

Spider-Man stories readers wish had never been

# More on Less

by **ANDREW "CAPTAIN COMICS" SMITH**

We're continuing this month with responses from **CBG** #1635 (Nov 07), wherein I asked readers to submit suggestions for "One Less Day," the story they wished had never seen print. For some

reason, everyone's friendly neighborhood web-spinner is a hot topic.

Dear Cap: While reading your "One Less Day" article in **CBG** #1635, it had me reflect on what I missed. I'd dropped all the Spider-titles after the Hobgoblin fiasco. Why do writers need to turn every supporting character into a villain? I exaggerate, but it does feel that way. Carol Ferris, Snapper Carr, Jarvis the butler, Alfred the other butler, Happy Hogan, nearly all of Tony Stark's girlfriends, etc. Reading your capsule summary on "The Clone Saga" certainly makes me happy I didn't waste my money on 136 issues or, frankly, any since then. Marvel lost me as a Spider-customer 18 years ago. That's a lot of lost money over that time. I still buy select Marvel titles but rarely buy into those storylines that jump from *Amazing* to *Web* to *Spectacular* to *Friendly*, etc. That type of stunt just ticks me off, and, instead of buying them all, I drop them all. In retrospect, the mid-'90s was a tough time for comics writing. The ideas were bizarre, and far too many stories stank. Thank goodness the '00s came along.

— **Bob Loeffler**

**The Captain responds:**

I've long made fun of the '70s as one of the worst decades in pop-culture history. I was there, and, let me tell you, it was dreadful. Disco, leisure suits, poofy hair, *Starsky & Hutch*, Leo Sayer — it was a long 10 years! When it comes to comic books, though, the '90s are certainly in competition for Worst Decade Ever. (Two words: Heroes Reborn.)

**[Spoiler Warning]**

Anyway, I also disliked the Hobgoblin story. Not only was I already bored in the early '90s with the endless parade of Green Goblin retreads (a trend that continues, and continues to annoy me, today), but also because it killed Ned Leeds. Ned wasn't that important in the Parker circle, but, by the '90s, he was just about the only supporting character left whose name I knew.

In the Romita years, *Amazing Spider-Man* had probably the best cast of supporting characters



ever. But by the '90s most of them were dead: Frederick Foswell, Captain Stacy, Gwen Stacy, Norman Osborn, Harry Osborn — the list goes on. Turning Ned (briefly) into a villain and then offing him was part of a long series of bad decisions that threatened to make Peter Parker the sole survivor of his circle of friends.

Of course, the recent “Brand New Day” leaves the door open for a lot of these characters to return. We’ve already seen Harry Osborn; maybe Ned isn’t as dead as we thought, either. And maybe this time he’ll have a personality.

**[End Spoiler Warning]**

Dear Cap: Here is my response to your question: What “One Less Day” would I pick? The single part of comics history that I would want to go back to change would be the two-part death of Gwen Stacy and Green Goblin storyline from *Amazing Spider-Man* #121-122 (Jun-Jul 73).

Comic books are a form of serial fiction. By that definition, it is important that the characters are preserved so that future fans will be able to continue to enjoy the characters. Each set of writers, artists, and editors are simply temporary caretakers. When the creative team hands the characters to the next batch of creators, those characters should be in essentially the same condition in which they were found.

Most Spider-Man fans would agree that The Green Goblin (Norman Osborn) is Spider-Man’s primary foe. Consider this: between Norman’s first appearance as The Goblin (*Amazing Spider-Man* #14, Jul 64) and his death (*Amazing Spider-Man* #122, Jul 73), The Green Goblin appeared in only 12 comics (if I’m counting correctly). Twelve. Think about that. Iconic super-villain on a par with Batman’s Joker and Superman’s Lex Luthor and he got there with only 12 appearances.

I know some people will read this and think, “But they revealed Norman did not die and brought him back later on.” This is true; however, for the stretch from 1973 until they brought Norman back in 1998, his death was played as a real death and there were no new Norman Osborn stories for that stretch of 25 years. In that time, we should have had hundreds of additional Green Goblin stories! Stan Lee and John Romita created a perfect scenario for countless Green Goblin stories. Norman didn’t remember what happened as The Green Goblin once he reverted to his normal personality. Spider-Man would want to defend the Norman side because he was Harry’s father (Peter’s good friend). That story could have (and should have) been told countless times.

