

Twilight of the Superheroes
The Interminable Ramble
An unpublished series proposal for DC Comics by Alan Moore

Okay... I'm sure this is going to be an interminable ramble as these things usually are, but I first want to set down my thoughts on the whole idea of mass crossovers, partly in response to Paul's letter on the subject and partly just to clarify my thinking for myself. Hopefully, somewhere along the line you might catch a glimpse of some of the logic behind the story outline that follows and will thus be able to make a little more sense of my reasons for doing that way.

Firstly, as I see the commercial side, taking into account what Paul was kind enough to pass on to me, the perfect mass crossover would be something like the following: it would have a sensible and logical reason for crossing over with other titles, so that the readers who were prompted to try a new title as a result of the crossover or vice versa didn't feel cheated by some tenuous linkage of storylines that was at best spurious and at worst nonexistent. It would provide a strong and resonant springboard from which to launch a number of new series or with which to revitalize old ones again in a manner that was not obviously crassly exploitative so as to insult the reader's intelligence. With an eye to the merchandising that Marvel managed to spin out of Secret Wars, I think it's safe to assume that if it were possible to credibly spin role playing games, toys, "Waiting for Twilight" posters and T-shirts and badges and all the rest of that stuff from the title, then that would be a good idea too. Ideally, it might even be possible, while appealing to the diehard superhero junkie, to produce a central story idea simple, powerful and resonant enough to bear translation to other media. I mean, I know that I'm probably still intoxicated by the Watchmen deal, but it never hurts to allow for these things as a possibility, does it?

Okay, so assuming that the above is an accurate summary of what, ideally, DC would like to see happen with the title commercially, then I'll go onto tackle the other pertinent areas of concern with an eye to that and then hopefully tie the whole lot together at the end before moving on to the actual plot outline. If I don't manage that and just forget and wander off at a tangent or something then I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to bear with me. As long as I don't start free-associating about my childhood then we should be okay. The first of these other pertinent areas relates to the effect of the storyline in question upon the DC Universe itself, and in response to this I figure that perhaps I ought to outline briefly my thoughts upon crossovers of this magnitude in general.

For one thing, they require some very hard thinking about in advance if they're not going to generate more problems than they solve, and in thinking about something which will affect every book that the company publishes, if only in subtle ways, then one obviously has to be very careful. I should say that as yet, although I saw the outlines I haven't read any of the Legends series or its crossovers, mainly by reason of not having got out to a

comic shop recently. The premise, if I understand it correctly, looked very good: it seemed to be attempting to give a sort of resonant mythic context to the DC pantheon while at the same time establishing a more vigorous social context for the assembled characters in terms of its storyline, thus drawing the whole DC continuity together into an interesting whole, which is exactly what needs doing in the wake of the Crisis. The more we can reinforce the idea of the DC Universe as a magical and fascinating concept in itself, assuming that those are our aims, then the more successful we'll be in keeping readers hooked upon that universe and on the books that chronicle its various phenomena.

Of course, this approach isn't without its problems. If you don't do it right, if your assembled multitude of characters look merely banal, which I personally believe happened with Secret Wars (although that may be mere personal prejudice on my part), then your entire continuity is cheapened in the long term along with its credibility, whatever the short term benefits in terms of sales might be. When this happens, your only recourse is to greater acts of debasement in order to attract reader attention, more deaths to appease the arena crowd element in the fan marketplace, eventually degenerating into a geek show.

Then there are the unintentional injuries in internal logic that can be unwittingly inflicted upon the mass continuity by such a venture, whatever the individual merits of the creators or their efforts, purely by the vast organizational problems that a project of this size seems to encounter. To explain what I mean, I should perhaps look at a series that I have read, that being Marv and George's excellent Crisis on Infinite Earths. Although the motive was pure and the aim true with regard to Crisis, I can't help feeling that somewhere along the line, in the attempt to consolidate and rationalize the DC Cosmos, a situation even more potentially destabilizing and precarious was created. Instead of a parallel Earth cosmology that was, if the reader was sensible enough to overlook obvious discrepancies as what they were (i.e. simple mistakes), relatively easy to understand, in the wake of Crisis and related seismic impacts upon the continuity such as John Byrne's new Superman books we have a situation far less defined and precise. In the wake of the time-altering at the end of the Crisis we are left with a universe where the entire past continuity of DC, for the most part, simply never happened. While I understand that Paul is attempting to sort out the Legion/Superboy problems over in LSH at the moment, and that other writers are tackling similar discrepancies, the fact remains that by far the larger part of DC's continuity will simply have to be scrapped and consigned to one of Orwell's memory holes along with a large amount of characters who, more than simply being dead, are now unpeople.

I believe this is dangerous for a couple of reasons. Firstly, by establishing the precedent of altering time, you are establishing an unconscious context for all stories that take place in the future, as well as for those which took place (or rather didn't take place) in the past. The readers of long standing, somewhere along the line, are going to have some slight feeling that all the stories that they followed avidly during their years of

involvement with the book have been in some way invalidated, that all those countless plotlines weren't leading to anything more than what is in some respects an arbitrary cut-off point. By extension, the readers of today might well be left with the sensation that the stories they are currently reading are of less significance or moment because, after all, at some point ten years in the future some comic book omnipotent, be it an editor or the Spectre, can go back in time and erase the whole slate, ready to start again. I myself felt something similar at the end of the first Superman film, when he turns time back to save Lois. It ruined the small but genuine enjoyment that I'd got from that first movie and destroyed all credibility for any of the following sequels as far as I was concerned.

I know that the average eight year old reader in the street is not thinking these things consciously while buying his monthly batch of titles. Probably the average seventeen or twenty five year old reader isn't either, although that's more open to debate. My point is that the large and largely incomprehensible tides of public favor or dismissal that determine the success of a title are often influenced by very subtle things far below the waterline. I don't think it's too high-faluting to assume, for example, that the current success of the Teenage Superhero Group book has more than a little to do with the current massive sense of instability pervading our culture, especially with respect to instabilities in the family structure. I firmly believe that both this and the current seeming obsession with a strict formal continuity are some sort of broad response from an audience whose actual lives are spent living in a continuity far more uncertain and complex than anything ever envisaged by a comic book. I believe that one of the things that the comic fan is looking for in his multi-title crossover epics is some sense of a sanely ordered cosmos not offered to him or her by the news headlines or the arguments of their parents over breakfast.

That isn't to say that it's healthy or necessarily desirable to fulfill this fundamentally escapist sort of urge. I myself would feel uncomfortable if the imaginary reality I was offering my readers was intended as a pacifier rather than as something to make them think about their own reality. I'd cite *Watchmen* as an example of how it's possible to fulfill the requirements of a continuity much more strict and rigidly defined than is usual while still making some sort of relevant point, hopefully, about the real world that the book's readers are living in.

Attendant to this, there are a number of people in the industry (and in my opinion they have a good case even if I'm undecided about the right means to carry it off) who feel that it's time to break down the continuity and try to get rid of a lot of the rather anal and obsessive attitudes that have been allowed to dominate the marketplace and to some degree have hindered it in its periodic attempts to be taken seriously. I suppose a shining example of this would be Frank's *Dark Knight*, which, while it doesn't seem bothered about fitting into any graven-in-stone continuity, does service to the legend of Batman and brilliantly redefines the character for an eighties audience, and nobody really seems to care much how this all fits into the continuity because it's such a bloody good

story. Will Jason Todd really die? Will all the superheroes leave Earth to Superman and his government pals? Will Oliver Queen really get his arm burned off at the elbow in a fight with Clark Kent and become an embittered urban terrorist? Who cares?

The readers seem quite capable of accepting that this may or may not happen in the future, without getting worked up and starting to chew through their own arms over how the idea of alternate possible futures fits in with the Crisis idea that there is only one timestream with no possibility of alternate pasts, presents or futures.

Okay... so on one hand we have an audience thirsty for the stability that an ordered continuity gives them, and on the other hand we have good creative reasons for throwing continuity to the winds altogether. Is there any way that these two apparently conflicting notions can both be accomplished at once? Yes, I believe there is. I think it is possible to create a limited run series that would embrace both these attitudes comfortably and fulfill all the other requirements that we've gone over concerning crossovers of this type before. I think we could come up with a story that, like Legends, casts new light upon all the DC characters, and yet does no violence to however their creators and current creative teams are handling them in their own titles. Something that pulls together the threads of the DC Universe in an interesting and revealing way, while at the same time remaining simple enough in construction so that the chances for any screw-ups in the crossover continuity are diminished or avoided altogether.

This last point is important. Looking at the practicalities of the situation with the insight that Crisis has afforded us, it is possible to see the various practical problems which have emerged and which are unlikely to be solved by vigorous debating between the parties or sides involved. Firstly, there will almost certainly be some writers or artists who do not really want to involve their stories with the crossover, whether they say so or not. Making them "toe the line" if they're vocal about it or taking comfort from the fact that most people, even if they don't like the idea, will go along with it for the sake of a quiet life clearly isn't practical when you're dealing with writers and artists. If they aren't motivated by an idea, while it is theoretically possible to force them to adapt to it, it isn't possible to ensure that you'll get better than a mediocre story out of them, thus cheapening the whole overall concept to some degree. It seems to me much more workable to come up with a concept by means of which whatever individual writers choose to do or not to do in their own books will have relevance to the crossover, whether they necessarily intend it to or not. If they choose to involve themselves actively in the crossover, then that's fine. If they refuse to do so, then the very act of refusing to do anything about the crossover also becomes part of the overall storyline, without doing any violence to the continuity of the books involved at all. If the mechanics of how all this is to be achieved seem a little far fetched at this stage then I'd ask you to bear with me until after the story outline, at which point I'll attempt to demonstrate how the outline fulfills the various criteria that I'm defining here, including the next pertinent area on our

agenda after the demands of commerce and continuity have been covered, this being the purely creative opportunities and pitfalls involved.

