecessary two-page fight sequence of our favorite archer against his teammates. They manage to tie Hawkeye to a chair and then jump into a quinjet to answer Wonder Man's signal for help.

Wonder Man and the Grim Reaper get to the Rose Parade where Ultron-13 is hiding in a blimp hovering above, waiting to release his robot spray (sorry, it's *gallium arsenide spray*, for all you scientists out there) on the unsuspecting population. The blimp, it turns out, isn't a blimp, but a metal craft using some kind of anti-gravity. Once inside, the Grim Reaper confronts Ultron-13. It turns out that Ultron-13 has been unknowingly absorbing the life force of the humans he's been transforming to robots, making him vulnerable to the Grim Reaper's scythe. The Grim Reaper takes Ultron-13 down.

Unbeknownst to Wonder Man, the feedback from Ultron-13's computer makes the robots in the Rose Parade come to life, which allows the West Coast Avengers to spend a few pages fighting Gort from *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and the robots from *Lost in Space* and *Forbidden Planet*. How these Hollywood props could become fully functioning deadly robots is yet another detail readers are expected to roll with.

The Grim Reaper, having absorbed Ultron-13's life force, is now more powerful than ever. Wonder Man breaks his promise and decides to take in the Grim Reaper dead or...well, dead. But wait, Ultron-13 isn't down for the count after all. Before everyone can start pounding on each other, Hawkeye comes blazing in to the rescue. How he escaped from being tied to his chair is not addressed? Since Hawkeye is part human and part robot, both the Grim Reaper and Ultron-13 try to absorb his life force. However, they simply cancel one another out and lose consciousness.

The rest of the team arrives to clean up the mess and take Hawkeye back to the compound. Wonder Man, who is weak from saving Hawkeye, tells the team that the Grim Reaper might be dead and a murderer, but he is still his brother. And then he passes out too.

Lots of passing out going on in this issue.

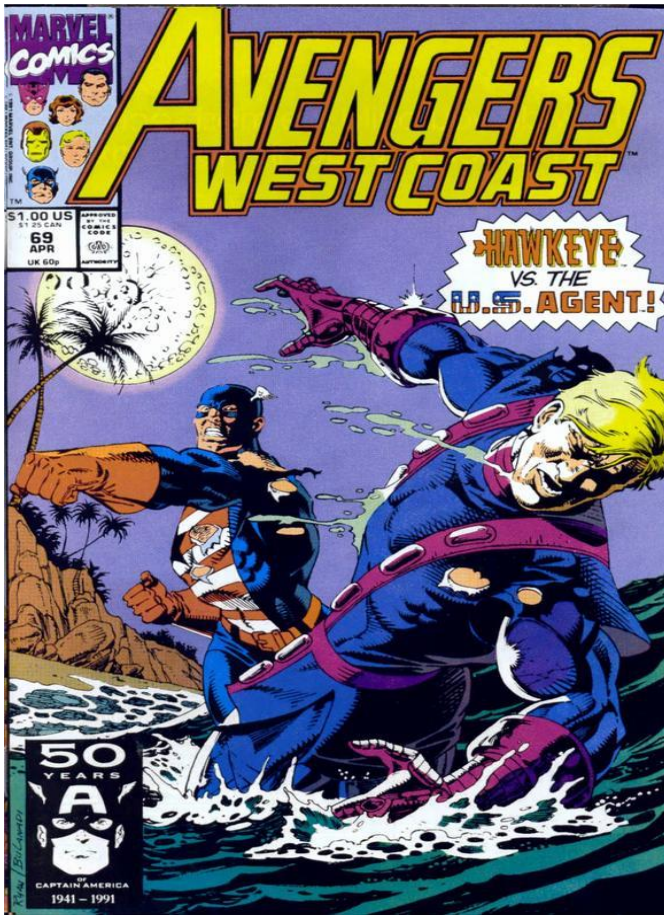
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Seriously, did I miss an issue? And are there pages missing from this issue? I like what they're trying to do with the brother storyline, but it doesn't have enough dramatic weight, especially when you push it into a story involving a robot with his own robot spray.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Even the local law enforcement doesn't respect the West Coast Avengers!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 69 (April 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Paul Ryan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The fight that's been a couple of years in the making is finally happening: Hawkeye vs. the U.S. Agent! And while this goes down, the team votes in its seven regular members.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The cover promises a fight and the book delivers one. This is the fight that's been a long time a coming, ever since U.S. Agent was pushed into the team by the government (issue #45). Roy and Dann Thomas really make the fight count too. By the time it's over, the book's status quo will be forever altered. And while the fight is big enough to fill a whole issue, the Thomases play with the story's chronology to show the team convening to vote in its seven regular members. This is perhaps the issue's saving grace.

The issue starts off with a battle-armored Hawkeye calling out U.S. Agent near the cliffs of the compound. After a little back-and-forth and some Liefeldian posturing (seriously, Hawkeye's battle armor would make Cable blush), the two go at it.

We jump back a few hours previous to the West Coast Avengers getting together to vote on their regular members. The Avengers are now operating under the United Nations, so they'll no longer be overseen by the U.S. government. This means that U.S. Agent is no longer needed as a representative for the government,

and he'll now have to be voted on to the team like everyone else. All of this information is delivered by a video message from the Avengers East. Naturally, U.S. Agent doesn't take the news well.

The votes are: Hawkeye (4 votes); Mockingbird (1 vote); Tigra (4 votes); Scarlet Witch (5 votes); Wonder Man (5 votes); Quicksilver (2 votes); Iron Man (5 votes); U.S. Agent (1 vote); Wasp (5 votes); Hank Pym (5 votes); Human Torch (3 votes); and Machine Man (1 vote). So the seven regular members of the West Coast Avengers are Hawkeye, Tigra, Scarlet Witch, Wonder Man, Iron Man, Wasp, and Hank Pym, with everyone else acting as reserve members.

After the meeting, Mockingbird thanks Hawkeye for voting for her so she wouldn't look bad with no votes, but he tells her that there's no way he'd want his estranged wife sitting across from him. She gets offended and storms off. Wonder Man asks Scarlet Witch out for another date and she gives him the "let's be friends" speech. After Wonder Man flies off in his usual passive-aggressive style, Scarlet Witch approaches Pym and Wasp to tell them that she appreciates that they can make being a couple look easy. However, they have bad news for her too. They're both leaving the team to go their separate ways; he wants to do research and she wants to travel. They give Scarlet Witch a strangely comforting speech about their relationship, which didn't make a lot of sense due to how mature and well thought out it was (come on, *West Coast Avengers*, your

relationships are supposed to be juvenile and ridiculous, like one from middle school!).

Back to the fight, after lots of arrows and shield throwing, the gloves come off (literally) and they just start duking it out, despite U.S. Agent warning Hawkeye that he's seriously outclassed in that department. U.S. Agent throws Hawkeye away from him, which ends up being over a cliff. Hawkeye uses a grappling hook from one of his arrows in the nick of time, but he still hits the beach below pretty hard. U.S. Agent runs down, apologizing. While he hates Clint, the last thing he wanted to do was kill him. When he reaches Hawkeye's body, the fight continues with Hawkeye throwing the next punch.

U.S. Agent keeps fighting, but he pulls his punches because of his strength. All the while, he yells out how Hawkeye and the rest of the team had been against him from the very beginning and he was "good and sick of it!" Hawkeye is seriously defeated, but he just won't quit (I give the Thomases a lot of grief here, but they really understood Hawkeye's arrogance and tenaciousness). U.S. Agent is both annoyed and impressed by Hawkeye.

Eventually, U.S. Agent drags Hawkeye back to shore just when the team arrives. They kick U.S. Agent off the team officially, and mention that Hawkeye will be put on probation. Iron Man gives U.S. Agent a huge talking down to - probably way harsher than he deserves. This goes to show you how much they fumbled the ball in terms of U.S. Agent's participation in the book. I'd like to

think if Byrne were still around, U.S. Agent would have become a much stronger character. The fight part of the issue wraps up with Scarlet Witch pontificating on the possibility of someone like U.S. Agent turning bad and how he could give the team a run for its money.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm good with this issue. The saving grace is playing with the story's chronology to good dramatic effect and Hawkeye's characterization, unfortunately, at the expense of U.S. Agent.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Oh, Wanda, you! Got what I need! But you say I'm just a friend!
friend! But you say I'm just a friend





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 70 (May 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Steve Butler

Inker: Danny Bulanadi

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After Spider-Woman accidentally has a run in with members of the Pacific Overlords, she calls on the West Coast Avengers to attack their secret lair. And while the Pacific Overlords aren't there, that doesn't mean that other dangers aren't awaiting...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

We start things off with Spider-Woman (Julia Carpenter), having just moved from Denver, hanging out at a pier in Newport Beach. She sees a boat coming in from the ocean without any lights on and she assumes it's thieves. She witnesses a large man (Jawbreaker) getting off the boat carrying a man over his shoulder. He is accompanied by Kuroko, a woman who can appear invisible. Spider-Woman confronts them and Jawbreaker takes her down pretty easily, punching her so hard she's thrown into the ocean.

At the West Coast Avengers compound, the first meeting with the new team has just concluded. Hawkeye is annoyed that he's been put on probation due to his fight with U.S. Agent last issue (*West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #69). Tigra is once again flirting heavily with Iron Man. Wonder Man is sulking. Quicksilver shows up with his bags packed to say goodbye to Wanda. And Hank and Janet can't wait to switch to reserve status so they can both go their separate ways.

In fact, they make such a big deal about being "just friends" that you have to wonder if Roy and Dann Thomas are really married. Look, I get that there's a suspension of disbelief when it comes to superhero stories, but I can't handle emotional dishonesty no matter how fantastical the story is. This is not the behavior of two adults, let alone two adults who were once married:



Wanda bumps into Wonder Man in another room as he's on the phone hooking up with a woman he had met at a wrap party for *Beverly Hills Rich Persons II*. What I love about this scene is that it's designed to look like he's being a douche as a way to make Wanda jealous, but she had accidentally walked into the room. Meaning that his douchey conversation with the woman on the phone is simply Simon being a complete asshole (see below).

Unless, of course, Simon was pretending to have a conversation and was standing at the desk with the phone to his ear waiting for Wanda to enter. The good news is, for the first time in many issues, Wonder Man doesn't destroy anything when he exits.

Jawbreaker arrives at Filmland in Wax (what is it with this book and wax museums? *See West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #64*) to deliver the body he's been carrying around. Underneath the museum is the secret lair of Dr. Demonicus. When Jawbreaker reveals his presence, it spooks one of Dr. Demonicus' minions who drops a monitoring device. Dr. Demonicus tells Jawbreaker to kill the minion and he chokes the minion without hesitation.

It turns out that Dr. Demonicus has kidnapped the Living Lightning after his battle with the Human Torch (*West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #63*) and has him hooked up to a bunch of devices. The body Jawbreaker was dragging around was Typhoon, a creation of Dr. Demonicus who eventually betrayed him. More importantly, Dr. Demonicus is excited about another package Jawbreaker brought - the Lifestone!

Tigra and Iron Man return from a date (Iron Man apparently bowled in his suit) to discover Spider-Woman roaming around the compound. After a brief tussle that, surprisingly, doesn't turn into a giant fight based on a misunderstanding, she informs them about the Pacific Overlords.

Before you know it, thanks to Spider-Woman's hunch that their lair wasn't far from where she fought Jawbreaker and Pym detecting an unauthorized power source, the team is crashing through the walls of the wax museum. They find the lair, but no one is there. Or so they think!

A giant-sized man - who looks like a cross between Sloth from the Goonies and the Blob - surprises the team and introduces the issue's big fight. After the team subdues him, they discover to their horror that Dr. Demonicus had mutated a toddler into this giant creature, and the West Coast Avengers just had their asses briefly handed to them by a baby. Once they realize that Dr. Demonicus is behind all this, the team is all pumped up to fight more babies. But where in the world do they start their search?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. It's not great, but I'm going with the flow for this one only because it's so ridiculous. I mean, the team fought a baby. That establishes a new low for the this book.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Man is a dick.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 71 (June 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross and Tom Morgan

Inker: Danny Bulanadi, Ivy and Hudson

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team tries to figure out Dr. Demonicus' plan. Hawkeye and Spider-Woman find a clue that brings them to Hawaii and face-to-face with Pele and...Sunfire?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The team gets the giant mutated toddler they fought last issue back to their compound and lock him up in a cell. However, his cries are so powerful, they actually throw the team around the room. Iron Man's magnetized boots allow him to remain unaffected, and poor Wasp almost crashes into a wall before Wonder Man safely catches her.

Wanda comes up with the idea of Tigra jumping into the cell with the toddler and purring in order to calm him down. She's reluctant to do so, but Iron Man literally throws her into the cell against her will. The toddler grabs her and holds her like a doll until her purrs finally get him to fall asleep. Wanda reveals an old teddy bear her children used to play with. Pym uses his Pym particles to enlarge the bear and they switch Tigra out with the bear.

Just to recap, the West Coast Avengers capture a giant-sized toddler, has Tigra cuddle with the toddler until he falls asleep, and then they switch her with a teddy bear.

Why didn't anyone ever take this book seriously again?

Thanks to Hawkeye's detective work (the second time he's managed to connect dots way before Hank Pym in the last few issues), he confirms that Dr. Demonicus is behind the toddler's startling transformation. The team jumps into action, quickly electing Iron Man as the team's chairman (keeping in mind that they do this not knowing who is under the helmet). He splits the team up to investigate leads in Australia and Japan. Wonder Man takes issue with being paired with Wanda, which leads to probably the coolest panel the book has had in years.



Hawkeye gets left behind at the compound as a liaison with Spider-Woman. During this time, he receives two

phone calls back-to-back. The first is from Dr. Jennie Falk from U.C.L.A. (you might remember her from *West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #67) who is calling about a dinner date. And the second is from a talent agency calling to represent Janet's screenplay. While all of this embarrassing character growth is happening, the mutated toddler sees some of the pictures Hawkeye brought back with him after playing detective. Because the toddler recognizes something in the photo that's not in Japan or Australia, Hawkeye decides to take Spider-Woman and go investigate what he saw in Hawaii. Hawkeye even makes a point that the mutated toddler who is capable of causing seriously bodily harm with his cries will be taken care of by the gardenersground crew.

Of interest, it's worth pointing out that Hawkeye has his flirt on with Spider-Woman. Considering that he's currently dating Spider-Woman today in the Avengers books, and it's a completely different woman under the mask, this does seem a little creepy. Has this been addressed at all?

It's during this part of the story that David Ross' pencils are replaced by Tom Morgan's work. We've seen Morgan on the book a couple of times before. The transition takes the book from the Milgrom-like consistency the book has steadily maintained to something more Liefeldian. It's not terrible, mind you, (actually, it's fun!) but it's certainly a noticeable difference.

It turns out that the pictures and clues Hawkeye found were deliberately left by Dr. Demonicus as a way to split

the team up and to buy him more time to get his master plan in motion.

In Hawaii, Namor is getting a plaque from the U.S. Navy for his heroic efforts in World War II when he is suddenly attacked by Sunfire and Pele. They've come to drive all the Americans back to the mainland. Because Sunfire and Pele - Goddess of Fire - are both Japanese, the U.S. Navy takes this to be a continuation of the attack on Pearl Harbor...because, why not?

Hawkeye and Spider-Woman show up and kick off the issue's much-bigger-than-it-deserves-to-be fight, with Namor jumping in to save the day when he's needed. It turns out that Sunfire and Pele were mesmerized and forced to attack our heroes. Sunfire only remembers being knocked out from behind in Japan and then waking up in Namor's arms (who hasn't had that fantasy?), but he does remember one thing: July 18. He doesn't know what's supposed to happen then, but he knows that it's very important. But that's...tomorrow!

In San Diego, U.S. Agent gets a phone call from the Commission ("What commission?" U.S. Agent asks. And they respond, "The Commission."). One of their people just turned rogue and they need U.S. Agent to take care of it. The rogue agent is none other than Spider-Woman. They tell him that she was last seen at the West Coast compound. Without hesitation, U.S. Agent jumps on top of a taxi (see below) and begins his journey to squash a spider.

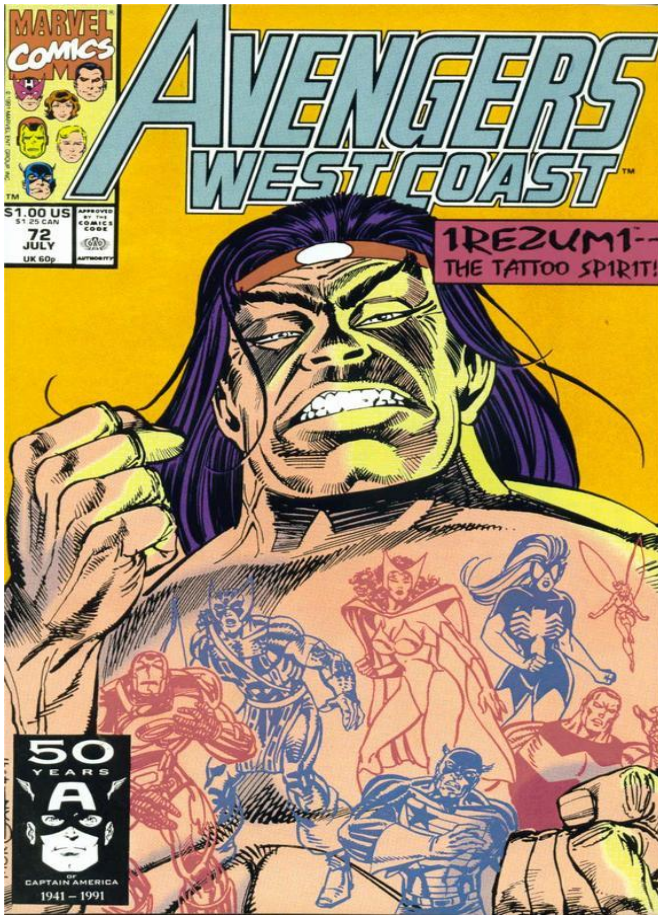
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Between the needless fight and the mutated toddler, there's not a lot to like here. The one panel I mentioned above is a breath of fresh air, but certainly not enough to save the issue.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

I'm on a taxi!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 72 (July 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Danny Bulanadi and Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team is split up in three different continents and, unfortunately, Dr. Demonicus is one step ahead of all of them.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Tigra, Wasp and Iron Man are in Japan to meet with Mr. Anami, the head of Hasanuma Electronics, to follow up on a lead. Before they can get any answers, the helicopter scene from *Lethal Weapon* makes a cameo in the book, and Mr. Anami is shot dead. Tigra jumps out of the window and attacks those in the helicopter. Naturally, the copter spins out of control and it's up to Iron Man to save the day. Because it would be awful if any of the female characters had an awesome moment that ran more than one panel.