The other death from this storyline is just as important. Gwen Stacy’s death started a clock ticking in Spider-Man’s life. Every major event in Spider-Man’s life after that point has



to be placed in relation to Gwen’s death. The passage of time became something readers had to think about. Writers became conscious of it, too, and eventually what do we have? A Spider-Man who is in his late 20s (early 30s?) and married to Mary Jane Watson. The character is far away from where he began. Maybe you don’t mind the changes and “advancing” of the character. I say you are selfish. Doesn’t each generation deserve to read about the same hero Stan Lee and Steve Ditko created in the ‘60s? If you support the changes, aging and advancing Peter Parker to this point, what will you think 20 years from now? At what point is Spider-Man no longer Spider-Man?

— Joe Hollon  
Wilmington, Ohio

**The Captain responds:**

Hmmm. Looks like “Brand New Day” will be to your liking, Joe. From my perspective, the current issues of *Amazing Spider-Man* have turned back the clock on the character by at least 30 years. The “BND” issues read like reprints from the Gerry Conway era to me.

Which is not a good thing. You say characters should never change, and maybe at some point I might have agreed with you. But “Brand New Day” has talked me out of that mindset forever, because of the tired “been there, done that” vibe I’m getting.

And, hey, I can ring in some experts for support. For example, Tom Wolfe was right when he said, “You can’t go home again.” And no less than Stan Lee once said that the writer owes the reader at least the *illusion* of change — and went much further than that. It was Lee himself who put Peter Parker through many of

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his most lasting changes, taking him through at least three girlfriends (Betty Brant, Liz Allen, Gwen Stacy), having him graduate from high school and go to college (1965), and moving him out of his aunt's house into an apartment with Harry Osborn (1967).

Lee spent a career breaking out of the villain-of-the-month super-hero conventions he'd inherited. That was true with *Amazing Spider-Man* in particular, where change was a part of the strip. Even when Steve Ditko was still drawing and co-plotting it. It was Ditko, after all, who drew Peter Parker's high-school graduation.

So you might want to check out "Brand New Day," Joe. It's boring me to tears, but my perspective is different from yours. If you believe that Spidey should never change, then you are exactly the audience Joe Quesada and Tom Brevoort are shooting for with "BND." Let me know what you think, since I'm genuinely curious to see if the target market gives it a thumb's up.

As to The Green Goblin, I never thought of him as Spidey's primary foe in the '60s. To the Li'l Captain's way of thinking, Doctor Octopus was Spidey's arch-enemy, and The Goblin was more of an irritant. He didn't appear to have any super-powers (until we learned his origin), he had a silly costume, and he was a one-trick pony — he kept trying to take over the New York mobs. (Although why he thought anyone, crooked or not, would take orders from an anonymous guy in a Halloween costume was unexplained.) He was such a minor foe that, when Doc Ock pulled all of Spider-Man's worst enemies together as The Sinister Six (*Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #1, late 1964), Osborn was a newbie (he was introduced in *ASM* #14, Jul 64) and was skipped in favor of the likes of Mysterio, The Vulture, and even Kraven, who first appeared *after* The Goblin (in *ASM* #15).

I admit Osborn picked up street cred for finding out Peter's identity in *ASM* #39-40 (Aug-Sep 66), but after that he disappeared for five years (with one appearance in the *Spectacular Spider-Man* magazine) until *ASM* #96-98 (May-Jul 71). Does that sound like an arch-enemy to you?

The Goblin was a no-show again until around #119 (Apr 73), setting into motion the events that led to "The Night Gwen Stacy Died." Of course, that issue transformed The Goblin into Spidey Enemy #1 for all time. No argument there. But prior to that he wasn't frightening — he was kinda pathetic. Especially with the memory-loss angle. This wasn't a scary guy; this was a guy who needed a lot of therapy. Until *Amazing Spider-Man* #121, that is. *Then* he was a scary guy.

