



The Question, Vol. 1: Zen and Violence

Dennis O'Neil , Denys Cowan (Illustrator) , Rick Magyar (Illustrator)

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Created by comics legend Steve Ditko, the faceless avenger known as The Question is one of comics' most mysterious and fascinating heroes! In the corrupt, crime-ridden Hub City, investigative reporter Vic Sage strives to tell his viewers the truth - and philosophical, trenchcoated hero The Question, whose face is a featureless blank - uncovers what Sage cannot. But with deadly martial artist assassins and political intrigue to contend with, will one man - even a master of unarmed combat - be able to make a difference? Legendary "Batman" writer Dennis O'Neill and penciller Denys Cowan (Deathlok) present one of the most acclaimed comics of the 1980s!

The Question, Vol. 1: Zen and Violence Details

Date : Published October 3rd 2007 by DC Comics (first published January 1st 1992)

ISBN : 9781401215798

Author : Dennis O'Neil , Denys Cowan (Illustrator) , Rick Magyar (Illustrator)

Format : Paperback 176 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Comics, Graphic Novels, Superheroes, Dc Comics, Comic Book, Graphic Novels
Comics

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From Reader Review The Question, Vol. 1: Zen and Violence for online ebook

Chuck Ventura says

I didn't expect this volume to be so engaging. The Question practices meditation and begins his new crusade through Hub City's corruption. It's dark and gritty, but Vic Sage's newfound outlook on life and crime-fighting provide some levity. I definitely recommend.

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

I first became acquainted with The Question on The Justice League Unlimited animated show on Cartoon Network. I was intrigued. He wears a mask that gives him a face with no features. The Question is sort of a more philosophical (and less badass) Batman. He's a crusader against injustice and corruption, who doesn't mind using his fists, although he's also very cerebral.

This was a good introduction to him in the graphic novel/comics form. I liked seeing how he goes from being rather brash and unorganized in his pursuits, to becoming more spiritually focused and more of a deadly weapon, when necessary. This is very much in the crime drama genre, but with little bits of supernatural elements mixed in, since The Question comes back from the dead.

Zen and Violence uses the common villain of the evil, corrupt church member. I'm not sure how I feel about that. As a Christian, I do take exception to Christians **almost always** being portrayed as crazy, evil, hypocritical, and megalomaniacal, more than we are shown as being mere humans on a spiritual journey. We don't seem to get the same even-handed approach as the other religions (which seem more palatable in the media and the humanities as a whole). On the other hand, I respect that there are members of the clergy and so-called Christians who do give credence to the bad reputation of those who profess to follow Christ. It wasn't a deal-breaker, but more of a somewhat painful pinch to me as I read this story, since the only obvious Christian in this story was the most evil, craziest character. But, sadly, I've grown used to this (not sure if that's good or bad).

I was in the mood for a quick graphic novel read, and I enjoyed this. I liked the noir elements, and I'm a sucker for brainy, crime-fighting martial arts practitioners (Batman, Deadpool, and Daredevil anyone?). Although this was not a five star book, I'd like to read more stories about The Question, since I like my heroes on the edgy, yet thoughtful side.

Michael says

I really appreciate Denny O'Neil's social conscience and I'm all for occasionally tackling important issues in superhero comics, but O'Neil does sometimes overplay his hand. Overall, I did enjoy these stories, and they're not as preachy as Denny's socially-aware stories from the 70s, but the Question stories are heavy-handed and over-written at times. He could add some subtlety to the villains at times, as well.

Still, the stories mean well, and Vic Sage's transition from angry, young vigilante to zen hero is interesting to

see unfold. Cowan's art is visceral and rough, but tells the story very well and fits the mood of O'Neil's Hub City perfectly.

Shannon Appelcline says

xtremely innovative. At times, thoughtful, brutal, and disturbing.

Matt says

Great, great crime stuff. You can see how Frank Miller influenced this...or maybe was influenced by it. Rick Magyar's inks aren't bad. And it weaves an excellent crime story, with some great long-term mysteries.