Creatively, there is an immediate aesthetic problem in the multi-title crossover in that, baldly put, it is very easy to strain the credibility of the entire universe by putting certain characters next to each other. Swamp Thing and Blue Devil spring immediately to mind, or Sgt. Rock and The Legion of Super-Heroes. In such juxtapositions, the flawed seams of the illusion of unity that we're trying to create become most apparent, and some thought should be given to a way of avoiding this distracting effect. There is also the very real possibility that any storyline involving so many characters in more than a superficial fashion is going to degenerate into incoherence and gibberish, becoming a sort of comic book babble of difficult-to-explain powers and origins and characterizations topped off with a muddy cosmic conclusion, some of which I feel that I certainly fell prey to in my recent "Crisis in Heaven/American Gothic" conclusion in Swamp Thing and am anxious to avoid repeating here.

The creative plus side of the equation is more dependent upon the tastes and leanings of the creative people involved, in this instance myself and whoever we get to draw this thing and work with me on it. For my part, speaking purely subjectively for the moment, what I'd like to do creatively with the series, above and beyond the creative satisfaction to me and in fulfilling all the criteria above, is to create a storyline that lent the whole superhero phenomenon, the whole cosmos and concept a context that was intensely mythic and we extracted from the characters involved in it their last ounce of mythic potential, aiming at coming up with something that cements the link between superheroes and the Gods of legend by attempting something as direct and resonant as the original legends themselves. One legend in particular will be the main thematic drift of the storyline, this being the Norse legend of Ragnarok, twilight of the Gods.

The Storyline Itself

Okay... assuming that six pages is enough for preliminaries, we'll now move to a discussion of the storyline itself. Please bear in mind that firstly, since the story has time travel as one of its central motifs, it's often difficult to present events in a clear chronological sequence without getting muddled, for which I apologize in advance. Secondly, since I myself don't have all the fine details filled in yet... unless those details occur to me over the course of this writing, which often happens... then there are going to be a few areas where the plot is maybe fuzzy or the storyline seems flatter and less inspiring than the areas surrounding it. I hope these don't detract too much from your enjoyment of the idea, since these will be things that will be polished up to their final shine in the actual scripting. I'd again cite Watchmen as an example of how much of this stuff only finds its way in at the final draught stage and ask your indulgence wherever necessary.

To kick off, I should perhaps explain the overall structure of the story, which, incidentally, I'm currently imagining as something in the Watchmen format, twelve issues long, twenty-eight pages, no ads, although these are just working assumptions and are certainly open to alteration at this early stage.

The story is structured so that there is a central "core-narrative" which in this case is the tale of the Twilight of the Superheroes, taking place at some point in the not too distant future, say twenty or thirty years. Around this there is a sort of framing narrative, a device which links these hypothetical future events with what is going on in the DC continuity at present. This device provides the sort of interface between the fairly self-contained story of Twilight and the numerous fairly self-contained storylines and continuities of the DC Cosmos, and it is achieved as follows: we have agents in the future who have managed to send a message back to agents in the present day DC continuity, urging them to warn the superhero community of the terrible future that is possibly waiting for them, and to avoid it if at all possible. (This is not without its own ambiguities, as we shall hopefully see, but it provides for the moment the easiest conceptual handle with which to grasp the mechanics of all this.) Thus, the agents in the present set about reaching various superheroes in the present and delivering the warning. Some of those who are warned heed the warning, and make decisions in their current doings and lifestyles that will hopefully avert what is to happen in the future, even though this is by no means definite. Others will ignore the warning and carry on with what they were doing, which of course has some relevance, even by default, to the outcome of this horrific Götterdämmerung waiting in the potential future. Some of the superheroes affected will perhaps not be reached at all, and thus remain ignorant of the whole thing, although this, too, obviously has relevance to the outcome of what will happen in the future. I hope this makes it comprehensible how I hope to solve the problem of writers/artists who don't really want to involve themselves in the storyline: even if they choose to have their characters remain oblivious to everything going on, or to ignore it, their actions are having an implied relevance upon what is going on in the crossover book while at the same time what happens in the crossover book down the line in the future will be seen as having a direct relevance to how those characters are perceived in their own books. Knowing the fate of characters in even a potential future lends them a sort of poignance which is very important and which I'll take a few moments to discuss.

As I mentioned in my introduction to Frank's Dark Knight, one of the things that prevents superhero stories from ever attaining the status of true modern myths or legends is that they are open ended. An essential quality of a legend is that the events in it are clearly defined in time; Robin Hood is driven to become an outlaw by the injustices of King John and his minions. That is his origin. He meets Little John, Friar Tuck and all the rest and forms the merry men. He wins the tournament in disguise, he falls in love with Maid Marian and thwarts the Sheriff of Nottingham. That is his career, including love interest, Major Villains and the formation of a superhero group that he is part of. He lives to see

the return of Good King Richard and is finally killed by a woman, firing a last arrow to mark the place where he shall be buried. That is his resolution--you can apply the same paradigm to King Arthur, Davy Crockett or Sherlock Holmes with equal success. You cannot apply it to most comic book characters because, in order to meet the commercial demands of a continuing series, they can never have a resolution. Indeed, they find it difficult to embrace any of the changes in life that the passage of time brings about for these very same reasons, making them finally less than fully human as well as falling far short of true myth.

The reasons this all came up in the Dark Knight intro was that I felt that Frank had managed to fulfill that requirement in terms of Superman and Batman, giving us an image which, while perhaps not of their actual deaths, showed up how they were at their endings, in their final years. Whether this story will actually ever happen in terms of "real" continuity is irrelevant: by providing a fitting and affective capstone to the Batman legend it makes it just that... a legend rather than an endlessly meandering continuity. It does no damage to the current stories of Batman in the present, and indeed it does the opposite by lending them a certain weight and power by implication and association--every minor shift of attitude in the current Bruce Wayne's approach to life that might be seen in Batman or Detective over the next few years, whether intentionally or not, will provide twinges of excitement for the fans who can perceive their contemporary Batman inching ever closer to the intense and immortal giant portrayed in the Dark Knight chronicles. It also provides a special poignance... while I was doing some of the episodes of "Under the Hood" for the Watchmen text backup and especially upon seeing Dave's mock-up photographs of the Minutemen in their early, innocent days, I felt as if I'd touched upon that sense of "look at them all being happy. They didn't know how it would turn out" that one sometimes gets when looking at old photographs. Dark Knight does this for the Batman to some degree, and I'd like to try to do the same for the whole DC Cosmos in Twilight. I feel that by providing a capstone of the type mentioned above, but one which embraces the whole DC Universe rather than just a couple of its heroes, I can lend a coherence and emotional weight to the notion of a cohesive DC Universe, thus fulfilling the criteria set out in my ramblings about the effect of all this on the idea of DC continuity as mentioned above. Being set in a possible future, it does nothing that cannot be undone, and yet at the same time has a real and tangible effect upon the lives and activities of the various characters in their own books and their own current continuities. At the same time, by providing that capstone and setting the whole continuity into a framework of complete and whole legend, as Frank did in Dark Knight, we make the whole thing seem much more of a whole with a weight of circumstance and history that might help to cement over any shakiness left in the wake of Crisis and its ramifications. Even if we pull the threads of these various characters' circumstances together at some hypothetical point in the future, this does imply that there is a logical pattern or framework for the whole DC Universe, even if the resolution of the pattern is at a point thirty years in the hypothetical future.

This also fulfills the criteria that I outlined in my opening paragraphs concerning the commercial application of the idea. The framing device, which links the central story of Twilight to its possible crossover points with the mainstream DC Universe, is constructed so as to be detachable from the whole. While the whole story presented in the actual comic will have cutaways to what is going on in the present to show how the crossovers work, the main storyline of Twilight will be working towards its resolution unimpeded. Thus, in order to make the central storyline comprehensible to a wider audience than the trivia-mesmerized hordes of comic fandom, the link with the present can be ignored and effectively severed, leaving only a powerful and simple central story idea, that of an apocalypse for superfolk played out by warring factions against the fascinating backdrop of a drastically altered future, with all the plotting, romance and intrigue of one of those stirring historical dramas about warring factions amongst the Medici or whatever. This central idea... that of a war and all its spectacular ramifications, makes it ideal material for a role playing game... perhaps the ultimate superhero role playing game. It also lends itself nicely to a wide range of other spin-off projects, including those in the toy soldier range. The apocalyptic mood of the series, tied in with current preoccupations and encapsulated in a phrase like the previously mentioned "Waiting for Twilight" could work nicely with regard to the advertising campaign as well as giving us a range of credible adult items such as badges, posters and T-shirts. The storyline would hopefully be resonant enough to provide a good springboard for new characters or revitalized old characters, and this again would work seamlessly when it came to actually orchestrating all this. A character who hasn't been seen yet... say Barbara Randall's proposal for a female Flash... could be presented in Twilight as an old established character who's been in the Justice League for years. When the character appears on the newsstands in her own title some months later, this should strike a suitably ominous resonance back to the Twilight storyline; is it all coming true? Even if it doesn't all come true in every detail, even if, say, she never joins the Justice League, mightn't most of it come true? This is the sort of feedback effect that I want to foster. In addition to that, any changes that writers have planned for their characters in the future could be hinted at directly as having happened in the past, so that when they actually happen in the regular comic book, they have a meaning beyond that which they have on the surface. Even if plans change and certain things don't materialize as planned, then even that has its implications with regard to the future proposed in Twilight, especially after certain key ambiguities that will be introduced in the final issues of this proposed crossover.

