

AN OPEN LETTER TO “AVENGERS ASSEMBLE”

by David A. Zimmerman

Once upon a time you could read a comic book and then mail your thoughts about it to its publisher. Many such letters would be included in later issues. In your own way, you were participating in the universe of your favorite characters—responding to their thoughts and words, what they did and what they failed to do. You could even help to ordain their future by suggesting plots, partnerships and personal struggles.

My comic of choice was usually *The Avengers*. Their letters page was called “Avengers Assemble,” and though I never wrote in, I read the letters with great devotion.

Ironically, it seems in this age of chatrooms—perhaps due to the sheer number of fan websites, perhaps to save more money and space for storytelling—“Avengers Assemble” has been abandoned. And suddenly I have the urge to write.

I learned about “open letters” from a fellow I know who published an open letter to Václav Havel, former president of the Czech Republic. Havel never read it, I’m told, but at least it’s out there. So, since the traditional forum for holding comic books accountable has been closed to me, I’ll use my own means to register my complaint. So there.

Ahem.

TO THE WRITERS AND EDITORS OF AVENGERS 491:

I am bitterly disappointed by your recent treatment of Jack of Hearts,

Ant-Man and, with them, your readers. The death of a hero is always sad, but I will grant that death is inevitable even to heroes and that such deaths often allow an even greater story to be told. My problem, I guess, is how one hero died, how another hero responded to that death, and what message about heroism was communicated to your audience.

Granted, the Jack of Hearts has been a jerk, and his self-pity over his health condition would test the patience of anyone. Nevertheless, he has been a hero and a fighter his whole life. His abrupt suicide cheapens that life struggle. More important, his final act—executing an already defeated, mentally ill, defenseless opponent—can be characterized not as heroic but simply as barbaric.

Which brings me to Ant-Man, who narrowly avoided the same act of barbarism only by Jack's intervention. Granted, having a gun pointed at your daughter would invoke rage from any parent. But the girl's police-officer stepfather, who was also present and had similar means of exercising his wrath, restrained himself and is thus guiltless in any death. More important, as the sole voice narrating the Jack of Hearts's homicide/suicide, Ant-Man pronounces infinitely heroic what is inherently tragic.

Granted, Ant-Man and the Jack of Hearts have never been friends or central characters, and I suppose I get some satisfaction from seeing Jack finally act in Ant-Man's defense and from hearing Ant-Man finally give Jack some respect. But in the process I am being subtly led by your story to praise both characters for acts that can be described most charitably as simply pitiable.

The rest of the Avengers, busy at the time discussing Jack's future, have so far kept silent about his fate. But I for one mourn the deaths of the Jack of Hearts and his victim, and I lament the coldness of his passing. I suspect, since I saw his body floating in space, that he will one day be resurrected, as is the way of comics and all of creation in a sense. But in the meantime I fear that our understanding of heroism has suffered a

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devastating blow, and I wonder about the impact of this new misunderstanding on the greater story being told.

By the way, nice job with Ant-Man’s daughter, and great art. Avengers rule!

David A. Zimmerman maintains a weekly online column, Strangely Dim, where this article was originally published. Read more such articles at <<http://www.ivpress.com/campus/sd>>.