Laura says

The art is dated, but well done. I rarely found myself wondering what was happening in a given frame or how the character moved from position 1 to 2. There were a few mistakes with the colorist, but those can be forgiven.

The plot is smooth. There's a crapload of character development completed in a very short period of time and it's all very well done. The art and story work cohesively.

B says

There's enough here to keep me reading. (Especially given that I believe in the book's critical bona fides, although from where I'm not sure.)

Two things really undermine the book. First, it seems like the Question's secret identity is easy to figure out. Despite the explicit text saying that the Question has a special transformation that makes his suit change colors, his suit does not change colors. There is a famous newsman in the city who always wears a salmon dress shirt in a bondi blue suit and a superhero who looks exactly the same (except no face) in the same suit. Normally, you'd just "comics logic" it like Superman's glasses, but here, people discover his identity pretty readily from time-to-time.

The second is that the villains were so caricatur-ish to really undermine the believability of the whole thing. The mayor is super-drunk all the time and totally a moron. There exist leaders who had debilitating addictions and there are times when there is a real power behind the man. But here's it's not believable that this mayor represents a viable puppet. Then, the power behind the throne is so insane that no one could imagine him achieving any popularity or helping anyone. So insane is he that his eye sclera is black, he has no iris, and his pupil is white.

The author's clear choice to position "Eastern" philosophy as his ideal makes the choice of an evil clergyman as the main villain (so far) at least a little strange. It's not clear that the author wants to "go there." (And probably for good reason!)

And the numerous hired toughs are awfully bulky and awfully useless.

There's something compelling about the visual design and the aura of mystery, though.

Joseph says

The Question appeared at DC at a rather amazing time for the company. Post Crisis On Infinite Earths, DC was going through a new "DC Explosion," with new talent and new types of books. This was after the John Byrne Superman appeared and Frank Miller's Dark Knight Returns, and coincided with the publication of Watchmen, the George Perez Wonder Woman reboot, and the Legends mini-series. The comic itself was printed on high quality paper called Baxter, and DC had a rather impressive set of comics that were using this process. At \$1.50 each, each issue was about twice the cost of the newsprint comic. The Question, therefore, appeared at a time of change and renewal at DC.

The Question himself was formerly part of the Charlton Comics Group, a rather obscure (read: spottily distributed comic line) that often looked as if their comics were printed on cardboard. At one time, Charlton had a super-hero line, headlined by the Blue Beetle and Captain Atom, and many Bronze Age comic creators got their start or made their first big impression working for the company: Jim Aparo, Dick Giordano, Steve Skeates, Don Newton, and many others. Writer Dennis O'Neil was one of them. O'Neil, of course, soon made his way to DC in the late 60s, penning many classic comics, such as the Green Lantern run where Hal Jordan and Oliver (Green Arrow) Queen traveled across America and in doing so, brought a modern and social sensibility to the rather staid DC line. Illustrator Neal Adams joined O'Neil on Green Lantern, and the duo also created a new take on Batman, introducing Ra's al Ghul and bringing a more realistic feel to the Batman world. O'Neil also created Richard Dragon, DC's entry into the martial arts craze of the 1970s, the titular comic running for eighteen issues, which also introduced the character of Lady Shiva into the DC Universe.

Fast forward fifteen years or so, and O'Neil, along with illustrator Denys Cowan, inker Rick Magyar, and editor Mike Gold were the team that brought us The Question. The Charlton heroes had been acquired by DC some years before, and were famously the inspiration for The Watchmen. Blue Beetle and Captain Atom were already being published by DC or in the works, and the Question filled a spot on the schedule as well. What makes The Question a different sort of hero, however, is that he's not really really a super-hero as we normally think of one being. His world is gritty, real, and filled with criminals one would find in the real world. As Gold mentioned in one of the letter columns, The Question is a man with a secret identity, but not an alter ego. The Question is the same man, with the same motivations, whether in costume or in his civilian identity of Vic Sage.

