

Steve Englehart Speaks!

Part 1



"Journey to the Center of a Vision"

SE: Hello.

FOOM: Steve? FOOM here.

SE: Hi.

FOOM: Have you been thinking about the Vision for this interview since I last spoke to you?

SE: To an extent. Scott talked to me about this last summer and I thought about it then. It hasn't been at the top of my mind but I have given it some thought.

FOOM: Right. That's basically what I wanted. Your thoughts on the Vision off the top of your head. What did you think when you first took over the book?

SE: Well, when I first took over the Avengers... I've said this before and I'll say it again... that Roy Thomas' AVENGERS were among the best comics that have ever been done. I thought, as a reader, that Roy's AVENGERS were just incredibly top rate. Again, it wasn't just Roy's AVENGERS because there was Buscema and Adams and Buckler and people like that which have not graced THE AVENGERS pages in my day. I thought, just in general, it had really come together and I thought, Wow! When Roy asked me to take it over I was, at the same time, really happy about it because I really loved the strip and I was also new enough at comics not to really know... I had a lot of enthusiasm but I really didn't have the knowledge of how difficult it would be to

follow in Roy's footsteps. I had a lot of confidence in myself and I figured I could do it. What I tried to do then was like Roy's AVENGERS and I did that for about a year and a half. And it took me like that year and a half to discover that I wasn't Roy, that what I should be doing is Englehart's AVENGERS so I finally started pulling it in that direction about the middle of the Mantis story. It was started in a whole different way than it ended. By the middle of it I realized Gee, I'm trying to do Roy's strip here but I don't approach a book the way Roy does, I approach it from the basis of the characters and how they face the menace, whereas Roy approaches from the aspect of what's a good menace and once I got a story then I'll add characterization. So we're coming at it from a 180° apart and trying to do it on Roy's basis... there were ups and downs but I generally was not entirely satisfied with the way the Avengers were going. That's basically why I gave up THE DEFENDERS of the two because I thought, myself, that I had done a real good job on THE DEFENDERS. I'd liked what I had done with it and I thought, okay, since I only want to do one group book I would rather stick with the one that I just don't feel that I've gotten up to my standards yet. So I dropped THE DEFENDERS and kept THE AVENGERS, and I know at the time lots of people said, why'd you do that? The point was

that I wanted to concentrate on it and I feel real good about the Avengers now. I really feel like I found what I was trying to find with that, which was how to do an Englehart AVENGERS. As far as the Vision goes... the Vision was created, as far as I could determine from talking with Roy, to be Marvel's Mr. Spock. He was going to be the mysterious guy that everybody fell in love with... you can ask Paty, she'll testify to this... The sort of untouchable but super man. You know, the guy that everybody wants because he's so unapproachable. And he was an excellent character under that conception. It was Roy's character and Roy's handling at that time and then Roy started that trip of Wanda and the Vision together. He started it and then he got off the book and I was left with it and that was one of the things that really stymied me. I didn't know where to go with it. I was trying to go where he was going but there was really no place to go with it. Except... well, I could have done Steve Rogers and Sharon Carter for the next twenty years where they sort of came and went, but I didn't want to do that because I had already gotten rid of the Steve Rogers Sharon Carter thing by the time I took over Captain America and I was well on the way to defining their relationships, with the one-armed vet (?) coming and going. He would have stayed if I had stayed but I wrote him out in

the last issue to give anybody who came after the chance to do whatever they wanted. But the point being that I've always thought the Clark Kent-Lois Lane type relationship might work for them, but Marvel comics are supposed to progress and things are supposed to happen. So, it finally occurred to me, and I hate to say how long it took me to really understand some of these characters I was working with, that if the Vision was in love with Wanda then he was not Mr. Spock, as Mr. Spock doesn't fall in love. What we had here was a Mr. Spock who wanted to be Captain Kirk, to follow that analogy. He wanted to be human and he wanted to be in love with her and he wanted to have feelings. That came as a great revelation to me and if it was going to progress, he had to get off the dime as far as his relationship with Wanda was concerned and the reason he wasn't going anywhere is because he was supposed to be Mr. Spock. When it finally occurred to me that he wasn't, then I could do something with him. So I did. The way I look at him now is that he is, despite having human brain patterns, still a computer mind. He still has an ice cold voice, he still has a very logical approach to things from his Spock heritage. But at the same time he wants to be more human. It's not like the Tin Woodsman who goes around crying, "Oh gosh, if I could just have a heart everything would be fine." The Vision's more together than that but he wants to be more human without necessarily giving up anything he already is. He just wants to try to develop that side of his personality which the computer mind doesn't give him a whole lot of.

