

Marvel Comics

IN THE EARLY 1960S:

***AN ISSUE BY ISSUE FIELD GUIDE TO A
POP CULTURE PHENOMENON***

by Pierre Comtois



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Marvel Comics In The Early 1960s

AN ISSUE BY ISSUE FIELD GUIDE TO A POP CULTURE PHENOMENON

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Dedication

Dedicated to Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Don Heck, Larry Lieber, Stan Goldberg, Chic Stone, Dick Ayers, Jack Keller, and everyone else in the Marvel bullpen who helped make those early years a great age of dawning potential for comics fans!

Special thanks to Roy Thomas for making himself available whenever I had a question or two about the early days at Marvel!

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The Jack Kirby Collector: John Morrow, editor (various issues), Twomorrows Publishing
Marvel Comics Group (various comics and magazines)
Various on-line sources

Introduction:

Welcome to the fourth volume in the “Marvel Comics in the...” series (the fifth if you count the expanded edition of the 1970s volume published in 2021). It’s hard to believe that it’s been almost fifteen years since the first volume appeared under the full title of *Marvel Comics in the 1960s: An Issue by Issue Field Guide to a Pop Culture Phenomenon*, but it has! And a testament to the enduring interest in the material covered is the fact that each volume has continued to find new readers over all those years.

Before that first volume appeared, however, the plan had always been to provide what I call “capsule reviews” of every single Marvel comic from *Fantastic Four* #1 on through what I termed the company’s twilight years, which encompassed the tail end of the 1960s through the ‘70s and beyond into the 1980s. (Although originally, I had never planned to cover the ‘80s, readers of the previous volumes had different ideas and demanded another volume covering that decade... and the good folks at TwoMorrows agreed with them.) Be that as it may, my coverage of all those Marvel comics would not necessarily be complete. My initial idea was to concentrate on the flagship titles, so as to avoid any criticism of the lesser material. That intention fell by the wayside when the need for more entries became apparent in order to balance out the first two volumes covering the ‘60s and the ‘70s. It was even more obvious in the ‘80s

volume when much less of quality was produced in that decade, as it wound down to what I called “the dark age” of the 1990s and beyond.

Incidentally, for the newcomers among you, my breakdown of the years comprising Marvel Comics’ evolution come down to roughly five phases:

The early, formative years (from *Fantastic Four* #1 in 1961 to 1963) when editor/writer Stan Lee and artists/co-plotters Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck introduced the new heroes.



The years of consolidation (1964 to mid-1965) when Lee began to consciously weave his new heroes into a coherent, integrated universe.

The grandiose years (late 1965 to 1968) when, inspired by Kirby’s art style that evolved into larger than life depictions of events on a grand scale, the heroes’ adventures frequently took place at a cosmic level.

The twilight years (1968 to the late 1980s) begun when Kirby and Ditko left Marvel and Lee retreated from active scripting. New editor in chief Roy Thomas kept the momentum going for a while but succeeding editors could not hold back a slow decline in the overall quality of Marvel’s product.