Once on the ground, the team learns that the people on the copter are members of the Yakuza. Iron Man talks about how Tony Stark always suspected that Anami was linked with the Pacific Overlords, and why not the Yakuza? Tigra is curious to know how this Iron Man can be so certain about what Stark knows. At this, Iron Man unmask himself to reveal that he's actually Stark. Wasp admits that she, Hank and Hawkeye had already suspected the truth, but Tigra is embarrassed and thinks he had been probably laughing at her the whole time.

THEY'RE ALL GONNA LAUGH AT YOU, TIGRA!

At his secret underwater base, Dr. Demonicus has a conversation with the recently awakened Living Lightning. Because he's the main supervillain, he sees this as an opportunity to reveal his origin story (In short: Overdosed on radiation, found Lifestone, mutated huge monsters, and then got caught! You know, typical teenage rebellion stuff!). We also finally discover who the unconscious man Jawbreaker was carrying around a couple of issues back was. Recently, a yacht carrying a young couple and their baby was caught in a storm. Dr. Demonicus rescued them and, as you do, transformed them all into super-powered servitors. We've already seen the wife as Pele (*West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #71), and the baby was transformed into the mutated toddler the team captured previously. The husband, called Taifu, breaks free of his constraints and attacks Dr. Demonicus. Because all of the power was used to hold Taifu hostage, the Living Lightning's restraints go offline and he's freed. He immediately turns into lightning and accidentally knocks Taifu out. Dr. Demonicus congratulates and welcomes him into his ranks.

Iron Man, Wasp and Tigra arrive at Kyoto, where one of the Hasanuma Electronics plants is located to search for more clues. Once there, they're attacked by Irezumi ("Which, in your language, means 'tattoo'!" he patiently explains to his enemies). His tattoos capture the essence of those at close range and then returns the essence back two to three times. Put simply, he makes short work out of Iron Man and Wasp, and would've done the same for Tigra, but she manages to get back to the quinjet and make an escape.

In Australia, we briefly check in with Hank, Scarlet Witch and Wonder Man, who are about to be attacked by Jawbreaker and Cybertooth.

And back in California, Spider-Woman and Hawkeye return to the compound. Hawkeye is caught off guard and knocked out by U.S. Agent, who is there to kill Spider-Woman for the Committee. He ends up punching her a couple of times and gets his hands around her throat, but when it comes time to kill her once and for all, he can't do it. He falls back on a couch and says he's never going to waste anyone ever again (though, punching women seems perfectly okay with him).

The issue ends with Spider-Woman telling him that he needs to listen to her side of the story.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. This book always works a little better when everyone splits up, but that's really not enough to help this issue.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

"Not that I'm gonna learn much from that guy who I made fall to his death..."





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 73 (August 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross and George Freeman

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Wonder Man, Scarlet Witch and Hank Pym arrive in Australia, but that's not a welcoming party waiting for them. Tigra crashes the quinjet. And Dr. Demonicus' plan finally becomes a reality.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Tigra just barely managed to escape the fight with Dr. Demonicus' minions (*West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #72) and now she's flying the quinjet to safety while trying to remain conscious from the blood loss. After a few mishaps, she finally gets the quinjet on the ground in the middle of the jungle. Once out of the quinjet, she falls into water and is just about to drown when she's rescued by a strange arm.

Dr. Demonicus' plan is moving forward and even his workers are getting excited. The Living Lightning is the only one who's been kept in the dark over what is going on. Dr. Demonicus has given him a suit which allows him to retain his human form, but - as he discovers from Kuroko - the suit is also booby-trapped to transform him into a mass of formless electrons if he even thinks about causing any problems.

Scarlet Witch, Hank Pym and Wonder Man land in Australia. In direct contradiction to their last appearance in the previous issue, they're immediately surrounded by an Australian security force. Since the security force is clearly outmatched, their ultimate weapon is to

overwhelm the team with flagrant Australian stereotypes. Wonder Man sees their stereotypes and raises one of their cars and throws it at them while Wanda uses her hex powers to dismantle their weapons. Pym shrinks Simon and Wanda down for them to escape and they immediately run to the factory they were sent to investigate.

Once inside, Wanda and Simon are confronted by Cybertooth and Jawbreaker. Wonder Man manages to make fairly short work of them, but he's paralyzed when they take Wanda hostage and threaten to kill her. Eventually, they are - along with Pym - captured.

At Dr. Demonicus' secret underwater lair, the whole team (Iron Man and Wasp included) are put into individual glass tubes, which is a favorite among supervillains. In fact, Ultron used it a few issues back too, and you'd figure that Pym would've created an anti-glass tube device to carry around with him by now. Dr. Demonicus thinks this is a good time to let everyone know that he recently got a unique form of cancer, and while it's currently in remission, it completely disfigured his face. He removes the mask to reveal a grotesque countenance that conveniently resembles the mask he wears.

And now we get to Dr. Demonicus' big plan. He's using magma to create an island-continent called Demonica. As the magma rises to the surface, the secret lair is thrust upward, causing the whole place to shake. Wanda is temporarily freed from her glass tube, but before she can

use her powers to rescue the team, Kuroko knocks her out. Because a conscious Scarlet Witch would be too disorientating to regular readers.

The issue ends with the formation of Demonica, and Dr. Demonicus proclaiming that it will soon be the most powerful nation-state in the entire Pacific rim.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. This one works better than the last issue. The Tigra scenes at the beginning are actually well thought out (see below), and I'm surprised so many pages were given to that subplot (especially when there's no real payoff for it next issue).

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 74
(September 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Demonica has surfaced! Now it's up to Hawkeye, Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent to save the day. But is the team prepared for The Change?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Starting right where we left off last issue (*West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #73), Dr. Demonicus orders the execution of Scarlet Witch and Pele. Immediately his crew starts bickering about who gets to kill them as the team is forced to watch helplessly. The Living Lightning steps in and stops them from hurting the women, claiming that while he agreed to join the Pacific Overlords, he didn't agree to murder helpless women.

Just then, Hawkeye, Spider-Woman, U.S. Agent and Sunfire come diving out of the quinjet to save the day. However, things turn pretty bleak with the Pacific Overlords taking them down one at a time. Dr. Demonicus tries to take Scarlet Witch hostage, but once again the Living Lightning steps in, telling him that he's not putting innocent women in danger. Dr. Demonicus takes out the device and threatens to deactivate the Living Lightning's suit, but because he's too busy explaining rather than actually doing, the Living Lightning simply destroys the deactivator with his powers at the blink of an eye.

With that distraction, a now conscious Scarlet Witch is able to focus and use her hex powers to free the rest of

the team from the glass tubes. With the team at full strength, they're able to take down the Pacific Overlords. Dr. Demonicus tells his right-hand man Kain to defeat the enemies, but he says it's hopeless. "We must," he says, " attempt the Change!"

And with that, he begins growing into a giant synthetic creature with studs growing out of his that - as the team learns when they attack him - allow him to control anything mechanical in his vicinity.

Changed Kain silently takes down the big players on the team. Wasp flies up and enters his ear and stings him from within. This stuns Changed Kain and falls to the ground unconscious (usually this role is played by Scarlet Witch, so this is a refreshing change!).

Finally, they have Dr. Demonicus, but he has one trick left up his sleeve. He reveals a conveniently placed giant TV screen which shows a non-disfigured version of him at the U.N. getting Demonica to be accepted as one of its members. It's amazing how I can accept mutants, monsters, Gods and everything else fantastical in the Marvel universe, but I'm forced to call bullshit at a crazy efficient U.N. that accepts a new nation within minutes after it surfaces above water.

The Dr. Demonicus at the U.N. is a genetically altered lackey that's meant to look like the real deal. Also in attendance is Kenjiro Sasaki, the mutated toddler that was locked away at the compound. His parents, who are on Demonica, are relieved to see their son back to

normal (Dr. Demonicus insists that it was all meant to be temporary), while no one on the team questions how Kenjiro escaped the compound.

Because Demonica is now a sovereign nation, the team realizes that they have no jurisdiction there, and they are forced to leave.

Tigra radios the team on the quinjet and lets everyone know that she was rescued by Australian Aboriginies...and that she'd like to stay and hang out with them for a while. She then nominates Spider-Woman to take her place on the team, which everyone agrees with. U.S. Agent is added to the team ("I'm a regular or I'm nothing!" he demands) to take Pym's place. And Wasp suggests that the Living Lightning take her place.

And we now have a brand new West Coast Avengers: Hawkeye, Wonder Man, Scarlet Witch, Spider-Woman, Iron Man, U.S. Agent and the Living Lightning. This is probably the most dramatic change on the team since the book started.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. This one is so ridiculously stupid, you really can't help but love it.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Oops, they accidentally made Iron Man lame and Wonder Man cool on this page.





West Coast Avengers Annual #6 (1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: George Freeman, Jeff Moore, Steve Carr

Inker: Bulanadi, Pepoy, Wiacek, John Tartaglione, Marc

McKenna, George Wildman

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The West Coast Avengers go underground to rescue the Avengers and to help the Mole Man stop the Deviants' army.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

"A Storm in Subterranea"

This is Part 5 (of 5) of the *Subterranean Wars* storyline that was running through some of the Marvel annuals in 1991. Because I don't remember this particular crossover, and also because I don't feel like I've done anything terrible enough recently to punish myself by reading the preceding four parts, I'm going to rely on Marvel's Wiki page to bring us all up to speed on what's going:

In Subterranea, the Deviants, under Brutus, begin a war for territory with the other underground empires. Pushed back, these lesser powers are briefly forced to fight the surface-dwellers, before both teams of Avengers unite to defeat the Deviants.

Oh, okay, that's better.

Iron Man raises the alarm as he returns to the compound and the team meet him outside. He's carrying Kala, one

queen of an underground realm and a former consort of the Mole Man. The Mole Man needs help, as do nine Avengers who are with him.

After some discussion and debate, the team agree to help Kala. They jump into Tony Stark's Groundhawk tank (which he borrowed from *The Dark Knight Returns*) and enter the subterranean tunnels. As they move along (though, not fast enough for Kala), this gives us an opportunity to see the new team and see how everyone is dealing with the coming crisis. Spider-Woman and Wonder Man have a chat. Scarlet Witch is casually reading *Newsweek*. And the Living Lightning is unusually quiet, which is noticed by other members of the team.

Hawkeye tells Iron Man to stop the tank, as he thinks he saw something. Once outside, they conveniently discover Captain America and Black Widow tied up behind some rocks. They had been attacked and knocked out. Luckily, whoever did it was only interested in tying them up instead of, you know, killing its enemies.

Back in the tank, Kala admits that she's disorientated and that perhaps they took a wrong turn. Suddenly, the tank falls through the ground and lands in the middle of a Subterranean army. They begin to attack the team, but the Mole Man appears and apologizes for their mistake. Without his guidance, the army is at an utter loss and they attacked out of fear.

"Mole Man, sir, while you were napping, your army attacked the world!"

After the Mole Man brings them up to speed on the unnecessarily convoluted nature of his conflict - one that I have no interest in recapping here because it's painfully awful - the Deviant's mutate army begins its attack. The battle scenes are interesting, with Wonder Man really getting into the whole war thing:



Thanks to Scarlet Witch, the team is able to free the remaining captive Avengers, and turn the tides of the battle in their favor.

Grotesk, who up until this moment was an ally to Mole Man, takes control of the Deviants' Oscillatron, a

machine capable of destroying the whole world and after the usual villainous speech, he pulls the lever. But the machine doesn't work, as the Living Lightning absorbed most of its energy. And with that, the Avengers attack Grotesk and end this ridiculous battle once and for all.

The denouement has lots of little surprises, but it's all so painfully bad I can't take it anymore. And to make matters worse, Freeman's art doesn't do the story any favors either, as the dialogue has to step up and tell the readers what's going on in the panel. For instance, look at these two panels and notice how he completely botches what is supposed to be a dramatic moment when Kala saves Mole Man's life:



To add insult to injury, the story ends with the threat of *The End* (for now). Yikes.

"West Side Story"

Spider-Woman enters a room to watch a Hank Pym hologram (Tupac was busy) reveal the history of the West Coast Avengers. Shockingly enough, it takes only 7 pages to properly recap what I've been doing for the last year and a half.

You win this time, Hank Pym hologram.

"A Wasp in Hollywood"

Janet Van Dyne meets with Mr. Domani (call him Dino!), the head of a movie studio, to talk about turning her script "The Coming of the Avengers" into a major Hollywood movie.

Here are the highlights:

- The movie will be directed by Steven Spielberg.
- Arnold Schwarzenegger will play Thor (though he always wanted to play Captain America).
- Sylvester Stallone will play Iron Man.
- Lou Ferrigno will play the Hulk (if they can get the character from Universal).
- Winona Ryder or Paula Abdul will play the Wasp.
- Henry Pym (Dino refers to him as Henry Pimp) will act like Doc Brown from *Back to the Future*.
- Loki isn't scary enough to be a villain in an Avengers movie.

"Justice, Like Lightning"

The Living Lightning returns home to tell his mother the good news about becoming a super-hero and joining the West Coast Avengers. He discovers, however, that his sister was killed in a drive-by shooting by the Snakes gang and his brother has joined a rival gang. On top of that, his girlfriend left him to hook up with the same gang member who killed his sister.

It all comes to a head a playground when the Living Lightning's brother's gang confronts the Snakes. The Living Lightning appears between them and tries to put an end to the madness. In the process, one person is wounded and the man who stole his girlfriend and shot his sister is shot in the back.

Can't we all just get along?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. A mess from beginning to end.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

What bothers Hawkeye more? How upset Vision is when announces Hawkeye is going to run the West Coast Avengers? Or how shocked his wife is at the news?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 75 (October 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Herb Trimpe

Inker: Herb Trimpe and Charles Barnett

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

A night out with the Fantastic Four at the Sword and Sorcery World theme park turns ~~stupid~~ deadly.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The Sword and Sorcery World theme park is a week away from opening and the West Coast Avengers - along with the Fantastic Four (by the way, this is Thing's first appearance in the book since he ran away after joining the group for one issue back in *West Coast Avengers #10*). The Fantastic Four bring along Franklin, and Spider-Woman brings her daughter Rachel.

In fact, Rachel doesn't know that Spider-Woman is her mother. She was dropped off at the compound for the team to babysit, because that's what the team does when there are no bad guys to fight. A few minutes after being dropped off, Spider-Woman made an appearance and vowed to help watch Rachel while they were at Sword and Sorcery World.

The kids want to ride the Arkon vs. The Dragon rollercoaster by themselves. The ride goes out of control and it starts to go faster and faster. The heroes are unable to stop the ride because compared to Galactus, stopping a rollercoaster is clearly a problem for the Fantastic Four. By the time the ride finally stops, the heroes discover to their horror that the children have disappeared. Susan says, "It's as if they were transported to another world!"

Clearly.

The heroes realize that the only way to find the children is to follow their path. The heroes - except U.S. Agent - jump on the rollercoaster. The Living Lightning uses his powers to get the ride to go as fast as it did before when the children disappeared. And eventually, they all vanish, leaving U.S. Agent wondering what happened to his colleagues.

Half of the heroes end up in the space/time continuum of the Sisterhood, a dimension totally ruled by women. They discover that it was Thundra who brought them there - and the children before them. However, while Franklin made it, Thundra admits that Rachel was transported to another dimension, the depraved world of Arkon the Magnificent. What was Thundra's goal? Well, she just wanted Thing to come so she could ask him to be her husband and emperor-consort. Ben refuses, as he had done before.

The other half of the team arrives in Arkon's dimension with their collective will power wiped clean (because, well, why not?). Rachel is scared and wants to go home, and she is kept under the care of Mr. Shigaru while Arkon spends a lot of time explaining nonsense. Basically, Arkon is using the brainwashed heroes as part of his full-scale assault on the Sisterhood.

The 75th issue of the West Coast Avengers has the team becoming pawns in a war between a dimension

controlled by men with a dimension controlled by women. This is how you celebrate anniversaries, folks.

And so we have an army of women fighting an army of men, with the heroes fighting one another. All of the usual nonsense comes next. Fights. Hero against hero. A child telling his brainwashed mother to snap out of it just in time to save the day.

Eventually it's Arkon fighting Thundra one on one. The fight between them is particularly brutal until they both realize that they don't hate each other, but actually love each other. Their punches finally give way to some heavy P.D.A. while the heroes watch. Arkon makes Thundra his empress.

The team is transported back to Sword and Sorcery World where Spider-Woman makes the decision to tell Rachel that she's her mother. And for a story loaded with a lot of awful nonsense, Roy and Dann Thomas finally decide to make a smart choice and have Rachel admit that she knew all along because she's not blind and/or stupid.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Awful. Awful. Awful. The writing is painful. Herb Trimpe's art is not easy on the eyes. And I'm pretty sure there's a gender studies paper just waiting to be written about this issue and it won't be pretty. So Thundra just needed to be dominated by another man all along...?

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Reed Richards is so smart he knows when two people are about to get it on!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 76 (November 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Night Shift return with their mysterious new leader: Hangman.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Wonder Man takes Spider-Woman and the Living Lightning to the set of "The Demon that Devoured Hollywood." Since the majority of the movie has been in the can for several years after the star, Jason Roland, disappeared, the studio is now busy trying to finish the movie with its newest star, Wes Nelson.

As they're filming another scene, a noose appears and tries to hang Nelson. The Living Lightning breaks the rope before it can hurt the actor. From above, the Hangman tells everyone that the set is now closed. Wonder Man and the Living Lightning fly up to confront him when the Brothers Grimm from Night Shift (you remember them, right? From *West Coast Avengers* Vol. 2, #40!) appear out of nowhere and attack our heroes with acid-filled eggs and terrible rhymes. While all of this is happening, Gypsy Moth tries to kidnap Nelson, but Spider-Woman uses her webs to stop her. Not expecting the West Coast Avengers to be there, the villains all flee.

They do, however, leave a note demanding that they receive 40% of the profits if they want to finish making this movie or the main actor dies. Nelson freaks out and quits. Wonder Man talks to the director and says he can

take over Nelson's part and even do his own stunts. The director hires him immediately.

Hangman calls a meeting with the Night Shift, who aren't exactly pleased to have him as their new leader. Misfit steps up to take Hangman down, but proves to be powerless against him. Once Hangman shows his dominance, he uses his rope and lifts it into the air where it disappears into a strange portal. He tells the team to grab the rope and they are lifted into the portal where they will be doing...the ceremony.