This volume collects the first six issues of the comic. It sets up that the Question, who had already appeared in Crisis and Blue Beetle, as an established crime fighter, but he is killed off in the first issue. How he is revived is a bit spotty, but it works. One of his tormentors in the first issue, Lady Shiva, saves him and brings him to Richard Dragon for training. With new dedication to the art of fighting and certain Eastern principles, the Question returns to his city to fight the sleazy political machine that tried to murder him.

This political machine is controlled by a corrupt clergyman, seeking to bring in the Apocalypse through nefarious methods. While recuperating and training with Dragon, the clergyman's grip on the city tightened, so when The Question returns a year later, there is no way to save the city but to take out the clergyman. These issues deal with that struggle and the immediate aftermath. O'Neil brings in a lot of secondary characters that are just as interesting as the lead, and spends a good bit of page space fleshing them out and sharpening their motivations. There are no unnecessary words here, as O'Neil is both spare with descriptives (several pages are fight scenes with no dialog or exposition) and the spoken words of his character. This book reads like a hard-nosed detective novel.

Both O'Neil and Cowan were martial artists, and that background lends well to the comic. Cowan's fight scenes are pretty damn good, full of energy and correct technique. Although Cowan's art seems a bit dated to some of the other reviewers here, perhaps because his women are high- and tiny-waisted, but I think it still fills as fresh as it did in 1986. Master DC colorist of the 80s, Tatjana Woods, is the colorist, and she does a fine job in differentiating between The Question and Vic Sage.

This book is long out of print, and it goes for nearly \$150 on Amazon and Ebay. I bought the individual issues for under \$20, so I was able to read this book as it was originally published. That was a real treat, as the letter columns were a joy to read. The first few letter columns were more about how the book was created, and in every issue there was a book recommendation from O'Neil himself.

The best part about reading these in single issues were seeing the house ads for upcoming DC Comics. In addition to the titles mentioned in the first paragraph, there were ads for the first issues of the Suicide Squad, the Wally West Flash title, the Doug Moench/Gene Colan Spectre, the Outsiders, the Long Bow Hunters by Mike Grell, the DeMatteis/Giffen/Maguire Justice League, Matt Wagner's Demon mini-series, and the beginning of Max Collins's run on Batman. Pretty damn amazing time in comics history.

Timothy says

Every issue provides a satisfactory ending. The action flows really well without using any gimmicks. The noir/pulp crime-fighting atmosphere is great. A lot of tropes that are now tired - the gritty and dark city, the hero who beats criminals to a pulp, the psychotic crime bosses tearing the city apart, the loyal and wise older companion/mentor figure, the time abroad training, etc - all works here through sheer quality of writing. O'Neil knows when to let the (superb) art do the talking, when to narrate, when to describe a scene and when to move the plot forward. The pacing is fantastic.

Basically, one of the best comics I've read in a while. It's aged incredibly well.

Chris says

Vic Sage is a brutal hero in a brutal town. Populated by truly despicable yet rounded characters, Hub City makes Gotham seem almost Utopian; an inept, drunken mayor, a corrupt, bullying police force, and a crazy evangelist ensure that Hub City mirrors the "real world" in a way that Gotham, with its gleefully evil crazies, never could. Vic Sage (The Question) is a truly complex, conflicted character, at times bordering on being unlikeable but at others displaying a surprising tenderness (like when he builds a snowman with the children). Tot, who serves a similar role as Alfred does for Batman, is a wonderful supporting character and

foil to Sage, as is Myra, the mayor's reluctant wife and Sage's lover. This first volume of Dennis O'Neil's run is as riveting as any TV crime drama. I am thrilled that I have another five volumes to go.

Luiz Santiago says

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Wombo Combo says

This is definitely worth reading if you like Daredevil/Punisher/Jessica Jones or any darker Batman stories. I would love a new Question series.

Dan Schwent says

Victor Sage, aka The Question, fights crime in Hub City, possibly the most corrupt city on Earth.

Prior to this volume, most of my exposure to The Question was in Modern Comics reprints of Charlton comics stories and the weekly 52 miniseries. The Question has been held in high regard for years so I finally gave it a shot.

Dennis O'Neil's run on The Question stems from DC creating a mature readers line before later creating the Vertigo imprint. It's a tale of a man facing an insurmountable tide of corruption in his home town.