The dark ages (1990s and beyond) when most norms of comics production including

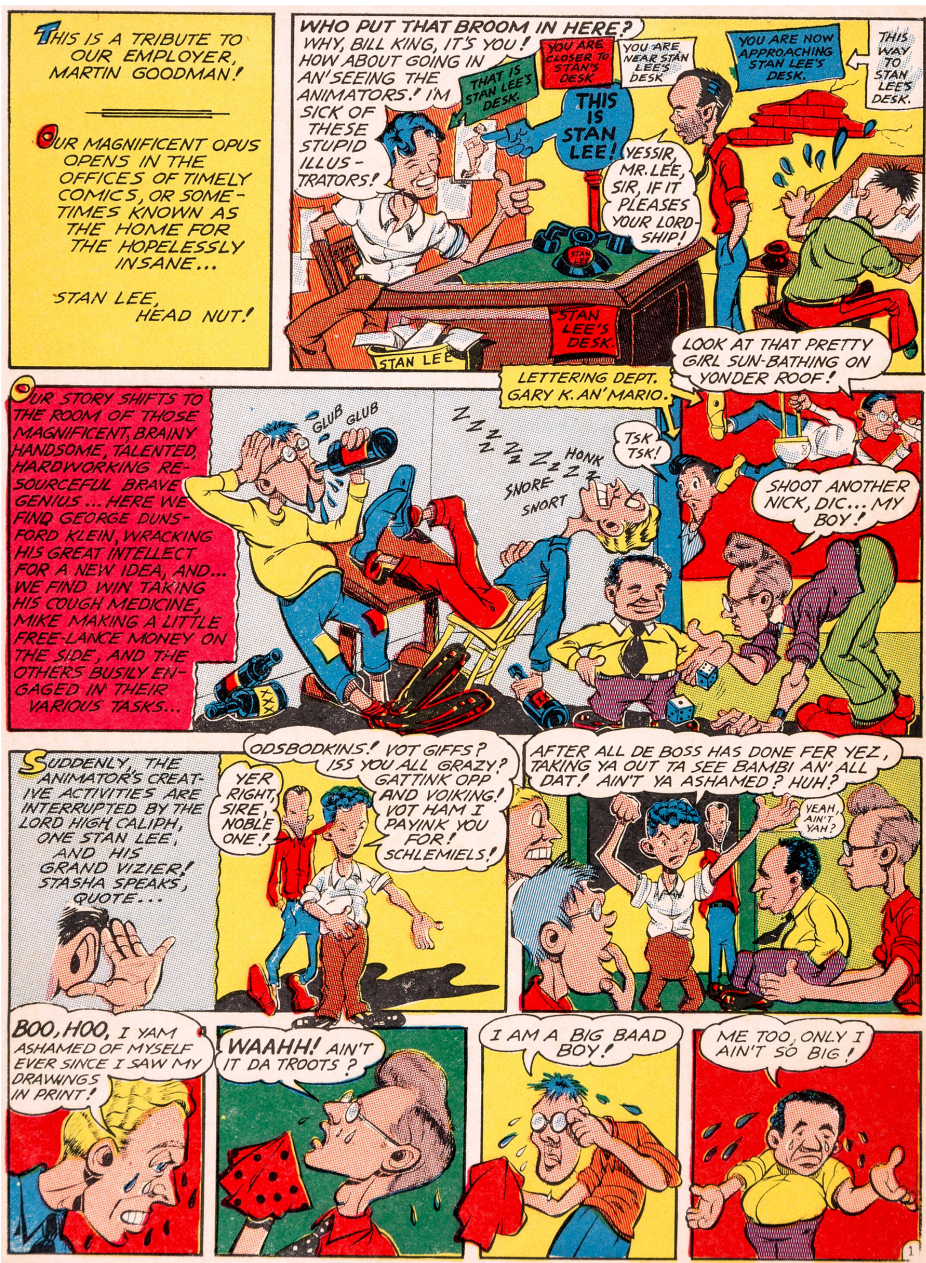
abandonment of the Comics Code ended printed comics' role as a mass medium.

Including in earlier volumes the not so impressive comics produced by Marvel in the twilight years did succeed in creating a balance not only in the superior efforts vs. the inferior, but in coverage of titles that were not necessarily superhero driven. Thus, when I looked back to the material I had covered in the early 1960s (that had not appeared in that first TwoMorrows volume), the first thing I noticed was the lack of coverage of Marvel's output aside from the superheroes. When considered, it was obvious that though there had never

been a point when the company had dedicated itself solely to superheroes, its early years, like its twilight years, did boast a more diverse product than that of the years of consolidation and grandiose years. And so, it became evident to me that I needed to expand my coverage of those early years to include Marvel's other offerings that were coming out at the same month as *Fantastic Four* #1, if only to provide context as editor Stan Lee transitioned the line from monsters, westerns, and romance books to superheroes.