I should also point out (if only to start a new paragraph... I just noticed I didn't draw breath on the last page) that the fact that the meat of Twilight's central storyline is detachable from the crossover device means that should anyone see any potential in the ultimate superhero movie, bearing in mind that DC currently own almost all of the really important superhero icons imprinted on the mass consciousness and could thus perhaps come up with something that legitimately laid claim to that title, then it will be simple to detach the central idea from the off-putting clutter of a massive continuity such as would almost certainly alienate the average non comic fan moviegoer. I'm talking about

characters such as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, the Marvel Family, Blackhawk, Plastic Man, the Shadow and all the other truly classic and publicly recognizable characters that DC are fortunate enough to have access to. Handled in the right way, with the inclusion of these classic figures, the Twilight storyline could be printed as a spectacular and epic finale to the whole essential superhero dream. Like I say, anyway, it never hurts to consider these angles, just in case.

Okay, so now that the actual mechanics of this linking/framing device have been discussed, perhaps it would help if I told you what they actually are. Bear in mind that the details of this are subject to change, as long as the overall idea is sound, since I'm not absolutely sure about forthcoming events in the DC Universe that might invalidate some of this. I'm confident there'll be a way around any such problems anyway, so the following should still be fairly sound and useful.

The first thing we do is to solve the paradox mentioned earlier, concerning "Does Dark Knight really happen in the future?" and the attendant schism between those who want a concrete universe and those who want endless possibility free of the restrictions of a rigid cross-title continuity. At the same time, I'd also like to put right something that has bothered me since the resolution of Crisis, namely the fact that I actually like parallel world stories and that a lot of other creative people enjoy the freedom that gives them too. Some of the better stories in DC's history have been those directly related to the idea of alternate Earths (including Crisis itself, paradoxically enough), and there are a lot of brilliant imaginary stories which display the same urges and the same ideas at work, albeit outside mainstream continuity. What I propose is something that would allow for the possibility of alternate world stories as well as the possibility of revisiting old discarded continuities that still have charm without opening up the whole "Earth-One through -Fifteen" problem that prompted the Crisis in the first place. It will also be an idea central to the whole concept of this framing/linking device with which we connect the events of Twilight with the current continuity. What I propose, basically, is something like the following, subject to input by any creative people with prior claims on the characters I'm suggesting, of course...

Firstly, I understand that there is to be some restriction upon time travel in the revised post-Crisis continuity, which is all well and good by me. To consolidate the importance of these restrictions and their reverberations upon the various books that use time travel as a motif, I suggest that, as an example, some members of the Legion of Super-Heroes should volunteer for a reconnaissance mission exploring the time stream and testing its new limits with regard to their vehicles. Those Legionnaires might be selected for this that me and Paul have agreed between us are appropriate. At the same time, in any other books that might have time travel problems, it could be mentioned in passing that from our own era, Professor Rip Hunter was currently investigating the phenomenon in his time top.

Okay... now if Paul and Karen and everybody else involved are amenable to this, then I figure the next step is to introduce a scheme by the Time Trapper. The Time Trapper, living up to his name, intends to set up a sort of temporal fluke field in the timestream that will in effect make time travel in or out of this area all but impossible, thus trapping the Legionnaires who volunteered or were selected in the past, unable to return. I suggest that the Legionnaires chosen should be some that Paul is able to do without for a few months, and maybe those that he'd like to see some changes made to. Like I say, these details can be sorted out later. The Time Trapper is maybe planning to trap these various Legionnaires in the past so that they cannot help prevent some plot he is planning to devil the Legion with in the future and might conceivably be useful as a plot springboard to Paul over in the Legion's own book. The important thing in terms of Twilight is that the Time Trapper successfully sets up his fluke field, which effectively distorts a whole stretch of the timestream from, say, 1990 to the year 2010. With very few exceptions, nothing can get in or out of this Time Tangle. Furthermore, as a result of an effect of the fluke field upon a continuum already sorely abused during the reality-reordering of the Crisis on Infinite Earths, within this bubble of fluke time, numerous alternate realities again become possible, if only for a limited thirty year stretch. Although we won't be exploring any of these realities save for one in Twilight, the possibilities there for story ideas in other books are limitless. Within the fluke, there are maybe worlds where the imaginary stories happened: what would the world of Superman Red/Superman Blue be like if you were to visit it twenty years on? Or the world in "The Death of Superman". Is there a world perhaps like the old Earth-Two or a world in which Dark Knight takes place? As well as opening up a wealth of story possibilities without opening up the attendant can of worms, it also provides a convenient trash bin for every story that DC ever published that didn't fit in with the continuity. Brother Power? It happened in the fluke. Prez? The fluke. The Rainbow Batman? In the fluke. Because travel by people in the mainstream continuities into the fluke zone of the timestream would be presented as all but impossible except in exceptional circumstances, the chance for the infinite number of maybe-worlds in the fluke to spill over and damage the mainstream continuity would be minimal.

Okay... so while the LSH volunteers are exploring the altered Post Legends Timestream, the Time Trapper springs his ultimate Time Trap and the fluke comes into existence. The group of Legionnaires find themselves trapped upon an Earth, circa the year 2000, albeit only one of the Earths A.D. 2000 that now exist in the flux. As a result of the sudden moiré effect rippling across the timestream from the fluke, any time travelers in the timestream at the time of the flux coming into operation (which, as we shall see later, poses an interesting little subparadox) are drawn to the same point, trapped within the enclosed multiple continuities of the flux. These include Rip Hunter and some others who I'll detail later. They find themselves cut off from their own times on a world in which the superhero ideal seems to have gone badly awry, with events seeming to be leading to a terribly apocalyptic war between superheroes. As they struggle to find a way to return to their own times, they experience the terrible events which are going on in the world

around them, these events making up the central core-narrative of Twilight. Eventually, they find a way to escape, the Legionnaires and others returning to their respective times while Rip Hunter returns to the present, which is where our story proper "begins", if such a time crossed tale can be said to have a real beginning. At some point during his unwanted stay in the future, Rip Hunter has met a twenty-years-older version of John Constantine, who, as ever, seems to be a prime mover behind the scenes in the events going down in this world. Prior to Hunter's escape, Constantine circa A.D. 2000 has told Hunter that he must find and enlist the aid of John Constantine circa 1987, who will help him in alerting Earth's super-people to the possible danger waiting in their future and thus avert it. This Constantine and Hunter proceed to do, crossing over into a couple of current books in the process, or merely making phone calls and writing letters if a guest appearance was too much trouble for the various creative teams involved--they could also talk to a few people in the pages of Twilight itself, this narrative providing the stuff that makes up this linking/framing device, as the two prophets of doom meet different reactions to their tale of a nightmare future waiting to claim the world. The mechanics of this as a crossover device, as explained above, allow all the creative people involved to do or not do whatever the hell they please while still directly or indirectly involving them in the concept of Twilight as a whole. Think how much mileage the Thor writers have got from the idea of the Norse Gods trying to do something to prevent Ragnarok, or fearing that Ragnarok was about to come upon them and I'm sure you'll get the possibilities.

Okay, so now that everybody is at least hopefully conversant with the concepts behind this framing/linking sequence, I'll go on to discuss the meat of the story, the terrible possible future that Constantine and Hunter are warning everybody about. To do this I'll start off with a brief description of the world and its background before moving on to give sketches of the main characters who make up the events which happen in this world.

The World and Its Background

The world of Twilight is not a world where the superheroes have deliberately taken over, but one where they have inherited the Earth almost by default as various social institutions started to crumble in the face of accelerating social change, leaving the superheroes in the often unwilling position of being a sort of new royalty. Even though government and civic authority has all but disintegrated, the various areas of America each have their own coterries of protecting superfolk to look after them, and the superheroes have thus tended to group into clans, each looking after a certain province. There are numerous "Houses" of this nature dividing America up into a kind of feudal barony system effectively, in terms of politics if not in terms of technology, which is as advanced as one might expect by 2000 A.D.

The development of this future society is something which I intend to go into in detail,

although not here. I want to avoid the sort of nuke-blighted future that has been a feature of Dark Knight, Watchmen, Ronin and a lot of other futures presented in comic books and other media, like the Road Warrior films and their ilk, because I feel that is becoming something of a cliché, and, while it's gone some way towards serving its purpose and alerting people to the dangers of the present day by pointing out the possible effects waiting in the future, I personally feel that it's all but outlived its usefulness as a motif in Twentieth Century fiction and would prefer to come up with a different kind of holocaust. What I want to show is a world which, having lived through the terrors of the Fifties through the early Nineties with overhanging terror of a nuclear Armageddon that seemed inevitable at the time, has found itself faced with the equally inconceivable and terrifying notion that there might not be an apocalypse. That mankind might actually have a future, and might thus be faced with the terrifying prospect of having to deal with it rather than allowing himself the indulgence of getting rid of that responsibility with a convenient mushroom cloud or nine hundred. Following the predictions made by Alvin Toffler and other eminent futurologists, I want to show a future in which everything from the family structure to the economy is decentralizing into an entirely new form that, while it might ultimately be better suited to survival in the changed conditions of life in the Twenty-First Century, is in a constant and incomprehensible state of flux and chaos for those living through it, caught in one of those violent historical niches where one mode of society changes to another, such as the industrial revolution, for example. The people of our world find themselves going through an upheaval more abstract and bizarre but every bit as violent, and as their institutions crumble in the face of the wave of social change, they find themselves clinging to the various superhero clans who represent their only anchor of stability in this rapidly altering world. At the time in which our central Twilight storyline takes place, there are eight "Houses", each containing a different superhero clan, scattered across America, although as we shall see some of these are pretty well abandoned or non-functioning in any active sense. I'll deal with these one at a time, and introduce our main characters along the way, House by House.

