Spider-Man: Kravens Last Hunt
(Marvel Premiere Classic)

The Ultimate Tale Of Revenge

Writer J.M. DeMatteis and artist Mike Zeck craft the ultimate tale of revenge in this groundbreaking and legendary collection! Kraven the Hunter has stalked and killed every animal known to man. But there is one beast that has eluded him. One quarry that has mocked him at every turn: the wall-crawling web-slinger known as Spider-Man. And to prove that he is the hero's master, he will pull on his costume and become him... after he shoots and buries him six feet under! Collects Web of Spider-Man 31-32, Amazing Spider-Man 293-294 and Spectacular Spider-Man 131-132

My Personal Review:
It has been two decades since I read the six comic books that made up Kravens Last Hunt. This is because once upon a time my brother and I divided up my comic book collection and he became responsible for procuring and storing all of the Spider-Man titles. But there was an end of the year inventory reduction sale at my local comic book store and when I saw this on the shelf I decided to pick it up. I almost did not recognize it, because the last time I saw this trade paperback it had a cover where Kraven is cradling a gun; it turns out that art is now on the back cover and the front, as you can see, has a blood red picture of Spider-Man emerging from his grave.

Kravens Last Hunt is written by J.M. DeMatteis and illustrated by Mike Zeck, whose pencils were inked by Bob McLeod. Looking back now I can still remember how unusual it was to have a six-part story told in a two month period by telling it in the three Spider-Man titles. That is why this collection brings together issues 31-32 of Web of Spider-Man, 293-294 from Amazing Spider-Man, and 131-32 of Spectacular Spider-Man. For this edition DeMatteis has written an introduction entitled, Confession: I Didnt Write Kravens Last Hunt, which tells how his idea of a story wherein a superhero is buried alive and emerges from their grave was originally intended to be about Wonder Man and his brother, the Grim Reaper. That did not pan out and then DeMatteis tried to make it a Batman and Joker story, only to be thwarted because DC already had a pretty good Batman and Joker story in production, namely Batman: The Killing Joke. The story continues and DeMatteis lays out how in the fullness of time Spider-Man became the story's hero, Kraven its villain, and Vermin became a necessary part of the tale.
I always thought that Kraven was a second rate villain, and that was on a good day. He certainly was not in the same class as Doctor Octopus and the Green Goblin. Ironically, this is part of what makes Kraven's Last Hunt so great, because it deals quite dramatically with the inherent ineptitude of Kraven as a villain. In fact, Kraven/Kravenov appears on more pages of these six issues than does Spider-Man/Peter Parker. This is not surprising when you consider that Spider-Man is buried alive for two entire issues. DeMatteis and Zeck had created Vermin as a villain for Captain America, while working on that title, which explains why they decided to throw him into the mix with Spidey and Kraven. This proves to be another masterstroke because nobody in the pantheon of Spider-man villains that was extant at that time was going to produce the visceral reaction of Vermin, which was critical to the line that the story draws between Spider-Man and Kraven. DeMatteis and Zeck also have the added advantage of this being the final Kraven story, which certainly heightens its dramatic impact as well.

Now, I do not know if they were part of the previous trade paperback edition, but included in the back are Zeck's original pencils for all six covers (full page) and the first two parts of the story (done four to a page). I have always had fond memories of Zeck's artwork for this series, but that is nothing compared to seeing his original pencils because they are even more impressive. If anything, I sort of wish they had never been inked. I have seen plenty of original pencils by comic book artists that have half as much detail and shading as what Zeck does on these pages. As I reread this story again, I was wondering if I would still think of it as being one of the Top 10 Spider-Man story arcs of all-time, and the answer is, yes, it is still that good.

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