For that reason, the current volume begins with *Amazing Adventures* #4, cover dated September 1961 (which, interestingly, features Dr. Doom, technically Marvel's "first" superhero of the Silver Age). This issue of *Amazing Adventures* was released almost concurrently with FF #1, cover dated November 1961 (but released August 8), so it seemed to me to be the ideal starting point in tracking the progress of Marvel Comics (although the company was not known as such at the time) through the 1960s. And so, readers will find the early years of Marvel's development dominated by westerns and monster books that will gradually diminish as the company moves into its years of consolidation. And though the monster books will have the occasional foreshadowing of elements to be found later in the superhero books, it's the westerns that will be of more interest, which I feel foreshadow the coming of the superheroes most of all. (However, I do not attempt to cover every single issue of the westerns and monsters as I do with the superheroes.)

But back to the contents/format of this new volume, which both supplements and eventually will complete my issue-by-issue survey of Marvel's output



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PAGE 1 OF A THREE-PAGE MINI-COMIC FROM THE 1940S SCRIPTED BY STAN LEE SPOTLIGHTING TIMELY COMICS PUBLISHER MARTIN GOODMAN. IT ALSO SPOOFS LEE HIMSELF WHILE CASTING AN UNCERTAIN LIGHT ON THE REST OF THE THEN CURRENT BULLPEN.

through the Sixties—that is, except for a few series which, as I hinted above, I avoid covering with any more than representative issues, on account of the fact that I never found them consistently well done either in story, or art, or both. (Not that they don't have their quotient of entertainment value; they were still Marvel Comics, after all!) I'm aware, of course, that art is subjective and that there will always be differences of opinion among fans and readers as to which comics are "better" than others, but I've tried in this series to approach the material with some objectivity (despite my obvious enthusiasm for those issues that meet my standards!). Nevertheless, I hold that those particular series (*Iron Man*, *Sub-Mariner*, and the *Hulk*, in their solo titles) were of far lesser quality than Marvel's other concurrent titles. As a result, unlike, say, the *Spider-Man* book, I have refrained from reviewing every single issue, but confined myself to random issues spread over their long runs. This choice may disappoint some, but then it also leaves space for future enterprising writers to take on that task themselves!

In the meantime, *Marvel Comics 1961-1965: An Issue by Issue Field Guide to a Pop Culture Phenomenon*, as has been said, takes up the story at the dawn of the early years and into the years of consolidation, the first of four phases in the company's development. The early years were those that saw the introduction of new superheroes by Marvel. Where editor/writer Stan Lee still concentrated on westerns, humor, and fantasy stories, with his only involvement in the plotting of the superhero books (with the exception of the *Fantastic Four* and *Hulk*). Scripting for the rest of the new heroes and oddball titles was given over to brother Larry Lieber and others. These early years were years of exploration as Lee, with artists Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck, haltingly explored the new world of superheroes, more or less unconsciously shaping them into a new, shared universe. By the years of consolidation, a new self-consciousness had settled in among the creators, especially Lee, as the possibilities of a shared universe manifested themselves. Heroes resided in real world cities with harassment by paparazzi, could meet each other and sometimes come to blows, and suffered personal foibles that made them seem more human and realistic to readers. Continued stories were introduced, as well as crossovers of heroes between titles. And ubiquitous among them all was the art of Jack Kirby (whose primary inker in this phase would be Chic Stone), who drew the major titles, key stories in others, layouts in still more, and most of the covers—all of it leading to a still more expansive phase, the grandiose years,



WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN: ARTIST JOE MANEELY AND STAN LEE CIRCA 1957. HAVING COLLABORATED ON A NUMBER OF PROJECTS TOGETHER IN AND OUT OF COMIC BOOKS, LEE AND MANEELY WERE TIGHT. THERE WAS EVERY POSSIBILITY THAT MANEELY WOULD'VE LOOMED LARGE IN THE PRE-HERO ATLAS MONSTER/WESTERN ERA AND SO BE POSITIONED TO DO THE SAME IN THE COMING MARVEL AGE.

where horizons for stories and characters would balloon beyond the wildest expectations of readers (and perhaps even the creators!). Meanwhile, the years of consolidation, though still dominated by artists Kirby, Ditko, and Heck, also saw the introduction of new blood in the form of artists Gene Colan and Wally Wood and scripter/editorial assistant Roy Thomas. just as this second phase prepared to give way to the grandiose years, which is where this volume ends its coverage. Kind of like a Marvel style cliffhanger, right? But be assured, another volume covering the years 1966-1970 is waiting in the wings!