The Houses of the Heroes

The Houses

House of Steel

House of Thunder

House of Titans

House of Mystery

House of Secrets

House of Justice

House of Tomorrow

House of Lanterns

House of Steel

This is one of the two most powerful clans, and it dominates the eastern seaboard around New York and environs. Alternatively, if I change my mind it could be outside America altogether and set in the Arctic Circle, based around a new Fortress of Solitude. This is because the House of Steel consists of the clan founded by Superman--we have Superman himself, a morally troubled figure who doesn't know what's best to do about the chaos he sees surrounding him, but who has come to accept that the Houses provide the only real permanent structure in a destabilizing world and are thus important to maintain. Superman has married and raised a couple of kids, and the person that he has married is Wonder Woman, who has had an identity change to Superwoman to accommodate her new stature--we see the genuine and powerful love between these two in the face of the perils of the world surrounding them and the desire to do what's best. They are also troubled by their two offspring--one of these is a new Superboy, and he's about eighteen when the story opens, and he's real bad news. The other child is a less delinquent Supergirl, a new one who, like Superboy, has been born of the union between Superman and Wonder Woman but who is much kinder and gentler, more her mother's child. Having three members in the Superman class and Wonder Woman (Superwoman) herself, they are obviously a clan to be reckoned with.

House of Thunder

The House of Thunder is the other major power, and possesses members with power in the same class as that of the House of Steel. The House of Thunder is composed of the Marvel family, plus additions. Captain Marvel himself is the patriarch, and is if possible even more estranged and troubled by the state of the world than Superman is, perhaps because the Marvel family are having to come to terms with the difficulties of having human alter egos along with everything else, a point I'll return to when I outline the plot. Alongside Captain Marvel, there is Mary Marvel, who the Captain has married more to form a bona fide clan in opposition to that of Superman than for any other reason. There is also Captain Marvel Jr., now an adult superhero every bit as powerful and imposing as Captain Marvel in his prime, but forced to labor under the eternal shadow of a senior protégé. To complicate things, Captain Marvel Jr. and Mary Marvel are having an affair behind the Captain's back, Guinevere and Lancelot style, which has every bit as dire consequences as in the Arthurian legends. The other member of the Marvel clan is Mary Marvel Jr., the daughter of Captain and Mary Marvel Sr. Mary Jr. is fated to be part of a planned arranged marriage to the nasty delinquent Superboy during the course of our story, in order to form a powerful union between the two Houses. Peripheral to all this but perhaps interesting, somewhere in the House of Thunder (which rises up from the middle of Los Angeles over on the west coast, by the way) there are quarters

occupied by those characters from the Fawcett universe who can no longer cope with life in an increasingly realistic and difficult outside world. These include a sad and aging Mr. Tawky Tawny and perhaps even Mr. Mind. Please don't laugh... I think I can make it work. The Houses of Steel and Thunder face each other across the country, with the various minor Houses and constellations gathered somewhere in between, vying for the power that's left over after the two major Houses have had their share.

House of Titans

One of the two foremost clans making up this collection of lesser Houses is a clan composed of the remains of the Teen Titans, now grown up and a hell of a lot grimmer and more frightening than they ever were in the past. They are led by an adult Nightwing, who, trying to emulate and live up to the reputation of the Batman, has become every bit as driven and vicious as his mentor but who lacks the depth of compassion and understanding that separate the Batman from all the other grim vigilantes. As a result, Nightwing is not an altogether nice character. This isn't helped by the fact that Starfire has been killed some years earlier during a period when all the aliens were being forcibly expelled from Earth by the big powers, who feared alien influence moving in to take advantage of the disruption and uncertainty in society. Other Titans who have died include Jericho, while some, including Kid Flash and Wonder Girl, have left the Titans to take up with other clans, a cause of bitterness amongst the remaining Titans. These include an adult version of the Hawk (formerly of the Hawk & the Dove) who is maybe renamed Warhawk and who only lives up to his name... a sort of super Rambo who Nightwing tends to use as a human weapon. There is also the Cyborg. Vic Stone has had some rejection problems with his bio-electronic parts in the time that's elapsed since our present day, and as a result more and more of his body has been replaced by mechanical parts, including one lobe of his brain. He is forced into considering the frightening question of when exactly something stops being a person and starts being a machine. How much do you have to take out and replace before there's just a robot left? One thing that helps take Stone's mind off his own problems is that he must keep an eye on the Changeling, who has serious problems of his own. When the terrors of the world finally became too much for his hokey, light-hearted façade, the Changeling did what he always said he'd do: he went crazy. Not completely crazy, but more and more these days he stays in animal form, or worse, in some awful halfway form between the human and the animal. Worse still, increasingly these days he is starting to adapt the forms of animals that don't exist outside the increasingly tortured confines of his mind. Before the story is out he will have adopted a new identity, calling himself the Chimera. The only other Titan is Raven, who is now an aging, very dignified sorceress. She stays with the Titans out of loyalty for the way they stayed with her in the past when she had troubles, but increasingly she finds herself drawn to the tempting notion of leaving the House of Titans and moving into one of the other Houses, which is far more suited for her, this being the next House on our agenda for discussion. (The House of Titans, incidentally, can be constructed around the remains

of the original Titans Tower, although I must confess I forget exactly where that's situated geographically.)

House of Mystery

Nothing to do with the previous House of Mystery except in name, this House of Mystery is built around Baron Winter's Georgetown mansion and is the residence of a number of DC's supernatural characters. These include Jason Blood, a.k.a. the Demon, maybe the Spectre, Zatara, Dr. Fate and a strange amalgam of Baron Winter and Deadman. Baron Winter has had his mind burned out in a psychic battle some years earlier and is now just an empty shell, except when he's inhabited by the spirit of Boston Brand, who uses the Baron's body as a kind of holiday home in the land of the living. The other person in residence at this new House of Mystery is a reformed Felix Faust. The supernatural presences at the House have very little to do with the outside world and have instead devoted their pooled knowledge and talents to plumbing the depths of the universe's many mysteries, being all but inactive in the world of men.

House of Secrets

Again, similar only to its predecessor in name, this House of Secrets is the residence of a rough conglomerate of the few surviving super-villains that haven't been wiped out in an earlier Justice League-headed purge on super-villains which makes up part of the historical background of our story. The villains, all considerably older than today, who make up this fraternity are roughly as follows, subject to revision: Luthor, the Joker, Gorilla Grodd, Captain Cold, Catwoman, Chronos and Star Sapphire along with maybe Dr. Sivana and a couple of others. This House is powerful enough to defend itself against occasional attacks by the other hero-centered clans but isn't otherwise especially active and thus tends to get left alone, largely because the province that these villains protect, somewhere up in the reaches of Nevada, is just as well-looked-after as the places controlled by the heroes, whereby hangs some sort of moral.

House of Justice

The House of Justice, built around the remains of the JLA's old cavern headquarters, is the residence of the remains of the Justice League. These are the most important of the lesser House, along with the Titans. The lineup of the Justice League at the time of our story includes Captain Atom and the Blue Beetle, an Aqualad that has grown up to be the new Aquaman and a Wonder Girl who has taken on the mantle of Wonder Woman after Wonder Woman herself opted to become Superwoman upon marrying Superman. In addition to this there is the Flash (Wally West) and the new female Flash, Slipstream (although I prefer the name Joannie Quick, but this is by the by). There is also Captain Comet and the new female Dr. Light.

House of Tomorrow

This is the House built by all the various exiles from other eras who have been trapped in this world by the Time Trapper's flux. These include Rip Hunter and some members of the Legion, but since anyone passing through that strip of timestream at any time in the "future" or "past" would be sucked into that time zone as well, there are a paradoxical number of past and future selves of the various time-travelers also caught there, including two or three different Rip Hunters and two or three versions of the Legion at different stages in their development. Other time travelers might very well include Tommy Tomorrow and even maybe an earlier version of the Time Trapper himself, who might very well provide the help these stranded travelers need to return to their own times. It strikes me that amongst these travelers there might also be Space Ranger and Jonah Hex. This might even be an opportunity to return Jonah Hex to his original western continuity where we know he will eventually end up according to previous DC history. It would also be convenient to explain the so far unassigned radioactive hellworld that Hex's adventures have been set in as one of the maybe-Earths that exist in the fluke. Another possibility that struck me for time travelers stuck at the House of Tomorrow would be past selves of those DC characters who've traveled through the time barrier in their past adventures. One that I'd like the limited use of is Barry Allen, the Flash. I understand that there might be reservations about this, but I think I could do it all lucidly enough to avoid any complications. Anyway, the people at the House of Tomorrow aren't terribly active since they are trying their best not to influence events going on around them too much with an eye to possible repercussions in the future if they mess around with the timestream in the past. Also, their energies are mainly directed towards finding a way out of their time trap... which, as I mentioned, is a problem that might be solved by a past self of the Time Trapper himself.