FOOM: On that wanting to be human aspect of the character, I would think, and this is going back to some things you said in several letter columns, that he would want to have kids.

SE: That was exactly my idea, as a matter of fact. I kind of thought that he would and I didn't, being a male, necessarily think through Wanda's trip entirely. I'd have to say that I think I do a pretty good job on women generally but I didn't really... well, thinking through wanting to have a baby isn't something that's been part of my experience, but now that I'm married my wife and I have discussed it, etc., but the thing with Wanda and the Vision goes back to before I was married. But Paty made a good argument somewhere that Wanda was not at all interested in being a mother, which, once it was explained to me, I saw immediately and I said sure. My original idea was that they would adopt a kid. I thought that would be a nice, bizarre development in their relationship. But I think it is true that Wanda would not be so interested in it as, given that point... it's always been my opinion that the Vision could not be a natural father. I had played with the idea and rejected it as being impossible to explain in a code approved comic book... that the Vision could drop around to his local sperm bank and pick up a liter of stuff. But you could never explain that in comics and since that solution was therefore denied me entirely, the adoption thing seemed logical until I came to realize that Wanda wouldn't necessarily go for it.

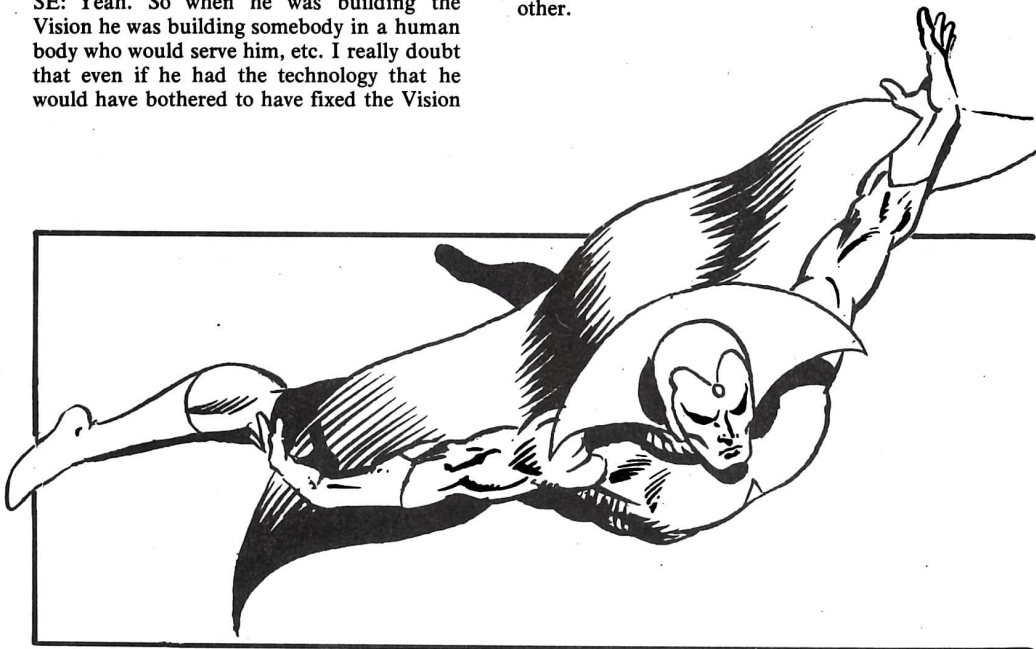
FOOM: What I thought on the terms of the sperm bank thing was that when Ultron created him he created him fully operational. In which case he would have had to get the sperm supply from either Hank Pym or Jarvis

or... That could arise into some interesting things if it were Hank, but what could you get away with in terms of the Code.

SE: Yeah. So the sperm bank idea was just out from the start. The more I thought about, a writer, as I've often said, particularly when I was working with Tuska, is supposed to make everything make sense. It's like you've got Point A and Point B and you've got to figure out a way to get from one to the other that will make sense. You've got to be able to read it and think that it's progression and nobody thinks well, you think of the beginning and then the end and then a way to get there. Always a challenge. But, given any two points you can find some way to get between them and thus, given the idea that they were not going to have kids it became very logical to me that Ultron-5 would not have endowed the Vision, as I said in the letters page. There are reasons. I could give reasons why. Given the fact that he was trying to build a sort of "son"... you never think of your son as being a sexually together individual. A son is not thought of in terms of his sexual prowess.

FOOM: The same with your father and mother type thing...