As to the book's format, the same rules apply here as with the previous volumes, in explanation of which, I'll paraphrase from an earlier introduction:

Designed for the casual browser as well

as those already familiar with its subject, this book can be read from the beginning or opened at any page for quick reference. What allows such versatility is the book's unique format, which includes a text divided into easily digestible, quick to read "capsule reviews" of hundreds of the most important (and a few not so important) individual issues of Marvel Comics from the 1960s. These capsule commentaries not only provide brief but succinct roundups

of the action and significance of the comics discussed, but also who wrote and drew them, where the creators received their inspiration, what their backgrounds were, and where it all fits into the pop culture scene of the times...

The book is also intended to be a kind of informal history / handbook for anyone interested in finding out more about Marvel Comics and the origins of characters that have at last become genuine cultural icons.

Although it's not necessary to start reading from the beginning to enjoy the book, doing so will provide the reader with a better sense of the beginnings of Marvel Comics, how it evolved under the guidance of Stan Lee, and became a pop culture phenomenon.

And now, a final word to readers of our earlier volumes (and those inspired by this latest volume to seek them out): One might look at those earlier volumes as a high octane sampling of cherry-picked entries that often included the key events and continuities, high points, and issues of historical importance that extended through the entire decade of the 1960s. The entries in *Marvel Comics 1961-1965: An Issue by Issue Field Guide to a Pop Culture Phenomenon* are the best of the rest: All those issues between the keys and continuities that make up the blood and sinews, the expansive panorama, of Marvel Comics in its Golden Age. No less important or interesting than those covered in earlier volumes, these stories also feature the best in art and story (and sometimes, the not-so-great) by the same gifted creators featured in the earlier volume, the ones who led the way, or who laid the groundwork for the coming Marvel Age of Comics. So consider the entries in this volume (and hopefully the next) as the ultimate in supplementary material that will complete the big picture, or add the final pieces to the grand mosaic that was Marvel Comics in the 1960s!



WAS HE OLD ENOUGH TO HAVE LEARNED ALL THE SECRETS? MAYBE! STAN LEE WAS ONLY IN HIS MID-TWENTIES WHEN HE WROTE SECRETS BEHIND THE COMICS. ILLUSTRATED BY KEN BALD, IT WAS ADVERTISED IN TIMELY COMICS UPON PUBLICATION. APPARENTLY, NEITHER LEE NOR PUBLISHER MARTIN GOODMAN WAS CONCERNED ABOUT GIVING ANYTHING AWAY!

Amazing Adventures #4

"I Am Robot X"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Pact"

"Who Or What Was the Bootblack?"

Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

"What Lurks Within?"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber
(script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

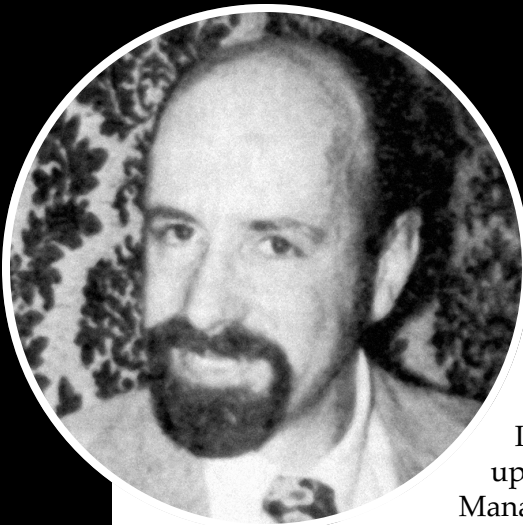
In what would later be seen as a false start in the superhero sweepstakes, the earliest collaboration between scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby on a costumed character was Dr. Droom. Who? You might well ask! Forgotten for over 20 years since his initial appearance in *Amazing Adventures* #1 (first volume), Dr. Droom was revived as Dr. Druid in the later twilight years and made a member of the Avengers. But before all that, he was Marvel's (then known as Atlas) first tentative entry in the superhero business since the company's abortive effort in the previous decade, when it attempted a failed revival of Captain America and the Sub-Mariner. But by 1961, rival DC comics had already proven the viability of superheroes with their resurrection of a revamped Flash, Green Lantern, and other of its Golden Age characters. Thus, it was perhaps with that success in the back of his mind that editor Lee decided to introduce a regular hero into one of his fantasy titles. Droom, sort of a typical comics magician type, was actually more down-to-earth than the later Dr. Strange. His powers were of the mind rather than in casting arcane spells. Thus, in *Amazing Adventures* #4 (Sept. 1961), he defeats alien invaders by making them think a construction derrick (!) represented Terran life and as such, could easily defeat their own fleshly forms in any battle. It was a simplistic story, sure, but safely within the parameters of all Marvel's pre-hero books. And as drawn by Kirby, "What Lurks Within" would serve as a much better precursor to the company's hero revolution to come, than other so-called prototypes often cited by comics commentators. In fact, the art here looked an awful lot like Kirby's work on a new Marvel title called the *Fantastic Four* that was due to be released the very next month. Actually, it was slightly better, having been inked by Dick Ayers rather than Chris Rule (or George Klein, depending on where you look) as the *FF* book was. That goes for this issue's lead story too. "I Am Robot X," again drawn by the Kirby/Ayers team, is even better than the Droom story! There's plenty more detail in the robot design as well as in characters' faces, scenery, and sets, and Larry