Wonder Man asks for the team to help him with security while filming "The Demon that Devoured Hollywood" but most of the team is against it. Spider-Woman suggests investigating the disappearance of Jason Roland, thinking there might be a connection to what's happening now. Hawkeye agrees to help her investigate. Mockingbird calls Hawkeye because she's on her way to California and wants to have a talk with him about their separation. Hawkeye tells her that he'll be working all night on Avengers' business, going as far as to lie to her about who he's working with. When he hangs up, U.S. Agent volunteers to join Spider-Woman and him with their investigation.

The three visit Stella, an actress who was having an affair with Roland back when he disappeared. As they're asking her questions, Hangman and the Night Shift appear. Hawkeye and Spider-Woman are taken out fairly quickly, so it's up to U.S. Agent to save the day. However, he discovers that they're a lot stronger than previously

advertised, and he's eventually overcome when Misfit knocks him out.

When the heroes wake up, they're restrained on a large circle. The Night Shift is surrounding them and doing some kind of chant. A portal opens up above them and then a giant hand comes reaching down for our heroes.

Uh oh.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. This isn't great, but it's okay. I'm a little nervous about this being a 4 part story though.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

The Return of Carlos!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 77 (December 1991)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Iron Man and the Living Lightning arrive in time to save Hawkeye, Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent. And Wonder Man is kidnapped by the Night Shift and given an offer he might not be able to refuse...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Iron Man and the Living Lightning arrange for Digger to escape from prison in hopes that he'll unwillingly lead them to Night Shift's Tower of Shadows. And within a matter of minutes after fleeing prison, he walks right to it. Keeping in mind, the Tower of Shadows is a giant mountain with a haunted house sitting on top of it - something Iron Man should've found by simply opening his eyes.

Once there, Iron Man and the Living Lightning stumble onto Hawkeye, Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent as they're about to be grabbed by Satannish the Supreme (now we know who the giant hand from last issue belonged to - sorry, goatse fans!). Iron Man and the Living Lightning attack Satannish the Supreme who is annoyed by all the interference. He tells Hangman that if he values the powers he has, then he better dispose of the heroes before he's summoned again. Satannish also says that Hangman's soul belongs to him, but Hangman corrects him by saying that he's only optioned it. Man, Hangman is so Hollywood! Satannish the Supreme disappears.

With Hawkeye, Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent free, Night Shift attack our heroes. But before the heroes can take down Night Shift, they disappear, along with the whole Tower of Shadows. With Night Shift's secret lair gone from right under their feet, our heroes are in free fall. Hawkeye catches Spider-Woman, uses a suction arrow and shoots it at Iron Man, and then U.S. Agent grabs the line. Once on the ground, the team decides to visit Wonder Man at the movie set to make sure he's okay.

At the movie set, Wonder Man is doing well playing the part of the monster previously played by Jason Roland and Wes Nelson. However, he's concerned that the director wanted him more for protection than acting. Scarlet Witch, who is there to protect everyone, is asleep by the door, as she finds the process of movie making to be rather boring. Wonder Man and Scarlet Witch decide to have lunch together. Felicia Fawn, the actress working with Simon, decides to join them. However, before they start eating, everyone but Wonder Man is trapped in a suspended state.

Wonder Man suspects that Night Shift is behind this and calls them out. They appear on cue, but Wonder Man isn't prepared for the new powered-up version of the group and is taken down. Scarlet Witch comes out of her trance, but the Night Shift teleports Wonder Man away before she can use her powers to save him.

Wonder Man is confronted by Hangman, who unmask himself to reveal that he's Jason Roland (this is perhaps

one of the most unsurprising twists in comic book history). He optioned his soul to Satannish in exchange for movie stardom, and when he tried to renege on the deal, the demon outfit he wore in the movie became his real skin. Years later, he approached Satannish again who decided to give him a second chance and reverted Roland back to his human form. Now he needs Wonder Man to help him direct and finish making "Demon".

Roll with it, people.

Scarlet Witch is back at the compound telling the team what happened to Wonder Man. Apparently, the team never went to the movie set, but instead just returned back to their base. Between U.S. Agent's sexist comments and Hawkeye's theory that these demons are more extraterrestrial than religious, Scarlet Witch is having a hard time telling her story.

Consuela the maid comes in and tells Senor Iron Man that they need to turn on the television *rapido*. Hangman is threatening to kill the announcer of "Show-Biz News" if anyone interferes with him filming "The Night Shift Takes Hollywood" which will star Night Shift and, of course, Wonder Man who will also serve as technical adviser. When Hangman asks Wonder Man why he's helping them, he says that he's now a real live movie star thanks to this movie.

The issue ends with the team wondering aloud if Wonder Man is serious or if this is part of an elaborate plan to

eventually betray Night Shift. Sadly, his teammates aren't convinced either way.

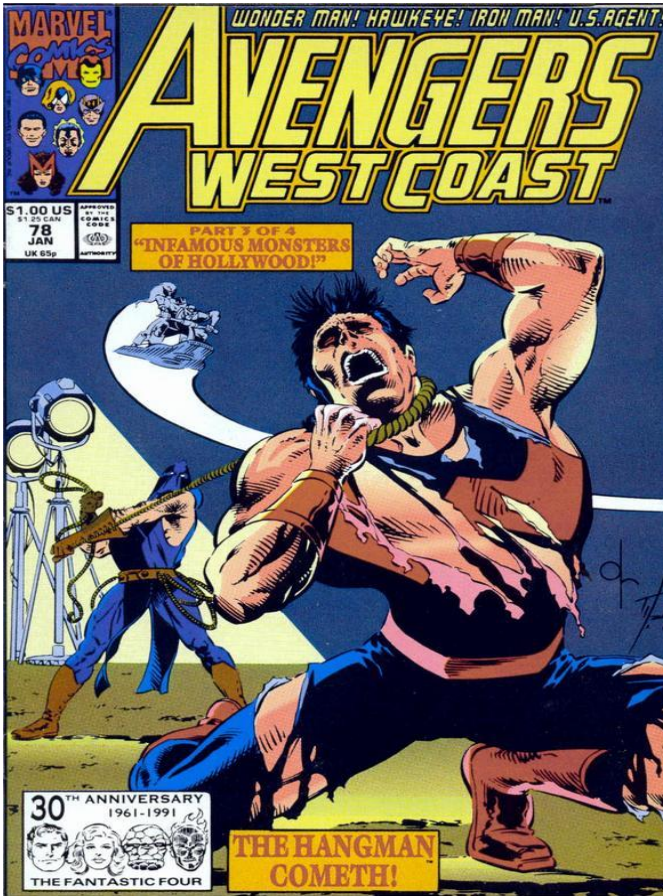
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I can't believe we're only halfway through this story.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

That's one way to use a suction arrow...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 78 (January 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

"The Night Shift Takes Hollywood" begins filming with Wonder Man's help while the West Coast Avengers coordinate an offensive against the Night Shift without knowing whose side Wonder Man is really on.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Wonder Man is hanged at the Hollywood sign while the Night Shift look on admiring their work. While they're bragging, he wakes up and begins fighting them before he's overwhelmed by the team. Just when it looks like he's down for the count, Hangman yells, "Cut!" It takes a while though for the Night Shift to hear him through all the body blows. Yeah, all of that was part of the filming of "The Night Shift Takes Hollywood."

Members of the Night Shift have some concerns about the movie. Some are bothered by the lack of lines they have, while others are worrying about how thin the story's plot is. The Misfit is even having difficult keeping his hands off one of the main actresses. All of this is supposed to be making fun of Hollywood as imagined by a ten year old.

Wonder Man is trapped in a Mexican standoff. You see, he's playing along with Hangman's directorial debut as there are a lot of innocent bystanders involved. Once it's safe to do so, he's going to take everyone down. The only problem is, the Night Shift know this and are waiting for him to act. So everyone is acting the part while acting the

part. I'm pretty sure that all of this is supposed to be clever, but it's so painfully contrived that it's a wonder that this is the third part of a four part story.

Back at the compound, the West Coast Avengers is trying to figure out what to do next. They don't know whose side Wonder Man is really on, which says a lot about how much the team trusts him. U.S. Agent is ready to go and take down Wonder Man, but Iron Man and the rest want to do so without hurting him. This, of course, leads to another argument between U.S. Agent and Hawkeye.

As all of this is going down, Mockingbird arrives. She is introduced to the newest members of the team and discovers that Hawkeye had lied to her in the previous issue on the phone. Spider-Woman also realizes that Hawkeye had been coming on to her all this time.

Because of urgent super-hero business, Spider-Woman has to call her ex-husband and tell him that she won't be able to pick up her daughter. This leads to an argument over the phone that's meant to make the ex look like a bad guy, but in reality, she's the one at fault.

Meanwhile, on the set of "The Demon that Devoured Hollywood," U.S. Agent has taken over the part of the Demon which was previously played by Wonder Man. This infuriates Wonder Man ("Why, that backstabbing...") and Hangman. The latter is so mad that he tells everyone that they're going to kidnap the director of "The Demon that Devoured Hollywood" and make him co-direct "The Night Shift Takes Hollywood."

Hey! Why not?

Iron Man visits Dr. Strange and barges in - against the protests of Wong - on one of Strange's spells. Iron Man brings him up to speed on their problem with Santannish. Once he's filled in, Dr. Strange promises to investigate and quickly disappears into a dimensional portal of some kind.

Back on the set of "The Demon that Devoured Hollywood," production is halted when Wonder Man is found hanging from the Hollywood sign (oh, that was foreshadowing from before! Wow! I didn't know they were capable of this). U.S. Agent is quick to act, but realizes that Wonder Man wasn't hanged, but knocked out instead. And...it's a trap! U.S. Agent is knocked around by the Night Shift until he's knocked out.

Holding the unconscious bodies of U.S. Agent and Wonder Man, Hangman contact the West Coast Avengers and tells them that they need to arrive tomorrow at dawn for a final showdown with the Night Shift that will be filmed as the climax for "The Night Shift Takes Hollywood."

Oh noes!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

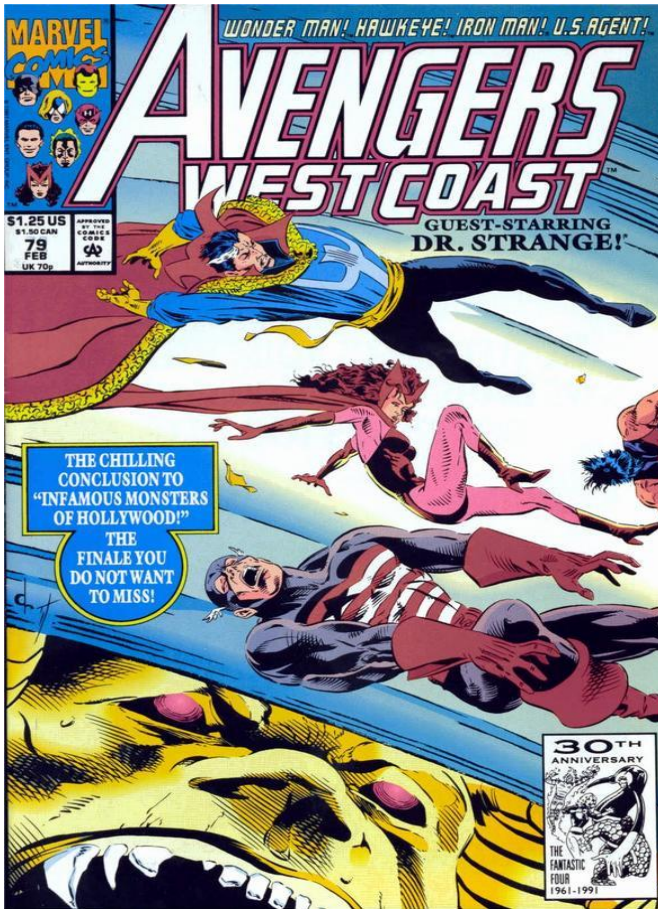
Roast. If stupidity can cause cancer, this story might be carcinogenic.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wong will not answer your questions.



23



West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 79 (February 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Dr. Strange joins forces with the West Coast Avengers to not only put an end to Hangman and the Night Shift, but stop Satannish from absorbing millions of souls.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Well, the final part of "Infamous Monsters of Hollywood" goes big, I can say that much.

The Night Shift materializes - along with their Tower of Shadows - at Griffith Park in anticipation to their dramatic showdown with the West Coast Avengers. However, before the heroes show up, the kidnapped movie crew finally fight back with rocks, fire extinguishers and hair spray. Surprisingly, these items appear to be formidable weapons against the villains. In fact, I'd say they're more effective than anything Iron Man has cooked up in this story. Sadly, the revolt is short lived, largely because the TV news crew who've arrived to cover the showdown between the Night Shift and the West Coast Avengers insist on being neutral and won't help them out (this is back in the days of journalistic objectivity). Just as the Night Shift is about to kill one of them, the West Coast Avengers arrive!

The Night Shift free U.S. Agent and Wonder Man to be fair and the real fight begins while the whole world - including President Bush - watches it all unfold live. Why this particular fight grips the world is beyond me, as I'm sure any other hero in the Marvel universe is wrapped up

in a better fight at the exact same time. I mean, if it came down to watching the West Coast Avengers fight the Night Shift on NBC or the Fantastic Four tackle Galactus on FOX, I don't think there's any contest.

You have to wonder though, considering all of the epic things that happen in the Marvel universe, are people constantly glued to their TVs? Or is it such a normal thing that people are bored half the time?

"The Watcher just showed up, honey, so this might be serious."

"He showed up? Again? Sigh."

The team rediscover that the Night Shift are far more powerful than they were before, as well as ruthless. The heroes are way over their heads here, even more so than normal. By the time Satannish the Supreme appears through a dimensional doorway, even Spider-Woman states the obvious, "Does this mean we're going to be fighting out of our weight-class again?"

Yes it does, Spider-Woman.

When Scarlet Witch, who survived a fall to her death courtesy of the Brothers Grimm, realizes who the true threat is, she decides to use her dormant magical powers to conjure Dr. Strange. He appears just in the nick of time too, as Satannish hasn't fully materialized yet.

The Hangman's old flame Stella arrives. She unmasks him and realizes that he hasn't aged a day since she last saw him. She wonders aloud what he had to trade for that - his soul? He hits her hard enough to throw her across the way, killing her instantly. Not really, it just looks that way.

Dr. Strange confronts Satannish, threatening to use his own powers against him. Using Scarlet Witch to help with the probabilities, he brings forth the half-souls of the members of the Night Shift, who realize what they had given up in exchange for their new powers. They turn against Hangman and join forces with the heroes to help bring down Satannish, who was planning to not only absorb their souls, but all of the souls of the people watching this live on TV.

Iron Man and the Living Lightning manage to foul up the TV transmission, cutting off Satannish from the viewers at home. Weakened and defeated, Satannish leaves, but not before taking Hangman's soul, leaving behind a shell of a man; kind of like how Fabio felt whenever he filmed a *I Can't Believe It's Not Butter* commercial.

Or how the reader feels when they finish this issue.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. The last part goes epic, but it's not enough to save this story. Especially when this could've been done in two issues at the most.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Even President Bush can't save this book...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 80 (March 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The West Coast Avengers is part of Operation: Galactic Storm!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Outside of the annuals, it's been a while since this book was sucked into a big event. And what better way to celebrate our nation's independence than to read an issue of "Operation: Galactic Storm"? For the sake of convenience, let's see what Wikipedia has to say about this one:

"Operation: Galactic Storm" was a 19-part comic book crossover storyline which ran through Marvel's Avengers related titles - *Avengers*, *West Coast Avengers*, *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, *Thor*, *Wonder Man*, and *Quasar* - between March and May 1992.

"Operation: Galactic Storm" is meant to be a sequel to the "Kree-Skrull War," a famous storyline that ran in *Avengers* back in 1971 and 1972.

This issue is the second part, continuing from where things left off in *Captain America* #398. Rick Jones had a dream that the Kree race had been annihilated. Not wanting to be sucked into another intergalactic war (see Kree-Skrull War), he contacted Captain America. Along

the way, they were attacked by Warstar. And then aliens attacked all of them and kidnapped Jones. When this issue begins, Jones learns that he wasn't kidnapped by the Kree (as he suspected), but the Shi-ar. They need Jones to bring him to the Kree lair where he first met Mar-vell, a Kree officer that Jones used to switch places with thanks to the help of nega-bands.

Captain America calls the West Coast Avengers for help, as he's stranded in Arizona and they're the closer team. This is important because Iron Man and Captain America haven't been on speaking terms since the Armor Wars, and you know Steve is in a tight spot if he has to call Tony. Before you know, everyone is together on the quinjet and on their way to save Jones. Luckily, Captain America gave Jones his communicard, which the team can use to track down his location.

Jones, in the meantime, is underground somewhere at the lost Kree outpost. He leads the Shi-ar to the long-outlawed psyche-magnetron, which is the device they were looking for all along - or rather, a specific part of the said device. And as they grab the part, Intergalactic Sentry #372 rises from below. It had been activated to protect the lair in the event that no Kree were present.

A fight breaks out between the sentry and the Shi-ar, with Jones trapped in the middle. And just when he's about to be blasted by the sentry, Captain America and the rest of the heroes arrive, as does Warstar, who has been following them all along. So now it's a mess of a

fight involving a Intergalactic Sentry #372, Shi-ar Imperial Guardsmen, Warstar and Avengers.

There's nothing that happens next that should surprise anyone. The only thing worth noting is that U.S. Agent finds an awfully big Liefeldian gun that he shares with Iron Man to bring down Intergalactic Sentry #372. And when the dust finally settles, the Shi-ar end up escaping with the technology that they came for...because this is Part 2 after all.

With the Shi-ar in space, Captain America calls Quasar to follow them, but the Shi-ar's ship "warps out" before he can get to it.

The issue ends with a shadowy figure standing over Marvell's grave on the moon of Titan.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. While it's a step up from fighting the Night Shift in Hollywood, this is still a mess.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

At least Cable never needed anyone to help him carry his gun.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 81 (April 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

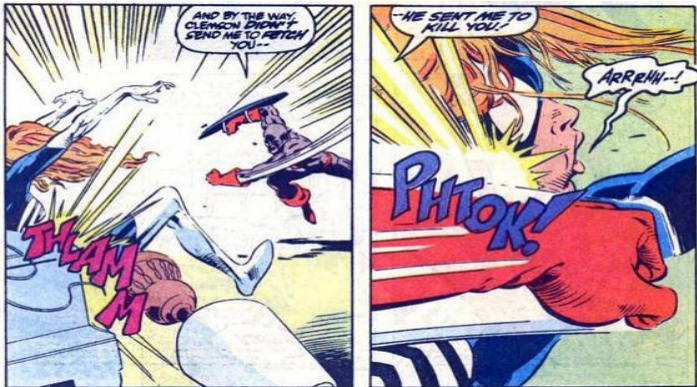
WEST COAST SUMMARY!