House of Lanterns

The House of Lanterns, at the time our story opens, is abandoned and shattered, since all the Green Lanterns, being self-confessed agents of an alien power (the Guardians) have been banished from Earth during the anti-alien purges mentioned earlier which resulted in Starfire's death, and which also resulted in the banishment from Earth of the Martian Manhunter, the Hawks and any other alien characters I may have forgotten. Superman, since his own alien culture no longer exists, and since he has lived on Earth since infancy, has been made a citizen of the United States and is thus exempt--anyway, while the House of Lanterns no longer exists upon Earth, an emergency House of Lanterns has been set up upon one of the moons of Mars. (There's one that seems from radio telescope scans to be either hollow or riddled with caves, but I can't remember whether it's Phobos or Deimos.) Here, the exiled Green Lanterns conspire with the other space powers, including the Ranns and Thanagarians to restore their power on Earth. The space powers, knowing through their intelligence sources of the imminent joining of the House of Steel and the House of Thunder by marriage are afraid that such a union will

enable the Super/Marvel family to bring all the Houses under control and unify Earth as a resourceful planet ruled by a pantheon of invincible gods--the space people fear that such an empire might soon set its sights upon territories that are currently the province of the Hawks, Guardians or Martians. The actual Green Lanterns residing in the House of Lanterns at this time are a reformed Sinestro, Carol Ferris and Guy Gardner, Green Lanterns of Earth; Sodal Yat, the Daxamite "Ultimate Green Lantern" whose existence I hinted at in the story me and Kevin did for the Green Lantern Corps Annual, and maybe an aging Tomar Re, just because I'd like to see what Parrotmen look like when they get old.

Drunks, Hookers, and Panhandlers

The Heroes

John Constantine

Sandy's Place

The Phantom Lady

The Doll Man

Uncle Sam

Blackhawk

Plastic Man

Congorilla

Green Arrow and Black Canary

The Question

The Batman

The Shadow

The Metal Men

Robotman

Adam Strange

Other Characters

Okay, so that's about it for the Houses. Not all the superheroes, however, are actually members of clans. Those who aren't in clans are almost totally inactive, and for the most part inhabit one of the rundown barrio areas of either Gotham or Metropolis, both cities transformed beyond anything we've seen previously by the passage of time and change. The way I see it, the scenes in the barrio will take up much of the book and will probably be some of the livelier ones. The barrio is a superhero slum where all the old heroes come to die. As I see it, almost every passerby, shopkeeper and incidental background character there used to be some sort of super character or other twenty years ago. A lot of them are drunks, some of them are hookers or panhandlers; the majority eke whatever living they

can out of dead end jobs, while there are a few who have actually adapted to their changed circumstances quite successfully and certain others who still actively carry on their own personal vendettas against injustice, albeit secretly. I'll list these various characters one at a time, mainly because I have fairly specific ideas about all of them that I'd like to get across so that you'll know who we're talking about before I get on to the actual plot. Most of the following have been altered almost beyond recognition, so this is fairly necessary.

John Constantine

Constantine is about twenty years older, but obviously hasn't changed a bit, except for the fact that he's living with a woman and has been for the past fifteen years. This woman might even turn out to be the Fever character that I introduced in my two part Vigilante story a while back. Anyway, her and Constantine are to all intents and purposes married, and are obviously loving it. Constantine is still into the same sort of scams and wheeler-dealing, and in the whole story of Twilight he seems to be the only character who has his finger upon all the pulses and knows exactly what's going on in this maze of plot and counterplot between the various factions involved. He thus becomes a central character in the story, and it strikes me that Constantine would probably be a logical choice to launch into his own title off the back of this crossover, if you're looking for characters to do that with.

Sandy's Place

Sandy's Place is one of the pivotal settings in our story. It's the main barroom in the barrio, and thus acts as a meeting point for a lot of the characters involved. Its proprietress is Sandra Knight, formerly the Phantom Lady. I'll run through the main characters who hang out at her joint starting with the Lady herself.

The Phantom Lady

Sandra Knight is now somewhere approaching fifty and has a sort of ripe, down-at-heel Joan Collins sexuality to her still. She runs the bar and acts as a sort of a den mother to all the regulars who drift in there, maybe occasionally sleeping with one of them for old times' sake, although never anything lasting or serious. She's a nice woman, doing her best to get by in a difficult world who nevertheless seems to have a lot of care and affection to lavish on others, as evidenced by her care of the next member of our cast up for discussion.

The Doll Man

Darrel Dane is probably the most unsettling and pitiful character in our cast, even though we don't see much of him. What has happened, basically, is that the constant shrinking

and growing, plus the effects of the square cube law with regard to size increase have taken their toll upon him. As the years passed, his bones became brittle and would break easily if he stayed at normal size for too long. Eventually it became easier to stay at six inches tall all the time, but this itself was not the end to the problem--remaining at a constant six inches, Dane's body and brain began to adapt to their new size, redistributing their mass and aging their neurons for greater comfort and effectiveness. As a result, Dane has slowly changed shape into a horrible elongated insect man, still six inches high, whose bone structure has altered dramatically into something barely recognizable as anything that used to be human, although just recognizable enough to be disturbing. His brain has also had to change to accommodate drastically reduced brain size and capacity. He's still intelligent, but it's a non-human intelligence and he can barely communicate coherently with normal humans anymore. Sandra Knight has taken him under her wing. She keeps him in a vivarium behind the bar (it brings in enough money to pay for his food, and he's too alien to mind being displayed like this, so what the hell, although she still feels bad about it), and Sandy is almost the only person that the former Doll Man can talk to and make himself understood. She's also the only person unselfish enough to be able to bear the creepy little bastard running up her arm to nestle on her shoulder and talk into her ear in his eerie, piping, almost inaudible voice. Darrel Dane, while he's the only person other than Sandy who lives at the bar full time in his tank, is not the only lame duck that Sandy extends her sympathy to.

Uncle Sam

Uncle Sam is the character I'm most looking forward to writing, taking my cue both from the character of Uncle Sam in Robert Coover's excellent book about the Rosenberg execution, *The Public Burning*, and from the portrayal of Richard Nixon on Robert Altman's *Secret Honor*. In Coover's book there is a sort of giant called Uncle Sam who is exactly like the old Quality character right down to his dialogue, which is a sort of breathless rush of manic cornball philosophy and darkly lyric jingoism. He talks endlessly about his exploits, boasting Paul Bunyan fashion about how he strode across the sea, up to his red and white striped thighs in the deepest waters of the Pacific and rooted out his archenemy, the Phantom, wherever he should strike. In the Altman film, there is a harrowing portrait of Richard Nixon putting himself through a solitary self-confessional, sitting in a lonely room and vomiting his history into a tape recorder, helplessly spilling out all the things that he'll never be able to tell another living soul for fear of his life. All the stuff about Watergate that nobody ever suspected, all the stuff about Kissinger and the Shah, all the places where the bodies are buried. As I see my Uncle Sam, he's a hopeless derelict with no power at all, and nobody is even entirely sure whether he actually is the Uncle Sam or some wino dressed up like him. He sprawls in a dark corner of the bar, drinking the last years of his life away and babbling to himself in a mixture of the two styles outlined above, his cornball jingoistic reminiscences occasionally leading his erratic memory up alleyways in the American past down which he'd rather not stray since his ramblings will have a kind of dark poetry to them. I see him

acting as a sort of surreal Greek Chorus or something, his senile monologues having suggestive resonance within the main framework of the story. He is one of the other social cripples that Sandy can always find a free drink for, even though he is not an actual physical cripple yet, despite the fact that his liver is obviously deteriorating rapidly. The only actual physical cripple to regularly visit Sandy's Place is our next character for discussion.

Blackhawk

For a few issues it might not even be apparent that Blackhawk is a cripple. This is because he has a perfect pair of prosthetic legs to replace his own legs which, Douglas Barder style, are now missing. He is a sinister and obsessive figure, still fighting a private war inside his head which has never quite been the same since the mission in which all his teammates died and in which he lost his legs. He lives in a single room in the barrio, paid for out of the remains of the fortune that once funded Blackhawk Island. I figure at some point in the Second World War he got his hands on some Nazi gold and still has a reserve of it somewhere, albeit a dwindling one. Gold is more than ever a firm economic unit in the chaotic economic flux situation of this future world, so he could probably afford to live a less Spartan existence. He just doesn't want to, rising at five every morning and strapping on his legs before working out in the gym and the flight simulator that he keeps at a secret location downtown. In the evenings he maybe calls in at Sandy's for a glass of Perrier before going on to cruise around the barrio's leather bars. At the bars, he singles out young men according to some system known only to him and offers them employment in some unspecified endeavor--we eventually find out that he is recruiting a new squadron of Blackhawks to replace his dead friends, and that he has seven F-III bombers hidden in a massive underground hangar that he has invested the remains of his gold into. He picks up boys and asks their names--maybe one of them says, "My name's Charles." Blackhawk pats him on the shoulder and smiles and says, "I think I'll call you Chuck." A boy called Andrew becomes André and so on--Blackhawk is a sort of obsessive urban fascist with a survivalist mentality and a strong sociopathic streak. He is obviously building up his squadron of vicious leatherqueen Blackhawks and equipping them to act out some terrible version of his own internal holocaust. You can take the boy out of the war, but you sometimes can't take the war out of the boy, and Blackhawk's new squadron will almost certainly figure prominently in the explosive climax to this series.

