



SPIDER-MAN #15

Erik Larsen partners Webhead with Beast to discover what might happen if Spidey and MJ laid eggs, as the duo discuss 'The Mutant Factor' By Jim Gibbons



You're born, you grow up, you get married and then...kids. That's the natural order of things, right? It's not so simple for our Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man.

Having children is a big life choice that many people face. So how do comic book heroes handle the prospect of potential progeny? That's the question guest writer-artist Erik Larsen addressed with this single issue of *Spider-Man*.

When boiled down, the prevailing theme of Peter Parker's

life in comics is an everyman moral:

"With great power comes great responsibility." And there's rarely a more serious conversation about responsibility in a man's life than the numerous and harrowing warnings about not getting a girl knocked up. Naturally, as Peter Parker and his then-wife Mary Jane reached a time in their marriage where relatives had begun prodding for a litter of little Parkers, it was time for the couple to weigh their options. After a well-crafted conversation about the couple's personal priorities—including MJ's acting career and Pete's busy schedule as photographer and superhero—the real question in this tangled web of parenthood hits, as the book's cover provocatively asks: "What is...the Mutant Factor?"

The physical defects of any two parents can sometimes be enough to make willing procreators hesitant—heck, I'm nowhere close to using my babymaking organ for it's babymaking function, and I'm still terrified of endowing a little Gibbons with my poor eyesight, asthma and deadly peanut allergy—and when one half of the couple has radioactive spider bite-infused blood coursing through his veins, the question about what genetic mishaps a father can bestow upon his offspring becomes entirely more serious. Lucky for the Parkers, the X-Men's resident genius geneticist Dr. Hank McCoy is in town giving a lecture at Empire State University! Cue badass Beast/Spidey team-up with radically responsible conversations about parenthood!

The book's plot progresses through a battle with a mutant-hater and angry mutant both set on eliminating Beast for preaching the gospel of good mutant/human relations, before the two brainy superheroes get a chance to chat about a possible Spider-Baby. Beast breaks it down simply: Any child has a potential to be a mutant, and Spidey's genes make the chance for some sort of complication a probability instead of a possibility, but later adds, "You'll love your child no matter what. Mutant or no, he's still a part of you."

Pete then swings home to find Mary Jane thoughtfully sporting some scandalously sexy lingerie, an extremely frequent attire for her at book's end in the early '90s, before the two realize they both want kids, but that they're young and have plenty of time for a family—later.

By the end of this 22-page treasure, Larsen has delivered a character-driven story in classic Webslinger fashion full of snarky Spidey banter that still manages to hit a relatable chord with readers and progress the Spider-marriage. You can't ask for much more in a single issue!

GEMOLOGY BONUS! "I don't actually remember a lot about the *Spider-Man* #15 story," Larsen confesses. "I know that they needed a quick fill-in and that I wanted to talk about the possibility of Peter and MJ having kids. It hadn't been addressed, and it just seemed like a glaring omission—I mean, that's one of those things couples do talk about, usually before they even get married. It was the first time I wrote, penciled and inked a Marvel comic book and that was a big step for me at the time. Tragically, all of the original art for that issue went up in flames when my house burned down in 1991."



When acrobatic heroes combine, it's always important to remember your villain-engaging etiquette.