With the Avengers in space dealing with the threat of an intergalactic war, the reservists, including U.S. Agent, Mockingbird, Spider-Woman and Pym, must deal with a threat closer to home.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

If there's a better way to spend your birthday than reading the ninth part to "Operation: Galactic Storm," I don't...wait a minute! That's right. Anything. Anything is better than reading this.

Most of the Avengers are in space on an extremely dangerous mission, leaving behind many Avengers reservists to hold the fort in their absence. U.S. Agent is not pleased about this and decides to take it out on She-Hulk by basically telling her that she's fat. And when she threatens to punch him, he says, "Don't try it, lady. I've never hit a woman in my life, but in your case..."



Hey, remember that time back in *West Coast Avengers* #72 when U.S. Agent beat the crap out of Spider-Woman?

It turns out the whole thing was simply a misunderstanding (a Marvel staple!), as She-Hulk was simply mad that U.S. Agent and Mockingbird didn't relieve her and Falcon of guard duty. You see, everyone is hanging out at Project: Pegasus where Warstar, the Shi-ar crewmen, Captain Atlas and Dr. Minerva have been captured and put into a miniaturized stasis by Pym. And now everyone is taking turns watching over them until this whole intergalactic mess is dealt with.

You might be annoyed right now that I've decided not to read any of the other parts to "Operation: Galactic Storm" so that this would make a lot more sense. But I've read over 90 issues (including the original mini-series and annuals) of *West Coast Avengers* by this point...haven't I suffered enough?

While U.S. Agent and Mockingbird guard the prisoners, we find out that U.S. Agent was the one who voted for Mockingbird to be a member of the team way back in *West Coast Avengers* #69. It took 12 issues for the Thomas's to finally resolve that little mystery. But it turns out that he voted for her because "even if you can't do all that much, you'd sure improve the scenery." This jab annoys her enough to throw U.S. Agent across the room. She informs him that there's more to her than her looks (unfortunately, this speech is completely undermined by the artist - see the Scene of the Week!).

When they finally stop bickering, they finally notice the intruder approaching them. A blue-skinned woman named Nightside who has the power to turn off the lights! Luckily, she's even aware of how limiting her powers really are, so she carries a handy concussion gun. So while U.S. Agent and Mockingbird are fumbling around in the dark, she shoots them both. Nightside is accompanied by another woman named Scintilla. They both free the captured villains, but not before She-Hulk walks in to see the escape.

Side note: One of the Avengers present is Gilgamesh, who I gather has replaced Hercules as the team's mythical half-naked hero. It's important to remember how fashionable Mesopotamia was back in the days of 1992.

The team manage to stop Nightside and the Shi-ar prisoners, including Warstar. However, the Kree prisoners - Captain Atlas and Dr. Minerva - manage to escape. The team catches up with them as their escape ship is taking off. U.S. Agent jumps on the ship without thinking. Using an electro-magnetic charge, the Kree manage to shake U.S. Agent off the ship where he would have fallen to his death if it weren't for Spider-Woman using her psi-webs (how exactly do these work again?) to slow down his fall in time for She-Hulk to catch him.

Now, I'm not going to say that this issue was good, but it might've had a chance of being close to good if it had ended here. However, there are quite a few pages left...and this is where everything turns stupid.

Dr. Minerva flies the ship into outer space. Captain Atlas tries to get in some kissing action with Dr. Minerva (they're lover, see?) but she's too busy landing the ship on a Shi-ar starcruiser. What? Dr. Minerva was actually Hobgoblin, a shapeshifting imperial guardsman! This whole elaborate scheme was for the Shi-ar to steal Captain Atlas' nega-bands.

The real Dr. Minerva was found unconscious back on Project: Pegasus, where Hobgoblin made the switch during the escape. She agrees to help the heroes - out of revenge against the Shi-ar - to locate Captain Atlas using her higher intuitive sense. She senses that Captain Atlas is with the Shi-ar and are now leaving Earth's orbit.

She-Hulk contacts Quasar - who is hanging out in outer space with Her (don't ask...*please?*) - and tells him to stop the Shi-ar starcruiser from reaching the stargate with Captain Atlas. Unfortunately, the Shi-ar send out some assassins to fight Quasar and Her, allowing the starcruiser to warp through the stargate.

This birthday was supposed to be a happy one...

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Come on, let me get back to my birthday already!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Nothing says that Mockingbird isn't tolerated for her looks more than a gratuitous ass shot!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 82 (May 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The Avengers attempt to stop the Shi-ar from waging war against the Kree Empire in Part 16 of "Operation: Galactic Storm".

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

This is a strange issue. The first 22 pages are devoted to Captain Marvel, Thor, Living Lightning, Starfox, and Scarlet Witch at the Shi-ar Imperium as they try to convince Lilandra - the Shi-ar Empress - not to launch a full scale war, even though she had already launched a nega-bomb at the Kree. And while there is the obligatory fight sequence between the Avengers and the Imperial Guard (complete with an unnecessary double splash-page), this is mostly a lot of arguing back and forth.

I point this all out because while this is basically a talking heads issue of the series, it's surprisingly effective - made even more unbelievable by the fact that it's in a single setting. The biggest problem is the simple fact that the West Coast Avengers are pushed out of their own book.

The Avengers are not there just to stop a war, they're also present to convince the Shi-ar to stop using their stargate near the Earth's sun, as their ships' repeated teleporting has created solar flares that are threatening to destroy Earth. Because everyone knows that solar flares are THE WORST! Am I right, people? THE WORST!

The whole thing builds to the issue's biggest twist when the Living Lightning shoots at Lilandra's war-mongering advisor, Araki. Upon being struck by one of Miguel's lightning bolts, it's revealed the Araki was actually a Skrull, which would explain why he was so against any decision that would lead to peace between the Shi-ar and the Kree.

The tone between the heroes and the Shi-ar changes immediately once they realize that the Skrulls are now involved. Lilandra releases one of the Kree prisoners, Ultimus, who concedes that it's possible that the fight between them was created by the Skrulls. Ultimus gets permission from the Empress to return to his homeworld to report the Skrulls' involvement in the war. However, just as it appears that this war between the Kree and Shi-ar might have a peaceful resolution, Lilandra confesses that they have a bigger problem: the nega-bomb she launched at the Kree has mysteriously vanished.

We get three pages of the West Coast Avengers at their compound. While Pym, Wasp, Mockingbird and U.S. Agent make brief appearances, most this scene is devoted to Spider-Woman, who is torn between staying with the team to save Earth or going to her daughter's side. While she's wrestling with her conscience outside, she's being observed by an ominous trio of villains in the shadows: Therak, Antro and Arachne. They "trapdoor away" and an editor's note promises that they will return in two issues.

And the last part of the book is my favorite because it strangely symbolizes everything that's wrong with *West Coast Avengers*: it's revealed that the nega-bomb has been stolen by the Skrulls and **Wonder Man and Vision are hidden inside of the bomb bickering with one another**. How great is that?

The issue ends with Quasar checking in with the Avengers to tell them that he knows where the nega-bomb is.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Surprisingly good, though I can't put my finger on why exactly. Maybe it's the brave decision to have 75% of the book happen in one confined space, or maybe it's because the idea of Wonder Man and Vision arguing while hiding inside a giant bomb delights me to no end.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Wonder Man and his robot brother hiding inside a bomb...this might be my favorite sitcom of all time!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 83 (June 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas
Artist: Herb Trimpe

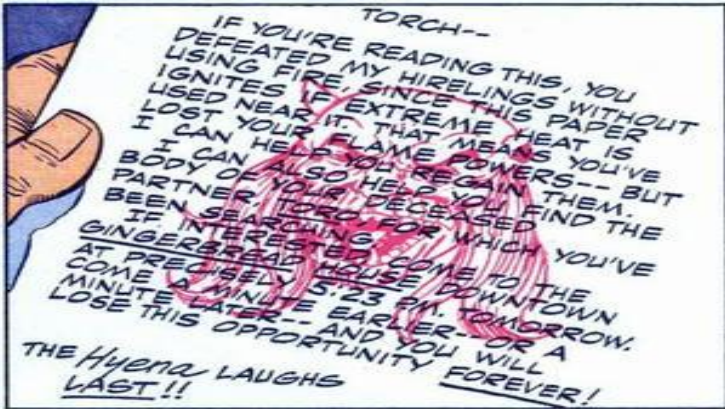
WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Seeking to reclaim his powers, the Torch must cooperate with the villainous Hyena.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Herb Trimpe returns to do the art. You might remember the last time he came aboard on the title in *West Coast Avengers #75*. His work isn't my cup of tea, honestly, so seeing his work again doesn't exactly thrill me. On top of that, this issue looks and feels like another dreaded fill-in issue, which never turns out well (see *West Coast Avengers #30*, *West Coast Avengers #38*, *West Coast Avengers #58*, *West Coast Avengers #59*, and *West Coast Avengers #64*).

The Torch arrives at a junkyard at night to meet his old nemesis - the Hyena. He believes that the Hyena has information regarding the location of his deceased partner, Toro. The Hyena isn't there, instead the Torch is ambushed by a gang of thugs. After making quick work of the thugs, the Torch finds a note from the Hyena on one of the unconscious bodies.



Let's take a moment to examine the note:

- 1) The Hyena has his own personalized stationery.
- 2) His personalized stationery ignites whenever its near extreme heat.
- 3) The Hyena imagines a world where every clock is synchronized.
- 4) He really likes to underline words for emphasis.
- 5) His signature is also a catchphrase.
- 6) His signature is conveniently written to fit the comic panel.

7) The Hyena is really confident that Torch will go through the pockets of unconscious people.

Sorry about that.

The Torch returns to the compound to find a completely different team because ~~this is an inventory issue~~ the real members are dealing with the aftermath of "Operation: Galactic Storm". The Torch has doubts about employing this ragtag group of heroes (Quicksilver, Mockingbird, Tigra, Pym, Wasp and Machine Man) against the Hyena. We learn a lot of exposition about who the Hyena is (he hasn't smiled since 1947) and the Torch's history with him. The Torch also reveals that he recently lost his powers fighting Master Man.

The Torch finally goes downtown to the Gingerbread House and confronts the Hyena. The Hyena wants the Torch to strap on a device that will give him access to "all of the networked computer power in the Los Angeles area." This will allow the Torch to gain access to any classified information about his partner Toro, as well as destroy the block that stops the Torch from accessing his powers. All the Hyena wants in return is to benefit from some of the information the Torch learns.

When the Torch straps on the device, three simultaneous events happen on the highway outside the Gingerbread House: 1) a truck full of starving hyenas are released; 2) a monster truck starts destroying cars on the highway; and 3) a plane crashes. The team

arrives to deal with the three threats, which finally answers the question: Who wins in a fight between Tigrā and a pack of hyenas?

The Hyena begs for the Torch is flame on, but he takes off the device and destroys it instead. I'll make a long story short here...the Hyena wanted the Torch to activate his powers, which would've set off an explosion that would've killed thousands of people (the three aforementioned events were designed to trap in as many people as possible in one area). The Hyena, who is already dying of cancer, would've died knowing that the Torch would be wracked with guilt. However, the Torch knowing something was amiss chose not to get his powers back, thus foiling the Hyena's stupid plan.

Though the Hyena is upset his plan didn't become a reality, he doesn't care because you can't punish someone who is dying. And on cue, he dies.

Or so he thinks, as he wakes up later in a hospital surrounded by the heroes. The doctor at the hospital offers his theory to why the Hyena is no longer dying. You see, his moroseness triggered his cancer, and because he recently started smiling and laughing (thanks to his plan to kill the Torch), it forced his cancer into remission. And then, I shit you not, the story ends with the doctor saying "...laughter is the best medicine."



WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Now we know why I grew up believing that seriousness caused cancer.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Hot and bothered?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 84 (July 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

When a tabloid threatens to expose a presidential candidate's corruption, a string of murders leads Spider-Man and the West Coast Avengers on a collision course with the Deathweb.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Not sure if this is a sign of things to come or if it's a fluke, but Roy Thomas is writing this issue solo. Not that it matters, as the story reads with all the familiar hallmarks we've come to expect from the Thomas's. The only thing that really sets this issue apart on a technical level is the lettering, which feels jarringly amateurish for a book of this caliber (hey, I'm trying to be nice here!).

In New York, Peter Parker attends a press conference where the *N.Y. Globe-Reporter* is about to announce which one of the presidential candidates is on the mob's payroll. When the paper's informant mysteriously appears on stage - as if he'd been teleported - with a strange mark on his neck right before he falls over and dies, Parker knows that something is amiss. Knowing that the presidential candidates are all out in California, he hops on the first plane heading west.

The West Coast Avengers are having breakfast at the compound (thanks to the hard work of Consuela) and discussing the news, especially of the mysterious death of the *N.Y. Globe-Reporter's* informant in New York. Hawkeye and U.S. Agent naturally get into a debate over

the new presidential nominations, especially Michael A. Galvan - the Liberty Party's nomination (I'm guessing that Galvan is meant to mirror Ross Perot). Hawkeye thinks he's the next thing to a Nazi, while U.S. Agent feels that Galvan's law and order platform - especially with the gang situation in L.A. - is just as important as the economy. During all this, Miguel and his girlfriend Mona walk into the kitchen half-naked, as you do. When the radio announces the mysterious murder of Henry J. Drummond, the attorney for the *Globe-Reporter*, and how his body was found in an enormous spider-web, Iron Man and Wonder Man call the team to action.

Spider-Woman picks up his daughter Rachel from her estranged ex-husband Larry. On the highway, Spider-Woman decides to tell her daughter her origin story - four pages of exposition that's about 12 issues too late. For those who are uncertain of her origin (as I was), Spider-Woman was living in Denver when her friend Valerie Cooper offered her a job. This job basically made her a test subject for a top secret Commission that did research on super-heroes. After injecting her with a bunch of needles, they confess that they accidentally injected her with extracts from spiders. And because this is the Marvel universe, she quickly discovered that she had the powers of a spider, including strength, wall-climbing, jumping, etc. She even found out that she could create spider webs with her mind (a detail I never quite understood from her appearances in this book, and now that I know her origin, am still a little flabbergasted by how stupid this is). From there, she ended up in Secret Wars, Freedom Force and then finally back to the

Commission under the guidance of the shady Mike Clemson.

Speaking of Clemson, Spider-Woman takes a detour to meet with him at an old run-down factory. Keeping in mind, that her daughter is along for the ride. Clemson - like the reader - is shocked that she's dumb enough to bring her daughter. While he's lecturing her about this, Rachel is out of the car and hitting Clemson. He pushes her and tells her to get back in the car. Spider-Woman, upset that he laid a hand on his daughter, throws him against a wall, telling him that she's done with the Commission. After she leaves, Clemson enters the warehouse where there are multiple screens with shadowy figures on them, and we learn that there is another group called the Conclave, which is even more secret than the Commission.

If that wasn't enough, Spider-Woman then decides to take Rachel to the convention center where the team has gathered to investigate those strange murders. Spider-Woman's solution to protecting Rachel's identity is to let her wear her own Spider-Woman mask. Rachel's presence makes the team freak out (see below). And rightfully so.

Galvan is giving a speech at the convention center when the lights go out. The team notices a strange figure climbing the walls and jumping around and chase it down. By the time they realize it's Spider-Man doing his own investigation, they're all under attack by Deathweb!

And so it ends...

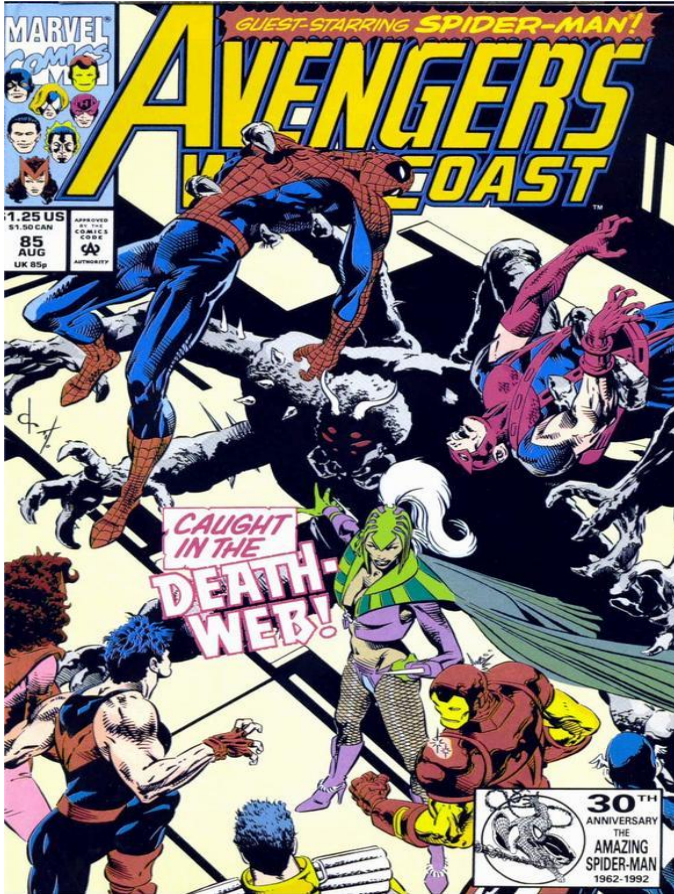
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Even if I could get on board a presidential conspiracy story, Spider-Woman's ineptitude keeps knocking me out of the book.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

When the West Coast Avengers is questioning your mothering skills, something is wrong...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 85 (August 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's the West Coast Avengers versus Death-Web with twists galore.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Looks like Roy Thomas' solo effort last issue was simply a fluke and now his other half has returned. Is there a difference? Well, this issue's less talky than the previous one. And the political thriller aspect of the first chapter takes a backseat here to the usual superhero fights. Whether that's a coincidence or not, we'll probably never know.

The first 16 pages of this book is a long fight between the heroes and the Death-Web, with intermittent scenes with Spider-Woman with her daughter as she protects presidential candidate Galvin in a blackout. It's interesting to note that Scarlet Witch is knocked out of the fight within the second panel of the story, making her the team's power-heavy player that needs to be taken out as soon as possible to even out the playing field.