Plastic Man

Like most of the old Quality characters, Plastic Man often calls by at Sandy's before moving on uptown to look for trade--Plastic Man is a male prostitute or gigolo or whatever the polite term might be. Thanks to his elastic consistency, he can keep himself looking young and attractive for a lot longer than many of his fellows, and it is this facet of his talent that he now exploits for a living. He is employed by the Seductive Winks

escort agency, managed by one W. Winks. He is, in fact, the only employee of the agency. He is likable and kind despite his shady occupation, and everyone gets on with him--with traces of his past as Eel O'Brien finally starting to show through, he is a sort of active and romantic neighborhood hoodlum who always dresses well and buys flowers for old ladies and drinks for bums and apples for kids. There is a more somber side to him that he probably only reveals to old friends like Sandy, who is the only person that he'll sleep with for nothing these days. Although he seems permanently youthful, he has started to notice a lessening of the elasticity in the skin around his lower back. It's becoming saggy and feels like crepe, like something that has been stretched once or twice too often and is becoming shapeless. Plastic Man has a sort of horrible half formed vision in his head that he doesn't like to think about concerning how he might finally end up. He might end up as just a puddle--he often wakes up screaming in the dead of the night from dreams about this, and the shades that he habitually wears now are there to hide the tired and worried look around his eyes as much as anything else. Woozy Winks is a roguishly half-likable but mostly disgusting old pimp who will get a phone call from Kathy Kane (yeah, I know the Earth-One Batwoman died, but the one on Earth-Two didn't and has presumably been living in anonymous retirement on Earth-Composite ever since the Crisis) and notify Plas, who will go round to her mansion to keep Ms. Kane company for the evening, giving Woozy a cut of the subsequent moneys. I see Plastic Man as being a sort of reluctant hero who'll come through in the end.

Okay... those are the main characters who hang out at Sandy's, although most of the other characters pass through from time to time. These include:

Congorilla

Another character that I'm looking forward to doing, and one of the nastiest characters in our assembled cast. Basically, what has happened to Bill is that he got old. His human body got older and older while at the rub of a ring he could transmit his body to that of a powerful and immortal sacred golden gorilla. Ask yourself, what would you do? Anyway, Bill eventually decided to stay in the body of the gorilla forever and now is quite a wealthy and successful local businessman, a golden gorilla wearing a business suit and even managing to talk just about recognizably, even if some of it has to be done in sign language. The sort of operation he runs is a sort of lucrative small time criminal organization that services the bars and the gambling dens and the brothels and also supplies most of the barrio's drug traffic. His activities will bring him into contact with lots of the other characters... putting protection pressure on Sandy's bar, for example, or having Woozy Winks beaten up for non-union pimping, and assuming that the barrio is set in the remains of Gotham, which I'm starting to favor more and more, then effectively he becomes the new "Gorilla Boss of Gotham City". He has a dark secret in his closet, however... almost literally. The body of Congo Bill, now over ninety years old, refuses to die. The gorilla mind that has been trapped in it unfairly refuses to let go and is hanging

on with a fierce and horrible willpower. Unable to bring himself to kill it outright, Congorilla keeps the shackled and naked old man in special rooms at his apartment, feeds it garbage and hopes it will die soon, but it doesn't. It just lies in the corner and snarls weakly when he enters and fixes him with its ancient glaring eyes as he gives it its food.

Green Arrow and Black Canary

Oliver and Dinah have both retired from costumed crime fighting and are now coeditors of a small but vital and thriving radical newspaper that serves the barrio and will be useful in getting over background information quickly and stylishly. Oliver and Dinah are two of the nicest and most normal people in the series, both fiercely committed and tireless in their efforts, both loving each other very much despite the violent rows that they have learned to weather and almost come to enjoy as part of their relationship. Their paper is called Black Feathers, and on its masthead there is a symbol of a drawn-back arrow about to be fired, fletched with black flight feathers.

The Question

The Question is a freelance investigator... a sort of masked Philip Marlowe who doesn't make very much money and who usually ends up taking cases just for the interest or the moral necessity. He's quite good friends with Oliver and Dinah and often gives them the inside dope on situations that he has knowledge of for reporting in Black Feathers. Him and Oliver have strong political differences but are firm friends despite this. When our story opens, the Question is investigating an impossible locked-room murder mystery involving a midget and a 6'6"-tall call girl into heavy bondage. Don't worry, I'll explain later. It's all vitally relevant.

The Batman

Nobody's actually seen him for years. He's rumored to be around, he's rumored to be active, and rumored to be doing something, but nobody knows what or even really if. He might have died years ago.

The Shadow

See The Batman.

In actual fact, these two crime-fighters have joined forces in a clandestine bid to rid the Earth of the oppressive and dominating superhero Houses forever, so that mankind can get on with its own destiny. We won't learn this until later in the series, although they play a big part in the ending. As an aside, are Tarzan and Doc Savage in the public domain yet? No big deal, but I'd really like a sort of secret council of the immortals: Batman, the Shadow, Doc Savage and Tarzan, all planning to start the revolution that will rid Earth of

the super-people forever. Being basically more elemental forces than people, these characters have remained exactly the same, except they got tougher.

The Metal Men

Very few of these survive. Platinum is working as a waitress in a sort of weird sci-fi auto-sex bar, while Iron is working as a construction worker, slowly corroding and losing his faculties as the rust claims his mind. No hope of a resurrection should he be damaged, since creator Will Magnus passed away years ago. Tin is destroyed, as is Mercury. Gold has gone into hiding, mainly because of the fact that, as mentioned earlier, gold is more in demand than ever, and there are a lot of people who would like to capture him and melt him down. We get to see Gold towards the end, but he isn't much in evidence throughout the rest of the series. The Metal Man with the strangest fate is Lead, who has become an animated part of the shielding surrounding a closed-down nuclear reactor that is still considered to be dangerous. As a result of his activities, Lead is radioactive and will not be able to go near anyone for about six million years. The Metal Men are not major characters, but I think we should be able to get some darkly comic stuff out of them, as well as a lot of genuine poignance.

Robotman

Still alive and clanking after all these years, this former Doom Patrol member is one of the few people hanging around the bar who still has an ear amongst the superheroes in the Houses. He is friendly with Cyborg, of the Titans, who he is maybe helping to adjust to his new, mostly robotic, state. He also has contact with the Justice League, since he was once close to the Teen Titans and since three ex-Titans... Wonder Girl, Kid Flash and Aqualad... are now amongst the Justice League membership. Mostly, though, he just hangs around the bar, maybe going out for an evening at the cinema with Platinum when she's finished work, or calling by at the construction site to talk to Iron. I figure a character who can cross the social boundaries will be useful, and it's nice to have someone from the Doom Patrol represented.

Adam Strange

Adam Strange is trapped on Earth, but is still in contact with the alien alliance based around the new House of Lanterns on the moon of Mars. He is a sort of a mole, and he will eventually figure largely in the aliens' plan to invade Earth and "liberate" it from superhero dominance. We see him around a lot, but don't realize who he is until near the end of the series.

Other Characters

There are maybe other characters that I don't have anything clear in mind for as yet but

who I'll want to include when the time comes. I figure I ought to list them here, so that any real problems can be sorted in advance. I might want to use the Challengers of the Unknown, the Golden Age Flash, Roy Raymond, Bobo the Detective Chimp, Johnny Quick, the Black Condor, the Ray, Sarge Steel and perhaps a few old villains from here and there. One thing that this series will enable us to do, if it should be called for, is to simply introduce a new and revamped group like the Challengers of the Unknown as an established fact, to try them out on the reader before launching them in a new title, which should be borne in mind.

The Plot

The Framing Device

The Central Plot

Okay, I think that's about it as far as the character sketches go, so I'll get down to a sketchy outline of the central plot. This is the area I have the least worked out in detail, although I have the overall picture pretty clearly, so maybe I'll just trust to luck and hope it comes together as I go along. If not, I hope you'll bear with me and I'll clarify and polish the weak points at some later date. As before, since the plot comes in two sections, with the central narrative and the framing/linking device, I'll discuss the plot in two parts for the sake of greater clarity, starting with a description of the events that make up the framing sequence. As before, since this is a time travel story, telling things in a chronological sequence is sometimes difficult to do without getting muddled, but I'll give it my best shot:

The Framing Device

The plot of the framing device is as follows: the story starts at its ending in a one-page prologue that takes place at the end of 1987 in a bar someplace in New York. John Constantine sits drinking alone, looking very bitter and pissed off at somebody or other. A striking and personable blonde enters the bar and, noticing Constantine, leans over and asks him for a light. Constantine, sitting there with a crumpled letter in one bunched fist and a glass in the other, glances up at her and then stares at her as if transfixed. We close up on his face and then move into flashback. Basically, the whole series is what passes through Constantine's mind in the two seconds it takes him to respond to the girl asking him for a light.

We flash back to the beginning of 1987, when Constantine is surprised by a visit from Rip Hunter, who he doesn't know but who appears to know everything about Constantine, including some very personal details that Constantine has never told a living soul about.

Intrigued, Constantine listens to Hunter's story. Hunter tells him about how he's been marooned in time for subjective months, stranded at the House of Tomorrow in the world of Twilight. Hunter tells him about how, in this world, he had met up with an older version of John Constantine who was somehow instrumental in Hunter's escape back to his own time after the events to be chronicled in Twilight have concluded. This elder Constantine, explaining about the flux that exists in the timestream, explains that there is a better than good chance that of the potential future Earths waiting in the fluke down the timestream from our present, this future Earth is the one most likely to actually happen, with all of its chaos and carnage. It's a world of war, and it ends with all of the super-beings being either killed or exiled from Earth forever. Giving Hunter enough personal information to convince the younger Constantine and get him to aid Hunter in his mission to alert the people concerned and avert this nightmare future, the elder Constantine sends Hunter back in time with his dire story of horrors waiting in the future that must be averted. Hearing Hunter's tale (although the readers don't hear it all at first) Constantine the younger is convinced enough to help the time traveler contact some of the various personages affected and tell them the bits of the story that are relevant to them, maybe in their own books or maybe in Twilight itself. This framing device has its own resolution, but I'll leave that till later.

