

## PANELOLOGY



BY SEAN MCQUAID

**Green Lantern (ongoing series)**  
**Writer--Ron Marz; Penciler--Darryl Banks;**  
**Inker--Romeo Tanghal;**  
**Colourist--Steve Mattsson**

*"In brightest day, In blackest night,  
 No evil shall escape my sight.  
 Let those who worship evil's might  
 Beware my power...Green Lantern's light!"*

OKAY, SO IT'S NOT EXACTLY Robert Frost; it is, however, one of the hottest and most imaginative catch-phrases in comics-- the Green Lantern Oath. The original Green Lantern (Alan Scott) actually used a spookier speech when he first charged his power ring back in the forties ("And I shall shed my light over dark evil, for the dark things cannot stand the light...the light of the Green Lantern!"), but that was the same era that spawned cheerful chums like the Shadow, Batman, and the Spectre. It was an era of comic book dichotomy, as dark knights and grim ghosts rubbed shoulders with more lighthearted masked daredevils and costumed swashbucklers. Alan Scott, with his mystic power ring (charged every 24 hours at the emerald lantern which was, like the ring, carved from a magical meteorite) and his two-fisted super-heroics, was a mixture of shadowy mystical power and super-heroic flamboyance, dark and light-- though he was never really a dark character.

The new Green Lantern, Hal Jordan, was even brighter. DC revived many of its old character concepts with new characters in the 1950's and 60's, and one of the most successful was the new Green lantern, whose power ring and lantern were actually scientific creations of the alien Guardians of the Universe-- semi-omnipotent, blue-skinned, balding, immortal midgets who tried to maintain order in the universe by supplying select individuals across space with power rings, creating an intergalactic "police force" of Green Lanterns. This epic-scale, imaginative sci-fi concept made the new Green Lantern one of the biggest and brightest stars of a comics era dominated by white knights and squeaky clean good guys.

Over thirty years later, Hal Jordan is still around-- but the lantern has dimmed. Contrary to present Green Lantern creators' assertions, Hal has been one of the most engaging and constantly evolving characters in DC's Silver Age pantheon-- a relatively regular guy who has often had trouble finding himself (test pilot, travelling salesman, social crusader, and a man torn between the desire for a normal life and the inescapable responsibilities of great power). Though he's had more than one dry spell in popularity (and has even been replaced a few times), the character remains one of DC's most enduring properties and, as both concept and character, continues to bounce back. In recent years, the excellent *Emerald Dawn* mini-series (chronicling his early years) sparked a resurgence in his popularity and the revival of his ongoing series.

In a comic book era where dark characters are again (now more than ever) monopolizing the spotlight, Hal was one of the few relatively recognizable survivors of DC's old guard.

The preceding comments are in the past tense because the honeymoon is over. In a comics universe where even Wonder Woman is becoming grittier, nice guys apparently finish last. So, the creative team and editors of Green Lantern decided that Hal needed a makeover, culminating in last month's "Emerald Twilight" storyline, which saw Hal and the Corps (as we knew them) utterly destroyed.

The breakdown started with the well-publicized shake-ups in the Superman comics (his apparent death, the subsequent Superman impersonators-- "Great Shades of Elvis!"-- and his resurrection), wherein a cyborg Superman impersonator joined alien bad guy Mongul in utterly destroying the fictional metropolis Coast City (Los Angeles by any other name). The connection? Coast City is (was) Green Lantern Hal Jordan's hometown like Batman's Gotham.

Understandably, Hal went the teensiest bit bonkers with grief and rage following his city's destruction, and called on his bosses, the aforementioned Guardians, to use their near-omnipotent power to restore Coast City by, say, tampering with time. The Guardians, whose code forbids them from meddling in "what has been," coolly refuse. Hal, driven further round the bend by his perceived betrayal at the hands of his masters, sets out to seize the Corps' power for himself-- first, by stealing and amassing Green

Lantern rings for himself, then by using those rings to invade Oa itself (the Guardians' home planet) with the intent of absorbing the power of the Central Battery all the power rings draw upon-- becoming almost all-powerful, and in effect putting an end to the Green Lantern Corps.