The Death-Web consists of Antro, Therak and Arachne - all with the requisite spider motif. Antro is an armored version of Spider-Man with the ability to shoot acid venom. He also has the ability to "trapdoor" - a kind of teleportation. Therak - the most visually impressive of the bunch - is a giant spider with glowing red eyes that reveal his ionic powers (just like Wonder Man). And Arachne, the female of the team, is able to shoot webs

with neuro-toxins that weakens her opponents (in this case, U.S. Agent). The Death-Web are quite formidable and hold their own very well, that is until Scarlet Witch regains consciousness.

The intermissions with Spider-Woman are more problematic. The Living Lightning and her are protecting Galvin, with Miguel providing light during the blackout at the convention center. Spider-Woman has one eye on Galvin and the other on her daughter Rachel who is sitting in the audience wearing her mask. To make matters worse, Spider-Woman's estranged ex-husband Larry happens to be Galvin's PR guy and he wants some answers. When the lights finally come back on (just in the nick of time too, as Miguel's powers were being stretched thin), Spider-Woman realizes that Rachel has disappeared.

Spider-Woman stumbles onto the big fight with the Death-Web as she's looking for Rachel. This happens just in time too so Ross can provide readers with this issue's unnecessary ass-shot. Naturally, Rachel ends up in the same room, and as the Death-Web are fleeing (courtesy of Antro's trapdoor), Antro grabs Rachel and disappears with her.

We return to the factory from last issue and see Clemson with the Manipulator. It turns out, the Conclave hired the Manipulator to take care of their business, and then he's the one who hired the Death-Web to...do stuff. While the Manipulator is a contract worker, he reminds the Conclave - who are a little skittish about his methods

- that his contract allows him complete control of how he gets things done. Clemson, put off by the Manipulator's arrogance, tries to tackle him only to discover that he's a hologram.

Just then, Spider-Woman arrives asking for Clemson's help with finding her daughter. She, of course, is completely unaware that the Commission (or Conclave or whatever) is connected to the Death-Web. She vows to do what the Commission wants in exchange for their help in tracking down the Death-Web. Clemson thinks she's unreliable and pulls out a gun, but before he can shoot, Spider-man appears. And then the Death-Web appear. And then the not-a-hologram-this-time-Manipulator appears.

The issue ends with the Manipulator telling Spider-Woman to kill Spider-Man in exchange for her daughter's life.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. All of the coincidences at play here help to hide what a ridiculously awful mother Spider-Woman is.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

The Manipulator manipulates call waiting!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 86
(September 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Spider-Woman vs. Spider-Man? Things go from bad to worse when the team have their final confrontation with the Deathweb. Plus, a character dies!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Clearly the book must be hurting by this point to call for a three-part story with Spider-Man's involvement. This is confirmed even more with the appearance of Wolverine in next month's issue. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Also, is it Death-Web or Deathweb? The book can't quite decide, which is why I tend to go back and forth myself here.

The issue starts right where we left off with Spider-Woman being forced to kill Spider-Man in order to save the life of her daughter Rachel. Our two heroes throw one another around the room, smashing up the Conclave's equipment as they go, until eventually the machines threaten to explode. Seeing our heroes in a "death struggle", the Deathweb, along with the Manipulator, trap-door away before the factory explodes.

Meanwhile, the team is licking its wounds from their last encounter with the Deathweb (though Hawkeye and U.S. Agent are getting checked up at the hospital). It's also worth mentioning that Spider-Woman's ex-husband Larry Carpenter is also there, as he's there to make sure the team protects the Liberty Party's candidate for

tonight's big rally. Wonder Man is especially bummed about losing Rachel. As usual, he's too busy moping, which is why he's caught off guard when the Deathweb trap-door right behind him. He's knocked down long enough for the villains to leave a mysterious device before trap-dooring away. The rest of the heroes come running in too late. Wonder Man insists the device is a bomb, but after a quick inspection, Iron Man disagrees. When he plugs it in, a hologram of the Manipulator with Rachel appears. He tells them that Spider-Man and Spider-Woman are dead and that he'll hurt Rachel unless the team shows up at the rally. Larry is, of course, distraught that his daughter is in danger and begs the team not to come to the rally.

Back at the destroyed factory, Spider-Man and Spider-Woman are, in fact, not dead. They're trapped under the building's rubble. This scene is supposed mirror *Amazing Spider-Man* #33, the classic story where Spider-Man is trapped under debris, but the major difference here is that Ross doesn't sell the scene like Steve Ditko did. They would probably escape quicker if they didn't spend all their time chatting away. Spider-Woman confesses that she couldn't have killed Spider-Man, even if it meant saving her daughter's life. Spider-Man informs her that he knew, and that he also conveniently managed to throw a spider-tracer on Rachel before the Deathweb teleported her away. It should be of no surprise that they finally free themselves.

Spider-Woman and Spider-Man show up at the rally. On stage, Michael A. Galvan is giving a big speech on stage

and introducing his running mate, Wilson Lambert. Backstage, Larry is a mess as he is sick with worry over his daughter's kidnapping. However, that's all quickly resolved when Spider-Man brings Rachel into the room. He had found her in an unguarded trailer thanks to his spider-tracer. And while Larry is thrilled to see Rachel, he's still mad at the heroes for putting her in danger. And at this moment, Spider-Woman unmask herself. Larry's reaction is surprisingly natural, as he freaks out for her putting Rachel's life in jeopardy. He threatens to take her to court where she'll most certainly lose any custody of their daughter.

The Deathweb trap-door on stage behind Galvan and immediately kill him. As it turns out, the West Coast Avengers ignored Larry's plea to avoid being at the rally and were there all along. In fact, the Living Lightning was disguised as a police officer near Galvan the whole time. And the heroes are so busy telling the Deathweb how they're ready for them this time, that they never seem to fully address that they weren't ready enough to stop them from killing a presidential candidate. Once again, the West Coast Avengers continue to be the worst super-hero team ever. The team fight the Deathweb, and with some ingenuity thanks to Scarlet Witch, they defeat them fairly quickly.

With Galvan dead, Lambert quickly takes to the mic and tells everyone that he plans to carry on Galvan's message and inspires two people from the audience.

Outside the rally, Larry is bringing Rachel to the car to get her out of there when the Manipulator appears to reclaim the girl. Larry fights back and the Manipulator gives him a heart attack. Spider-Man and Spider-Woman appear too late, but they do show up in time for the Manipulator to vanish into thin air. Larry tells Julia that maybe neither of them was as bad as the other thought. And then he dies.

Back inside, Lambert continues to give the most ill-timed political speech of all time, while the Deathweb are tied up a few yards away. Because of this convenience, it's learned that the Deathweb were ordered to kill everyone but Lambert, meaning that the running mate was the one working for the mob all along. Of course there's no evidence and Lambert denies the whole thing, but his audience begins to suspect that something's wrong, with one of them harshly saying, "I gotta go think about him for a while."

If this issue doesn't inspire you to get into politics, nothing will.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. A convoluted mess, with all the emotional scenes being too short to have any impact and all the stupid moments lasting too long.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

And when Matt Drudge was finishing thinking about him, he invented the internet.





West Coast Avengers Annual #7 (1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: M.C. Wyman, Al Bigley, John Dennis and David Ammerman.

Inker: Tim Dzon, John Tartaglione, Mike DeCarlo, Pam Ecklund, Brad Vancata and Keith Williams.

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The second part of "Assault on Armor City" has the team working with Darkhawk in order to save a kidnapped Jim Rhodes.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

"Locate (Assault on Armor City, Part 2)"

"Assault on Armor City" ran through three Marvel annuals in 1992, with part one in *Darkhawk Annual #1* and the third part in *Iron Man Annual #13*. This issue is the middle chapter, which is pretty amazing considering how little information is given to what happened before.

Tony Stark is running out of time since he's discovered that his technology is being used for villainous purposes. On top of that, Anthony Power - one of the men responsible for this technological conspiracy - has kidnapped Jim Rhodes and is prepared to torture him in order to acquire information.

Iron Man splits the team up, asking the Living Lightning, Hawkeye and Wonder Man to protect the Stark Enterprises in California while Spider-Woman and Scarlet Witch join him and Darkhawk to attack a manufacturing base. Other than that, there's not a lot to say here. The attack on the manufacturing base goes pretty much by the numbers, with an emphasis on the mysterious Darkhawk that Marvel was trying really hard to sell. Iron Man hacks into the system, makes some

shocking discoveries, leaves a crippling computer virus and saves his friend Rhodes.

This chapter ends with Living Lightning, Hawkeye and Wonder Man under attack at Stark Enterprises by the Hunters, Seekers and Raiders (I have no idea who they are either).

"A Study in Scarlet"

While doing her morning "hexercise" the Scarlet Witch accidentally opens up a window to an alternate world. Through this window, Wanda see a reality where the Vision wasn't kidnapped and redesigned by Cameron Block (*West Coast Avengers* #42). Because of this, she and Vision live happily ever after with their two children. And though the window disappears, Wanda takes comfort knowing that she had a happy ending somewhere else.

"Mile High Mayhem"

While she has an hour layover in Denver, Julia meets with her old friend Yvonne to catch up at the airport. They share family photos and talk about men, dieting, and children. When a plane tries to land with two engines out, Julia takes a bathroom break to change into Spider-Woman and save the day. Once the crisis is averted and Julia is back in normal clothes, Yvonne confesses that she's dying from breast cancer. And through this experience Julia realizes that her problems

with balancing a superhero career with being a divorced mother is complete and utter bullshit.

"Ten Little Villains"

The team sits around at the compound on a rainy night and discuss who the West Coast Avengers' Top 10 Worst Villains are. Keeping in mind that they can't choose Ultron because he's more of an Avengers East foe.

And the list is:

- Dr. Demonicus and the Pacific Overlords
- Hangman and the Night Shift
- Grim Reaper
- Immortus
- Master Pandemonium
- Quantum
- Halflife
- Cat People
- Dominus (even though he's really an X-Men villain, Hawkeye says he's theirs because they've tangled with him twice now...you know, like Ultron!)
- Graviton

"My Name is Legion"

The Living Lightning is the special guest at L.A.'s Cinco de Mayo festivities. Attending with his mother, Miguel meets with Lou Denham, an old colleague of his father who is interested in knowing how Miguel got his powers

so that he can create a new Legion of the Living Lightning. When Miguel refuses, Denham takes his mother hostage at gunpoint. With some quick thinking, Miguel defuses the situation. However, a little girl is wounded when a bullet ricochets off Miguel. Luckily, the girl is only grazed, and Miguel agrees not to blame himself as long as the little girl calls him by his first name. Yeah...*what?* Sadly, this was 1992, when you couldn't do a story with a Hispanic character without someone getting shot.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Has there ever been a good Marvel annual crossover event?

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Say my name and make the guilt vanish!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 87 (November 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

After a three-part story with Spider-Man, it's time for the West Coast Avengers to step up to the plate for a Wolverine two-parter!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Things must not have been looking good for the book by November of 1992 if the appearance of Wolverine is any indication. Because any title with Wolverine in it was certainly going to grab the attention of readers. At this rate, I expect the Punisher to make an appearance pretty soon.

A U.S.-Canadian D.E.W. base is attacked by Russians. After all of the soldiers have been neutralized, a team of technicians begin assembling important equipment that'll take ten hours to do. "It must be done within five," commands a mysterious doctor. "This may be our last chance to begin a new cold war!"

Oh, 1992, how I've missed you!

Hawkeye and U.S. Agent are sharing a room in the hospital - still recovering from their injuries fighting Deathweb. Mockingbird comes to see how they're doing and she discovers that they're arguing, as always. U.S. Agent gets a call from the Commission about a mission in Canada. He hangs up and gets into costume, but the phone rings again before he can leave. This time it's

Scarlet Witch ordering him and the others to the compound.

Meanwhile, Wolverine is backpacking in Bathurst Inlet being stalked by a polar bear and complaining about the mosquitoes. And just as the polar bear is about to strike, Wolverine is confronted by two Russian supertypes who take him down surprisingly quick.

Back at the compound, it's learned that Tony Stark has passed away from an illness (see *Iron Man #284*), and the team is trying to come to terms with the loss. Hawkeye lashes out at Mockingbird but immediately apologizes. U.S. Agent is flippant and asks to leave. Spider-Woman accuses him of still working for the Commission, and he says what he does in his own spare time is his business. He leaves on a quinjet, and Wonder Man and Scarlet Witch decide to follow him in another.

If you feel I'm overlooking the death of Tony Stark, please understand that it's handled so nonchalantly in two pages that it's hard to feel like it's important. They could have devoted an entire issue to the team dealing with this (something the book could really use instead of fighting generic bad guys).

U.S. Agent arrives in Canada based on the Commission's instructions. He's immediately attacked by two Russian soldiers in a hovercraft. After dealing with the soldiers, he's confronted by a Russian man with psychic powers. This is Golubev (we find out his name later). Golubev uses levitation and telekinesis to tie up and throw U.S.

Agent into the water to drown. Luckily, Scarlet Witch and Wonder Man arrive to save him just in time.

Wolverine wakes up to find himself restrained in some kind of lab. He's greeted by Dr. Vladimir Volkh, one of the four Russian supervillains in this story, who proceeds to give Wolverine a page of exposition about who everyone is and what their powers are. Volkh plans to start a second cold war today by turning all of North America into a gigantic uninhabitable iceberg.

Oh, *cold* war.

Wolverine breaks free from his restraints and confronts Volkh. It turns out that Volkh's powers make him adaptable, so as Wolverine tries to cut him, his skin gives rather than tears. While he's getting beaten by Volkh, Wonder Man, Scarlet Witch and U.S. Agent come walking into the room. And now it's Wolverine and the West Coast Avengers versus "Dr. Volkh and his Never-Say-Die Bogatyri."

See you next week for the stunning conclusion.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Sorry, but even Wolverine can't save this one. And it's a shame when the guest star gets more page time than the death of one of the book's major characters.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Yeah, she still could apparently.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 88 (December 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

With half the team in Canada trying to stop a new Cold War with Wolverine, the heroes at home have their own crisis to deal with.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

We start right where we left off last issue with Wolverine, Wonder Man, Scarlet Witch and U.S. Agent about to take on a twisted Russian version of the Fantastic Four. The fight pretty much goes the way you'd expect, with the heroes having the edge until Scarlet Witch is knocked out. After that, only Wolverine and U.S. Agent are conscious enough to flee and attempt a different tactic.

I thought that the title didn't give Tony's death the space it deserved in last month's issue, and while that continues here (they mention attending Tony's funeral and that's it), the impact of his loss is finally starting to be felt in the book. Which brings us to the best part of this issue. After pages of seeing Wolverine fighting alongside our heroes, we return to the compound where an angry Captain America is on the monitor demanding an update regarding what's going on in Canada from Hawkeye. An annoyed Hawkeye hangs up on Cap, muttering that he's tired of the team "playing second fiddle" - a sentiment every reader can agree with.

Mockingbird comes to Hawkeye saying that they need to talk, but they're interrupted by Rachel running into the

room followed by Spider-Woman. And while the little girl doesn't bother either Hawkeye and Mockingbird, the news that she'll be living at the compound does. Then they stumble across a morose Miguel who announces that Tony's death has reminded him of how dangerous the job is and that he won't live forever, and so he has decided to attend college. And with that, he is leaving the team, though he'll be available if they were to ever need him. Just when it couldn't get any worse, Bobbi informs Clint that their divorce will be final in two weeks. And this is an abbreviated summary of what might be the best three pages of the entire run.

Now I give the book an awful lot of grief, but most of that is because it never quite figured out how to make its downtime work (like the baseball issues in *X-Men*) without resorting to broad soap-operatic clichés. And here the Thomases have finally done the impossible and created compelling character moments with a believable emotional core. All of this is made even more interesting because the real story that should be shining here is Wolverine interacting with the team, but that falls flat.

Back in Canada, Wonder Man and Scarlet Witch are restrained while Dr. Volkh can reveal the mechanics of his entire plan. He releases an experimental ice crystal that once it's released in open air it uses heat to grow and multiply. And so the crystals begin to grow in the room, consuming our two heroes. That is, until U.S. Agent and Wolverine return. Wolverine goes after Volkh while U.S. Agent frees Wonder Man from the ice, who immediately

tells him that Wanda should've been saved first before freeing her from the ice too.

Fight. Fight. Fight. Until Scarlet Witch uses her convenient hex powers on the original ice crystal to make it stop working and thus melting all of the ice it generated. With their plan ruined, the Russian villains flee in their hovercraft.

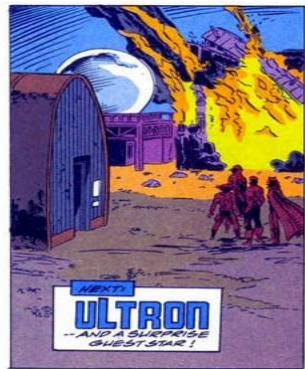
And that's how the new Cold War was ended by Wolverine and the West Coast Avengers. Oh...that would be a great comic book!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I'm willing to overlook the generic story conflict and the missed opportunity of Wolverine's appearance all because of the three pages I talked about before.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

This ending was lifted from John Carpenter's *The Thing*.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 89 (December 1992)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Ultron is back! And this time he's Ultimate!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

At the Vault, Ultron is contained in solid adamantium casing, and being guarded by Larson, the husband of a woman who was trampled in the Rose Parade that Ultron had previously mechanized (see *West Coast Avengers #68*). We know all of this because exposition forces people to talk to one another as if they've just met for the first time. Thanks to Ultron's hypnotic suggestion, Larson brought a portable video game with him that was full of robo-ticks, or Bytes, which is a nano-like swarm that eats the guard alive before freeing Ultron. While Ultron kills everyone who gets in his way, he's kind enough to talk out loud and inform everyone that we can finally do away with the numbering and simply refer to him as Ultimate Ultron.

Back at the compound, the team is trying to deal with U.S. Agent's involvement with the Commission. U.S. Agent doesn't see the problem, as he feels it doesn't matter what he does in his free time. However, the team does have issue with the fact that he took a quinjet with him to Canada to do the Commission's work (*West Coast Avengers #87*). And while there's talk about him being kicked off the team, the absence of Tony Stark means that there's no official chairman for the team at the moment.

War Machine shows up to offer his membership to the team, but because the heroes have already had a run in with him they aren't comfortably having him around. Unless, of course, he decides to unmask and share his identity (something that never bothered anyone before). War Machine says he'll have to think it over, but for now the answer is a solid no.