The Central Plot

This is the main central plot of Twilight, being the story that Hunter tells Constantine and that Constantine passes on to the other parties involved, and it deals with the world of the Twilight. I don't have it broken down issue by issue or anything, but the rough shape is something like this: In the middle 1995 or earlier, when society was starting to break down, many of the villains on Earth tried to take advantage of this situation by exploiting the uncertainty and disaster. Incensed by this, the current Justice League decide to go on the offensive for the first time and plan a careful campaign that will remove all the super-villains forever. They enlist the aid of a lot of other superheroes in this, and they are mostly very effective. So effective, in fact, that they begin to be seen as the only effective force for reason and order in a fast crumbling world. This goes to the assembled heroes' heads a little, and in an attempt to secure their new power base they pass a majority motion outlawing aliens from Earth. While this is passed and is rigorously enforced, it is one of the decisions that causes the first serious rift in the ranks of the assembled super-doers, with some small groups like the Titans starting to drift away from the main group. This process continues until the state of the ruling Houses is pretty much as described above, with the House of Secrets containing the only super-villains to survive the purge other than those who reformed, and the House of Lanterns demolished upon Earth and temporarily relocated upon Mars pending the planned secret invasion. At the start of our story proper, there is quite a lot of different activity going on in the various camps. The Houses of Steel and Thunder, each suffering their own internal stresses, are preparing for the marriage of the delinquent Superboy with Mary Marvel Jr., daughter of the Captain and Mary Sr. This is a development that causes considerable anxiety all over the place:

previously, even the two most powerful Houses could not attempt to exert any pressure upon the others for fear that the other Houses would unite against them. Both Houses knew that individually they couldn't hope to take on the assembled might of the Titans, Justice League and others. This preserved a status quo of sorts. However, with the prospect of an alliance in the offing, it seems quite possible that the assembled forces of three people with the power of Superman, four people with the power of Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman into the bargain could easily smash the most firm resistance. This prospect worries both the Houses of Titans and Justice tremendously. It also worries the villains remaining at the House of Secrets who remember back to the purges of the nineties and shudder. It certainly alarms the people living in the barrio, who, though downtrodden, still have a certain amount of liberty, impoverished though it be, and are not actually living under the absolute dictatorship that could result from a marriage between the Houses of Steel and

Thunder. The other major party alarmed by the prospect are the assembled alien forces that are conspiring out on the moon of Mars. They don't like the thought of a planet ruled by an unstoppable superhuman elite purely because it might very quickly pose a threat to the aliens' own well-being. Their plan is cryptic, but we learn a bit of it at a time. The main thrust of their plan is that they intend to use Adam Strange's place as their agent on Earth to set up a Zeta Beam link through which an inviting army of Hawkpeople, super-powered green Martians and members of the Green Lantern Corps could materialize in the center of Times Square or somewhere, this plan being linked to a Thanagarian Plan that has to be abandoned in the current issues of Swamp Thing, resurrected here to much more spectacular purpose.

Okay, so that's the rough background. Down at Sandy's the bums are hanging out, Uncle Sam muttering in the corner, Plastic Man dropping by for a drink with Blackhawk before they both go to cruise the bars uptown, Doll Man scuttling around his vivarium and so on. Oliver and Dinah are publishing their newspaper, with the Question occasionally dropping by for a political argument with Ollie or to pass on a bit of information. His current case is one that has him totally mystified: a midget turned up at a rough trade bar, was seen by witnesses, finally vanishing to an upstairs room with a very tall, very beautiful call girl that nobody had ever seen before. When the door was broken down, this after nobody had emerged from the room for some several hours, the body of the midget was found bound and gagged, with his neck broken by a single clean blow. The room was locked with no other possible exit. The call girl was gone. There was no murder weapon. This little conundrum will continue to puzzle them throughout the series until we get a few shaking revelations at the end.

In the Houses themselves, things are unsettled. At the House of Steel, both Superman and Super(Wonder)woman are worried about their delinquent son and his increasingly-difficult-to-conceal tendencies towards sadism and sociopathic behavior. They are also worried about their daughter, who they cannot find a suitable suitor for, since Captain Marvel Jr. doesn't appear to be interested in her. Captain Marvel Jr.'s disinterest is largely

due to the fact that he is madly and passionately in love with Mary Marvel Sr., and is liaising with her behind Captain Marvel Sr.'s back. Their relationship has grown difficult of late, largely because the increasingly erratic and cranky behavior of the Captain seems to have taken a turn for the worse. All of the Marvel family have had problems with the fact that they have two sets of bodies neither of which ever age in the slightest but Mary and Junior have solved this by more or less giving up their human identities. This doesn't worry them, mainly because they are a lot closer to the age of their counterpart than, say, Billy Batson is to his alter ego. (I should point out that for reasons I've yet to find a good explanation for, the Marvel family seem to grow, in their superhuman forms, to an ideal age, and then stop. Thus, Mary and Junior are both around twenty-five in their superhuman forms, as is Captain Marvel himself, since he is already the ideal age and hasn't grown up any more in the intervening years. All three are still children if they happen to say Shazam, but the only one who still uses the word is the Big Red Cheese himself, unable to give up his human self as Mary and Junior have done. Hanging on to his Billy Batson identity has caused a lot of problems for the Captain, as well as in his relationship with his wife, but these seem to have become a lot better recently. Now, however, there is a new element that is perhaps even more threatening. Whereas before Captain Marvel was wrapped up enough in his personal problems to leave Mary and Junior lots of time together, lately he has started to make more normal marital demands upon Mary's time. He's even being extra nice to her, which worries her like anything. There are other oddities of behavior... the Captain will no longer go down and sit and talk with Mr. Tawky Tawny as had been a regular habit of his. In the midst of all this, there are problems with Mary Jr., who really doesn't want to marry Superboy at all.

In the background of all this we see John Constantine moving around amongst the various characters, gathering a bit of information here and there, obviously conducting some plan that he has in mind. (Remember this is the older Constantine we're talking about here.) He seems to be paying particular attention to the areas of stress between the various Houses, and it becomes quickly apparent that although he's older he's still in the habit of manipulating people in various cryptic ways for reasons unclear to anyone but himself.

As things progress, we see the paranoia concerning the coming wedding between the Houses of Steel and Thunder amongst the lesser Houses start to come to a boiling point. The Titans, directed by a ruthless and embittered Nightwing, maybe approach the Justice League proposing that the two Houses should join forces, along with maybe the villains in the House of Secrets, to stand against the possible threat of being overrun by the Houses of Steel and Thunder. Maybe an uneasy alliance is formed between the three Houses, although the Houses of Mystery and Tomorrow are not at all interested in joining in. A plan starts to emerge for a massed attack upon the Houses of Steel and Thunder, perhaps even on the wedding day itself, in the hope that both Houses can be eliminated and the country divided up between the victors. Meanwhile, we see Blackhawk continuing to recruit his new Blackhawks, and we see Constantine starting to step up his

plan, making contact with more and more of the people he's going to need to accomplish it. For one thing, we see him finally manage to make contact with the elite council of the Shadow, the Batman and maybe Doc Savage and Tarzan as well, and learn of their plan to oust all the superheroes from Earth. Constantine seems eager to help them with this, although we aren't sure about how much of a double game he's playing. He also makes contact with Adam Strange, and through gaining Strange's confidence learns of the alien's planned attack upon Earth. Constantine seems eager to help with this plan as well. In fact, as Constantine brushes against the various groups involved, it becomes clear that he is promising his undivided assistance to all of them. It is maybe during this period that he calls at the House of Tomorrow and makes the acquaintance of Rip Hunter, who also figures in his plans. Beyond this, he also spends a lot of time hanging out with the Question and around the offices of Black Feathers, seeming to be everywhere at once as he works his dubious and incomprehensible scheme.

As the plot builds up in momentum, it is this ingenious and baffling juggling act of Constantine's that becomes the main attraction. We see him urging on the Justice League/Titans to their attack upon the Houses of Thunder and Steel, and yet we see him call at the House of Thunder and speak to Captain Marvel himself, telling him of the planned attack. This is a key scene: Constantine tells the Captain of the attack and asks him not to do anything to help the House of Steel in the thick of the battle. When the Captain politely asks Constantine why he should do this when he is, after all, supposedly intend upon cementing the union between the Houses of Steel and Thunder. Lighting a cigarette, Constantine smiles and says that he thinks the Captain already knows what the reasons are. The Captain flinches back from the match as Constantine strikes it with a look of terror which passes, changing into a smile at Constantine's cleverness. He agrees to go along with Constantine so far as it suits his own plans.

While urging the Titans/Justice League to strike while the iron is hot and simultaneously urging Captain Marvel not to defend his allies, Constantine is at the same time urging the Batman/Shadow group to hold back in their attack upon the super powers until a more advantageous time. After he has explained his plan to them, although not to the reader, they agree. On top of all this, Constantine is acting as a fifth columnist to the planned alien invasion through Adam Strange. He urges Strange to commence the alien invasion after the Titans/League and the Houses of Steel and Thunder have had a chance to weaken and decimate each other at the wedding. This sounds sensible, and they readily agree. As if this wasn't thoroughly confusing enough, Constantine also has a number of other irons in the fire. In the barrio he is seen at various times searching for two people. One of these is the vanished Metal Man, Gold. The other is an old crippled man who is reputed to live somewhere in the barrio that nobody knows the history of. Eventually, Constantine finds both of these. Gold, after leading him on with some story or other, he tricks cruelly and has melted down. The old man, when he finds him, he is much more careful with. I don't know when I'll reveal the information, but this old man is in fact Metron, formerly of the New Gods, banished to Earth for some treachery that he's

committed in the past when the temptation to uncover new knowledge became too much for the feeble moral restraints that he places upon himself. What Constantine wants with Metron is fairly straightforward: He wants the Moebius chair, although we don't find out why until later. I should point out that these various plot threads will be spread out dramatically, intercut with developments in the lives of the other characters, so it won't all be about John Constantine, endearing though I obviously find him. For example, while planning their raid upon the Houses of Steel and Thunder, the assembled Houses of Titans, Justice and Secrets will attempt to pressgang various heroes in the barrio into their army, with mixed results. Some of the barrio heroes either reluctantly or willingly go along with the revolutionary Houses, while some other people are enlisted by Constantine to aid in his master plan. When we finally have the various factions set up and defined, even if there are some ambiguous areas, we let the climactic fireworks commence.