This story ("Emerald Twilight" culminates in *Green Lantern #50*, wherein the desperate Guardians recruit renegade Green Lantern Sinestro (Hal's arch-enemy) to mount a last ditch defence against Hal. Sinestro fails, and the maddened Hal kills him in cold blood before entering the Central Battery and emerging from its explosion as a cosmically powerful being, leaving Oa in ruins and its defenders almost all dead. The Guardians and the Corps are destroyed, and Jordan flies off to find his new destiny as a vengeful demigod, his noble intentions seemingly lost forever in the mad quest for power he embarked on to realize those intentions. It's a pretty sobering space opera, but as Bugs Bunny once said, "What did you expect in an opera? A happy ending?"

So, is that it for *Green Lantern*? Nope. It's not over till the fat lady sings, or in this case, until the last of the balding, blue midgets croak. A sole surviving Guardian salvages the departed Hal Jordan's ring and uses the last of the Guardians' power to reach Earth and bestow the ring upon the first semi-worthy candidate he can find-- that being young, reckless, hard-partying freelance artist Kyle Rayner, who becomes (more or less by default) the universe's only known remaining Green lantern (unless you count non-Corps member original G.L. Alan Scott, who's still floating around in semi-retirement).

Thus begins a new emerald era.

Impressive? Not particularly.

Sure, it took guts to so boldly transform the Green Lantern mythos. It's also a startling new twist, and gives readers a whole new character (Rayner) to discover-- a character for whom the potentially vast power of the ring is both unfamiliar and daunting. The concept is intriguing; however, it didn't have to be done at the expense of an established character. DC's capacity for change, impressive though it is, has been characterized too often of late by a tendency to messily scrap or conveniently forget established characters in favour of "new" ones patterned in their image. It doesn't have to be that way. Alan Scott wasn't killed or ruined when Hal Jordan became a new Green Lantern; Barry (Flash) Allen was a comrade to the original Flash, Jay Garrick. Why does DC now feel the need to sacrifice its classics on the altar of change?

That's not to say "Emerald Twilight" isn't a good story; Hal Jordan's moving, disturbing descent into madness is pure Greek tragedy, and the story has a lot of power and poignancy; however, as one watches the carnage unfold, there is still an uncomfortable reliance upon shock value, making the whole story somewhat unpalatable in concept if not execution.

Equally dubious is the premise of the new Green Lantern, mostly because it's not a bad idea but it certainly isn't a new one. The old "venerable-hero-replaced-by-novice" routine has been done to death (Thor, Iron Man, Capt. America, Batman, Superman, etc.), and seldom lasts very long. Hal himself has been replaced as Green Lantern a few times, and this is the second time the Corps has met its apparent end (although this time, there is a disturbing ring of finality to it). Plus, the rookie hero routine is appealing but increasingly overdone. The DC brat pack alone includes *Damage*, *Robin*, *Superboy* and *The Ray*. Perhaps it's art imitating life-- the older guys losing their positions to younger men.

Turing to visuals, Darryl Banks' pencils are very impressive. He captures the alien environment of Oa both imaginatively and concretely, has a good eye for drawings of epic tone and scale (the cover and Hal's triumphal exit are really breathtaking), and shows a flair for both action and characterization in his figures which brings them to life, particularly the tormented Jordan. Banks captures both the savagery and grandeur of the tale, ably aided and abetted by veteran inker Romeo Tanghal and colourist Steve Mattsson, whose alternately harsh and vibrant palette is put to particularly excellent use in the power ring pyrotechnics.

On a final positive note, also of a visual nature, the cover to *Green Lantern #50* is a real eye-popper. Not only does it feature Banks and Tanghal's dramatic rendition of the transformed Hal bursting from the exploding Central Battery, but it also features glow-in-the-dark printing. Sure, it's a gimmick, and I usually denounce such shallow trickery, but the effect herein is pretty impressive.

**"Emerald Twilight" climaxes in Green Lantern #50, wherein the desperate Guardians recruit renegade Green Lantern Sinestro (Hal's arch-enemy) to mount a last ditch defence against Hal. Sinestro fails, and the maddened Hal kills him in cold blood before entering the Central Battery and emerging from its explosion as a cosmically powerful being, leaving Oa in ruins and its defenders almost all dead.**