Hawkeye takes a phone call for the absent Hank Pym from Dr. Myron Maclain, who is the inventor of adamantium. He claims that he has figured out a way to make adamantium cheaper and quicker, and he needs some protection. Hawkeye splits the team up with Mockingbird, Wonder Man, Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent going to see Maclain. When they arrive, Maclain tells them it was a false alarm and that they can leave. U.S. Agent doesn't buy Maclain's behavior and rushes him only to be thrown across the room by the doctor. Wonder Man attacks next and it's discovered that he's an organic robot, which can only mean one thing: Ultron's back!

U.S. Agent contacts Scarlet Witch to warn her of Ultron, but his signal is cut off as Ultron takes control of the compound's computers and security system to attack our favorite mutant witch. Scarlet Witch runs outside to the pool area where Carlos is playing with Rachel. She tells everyone to run when things start exploding.

And here's when things get serious. When Ultron disables Scarlet Witch by grabbing her cape and making

her fall into the pool, Carlos confronts the robot with a pitchfork. And Ultron kills him.

Just when it looks like it's going to go all crazy-go-nuts, the Vision shows up to confront Ultron.

CARLOS IS DEAD!

I can't be there for you all right now to hold you and tell you everything's going to be okay. And honestly, with Carlos dead, even I'm not sure everything is going to be okay. Let's handle this with the dignity and respect we would back in 1992. Let's fondly remember Carlos' life while listening to Boyz II Men's "It's So Hard To Say Goodbye To Yesterday".





You will be missed.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

I don't know how I'm supposed to feel. Come on, people!
CARLOS IS DEAD! DEAD!

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Her cape is her weakness!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 90 (January 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Ultron's attack on the compound is cut short thanks to the intervention of the Vision. However, the team can't possibly imagine the horror that awaits them when Ultron's ultimate plan is revealed...

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

I'm not too sure what's happening to this book because it appears to be getting good. In fact, the promise of those few amazing pages in *West Coast Avengers #88* is starting to reveal itself here. Maybe it's because the team is once again fighting an Avengers East level foe, as poorly defined in *West Coast Avengers Annual #7*, or maybe the Thomases finally realized the book's true potential.

We begin where we left off with the Vision stepping between Hawkeye and Scarlet Witch to confront Ultron. Naturally, Ultron wants the Vision to become his ally, as the latter was created by the former. The Vision wants nothing to do with him. The Vision manages to hold his own quite well against the villainous robot, but eventually Ultron gets the upper hand and drops a wall on both the Vision and Scarlet Witch. After dealing with these obstacles, Ultron finally gets what he came for: the parts of Ultron's previous incarnations, which were conveniently kept at the compound thanks to Hank Pym.

Mockingbird, U.S. Agent, Spider-Woman and Wonder Man return just as Ultron is leaving. U.S. Agent, Spider-

Wanda Maximoff and Iron Man jump out of the quinjet to attack, but Ultron simply dodges them and heads straight for the quinjet. Mockingbird, who was piloting the quinjet, is taken hostage by Ultron.

The Vision tries to locate Ultron, but it's going to take some time. A panicked Hawkeye doesn't have the patience to deal with an emotionless Vision, and in a rare moment of compassion, he confesses to Scarlet Witch that he loves Mockingbird, always had.

In a lab in Death Valley, Hank Pym is doing research in biochemistry when Ultron comes crashing in with his previous spare parts and his hostages (both Mockingbird and Dr. Myron Maclain, from last issue). The robot demands that Pym make him an adamantium mate.

Sigh, don't we all want an adamantium mate?

When the team realizes where Ultron is, they decide to be heroes for once. And this is where it gets interesting. Instead of just telling you, I'll just show you:



The moment Hawkeye realizes that the West Coast Avengers can be just as cool as the Avengers. Man, his wife should've been taken hostage years ago!

The team arrives in Death Valley only to be confronted by a small army of old, broken-down Ultrons. U.S. Agent pushes Hawkeye aside to get into the fight, but Hawkeye immediately swallows a test tube and become...GOLIATH! Interestingly enough, to pull this off, Hawkeye had to wear the Goliath uniform underneath his regular uniform, which is just, you know, weird. Anyway, with Clint all giant-like and in a mood for vengeance, it feels like they have the upper hand in this battle.

Sadly that isn't the case, as Ultron comes out and introduces everyone to his unfortunately named robot bride, War Toy, who we all used to know as Mockingbird.

"You turned into Goliath, Hawkeye! Well, I stole your wife! YOUR MOVE!"

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Now this is more like it.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Even in death, Carlos gets no respect...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 91 (February 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's the West Coast Avengers versus Ultron and his War Toy!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

It's nice to know that a robot isn't above having unrealistic expectations out of women. War Toy (boy, that name is something, isn't it?) has pointy breasts, is impossibly thin, has a memory bank that only goes back 10 minutes, and lives in a secret lair with walls covered in posters of New Kids on the Block. That's how evil Ultron is, people!

Once the team comprehends that War Toy is Mockingbird, the fight begins immediately. However, they're at a huge disadvantage. Goliath is knocked out first, followed by Vision, U.S. Agent, Wonder Man and Spider-Woman. Scarlet Witch gets the fight's biggest moment by flying the 14.5 ton quinjet with 34,000 pounds of thrust into Ultron and War Toy; however, it does nothing.

Goliath returns to the fight with a giant block of adamantium and begins to pound the crap out of the robots. Realizing that they're wasting valuable time, Ultron and War Toy flee.

Once inside Pym's lab, they discover that Mockingbird is alive and human, that Ultron simply copied her

brainwaves and was done with her. And for the first time since *West Coast Avengers* #33, they kiss:



YAY!

It turns out that Ultron was heading the Sun Lake Weapon's Center where the military tests all the most powerful weapons, many of which they claim do not exist, where Ultron could set off a "Super Chernobyl". The team jump into a new and improved R.O.V.E.R. to catch up with the robotic pair.

The robotic pair, however, aren't exactly getting along. In fact, they're bickering. It all starts because War Toy keeps calling Ultron "Ulty." It seems that Ultron put a little too much of Mockingbird's brainwaves inside War Toy. On top of that, she doesn't want to follow his orders. She doesn't agree with the way Ultron wants to end all organic life on the planet. She has, as she claims, more sense of fun. War Toy says, "I prefer years of destruction to a few seconds of 'bang!'"

Hmm...there's nothing sexual there.

Once the team arrives on the base, they come up with a plan. They tie up the Vision to the head of a nuclear missile. This gets the attention of Ultron and War Toy, who are both aware that it's a trap, but feel there's nothing that can stop them. When they get close, they realize that the Vision's body has become an electromagnet that attracts adamantium. With the villains trapped on the warhead, it's launched into space where it explodes. Fortunately the Vision phased through the missile and returned safely.

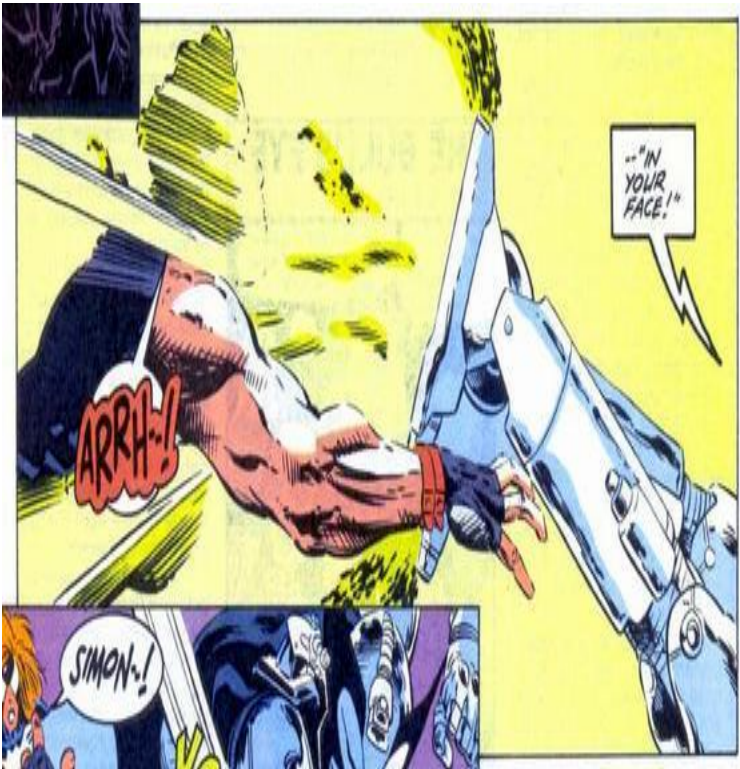
The issue ends with everyone celebrating sprinkled with the traditional moodiness we've come to expect from the West Coast Avengers. Hawkeye is pumped up and wants a party. Scarlet Witch has finally accepted that the man she married will never return. And Wonder Man wishes he could comfort Wanda, or at least take her out for tacos.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. I love this books again.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

So that's where it came from...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 92 (March 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

As the team picks up the pieces from their battle with Ultron, Goliath sees an opportunity to get some revenge.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Even though this picks right up after their fight with Ultron, a lot has happened. We've missed Carlos' funeral already, and more importantly, Wonder Man has quit the team thanks to events that happened in his title (for those reaching for their longboxes, that would be *Wonder Man* #17 and #18). From what I can gather, Simon went crazy and beat up on Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent, and then quit the team.

Goliath and U.S. Agent are cleaning up the serious damage on the compound from Ultron's attack and without even trying, they're already at each other's throats and about to start swinging. Mockingbird steps in and asks Clint if he really wants to spend the afternoon fighting with U.S. Agent or go inside and have superhero sex. They head inside, leaving a disgruntled U.S. Agent to clean up alone. While silly on the surface (honestly, John Byrne was the only one who could make the fights between U.S. Agent and Hawkeye work without it feeling forced), this scene is a nice reminder of the change in Clint and Bobbi's relationship.

Spider-Woman and Scarlet Witch are moving Consuela and Rachel to Newport Beach. Spider-Woman wants her daughter to be safe and Consuela doesn't feel it's safe at

the compound anymore after Carlos' death. The Living Lightning stops in and wonders if he should be back on the team now that both Iron Man and Wonder Man are out of the picture, but Wanda tells him that he needs to get his education first.

Meanwhile, a television news reporter has sneaked into a jail to do an interview with the villain Goliath, who has been incarcerated since Giant-Man put him there (*Marvel Comics Presents* #119). And even though he's supposedly drugged and unable to change size, at the mention of "Wonder Man" Goliath goes crazy and breaks out of jail like a poor man's Green Giant.

Clint and Bobbi are back at the compound giving each other massages and taking responsibility for what had kept them apart for all this time. When Bobbi hears a sound, they suit up and discover Kuroko of the Pacific Overlords wandering around. She's badly beaten and claims it was Doctor Demonicus, but before she can give anymore info, she passes out. Once Kuroko is put in bed, a giant hand comes crashing through the window, grabbing Clint.

Goliath wants to know where Wonder Man is. "I asked you a question, little man!" screams Goliath. Clint doesn't like to be called "little man" and starts growing, announcing that he's also Goliath. Goliath isn't pleased that someone stole his name and decides to kill Clint first. And now the stage is set for this issue's big fight between two giant men in Los Angeles.

Unsurprisingly, it's Mockingbird who saves the day by firing one of Hawkeye's electro-arrows at Goliath's head, which she modified to absorb electrons and cancel out Goliath's power. With Goliath weakened, Clint goes for the knock out punch.

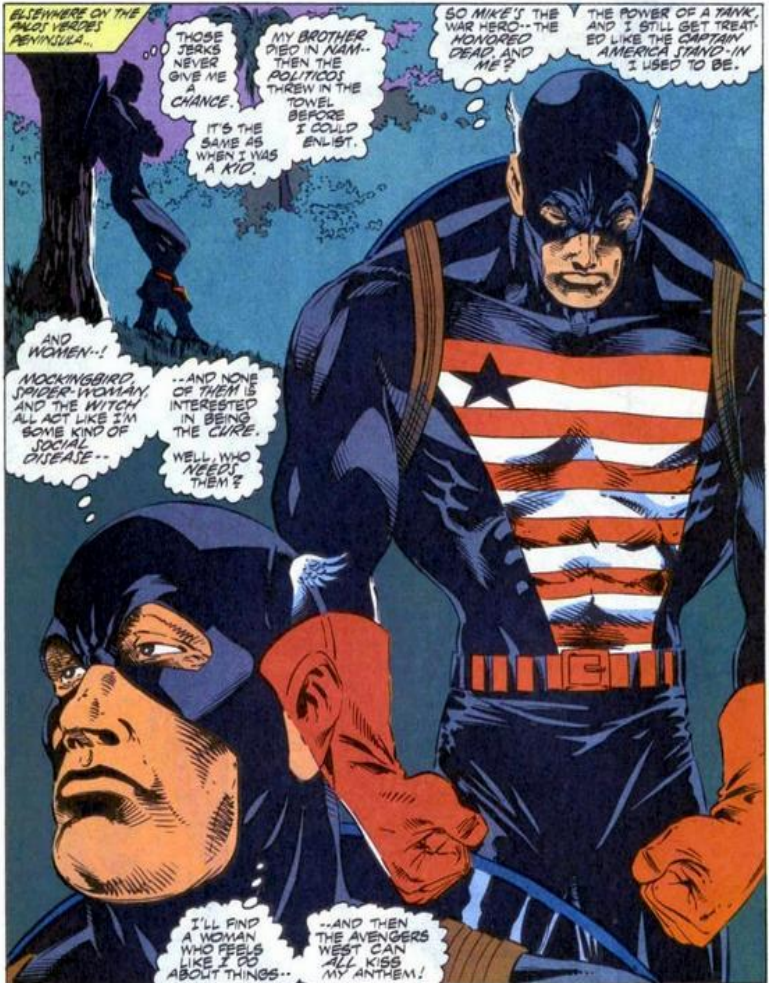
Back at the compound, everyone has returned to find Kuroko conscious and warning the team that Doctor Demonicus has gone insane and means to destroy the world.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Though it's a step down from last issue, I'm still onboard.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

With Wonder Man gone, U.S. Agent turns on the mope...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 93 (April 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon and Aaron McClellan

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team splits up to deal with the return of the Pacific Overlords and some Battledroids. Plus, the return of Iron Man?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Kuroko of the Pacific Overlords tells the team what's been happening with Doctor Demonicus and his island republic Demonica. It seems like Doctor Demonicus was on the road to being a decent human being, promising the U.N. to share all of Demonica's mineral wealth. That is, until one day he entered a newly-discovered cave and came out hours later a changed man. From that moment on he began treating people terribly, had a falling out with the U.N., and then had his Overlords attack and board a plane full of Wakandans in order to free the captured Klaw. Once Klaw was brought to Demonica, Doctor Demonicus welcomed him by announcing that he was now the country's new vice-president.

Kuroko was suspicious of Doctor Demonicus' behavior and she was troubled by the devices on the foreheads of Jawbreaker and Cybertooth which seemed to make them more obedient. When Kain is invited to the mysterious cave with Doctor Demonicus, Kuroko follows them. Once there, she sees a strange altar and ritual. A device similar to the one Jawbreaker and Cybertooth wears is placed on Kain's forehead and he begins to shout in an unknown tongue. Kuroko is spotted and Doctor Demonicus releases a small dragon-like creature to attack. She

eventually escapes in a stolen plane, bruised and battered, and sets course for the West Coast Avengers.

Upon hearing the story in the kitchen, the team wonders if it might be a trap. But before they can confirm any of the story with the U.N., Darkhawk appears. When I say appears, I mean he literally appears out of nowhere. U.S. Agent mentions that someone is in the shadows of the well-lit kitchen, and then Darkhawk is suddenly standing in the middle between everyone. Not sure if it's terrible writing or just a terrible layout. Anyway, Spider-Woman has been keeping in touch with Darkhawk since their adventure together (see *West Coast Avengers Annual* #7) and she invited him to hang out with the team. She figured with Wonder Man and Iron Man gone, they could use the extra power.

And with that, Darkhawk informs everyone that Iron Man is right now battling a bunch of Battledroids - he saw it on TV! The team freaks out and rushes to their biggest television set and watches the news. They discover that the Los Angeles headquarters of Stark International is under attack (like Darkhawk said!), but more importantly, Tony Stark is alive (I didn't see that coming!).

Before the team can celebrate, the Pacific Overlords attack. Actually it's Klaw and Morningstar (from *West Coast Avengers* #88) on their behalf. This allows fans to learn the answers to some important questions like: Who would win in a fight between Klaw and Spider-Woman? Spider-Woman. Who would win in a fight between

Morningstar and U.S. Agent? No one. Naturally, the villains escape and in the process kidnap Kuroko.

U.S. Agent, Mockingbird and Goliath bum a ride on Pym's ROVER and head over to Stark International to steal a quinjet (since all of the team's quinjets were recently destroyed (see *West Coast Avengers* #87 and *West Coast Avengers* #89). Naturally, this allows the three heroes to engage in another fight, this time with the aforementioned Battledroids. See, it all ties together!

The issue ends with Doctor Demonicus capturing a plane that violated Demonica's air space. More importantly, the issue ends with a reminder that this is, in fact, 1993.



How amazing is that?

NOT!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. And we're back to being terrible again. I miss Ultron.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Thanks for the hand!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 94 (May 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler and Co-Plotter: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The team goes to Demonica and things don't go as smoothly as they hoped because this is part two of a three-parter. Also: War Machine!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

It's worth noting that penciler David Ross is co-plotting this issue. I should also point out that Ross has been on the title since *West Coast Avengers* #71 and will be here until the end (excluding two issues) making his run a full 30 issues if we count Annual #8 - which I'll be getting to soon enough. Al Milgrom drew 42 issues of the title (counting two annuals), which puts Ross at second place. Considering that Ross came late to the party, that's not too shabby at all.

U.S. Agent, Mockingbird and Goliath are at the west coast headquarters of Stark Enterprises fighting Batteredroids. I wish I could say they were there to help out their old pal Iron Man, but in reality, they're there to steal a quinjet. While they're fighting away, War Machine comes in and helps them out. He wants to join the team as he just quit working for Stark. He's especially annoyed by the fact that Stark conned him - like everyone else - into thinking that he was dead. As much as they want him on the team, they still want to know who's behind the mask (just as they did in *West Coast Avengers* #89). With that, War Machine reveals himself to be Jim Rhodes (who you might remember as being Iron Man when the team first formed way back

in *West Coast Avengers* Vol. 1, #1). Once everyone knows who is who, War Machine is accepted in the team and then he goes and steals a quinjet for them.