The Question started as a backup feature in Blue Beetle, a Steve Ditko character who shared much of his creator's Randian philosophy. O'Neil and team gave The Question a near death experience and a new Zen lease on life, making him a much more viable character.

Now that the history lesson is over, this was some good shit, especially considering it's 30 years old at this point. While it's wordier than most of today's comics, O'Neil was way ahead of the curve. There aren't a lot of comics that feature the hero floating face down in a river after a gunshot to the head and that's just in the first issue.

The Question's journey sees him learning from Richard Dragon, 70's DC kung fu hero, now confined to a wheelchair. When he returns to Hub City, everyone has hell to pay.

Deny Cowan's art suits the story perfectly. I was skeptical at first since I wasn't a fan of his work on the Superman books in the 1990s but it had an understated, cinematic feel. There were a few wordless fight scenes that I'd put up against anything today. As always, Bill Sienkiewicz was marvelous on the covers.

O'Neil, Cowan, and the others had a good thing going with The Question, a dark crime comic that paved the way for a lot of others down the road. Four out of five stars.

Chris says

I love the fact that O'Neil took such a douche bag of a character and rather than reinvent him he actually reformed him by making him realize he was a prick, introducing him to eastern philosophy as opposed to his old set of "world is black and white, there is no gray" rules. And to top that, while becoming a reasonable human being he became 5 times deadlier, trained not only in a new school of thought but in the martial arts as well by none other than Richard Dragon. Thanks to Alex Boney for telling me this great series was from the 80's was available in TPB form (for about a day). I found it used on www.abebooks.com for \$25. Go Abebooks!

If you like Denny O'Neil's run on Batman, you should give this a shot.

I wanted to add that my big turn-off on this character originally from one of my all-time favorite comics creators, Steve Ditko was that the comic looked great but read terribly. This was Ditko's first comic book sermon on Objectivism is the philosophy that holds that reality exists independent of consciousness (huh?) that individuals have direct contact with reality through sense perception, that they can attain objective knowledge from perception through the process of concept formation and inductive and deductive logic, that the proper moral purpose of one's life is the pursuit of one's own happiness or rational self-interest, that the only social system consistent with this morality is full respect for individual rights. Fine, but the Question was a selfish, brutish thug of an asshole, so love or hate the philosophy (religion? If the ideology has an eschatology) of Objectivism really reads bad when it is celebrated by a very unpleasant character. The Question AKA Vic Sage was a deeply unpleasant character. He was the Punisher in a dress suit and fedora and he was very angular.

The fact that he was born of objectivism is not what made him unlikeable, the fact that he was written as a self-righteous creep and a murderer. I did not understand why I disliked this book (the issue I had read from 1967 that I probably bought at a flea market in '78) but not years later I get it. Buddhist beliefs are peaceful as are the practitioners of their philosophy/religion but if an artist wanted to introduce a Buddhist character to mainstream comics in the 60's it probably would have been a bad idea to make Dr. Fu Manchu the hero. The Question was not that evil, but Fumachu was the worst Buddhist I could think of. Your belief system that you impose on your character does not make a character good or even likable just because they reflect your beliefs. And in the Question's case he was what someone with those beliefs could do to make a case that said beliefs may not be a very healthy thing to have. I just wanted to clarify why I did not like the Question before O'Neil tackled the character and why I think he did such a great job making the character viable, which was apparently depth vs obsession. Not the philosophy but the brutish, ham handed execution.

Do not get me wrong.. I would rather be stranded on a desert island with nothing but Ditko's Question and Mr. A (a bigger dick than the question) than have to suffer through the The 2005 Question mini-series, where the character is re-imagined as a self-taught urban shaman whose brutal and at times lethal treatment of enemies now arises from a warrior ethos, rather than Objectivist philosophy. Yuck.

Steve says

Great 80s comics. From a modern perspective, it does seem a little dated, but only a little. Mostly it doesn't really seem to deserve the "mature readers" tag it had at the time, when there's only a little violence and some social commentary. But it's some great crime comics, all in all.