AMAZING ADVENTURES #4: DID COVER ARTIST JACK KIRBY USE HIS ERASER AS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE DESIGN OF THIS ISSUE'S MONSTER? REGARDLESS, THIS ISSUE WAS A CORNUCOPIA FOR READERS WITH KIRBY DRAWING BOTH THE TWO PART "X" OPUS AS WELL AS THE DR. DROOM STORY AND STEVE DITKO BATTING CLEAN UP WITH A FANTASY SHORT!

Lieber's two-part, novel length script (from a Lee plot) is natural sounding. (Compare it to DC's SF books such as *Mystery in Space* for how clunky and artificial such scripting could get.) Not to be outdone is Steve Ditko on "Who or What Was the Bootblack" where his facial expressions and body language totally shines over a slight tale of angelic doings. **Fun Fact:** After *Amazing Adventures* #6, the book would have a title and format change to *Amazing Adult Fantasy*. The final issue of that revamped book would be #15, wherein yet another hero would be introduced—except this time, unlike Dr. Droom, the new character would end up making comics history!

Larry Lieber



At a time when Marvel's line up of superheroes was still uncertain of success, editor Stan Lee delegated scripting chores to his younger sibling, Larry Lieber, who contributed mightily to the early interpretations of Thor, Iron Man, and Ant-Man.

Interested in art from a young age, Lieber attended the Pratt Institute nights while getting on the job training doing paste up work on the magazine side of Martin Goodman's Magazine Management, the umbrella company under which Timely Comics and later Marvel, were published. It was while there that Lieber may have received his first comics credit.

After a stint in the Air Force, Lieber returned stateside to attend the Art Students League and to begin work for his brother at Atlas. There, he started to draw in earnest doing weird stories, romances, and westerns.

Then the roof fell in. Due to a unfortunate business decision, Goodman lost his distributor and in gaining a new one, found his line of comics severely restricted. Now there were so few titles that editor Lee could write almost all of them. Perhaps it was due to the press of time that he began to look for someone to help ease the load and Lieber was close at hand. Having scripted some stories already and saying that Lieber's letters written home during his time in the Air Force impressed him, Lee began to train Lieber more intensely as a scripter.

As this was still the pre-hero, Atlas Monster phase of Marvel's history, Lieber found himself teamed with artists Jack Kirby and others scripting stories from plots supplied by Lee. Soon, however, the superheroes began to arrive and Lieber found himself scripting (still from plots by Lee who kept himself busy writing the Fantastic Four, Hulk, Spider-

Man and various westerns) the earliest appearances of Thor, Ant-Man, and Iron Man, providing those characters with details of powers and characterization that would remain with them for years.

However, as the hero features grew in popularity, Lee decided to script all of them himself and switched Lieber over to the westerns, so much so that credit boxes began referring to him as "larrupin' Larry Lieber!"