We get a brief look at Tony Stark when someone informs him that one of the quinjets was stolen. He tells him not to alert the police, and to send the team a second quinjet with a note on it that says he's sorry. What he's sorry for exactly is unclear.

Last issue Doctor Demonicus ordered his Overlords to kidnap a plane (yes, a plane!) that flew into Demonica's airspace. Doctor Demonicus is on the runway to greet the passengers who have been nominated to become the country's first tourists. He tells everyone that he insists they see all the country's sights. "And that could take -- years!" he shouts.

The U.N. asks the team to become the official U.N. delegation to Demonica after Doctor Demonicus tells the world that there's a 500 mile no-fly zone in every direction surrounding his island country. Our heroes waste no time and head to Demonica. Once they're close, they're attacked by a swarm of the dragon-like creatures that attacked Kuroko last issue. Once on the ground, they confront Doctor Demonicus who tells them that Demonica is now a theocracy and all the promises previously made to the U.N. are void. In fact, Doctor Demonicus is not only president-for-life, he's also the country's high priest. Scarlet Witch agrees to leave, but only if they can see that the hostages are safe.

Naturally, Doctor Demonicus disagrees and orders his Overlords to kick them out. And so we have the issue's big fight which goes on for a few pages longer than it needs to. The fight ends when Doctor Demonicus threatens to shoot the hostages. He orders everyone to leave except for Mockingbird and U.S. Agent. Everyone agrees to leave except for Goliath, who won't leave without his wife. War Machine knocks Goliath out to get him to leave peacefully, thus sparing the hostages lives.

Doctor Demonicus takes U.S. Agent and Mockingbird to the mysterious cave with the strange altar. Doctor Demonicus summons Raksasa, a demon from dimensions deep. The appearance of this creature helps to explain Doctor Demonicus' demon swarm and exactly who he is high priest for. While everyone is expositioning, Mockingbird manages to knock out Klaw and free U.S. Agent. They both begin to kick demon butt with Doctor Demonicus promising Raksasa that they will never leave the cave alive.

The issue ends with the quinjet landing in Hawaii to refuel. Goliath is ready to return to Demonica to save his wife, but before a decision can be made, the demon swarm can be seen heading their way.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Leave it to the Pacific Overlords to stink up the book.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

He's not real big on wasting woman, unreconstructed commie or not!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 95 (June 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas
Penciler and Co-plotter: David Ross
Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

It's the final battle against Doctor Demonicus and Demonica will never be the same!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

David Ross is once again co-plotting. I only point this out because it makes it really difficult to know who to blame.

When we left off last time, U.S. Agent and Mockingbird were attempting to escape from Doctor Demonicus' cave where a ritual was about to take place that would bring a horrifying demon called Raksasa into our dimension. U.S. Agent manages to get out of the cave, but he's chased through the streets of Demonica by the Morningstar. Just when it looks like she has the upperhand, it turns out that she wants to join forces with everyone's favorite carbon copy of Captain America. You see, even though she's the bad guy, even she realizes what a bad idea summoning Raksasa really is for everyone on Earth. While all of this is going down, Mockingbird is taken out of the fight back in the cave.

Meanwhile, in Hawaii, the rest of the team along with Darkstar are dealing with the demon swarm's attack. The creatures are deadly, as shown by the way they killed a pilot (see below). Goliath grows thinking that the bigger he is, the harder it will be for the swarm to hurt him, but he underestimates how many there are. Scarlet Witch saves him and he takes refuge behind Spider-Woman's

psi-webs. And let's be honest, if Spider-Woman is the one protecting you, then you're in serious trouble.

Back in the cave, Doctor Demonicus continues the summoning ritual. Morningstar returns claiming that U.S. Agent has been eliminated. While everyone is paying attention to Doctor Demonicus, she attempts to recruit Klaw to her cause. When suddenly, U.S. Agent drops down from apparently no where and kicked Doctor Demonicus in the head. Of course, Morningstar and U.S. Agent had a plan, but he jumped the gun. And here we are in the book's traditional fight mode. The biggest twist is that Klaw has joined the good guys. Kain then takes control of Klaw's vibranium claw, forcing U.S. Agent to direct it towards the ground to save everyone's lives. However, because of this, the whole island begins to shake and crumble.

All our heroes (and villains) are on the run in Demonica as the entire country is falling apart. At the last moment of the summoning, U.S. Agent uses his shield to knock out Doctor Demonicus, forcing Raksasa to remain in his own dimension and losing his foothold over his demon swarm which begins to tear itself to shreds.

The heroes find the hostages and load them back into their plane. And it takes off, but not a moment too soon as the runway literally tears itself apart just as the plane leaves the ground.

In the cave, the Overlords surround a fallen Doctor Demonicus, who apologizes to everyone for having been

seduced by the power of Raksasa. Because of this tragic mistake, he has doomed them and his empire. Just as he asks them for forgiveness, the cave consumes them as Demonica falls back into the ocean.

The issue ends with Morningstar telling the team that she won't be coming with them, right before planting a kiss on U.S. Agent's mouth. OH MY GOD! U.S. AGENT KISSED A COMMUNIST!

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Can Ultron come back now?

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

I like to think that this happened to every pilot who ejected in a G.I. Joe cartoon:





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 96 (July 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy and Dann Thomas

Penciler: Andrew Currie

Inker: Don Hudson

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

An *Infinity Crusade* crossover! It's West Coast Avengers versus West Coast Avengers! Because...why not?

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

And we're sucked back into a major event. This time it's *Infinity Crusade*, the sequel to *Infinity Gauntlet* (which I remember being pretty good) and *Infinity War*. Normally this would be the moment I'd give you a little background on what the event was about, but there's no need. Here's all you need to know: for the purposes of this crossover, some heroes turn evil and they will fight the other heroes.

Spider-Woman and Goliath are sparring outside of their destroyed compound, so it's no big deal when she throws his giant body into the mansion and causes even more property damage. Just when it looks like we'll finally know who is stronger (because this is the Marvel universe and that's the only thing that's important), War Machine enters and knocks Goliath down. Why would he do this? Well, it turns out that under the debris they've been fighting on is an unconscious Roberto, their gardener.



The team wonders if he'd been there since the Overlords attacked two issues ago (way to pay attention to the hired help, guys!). When Roberto wakes up, he tells them that it was Miguel, the Living Lightning, who attacked him!

NOOOOOOOOOOO!

With this information, they decide they need to pull the team together and investigate. War Machine agrees to get U.S. Agent from a pistol range in Beverly Hills. Goliath and Mockingbird are going to get Scarlet Witch from her apartment. And Spider-Woman agrees to go to Miguel's church to see if he's there.

At Scarlet Witch's apartment, Wanda is acting strangely when our favorite married couple arrive. When they try to grab her, she uses her hex powers to make Goliath grow uncontrollably. He ends up destroying the entire apartment building and causes a car crash. While they're dealing with the property damage and the safety of the civilians, Wanda makes an escape.

At the pistol range, U.S. Agent is also acting weird. When War Machine tries to detain him, U.S. Agent brings the whole building down around them. With War Machine holding the walls up for the civilians to escape, U.S. Agent makes his escape.

I'm seeing a pattern here.

At Miguel's church, Spider-Woman discovers the Living Lightning who has been praying there for over an hour, according to the priest. When she approaches him, he attacks, destroying the church and stunning Spider-Woman with his lightning blasts. While she's being cradled by the priest, the rest of the team shows up to see what's going on. The Living Lightning, of course, escapes.

The Vision contacts the team and lets them know that the same thing has been happening to the heroes not only on the east coast, but the entire world. He asks for them to send a representative to the Fantastic Four's headquarters (which Spider-Woman volunteers for) to deal with the global crisis.

Keep in mind, an unknown threat is turning some of the most powerful heroes into villains all over the world. Everything is seemingly at stake. So what's Goliath and Mockingbird decide to do?



This is why no one respects you guys!

But before they can get any quality time together (and they sure deserve it!), the coffee shop is attacked by Quantum's Power Platoon. You remember Quantum, right? He first appeared in *West Coast Avengers* #12.

End story.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I miss Ross' art as much as I miss the days before this title got sucked into every major Marvel event.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Please point to the Spider-Man doll and show us where he touched you.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 97 (August 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy Thomas
Penciler: Andrew Currie
Inker: Don Hudson

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

Mockingbird, Goliath/Hawkeye and War Machine are trapped inside a crossover issue.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Here we are with the second *Infinity Crusade* crossover issue. We're not only missing the usual penciler and inker, but Danni Thomas is no where to be seen either. I can only assume that they were inflicted by the same thing that forced Scarlet Witch, Living Lightning and U.S Agent off the book.

When we last left Goliath and Mockingbird, they decided to respond to a globe threatening crisis by grabbing a quick cup of coffee at a mall. Quantum's Power Platoon appeared to be as offended as I was and they have attacked our heroes. The Power Platoon all look like Quantum (you remember him, right? From *West Coast Avengers #12*), but each one has specific powers. Basically, imagine clones of Superman, each with a specific power.

Despite some fancy footwork, Mockingbird and Goliath do such a terrible job, a police officer steps in.



However, when he shoots at one of the Power Platoon, the bullet is hurled right back at him.

Seeing that they can't win this fight, they contact War Machine. When he arrives, he makes a difference, but it's clearly not enough. Finally Clint realizes he needs to return to his old bag of tricks. He runs to his car and pulls out his bow and arrow (don't leave home with it) and shoots off some smoke arrows. This disables the Power Platoon by robbing the creatures of sunlight (hey, like I said, think Superman!). War Machine wraps the Platoon up in a metallic awning, pokes a few holes for air, and the crisis is contained by page 16.

Once back at the compound, Clint decides that he's tired of being Goliath and becomes Hawkeye again. And then the real Quantum (all three of intangible versions of him - please don't make me explain why) shows up looking for his Platoon. Because he's unable to touch our heroes, he brought along Wundarr, who is under Quantum's

mental control. The Platoon is eventually freed and things go from bad to worse. Or, as Hawkeye puts it:



But the fight is cut short when Wundarr and the Platoon suddenly lose interest and run away. "We...just don't feel like hurting anyone we don't have to," says Wundarr as he walks away. Quantum is livid, but there's nothing he can do.

Spider-Woman calls and tells everyone that something very similar has happened in other places (meaning: read the main event, not just the crossover issues). The issue ends with Mockingbird wishing that they had the answers to what was going on, perfectly reflecting the inner monologue of every reader.

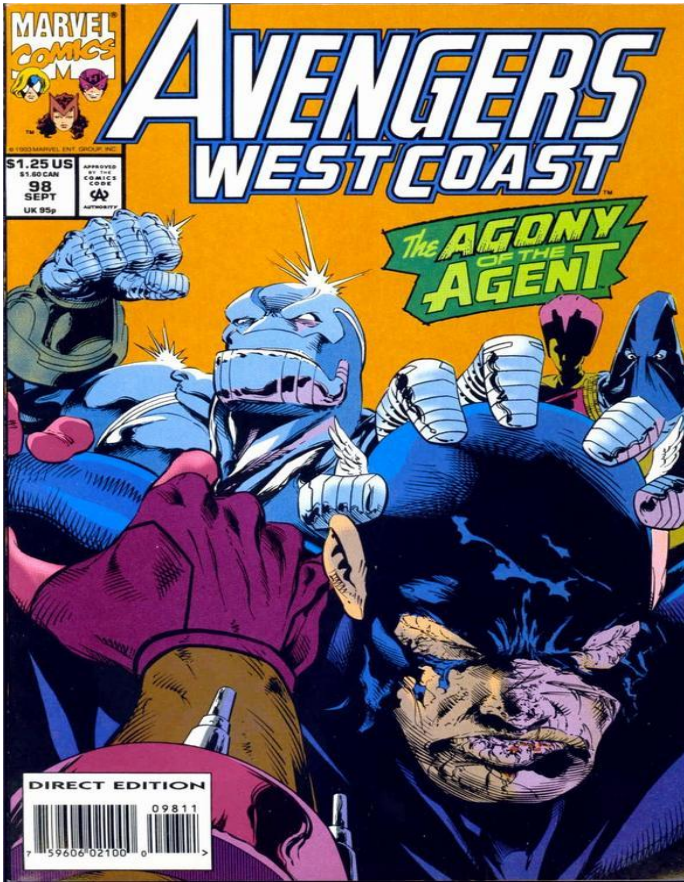
WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. Please kill me.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Any size?





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 98
(September 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy Thomas
Penciler: David Ross
Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

U.S. Agent is in a fight for his life against Hangman and his Lethal Legion!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

In a dimension that looks a lot like Hell, Satannish has brought four villains back to life to form a Lethal Legion for Hangman (we last saw him in *West Coast Avengers* #79). These four are Coldsteel, Cyana, Axe of Violence, and Zyklon.



Together, they must return to Earth and kill the West Coast Avengers one by one in exchange for their souls and possibly their lives.

Back at the still-destroyed compound, Hawkeye announces that he's stepping down as the team's chairman in order to spend more time with his wife (and

though they don't announce this to the team, they're also trying to have a child). He nominates Wanda to take his place and she is unanimously voted into the position. Though she's reluctant, Wanda eventually accepts the position.

Outside the compound, the heroes discuss the change in the status quo. Spider-Woman talks to War Machine about how her parents are coming to visit from Peru and that they were never around when she was a child. With that mind, she thinks Jim needs to bury the hatchet with Tony Stark. Is Roy Thomas suggesting that Tony is Jim's father figure? I never looked at it that way.

Feeling neglected by the team, U.S. Agent heads into the city looking for some bad guys to beat up.



After all that fighting, he walks across the street to a convenience store to quench his thirst. When a beautiful woman comes walking in dressed provocatively, U.S. Agent makes some small talk. She asks if he'll walk her to her car, which he does, and once there she gives him a kiss on the lips. U.S. Agent doesn't buy her act though and wants to know who she is and what she wants. She morphs into Cyana - "You know - as in cyanide," she says. It turns out that her kiss was poisonous, and while U.S. Agent feels the effects of it, he refuses to give in. When he goes to attack her, she freaks out and calls in reinforcements: Zyklon and Steelman!

What comes next is probably the best fight scene from the book's entire run, hands down. I don't know if it was the two issue break or what, but Ross and Dzon bring their A-game here and really sell the danger here. You can feel every punch. And Thomas deserves a lot of the credit too, as U.S. Agent goes from cocky to brave to afraid in the course of a few pages. This is the best U.S. Agent has ever been in this book. And the Lethal Legion? For once, the title has introduced a threat that feels legitimately dangerous.

And though the rest of the team shows up to save the day, they're unfortunately too late to save U.S. Agent from this:



The issue ends with the team standing over a seemingly dead U.S. Agent.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. We're four issues away from the last issue and we've just now uncovered the best issue of the series. Wonder if the next part holds up...

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

What do they say about guys who wear trunks over their tights?





West Coast Avengers Annual #8 (1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy Thomas

Pencilers: Kris Renkewitz, Dave Ross, Scott Kolins, Larry Alexander, John Czap and Vince Russell

Inkers: Don Hudson, John Lowe, Tim Dzon, Maria Beccari, Mike Barreiro and Fred Fredericks

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

When the West Coast Avengers are hypnotized by Ultron, it's up to some reservists along with Raptor to help stop the end of the world.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

The good news with this annual is that it isn't a crossover, nor does it have a bunch of nonsensical vignettes. The bad news is that this annual is one long terrible story.

The West Coast Avengers gets an anonymous tip that Ultron and War Toy are in San Francisco. When they land at Coit Tower, 18 year old Gary Wiltons flees believing there's something dangerous going on. While he's running away, his pencil clip falls into a sewer hole. Because it's a gift from his father, he enters the sewer and stumbles upon Ultron and War Toy in their secret lair. When Ultron grabs him, a mysterious aura appears around Gary. And that's when the West Coast Avengers show up.

Unfortunately for the team, Ultron hypnotizes them all. Seeing an opportunity, Ultron orders them to take his three seismic activators and place them at three exact locations. Once activated, this will cause the eruptions of volcanoes in three states, creating something similar to a nuclear winter. Ultron catches up with the fleeing Gary and once again he's surrounded by that aura, only this time he grows wings and turns into Raptor.



We get his origin story, which really isn't worth getting into here, as he'll never appear in this title again. In fact, the whole issue feels like a backdoor pilot.

Because we have mesmerized heroes at three different locations trying to plant bombs, this creates an opportunity for fights between heroes without pesky misunderstandings. We have Hank Pym versus Hawkeye. Wasp versus Scarlet Witch. The Living Lightning versus War Machine. Tigra versus Mockingbird. Iron Man versus U.S. Agent. And Raptor

versus Spider-Woman. Surprisingly, every mesmerized hero defeats his/her challenger.

Eventually, it's up to Iron Man to save the day by taking down Ultron. While Ultron is using all his energy to defeat shellhead, he loses control of the mesmerized heroes. So now it's a big free for all.

However, War Toy ends up stabbing Ultron in the back. It turns out, she was the one who tipped off the team to their location in San Francisco. She disagrees with the way Ultron treats her like a toy, and more importantly, she prefers to kill humans one by one and slowly, whereas Ultron wants to destroy everyone as quickly as possible.

Maybe they need couple's therapy.

Ultron is taken down, but War Toy gets away - despite Raptor's attempt to catch her.

The annual ends with Mockingbird talking to Hawkeye, wondering if Ultron and War Toy will ever get back together; you know, the way they did.

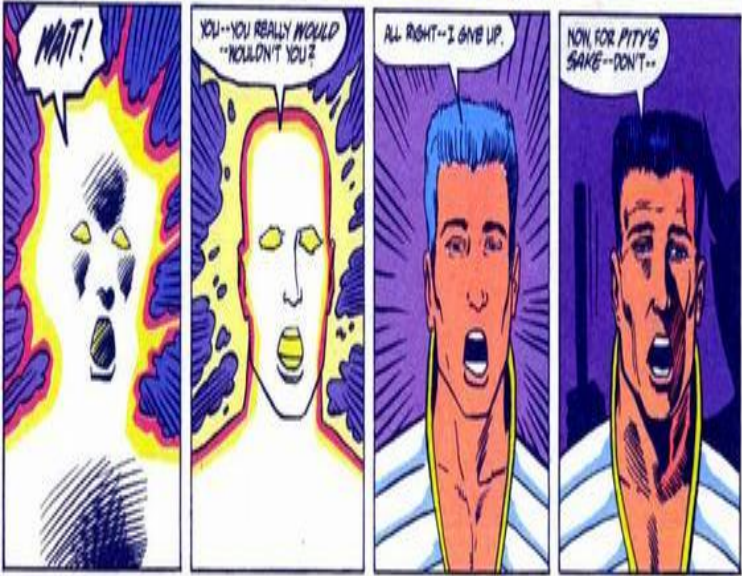
I think I might be missing the summer crossovers.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Roast. I'm pretty sure a large chunk of my soul died just now.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

It's called a bluff, Miguel!