On the wedding day, the planned attack by the Titans, Justice League and villains upon the Houses of Steel and Thunder gets underway. The losses are heavy upon both sides. Wonder Woman (the former Wonder Girl) is killed in battle by Superwoman (formerly Wonder Woman) who is herself killed by Captain Atom. Superboy is also killed, along with most of the Justice League, Titans and super-villains. Captain Marvel, who has been expecting the attack after being warned by Constantine, is unharmed, while Captain Marvel Jr. and Mary Marvel decide to take advantage of the confusion to flee into space, where they hope to make a new home. Supergirl goes with them. This leaves only Captain Marvel and a badly battered Superman standing amongst the bruised and bloodied remnants of an army of beaten superheroes. The attempted coup by the Titans/League has been successfully repulsed, and three Houses lie shattered, but all that remain of the two most powerful Houses of all are the two archetypal superheroes, standing back to back, waiting for what's going to be thrown at them next.

This turns out to be the alien invasion. Arriving by Zeta Beam, an army of Hawkmen, Lanterns and Martians pour into Earth and quickly get rid of what remains of the armies recruited by the Houses of Titans, Justice and Secrets in their failed attempt at a coup. They then advance upon the main palaces. Superman isn't worried, since with Captain Marvel by his side the two of them should still be just about powerful enough to send the invaders packing.

This is where the surprise card is played. Captain Marvel isn't Captain Marvel. Captain Marvel has been dead ever since the story opened.

It had all started with little Billy Batson and his problem. There he was, unwilling to give up being human, still spending a lot of time in a child's body. The unfortunate thing was that though little Billy's body didn't age, his mind did. Trapped in a child's body but afflicted with adult needs, Billy went quietly... well, bats, I suppose. A lot of the problems were sexual. Physically, Billy was not capable of normal sex and thus pretty soon began

to experiment with more bizarre variations such as S&M, visiting the appropriate bars in clothing that made him look as grown-up as possible while he still had the face and body of a child. At a certain club on a certain night, Billy had met a strikingly tall call girl who seemed to meet his every fantasy requirement. They went to a room upstairs together and locked it from within. Billy was tied up, and then agreed to be gagged. At this point the call girl began to melt and change shape, shimmering as if through a heat haze before Billy's startled eyes. In the end, instead of a six foot six human woman, Billy is staring at a seven and a half foot tall green Martian man. It is J'onn J'onzz, the Martian Manhunter, on Earth incognito using his power of disguise. Billy, being gagged, cannot say Shazam and turn into Captain Marvel. Nor can he prevent the Manhunter snapping his neck with one blow of his hand. The Manhunter then walks out invisibly through the walls and leaves a dead midget and an unsolvable mystery. The Manhunter has assumed the Captain's identity, being able to convincingly duplicate his powers, in order to catch Superman by surprise when the alien invasion finally comes. This is why he flinched when Constantine struck a match and why he didn't mind letting the three rebel Houses and the House of Steel tear each other to bits.

Upon realising how he has been set up, Superman fights with the Martian Manhunter, killing him with his heat vision. However, by this point it is too late, and the assembled Martians and Green Lanterns have arrived. We have a powerful and intense sequence where Superman manages to smash his way through a lot of the alien forces single-handed while being ring-whipped by the Lanterns, only to finally be beaten to death in single combat by the massive and frighteningly powerful Sodal Yat. The alien invasion is a complete success, and the coalition forces of the Martians, Guardians and Thanagarians will now govern Earth forever and keep it nice and peaceful. It seems that in his dealings, Constantine's plan has gone awry, unless he actually meant to impose an alien dictatorship upon the Earth.

It is at this point that the final pieces fall into place. The alien conquerors find themselves suddenly attacked by a small army of superheroes, these mostly being those recruited by Constantine as well as the forces of the council made up of Batman, the Shadow, etc. Most of these are wearing thin golden armor, made from the body of the unfortunate Gold, which renders the otherwise omnipotent power rings of the Green Lanterns useless. The aliens are driven back and contained by the surprise attack of the others, and the battle seems to come to a Mexican standoff when one of the Hawkpeople or Green Lanterns points out that however valiantly the heroes fight, there is a massive army of combined extraterrestrial warriors ready to keep pouring onto the Earth until all resistance is squashed. It is at this point that Constantine plays his trump card.

Using the Moebius chair of Metron, Constantine has visited the antimatter universe of Qward. In return for a firm promise of immunity for the planet Earth and its immediate system, Constantine has then sold them the secret of the Boom Tube, which he has also

managed to wheedle from Metron. Thus, while the assembled aliens are preparing to pour into Earth via Zeta Beam, Thanagar, New Mars, Rann and Oa are currently being overrun by a vast army of Qwardian weaponers.

Stunned, the aliens are forced to return quickly to their respective homes to fight wars upon their own soil that may take them centuries to win, if they win them at all. For the most part, the only heroes left on Earth are the non-powered variety, and most of these are more than prepared to take off their masks and go public. Constantine explains to them that under the guidance of the Batman, the Shadow and all the rest, American society, free of government or a super-dictatorship, will start to organize itself along different lines, so that it can deal with the future without fear or anxiety. The days of the big powers are over, and henceforth America will be built up from much smaller and more flexible units, both socially and economically. The story of Twilight ends with a delighted John Constantine standing at the verge of a new utopia, free from the interferences of power, all superfolk banished from Earth for ever.

Of course, the story that he gives to Rip Hunter to take back to his past self, while it gives the gist of all this, doesn't give the whole story. This comes home to the younger Constantine right at the very end of the series, when we wrap up the framing device.

Somewhere earlier on in the continuity, we'll have a scene where somebody says to Constantine that if he isn't careful, one day he'll run into somebody craftier than himself and get into a whole mess of trouble, to which Constantine replies confidently and with some justification that there isn't anybody smarter than him.

At the very end of the series, he finds out differently. Having contacted all the hero groups and people involved and met with varying responses, Constantine is disturbed. Has he failed? Some of the people he warned have taken his advice, some haven't. Some he hasn't been able to reach at all. He is still thinking of this event in the future as being a terrible thing, and he fears that he might not have averted it well enough. All he has for consolation is the knowledge that according to Hunter, at some point in this future, he's going to meet a woman who he will love very much for the rest of his life and who will fill a big lonely hole in him. He even knows, thanks to Hunter, how he will meet her. She'll come up to him in a bar and ask him for a light; their eyes will meet and that will be that...

While he is musing over the pros and cons of this Hunter delivers the last part of his message from the future Constantine, which he has been instructed not to give to the younger Constantine until after he has warned as many people as he can. Surprised, Constantine reads what may turn out to be the ultimate "Dear John" letter. Written by his future self, the letter apologizes for using his younger self so cynically, but assures John the younger that it's all for the best. The older Constantine having the advantage of hindsight, can remember everything that happened to his younger self, including meeting

with Rip Hunter, getting told a terrible story and then launching on a mission to warn everybody affected of what waited in their future and how they might avert it. The elder Constantine can even remember how that all worked out: The world of Twilight came about anyway, often because of people's actions in response to his warning. He can even remember getting a letter handed to him, exactly the same as this one. He muses briefly over the paradox of who really wrote the letter originally before apologizing to his younger self again and consoling him with the fact that a wonderful woman is waiting in his near future, and that she will be worth everything.

Reading the letter, the younger Constantine is furious. It has turned out that there is someone craftier than John Constantine... namely, John Constantine twenty years older and smarter. Constantine has been conned by himself. Worse, since the person who tricked him is twenty years away in an unreachable future, Constantine has no way of getting vengeance upon the person who did this to him. Angered and enraged, he goes into a bar and sits with the crumpled letter in his hand, getting drunk. This is the end of the story, and we only have a final one-page epilogue that takes us back to the beginning, now that we've come full circle. The woman enters the bar and notices John, asking him for a light. He looks up and their eyes meet. She is beautiful. He knows instantly that he could love this woman forever. Knows who she is, knows how happy him and all his future selves are going to be with her... and finally, perversely, he understands how he can have his revenge against his future self, how he can avert the circumstances that lead to Twilight by throwing a small but important spanner into the workings of destiny.

"Excuse me, have you got a light?"

Constantine looks at her and blinks twice before replying.

"No. I'm sorry. I don't smoke."

The woman shrugs, and after a while leaves the bar without speaking to Constantine any further. After she's gone he sits, dead drunk at a dimly lit corner table, and cries his cold and cynical heart out.

And that's it. I hope you can see how it's meant to fulfill all the requirements mentioned earlier. There are opportunities for new characters to get a springboard, old characters to get a shot in the arm and all the merchandising you can handle in terms of games and stuff, at least as I see it. The warring Houses idea sounds ideal for role-playing games, or maybe even a video game. The overall continuity is hopefully enhanced without being damaged in any irreversible way, and I think we might get a damn good yarn out of it in the bargain. Anyway, I seem to have gone on far longer than I intended, so I better wrap this up. I'll be looking forward with interest to hearing what any of you have to say about

all this when you've had a chance to read it. If any sections are incomprehensible and need clarifying then please give me a call.