SE: Yeah. So when he was building the Vision he was building somebody in a human body who would serve him, etc. I really doubt that even if he had the technology that he would have bothered to have fixed the Vision



up. It wouldn't have been of any use to him. He had no inkling that anything else was going to happen. So, as far as I'm concerned, the Vision is non-functional in that area. We will say for the sake of Wanda that he is physically functional. Anyway, you may have a point. The Vision may care but, I think that it's part of the trip about wanting to become human but at the same time, I've considered, and this is just another idea... I always have a bunch of ideas floating around to choose from... that I'd use in the Wonder Man story. Quite probably in this story, with the possibility of his regaining his full humanity, there could be a very oblique discussion about is Wanda satisfied with the way things are and this and that. But I think that the reason I got them married in the first place is because they're real good for each other, just the characters as established. She's very understanding with a guy like him. She's level-headed, very warm, so on and so forth. She understands where he's at (A singles Bar in

the Bronx...) and can not only live with it, but love it. And he digs her and I think they make a good couple and that's sort of where the whole overall thrust of the thing is now. There's no longer that will he or won't he? kind of trip because it became obvious after a while that he would. Now that they're married just the adjustments and there's still the big story that deals with what happens when they face the world for real. But basically, he's sort of like at Stage Two, having totally abandoned the pure concept of Mr. Spock. We're into the stage now where we see what happens when Mr. Spock gets married. He will be trying to adjust to it and the thing that I've already started to play with, and will be bringing to fruition here, is he brought her back from their honeymoon after a day and a half and said... well, okay... they were having fun and all, that we assume, but it's not such a big deal to him as it is to say, us. It's very logical to him that, okay, we've gone away and now let's get back and see what happens. And Wanda doesn't look at it like that and, being newlyweds, I didn't want to get them into a big argument, because newlyweds wouldn't get into this really big argument if they loved each other.

FOOM: But later on she'll think about it.

SE: Well, he's all ready thinking about it. Again, it's only been touched on since there's so much going on, but I have set it up where he's thinking, "Gee, everybody thinks it's strange that I came back after a day and a half. Maybe I'm not as human as I thought I was... there's a lot I still have to learn." He wants to be cool, and at the same time he doesn't have any experience at it so he's having to learn where it's at as he goes along.

FOOM: Are you going to open up their marriage in terms of Quicksilver and possibly even the Whizzer?

SE: Well, I understand Quicksilver is going into the Inhumans but I don't think it would be a big deal to get him back for a guest-star. I had been wanting to do it for a long time, and probably still will, something with Quicksilver. I want to have him come back and explain why he's a bigot, Present a sort of sympathetic... explaining his viewpoint because everybody's viewpoint makes sense to them. I don't

like to do the same situation over and over again so I think I would have Quicksilver coming back and have him come to at least grudging terms with the situation as it exists. But of course he wouldn't come back and consent to be an Avenger or something like that. He'll still go over and be an Inhuman, or whatever he is, but something with Quicksilver eventually. Again, since I am going to be concentrating on the Vision and Wanda, and Yellowjacket and the Wasp as a sort of nucleus for the sequence beginning with Avengers 150, I would expect that there would be something there. What I also want to get into is Wanda and Jan becoming good friends as the wives of the group. Instead of the quadrangle thing with Mantis and the Swordsman breaking in and out between Wanda and the Vision, just two couples who like each other. Like Hank and Vision could hang out together and watch the football game and drink beer and whatever's happening. As far as the whole team, that's why I decided on the team as it is because I've got that nucleus of four and then the two old guard guys, Captain America and Iron Man, and then the Beast, who's sort of the perennial outsider.

FOOM: I wish the Beast would get some of his old dialogue back.

SE: Well, that was shot to hell by Roy and Gerry when they started the Beast strip. When I took it over he was all ready supposed to not talk like that. It was the first strip I ever wrote and they said, 'Here, don't write him like he used to be.' Okay, so what I came up with was that real crazy sort of continuous comedy monologue that he's into. And I liked it. So did everybody else, except maybe you.

FOOM: No, no. I like it. It's just that I think he should still have some of that left.

SE: Well he's smart. There's no question of that. He's not stupid at all which is what made him win out over Hawkeye because he could see the weirdness in it a lot more clearly. He's smart but he's just more laid back. He grew up and he went through the whole X-Men trip... I think there are people who, while in high school, are all intellectual or heavy in to something and as they grow up they start to say, 'Yeah, well. I can roll with the punches a little bit more, too.' I just don't think you're going to see much change in the Beast in that direction. I'm not going to make him stupid, but I like writing him as this crazy guy.