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 99 (October 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy Thomas

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

As the identity of each member of the Lethal Legion reveals itself, the team discovers that the worst monsters of them all are human.

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

West Coast Avengers #98 turned out to be best issue of the book's entire run, so the second part to the story carries a lot of expectations. Let's see how it does...

U.S. Agent wakes up to find himself at the table of Lucrezia Borgia in Renaissance Italy where he is stabbed and poisoned. He then finds himself falling through time and space witnessing the atrocities of Nazi concentrations camps, the massacre of Russian peasant farmers, and other grisly murders. Until finally he wakes up again, only this time he's in a hospital surrounded by his teammates. The doctor didn't think U.S. Agent would survive from the injuries he sustained in last issue's fight, but his team never gave up hope. When Hawkeye tries to compliment U.S. Agent, he takes it the wrong way and they're once again back to threats and bickering.

War Machine and Spider-Woman go to Stella Houston's house to follow up on some possible leads. You might remember her as being the love interest of Jason Roland - the man who would become the Hangman (see *West Coast Avengers #76*). However, they arrive too late...



Throughout the course of the fight, they learn that Satannish wants the team dead and that Axe of Terror is actually Lizzie Borden - the famous 19th century murderer.

Scarlet Witch and Hawkeye visit Roland's old mansion hoping for some clues. Since it's a dark and scary place, naturally the heroes split up. Once along, Scarlet Witch is confronted by Cyana, who reveals herself to be Lucrezia Borgia. After Hawkeye survives an attack from the Hangman, Wanda tells him who Cyana really is.

Back at the hospital, U.S. Agent has had enough and suits up, despite Mockingbird's protests. She confesses to him that she'll be quitting the team so that she and Clint can start a family. But before U.S. Agent can fully respond, Coldsteel and Zyklon attack them. Through the fight, it's revealed that Coldsteel is actually Josef Stalin and Zyklon is really Henrich Himmler. Even though War

Machine comes in to help, the villains manage to get away with Mockingbird as a hostage.

When Hawkeye returns, he's not pleased. And though U.S. Agent seems to take responsibility for her capture, Hawkeye is surprisingly mature about the whole thing. Wanda suggests a plan using one of Agatha Harkness' books to open up a window to Satannish's dimension. Through the window, Satannish confirms that the Lethal Legion is the reincarnated souls of some of history's most terrifying monsters and that he's in need of souls.

Hawkeye takes a shot at Satannish, but the window closes. Just when things can't get any worse, Mephisto arrives and offers his help.

And now we're ready for the 100th issue of *West Coast Avengers*. Or are we?

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. While not as good as last issue, this is a good read. Again, the violence really makes the threat feel legitimate. It's a shame that the book find its footing this close to the ends of the series.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

That's not what I meant when I said that Spider-Woman needs to get the axe...



Also, I hope if I ever have an axe in my chest, I'll remain that calm.



**West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 100
(November 1993)**

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writers: Roy and Dann Thomas, Jim Novak and Len Kaminski

Pencilers: David Ross, Don Hudson, Tom Tenney and Tom Morgan

Inkers: Tim Dzon, Charles Barnett, Avon and Don Cameron

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

This is the final battle between the West Coast Avengers and Satannish. And nothing will be the same again. SHUT UP! I mean it this time!

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Just look at that red foil cover, will you? There's absolutely no doubt that we're looking at a comic book from 1993.

"Soul Gauntlet"

Using one of Agatha Harkness' books, the team is trying to get to Satannish's dimension in order to save Mockingbird from the Lethal Legion. Along the way, they cross paths with Mephisto. He wants to teach Satannish a lesson because he stole the souls for his Lethal Legion from him. He asks Hawkeye who is more important, Satannish or his wife, but before he can answer, Scarlet Witch casts a spell that sends the team right to Satannish's door.

Satannish appears immediately throwing out his threat. And the danger gets turned up a notch as the Lethal Legion appears and takes down each member of the team one by one until only Hawkeye and Scarlet Witch are the only ones standing. However, Hawkeye has a strong case of the Mephisto...



It turns into a giant fight between Mephisto and Satannish over the stolen souls of the Lethal Legion. The damage from the fight accidentally frees out heroes from their stony prison. The battle between the West Coast Avengers and the Lethal Legion is a little easier this time as the villains have reverted back to their human forms. When Mephisto goes to retrieve the four souls, Satannish resists, and their struggle completely destroys the souls in the process. With the four evil souls destroyed,

Mephisto sets his eyes on the six pure souls of our heroes.

The team flees Satannish's dimension with Mephisto's deadly brimstone balls being thrown at them from behind. During the escape, Mockingbird tackles Hawkeye in order to get him out of Mephisto's crosshair, but she takes a hit in the process.

With the window to Satannish's dimension closed, the team has a moment to consider the price they just paid: Mockingbird's death.

The story ends with Mockingbird's funeral.

"...And Make Death Proud to Take Us"

Standing at his wife's grave, Clint remembers when they both first moved out to California to form the West Coast Avengers. "Remember the time when we were doing it and Bill Foster called us up about an amazing real estate opportunity?"



Yeah, those were good times.

Oh, and live every moment like it'll be the last! SO ALWAYS ANSWER THE PHONE!

"Boys Will be Boys"

A guilt stricken U.S. Agent takes leave from the West Coast Avengers and returns to his empty childhood home. When he visits the grave of his parents, he's interrupted by a bunch of college kids who just wants to par-tee! When one of them pulls a gun, he beats up everyone.



The story finishes with U.S. Agent telling his parents that what he just fought for was "real...more real than most of

the battles I've had with countless super-villains. There's a greater truth at work here."

Indeed there is, U.S. Agent.

"Wild in the Street"

Because the Living Lightning is no longer a part of the team, it's up to War Machine to represent a minority culture on the team. And because this is the Nineties, this means that any story that focuses on a Hispanic or African American superhero must involve gang culture. We've gone down this road twice with the Living Lightning, so it's unfortunate to see War Machine having the torch passed to him.

When War Machine breaks up a gang fight, he's horrified to discover that they're packing some serious technology. He follows the source of the weapons and learns that Hate Monger and his Sons of the Serpent are supplying the weapons. And Hate Monger could care less about the money, he's in it for the killing. You see, the bloodshed and class warfare has been going on long before he showed up and it's going to be going on long after he leaves. And there's nothing War Machine can do to make a difference.

So War Machine punches him real hard and walks away. I'm not kidding. That's how it ends.



WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast and Roast. I'm game for the main story, but those back-ups.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Total bummer.





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 101
(December 1993)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Roy Thomas
Penciler: David Ross
Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

~~While the team deals with the loss of one of its founding members, Hawkeye must make a difficult decision.~~

WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

And that's a shame. After three solid consecutive issues capped off with a giant anniversary blowout, the book is once again sucked into a crossover. This time it's "Bloodties". To keep things simple, let's refer to the always trusty Wikipedia:

"Bloodties", a 1993 Avengers/X-Men crossover and a direct sequel to the X-Men "Fatal Attractions" story line. It details the fallout from Charles Xavier's infamous mindwipe of Magneto and Magneto's ultimate defeat. The story details a civil war between the human and mutant populations of Genosha, incited by Magneto's former protégé Fabian Cortez. Unaware of Magneto's incapacitation, Cortez attempted to shield himself from his former master's wrath by kidnapping Magneto's granddaughter Luna. However, as Luna's father Quicksilver had strong ties to the X-Men and her mother Crystal was a member of the Avengers, both teams became involved in the Genoshan conflict. The situation was further complicated by Magneto's lieutenant and self-proclaimed heir Exodus, who sought

to kill both Cortez for his betrayal and Luna for "disgracing" Magneto's line by being merely human.

This is the third of five parts. Keeping in mind, this is the penultimate issue of the series and it's being derailed into an X-Men event.

Let's see if I can figure things out based on this issue. Hawkeye and some of the Avengers are at the U.N. trying to get permission to enter Genosha, as the country has entered a civil war involving mutants and humans. As a U.N.-sanctioned team, the Avengers are not allowed to interfere with a sovereign nation. Hawkeye just sees a bunch of politicians stalling and threatens to scrap their U.N. charter if that means getting the job done.

And this is probably the issue's biggest problem: how it completely ignores the death of Hawkeye's wife. The last time we saw him he was mourning her loss at her grave and now he's back to being cocky in front of a U.N. assembly. Too bad.

The other Avengers are already in Genosha and they've come face to face with Exodus who is openly killing humans but claiming self defense. This doesn't please Captain America especially, and even a mutant like Scarlet Witch can see the error in Exodus' ways. War Machine is the first to lose his patience and goes after Exodus.



Despite the team's interference, the country is in the middle of a civil war, and both sides are too blind with rage to even consider the Avengers' attempt at mediation.

Meanwhile, in the sewers below the capitol, Professor Xavier, U.S. Agent and Beast are on a mission of their own. Despite Beast and U.S. Agent's constant sniping at one another, they uncover hundreds of mutants being

locked away under inhumane conditions, guarded by Genosha's president's Magistrate Elite.

On the other side of the city, the X-Men are battling the Unforgiven along with Fabian Cortez. Once the bad guys are disposed of, Cyclops threatens Cortez only to discover that it's not really him, but a shape-shifter.



The issue ends with Exodus disposing of War Machine and being confronted by Sersi, one of the Eternals.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Despite a lot of big set pieces, not a lot happens in this issue. And knowing that this is the penultimate issue only makes things worse. The team just lost a major player last issue and that's swept under a rug to accommodate a crossover that the series has no business being a part of. And it's not like they were using this to drive sales up to save the book because the final issue was probably already in the can by this point.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

With Hawkeye not around, U.S. Agent hopes Beast will stand in for him...





West Coast Avengers, Vol. 2, Issue 102 (January 1994)

WEST COAST CREDITS!

Writer: Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning

Penciler: David Ross

Inker: Tim Dzon

WEST COAST SUMMARY!

The final issue.

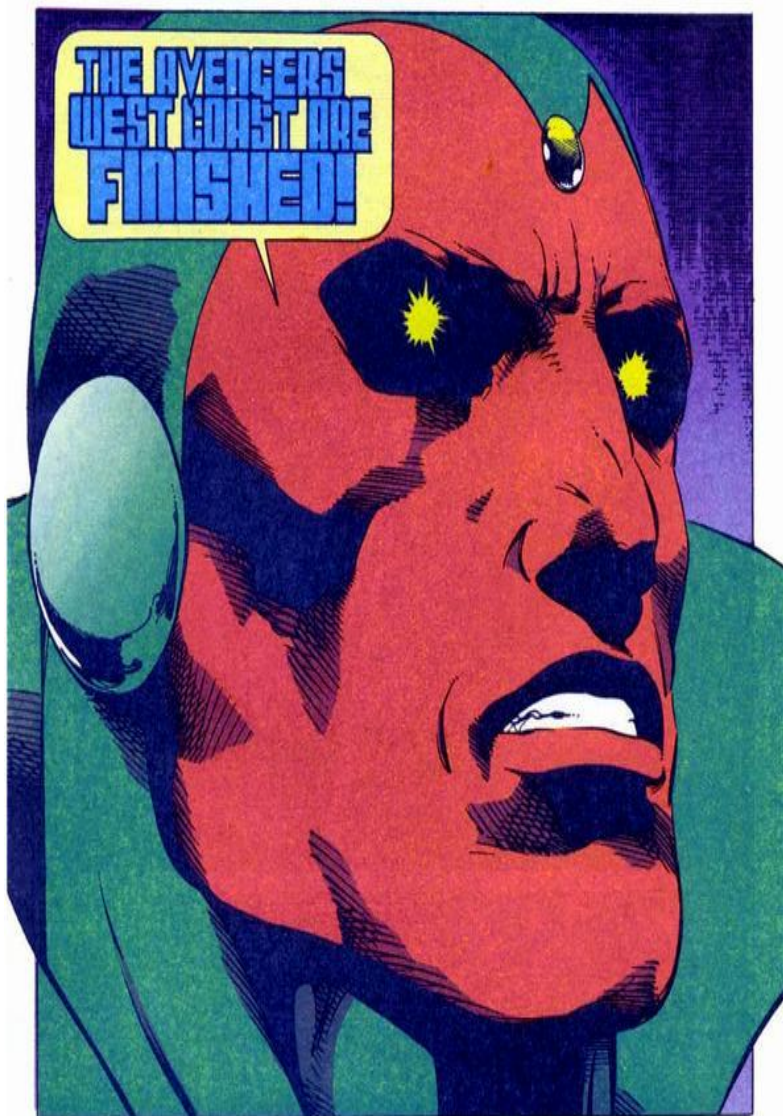
WEST COAST THOUGHTS!

Roy and Dann Thomas are nowhere to be seen (all fairness, Dann Thomas has been absent for a few issues by this point) and Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning have stepped in to give the series a proper farewell. Which isn't exactly true as there's a specific reason why these two writers were chosen for this issue, which I'll get to soon enough.

Way back in May of 1984, Vision proposed the creation of the West Coast Avengers:



And a decade later, Vision changes his mind:



Vision calls together all active Avengers to basically humiliate the West coast branch. "Any assessment of the West Coast performance must conclude that it is an understudy operation, overshadowed by the power and competence of the original Avengers...The problems are becoming abundantly clear. Avengers West has failed, conceptually and practically." And that's the nice part.

The West Coast Avengers is down to Scarlet Witch (who suddenly has a new costume and haircut), War Machine, Spider-Woman and U.S. Agent (Hawkeye has disappeared), and none of them are taking this lying down. Iron Man shows up unannounced and argues that the problem doesn't lie so much on there being two different teams, but the notion of what an Avenger is has changed in recent years. Captain America argues this, causing U.S. Agent to smash the table looking for a fight. Iron Man comes up behind U.S. Agent and says, "Not here. Not now. Not ever."

When lunch is served, everyone takes a break, but there's plenty of tension in the air. When Iron Man tries to approach and reconcile with War Machine, he quits the team and flies off. When Captain America lectures Iron Man on his lack of team unity, U.S. Agent almost comes to blows with Captain America. He's stopped in the nick of time by Iron Man who reiterates what he said before.

After all this drama, the team reconvenes to vote on disbanding the West Coast Avengers.



With Vision voting in the affirmative, it's a tie, leaving Iron Man with the final vote. And his answer is...



His teammates are shocked by his decision. When Captain America calls him on it, Iron Man responds, "The team can't continue to function with your resentment and lack of support." With that said, Captain America announces that members of the West Coast Avengers are now on reservist status.

Scarlet Witch promptly quits the team. Iron Man follows. U.S. Agent is next. And finally Spider-Woman quits.

We wrap up the issue with U.S. Agent throwing his uniform and shield into the waters near the Statue of

Liberty, saying that he doesn't believe in anything anymore. And the final page shows Wonder Man returning to the empty compound announcing that he's ready to be a West Coast Avenger again. Iron Man is there to break the bad news.

The issue ends with this threat: *The end...and just the beginning.*

Which is why Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning are the writers, as this is not only an epilogue to the *West Coast Avengers*, but a prologue to *Force Works*, a spin-off book featuring Iron Man, Wonder Man, Spider-Woman, Scarlet Witch and U.S. Agent (in a new costume). It would run 22 issues. And if you think I'm going to read those next, you're crazier than I've been for the last two and half years.

WEST BOAST OR ROAST?

Boast. Not a bad way to wrap up the series. It's interesting that Vision's assessment of the team mirrors the criticism I've leveled at the book during the course of this experiment. Still, it's a shame Hawkeye was taken off the table for this issue. It would've been nice to not only see how he's dealing with the loss of Mockingbird (which the previous issue tragically neglected), but see his reaction to his baby being destroyed. There would've been a lot of emotion to mine with that. Tune in next week when I finally put this bad boy to bed.

WEST COAST SCENE (OF THE WEEK)!

Simon, late to the party as always...



THE FINAL LIST!

West Coast Avengers Vol. 1, #1
West Coast Avengers Vol. 1, #2
West Coast Avengers Vol. 1, #3
West Coast Avengers Vol. 1, #4
Avengers Vol. 1, #250
Iron Man Annual #7
West Coast Avenger Vol. 2, #1
The Vision and Scarlet Witch #1
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #2
The Vision and Scarlet Witch #2
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #3
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #4
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #5
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #6
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #7
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #8
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #9
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #10
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #11
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #12
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #13
Avengers Annual #15
West Coast Avengers Annual #1
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #14
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #15
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #16
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #17
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #18
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #19
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #20
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #21
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #22
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #23
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #24
West Coast Avengers Annual #2
Avengers Annual #16
Silver Surfer #3
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #25
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #26
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #27
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #28
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #29
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #30
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #31
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #32
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #33
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #34
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #35

West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #36
West Coast Avengers Annual #3
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #37
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #38
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #39
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #40
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #41
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #42
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #43
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #44
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #45
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #46
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #47
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #48
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #49
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #50
West Coast Avengers Annual #4
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #51
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #52
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #53
Avengers Vol. 1, #312
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #54
Avengers Vol. 1, #313
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #55
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #56
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #57
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #58
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #59
West Coast Avengers Vol. 2, #60
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Christian A. Dumais is a writer. While he's published books like *Empty Room Lonely Countries* and *Cover Stories*, he's best known as the writer behind Twitter's Drunk Hulk – the internet sensation with over 180,000 followers – who TIME magazine called “one of [their] favorite funnymen.”

He lives in Wrocław, Poland, where he writes, teaches, and bakes delicious pies. He is currently working on a novel that will not die. You can follow him on Twitter as @PuffChrissy and visit his website: cadumais.com.

Follow @DRUNKHULK on Twitter today! And see what everyone is talking about!

"ME LIKE DRUNK HULK!"

- Anthony Bourdain

"I love DRUNK HULK. I help him get sober."

- Russell Brand

"Why not 'Shit My Drunk Hulk Says?'"

- John Hodgman

"Drunk Hulk [is] one of TIME's favorite funnymen."

TIME

"People get paid a lot of money to write comedy who are not one tenth as funny as Drunk Hulk."

npr

"[Christian A. Dumais] is one of the three or four people who make it seem possible that Twitter can spawn something like art."

beingboing





When Christian A. Dumais set out to read and review every issue of *West Coast Avengers*, he had no way of knowing that this exercise in futility would forever change the world.

Now, having achieved the impossible, Dumais has created the ~~only~~—most important book ever written about *West Coast Avengers*.

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