That said, I agree with you that the death of Gwen Stacy was such a dramatic turning point in Peter Parker's life that everything must be adjudged BGD (before Gwen's death) and AGD. I don't know if the creators at the time (Gerry Conway and John Romita Sr., among others) realized what a Stalingrad it would be, but it certainly has become a defining moment for The Wall-Crawler — and his fans.

At this point, it's hard to imagine Spidey without that defining moment. But I suspect that, like you, I'd be happier had it never occurred.

And speaking of "One More Day":

Dear Cap: I know this is going to sound strange with all the things that happened in the "Civil War" storyline, but "One More Day" is what got me going again. If I recall, this is an area we disagree on. I believe you've been in favor of an unmarried Peter Parker. To put it simply, I despise the idea.

Maybe it's because I'm no kid myself, but I want to read about characters that grow



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and change. Kind of the way I do. Or hope I do. There's one good aspect to it all, I guess. As soon as the issues of *Amazing* I've already ordered come in, I'm dropping the title and so will save myself about \$9 a month.

This is not an attempt to punish Marvel in any way. I realize how futile such a statement made by one fan is. It is, as I suggested above, simply that I don't want to read a Spider-Man caught in a time warp. I *will* read the issues I'm committed to. Partly because I'll have paid for them and also to see if MJ still being in Peter's life has any promise. I don't hold out lots of hope, however, as committed as Joe Quesada seems to be to a single Peter.

And this doesn't even begin to address the possibility of Peter's identity no longer being public. Which was a development I liked a lot. To say nothing of all the continuity problems that seem inherent in this change.

Two more thoughts to run by you in regards to "One More Day." Could Peter have looked any less heroic by, first, pretty much forcing this life change on Mary Jane, and, second, by not considering what *May* would want? It would be entirely in character for her to not want to live at the sacrifice of Peter and MJ's happiness. Also, I assume the irony of "Brand New Day" as a title for essentially a return-to-the-past story has escaped no one?

— Don from Barre

**The Captain responds:**

Actually, Don, there's not a lot of daylight between our opinions.

I once defended Quesada's right to unmarried Peter Parker, if he wanted to, and I always will

defend the creator's right to tell what he or she thinks is a good story. Because I'm always open to a good story, whatever form it takes. That doesn't mean I like every idea that comes down the block, though — and, after seeing how "One More Day" has played out, I'm not too keen on this one.

For one thing, however you care to interpret it, Peter Parker abrogated his sense of responsibility and made a deal with the Devil. That's no hero. Moreover, you can't put OMD in the "W" column — this is the biggest defeat of Spidey's life. Even if he doesn't remember it, *we* do — and it's hard to laugh at his one-liners now.

And, as I mentioned above, the execution of Brand New Day has left me unmoved. Not angry, not ecstatic — just bored. For the first time in my life, *Amazing Spider-Man* is sinking to the bottom of my to-read pile, because almost anything else, even *Power Pack*, seems more interesting.

I know that wasn't the creators' intent. I read and agreed with most of Spider-editor Tom Brevoort's bible, the "Spider-Man Manifesto" published in *Spider-Man: Swing Shift Director's Cut* (2008). (I responded in detail in my newspaper column, which you can find by clicking "Cap's Columns" at [www.captaincomics.us](http://www.captaincomics.us).)

Also, I'm well aware that I'm not the target audience. Joe Quesada said he believed that a married Peter Parker made the character too mature for many readers. Obviously, that doesn't apply to me or any other married readers of *Amazing Spider-Man*. (Which, I hate to mention to Joe, is the vast majority of comics readers, whose average age *Editor & Publisher* once pegged at 35.) But, hey, I realize that younger readers or new readers brought in by the movies or cartoon will be reading all these 35-year-old scenarios for the first time.

Goody for them. But the bottom line for me is this: I'm bored. I'm accurately predicting what's going to happen next in *Amazing Spider-Man*, because I've read this or that story "twist" 30 or 40 times before. I can even see Spidey's punchlines coming, just from the set-up.

That, to me, is a bad comic book. Hitting the reset button is one thing, but virtually redrawing Bronze Age issues of *Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man* is quite another. Hey, Sal Buscema did it right the first time!

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