FOOM: Right. I was also going to mention where, in the last issue or so, he turned blue and you said he was mutating further. Is that just in terms of changing his color or did you have something else planned?

SE: No, that was an editorial decision. The book was not selling and everybody sat around wondering why it wasn't selling. They figured it was because the Beast didn't look impressive enough as this sort of motley gray. The gray, you know, comes out this sort of light purple anyway. That was just an art decision, basically... "We're making him blue... explain it, Steve!"

FOOM: But back to the Vision... Have you done any ideas or plotting for the Vision story in SPOTLIGHT?

SE: No, not really.

FOOM: So you haven't had any real thoughts on how the return of Wonder Man is going to affect the Vision?

SE: No. All I know is that Marv said he wanted him back and it sounded like a good thing to get into for the 150th anniversary

issue. As to what's going to happen with him I don't really know. That's still two issues away as far as plotting goes. I do the stuff pretty much in sequence. I have ideas floating around as to what I'll do when I get there but basically I take it one book at a time. But the Vision, who's so secretive, is pretty unknown as a character so there's not that much known about him.

FOOM: I really wish you hadn't had him think.

SE: Oh yeah. That was an idea to try and open him up some and I agree with you and I don't plan to do that again. I did it for a reason, but upon further consideration I, as I said, agree with you.

FOOM: I think that pretty much anything you want to do with the Vision can be done without having him think.

SE: There is a problem with that, in that because he never thinks you never really know what he's doing inside which is okay with a Mr. Spock concept, but with a more developed person, after a time, you don't know where he's at. Which is why, in fact, in that Hellcat issue on the second page, we have him thinking, but not in terms of thought balloons just blurbs.

FOOM: That's the way it should be done.

SE: Right. I agree with you. So, we live and learn. It's really an organic think. Stan said that Spider-Man used to write itself and Len says that too. In some ways the books do and in others they don't. It's organic in that each issue is a step along the road. I'm sure not trying to tell you I've written THE AVENGERS perfectly.

FOOM: Like you said before concerning the writing on THE AVENGERS when you first started, it's difficult to write somebody else... it hampers you... but it must be much easier to say 'Well, now I've got the strip and I'm going to write me.'

SE: Well, I learned that. But I didn't know it from the start for sure and once I started approaching the Avengers as a sort of... well, as an analogy, Roy was writing the book as the television Avengers where I should have approached it as kind of the Waltons just because I started taking it from the characters point of view and that lead to the whole Mantis and quadrangle thing. That's when I started liking it as far as really being satisfied with what was happening. Trying to do it from somebody else's point of view... from Roy's point of view... that's just not where I'm at.

FOOM: When you were doing the Mantis-

Swordsman thing, were you planning on doing anything with Mantis and the Vision?

SE: That started before while was finding my own style on the book. Mantis was originally supposed to be a femme fatale who was going to come in and sort of dump the Swordsman originally and start putting the moves on everybody. If you remember, when she first met the Avengers she kissed everybody. In fact, the Vision was going to be the object of her affections. My original idea was to have the Vision swayed by her and would, in his interest of becoming human, find a second sexy woman who was definitely on his trail and he would be enough of a little boy in that sense to be flattered and even interested. But as I wrote the strip month to month I could never get it to the point where he could do that to Wanda. I tried making Wanda bitchy for a while but I could never convince myself that he would do it. It seemed logical as a concept to work towards but I could never get there because I could never make myself believe it. So it became more in everybody else's mind than a physical act.

FOOM: It seems to me that even though he is logical in as much a sense of the word as possible in his quest to become human he would at times go a bit overboard and mess up in some way or another.

SE: Yeah. That's what I'm getting into now. The trials and tribulations of an android who wants to be human. I want to keep him basically happy. I don't want to change it. Right now, I've got it so this'll be a happy marriage. He'll mess up but everything'll be all right. They're too much in love. He doesn't really know how to do what he wants to do, which is to become human, so he will make mistakes. I don't foresee any real heavy traumas where Wanda'll leave him or anything.

FOOM: There's a problem there with The Avengers being so much a part of their lives and separately they'd have to leave their whole lives in order to leave each other.

SE: Yeah. I couldn't see it in Reed Richards and Sue and I don't see it in Vision and Wanda either. They seem to be happy together. Perhaps Hank and Jan Pym, since he's so studious and she's so flighty, but not Wanda and Vision. They're very happy together. I really like to do characters and play them against each other.

FOOM: Okay, Steve, I guess that's about it for now. Thanx a bunch.