Throughout this time, Lieber continued to draw the odd weird story as well as westerns such as his mainstay, the Rawhide Kid. Truth to tell however, his scripting was better than his art which never seemed to improve beyond crude and chunky figure work. His later work on weird back ups in the early superhero features was only enlivened when inker Matt Fox joined him.

When work at Marvel dried up by the end of the 1960s, Lieber was hired by Martin Goodman, now publisher of Atlas/Seaboard, to edit a new line of black and white magazines meant to compete directly with Marvel's. From there, he also took over editing the color comics as well. It was a good fit for Lieber who also wrote and drew the occasional story but the line was doomed to failure and soon folded.

Lieber ended his career in comics by reuniting as artist with his brother who was writing the Hulk newspaper strip. Soon, he was writing it as well. When that gig folded, he took over on the Spider-Man newspaper strip, again scripted by Lee, and remained on it for a healthy twenty year run.



Journey Into Mystery #73

"Where Will You Be When the Spider Strikes?"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"What Lurks on Channel X?"; Stan Lee (plot/script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"Menace From Mars!"; Stan Lee (plot/script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
"One Look Means Doom!"; Stan Lee (plot/script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Ever hear of a spider with the proportionate intelligence of a human? Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Well, it should; the origin of the giant spider in this issue's lead tale, "Where Will You Be When the Spider Strikes," is similar to a certain costumed hero scripter/plotter Stan Lee would introduce only a few months later. The spider of the title, see, is brought into a research lab, stuck to the cuff of a scientist's pants. It crawls off and before you know it, finds itself accidentally irradiated. The result? Gigantism and intelligence! On the basis of such thin gruel, some fans had once considered the tale a firm link in the later development of Spider-Man. Spotting "precursors" to later, more successful Marvel characters became a popular indoor sport of the 1980s, most of whose conclusions were problematic at best, and non-existent at worst. It was true that many of Marvel's pre-hero monster and western books did display elements that would be used in later superhero books, but often they amounted to no more than a name or minor story element as shown here, but such was to be expected when most of the stories were either plotted or scripted (or both) by the man who'd later be majorly involved in the creation of the superheroes. Be that as it may, there was another connection on display here; namely the art team of penciler Jack Kirby and inker Dick Ayers, who manage a fast job with the giant spider, and then a more professional entry with the next story, "What Lurks On Channel X?" There, Kirby's pencils are more complete (with a spectacular opening splash crowded with weird faces, any one of which could have headlined their own monster story!), and Ayers' inks more elaborate, for a more visually satisfying entry than the opening story. That's followed by a Don Heck *tour de force* as he both pencils and inks "Menace From Mars!" Here, the artist's talent is on full display with evocative night scenes and judicious use of silhouette. It's easy to see from this work why he became so popular when the superheroes came around! The issue is rounded out with the third member of what would become the triple threat art team in the coming superhero revolution: Steve Ditko. In "One Look Means Doom," Ditko foreshadows his legendary run on the



LIKE MANY IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY, STAN LEE TOOK A BREAK FROM COMICS FOR A STINT IN THE MILITARY DURING WORLD WAR II. THERE, HE FLEW A DESK WORKING ON ARMY MANUALS, TRAINING FILMS, AND INFORMATIVE PAMPHLETS PROVIDING HELPFUL HINTS FOR GIs SERVING IN DISTANT LANDS. BUT HIS JOB AS EDITOR BACK AT ATLAS WOULD STILL BE WAITING FOR HIM UPON HIS DISCHARGE IN 1945.

later Dr. Strange strip, complete with eerie menaces, cliffhanging monasteries, and shadowy faces. Yessir, everybody was in place here for when editor Lee was ready to launch his company back into the superhero sweepstakes!

Strange Tales #89

"Fin Fang Foom!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Green Things!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)
"The Touch of Midas!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Paul Reinman (pencils/inks)

Strange Tales #89 (Oct 1961) featured a future superstar of the Marvel Universe, although no one knew it at the time. This star, however, wouldn't have super powers, be strangely irradiated, or even have a colorful costume (unless you count his orange trunks), instead, Fin Fang Foom had size, attitude, and possibly the most unforgettable name among a plethora of pre-hero nomenclature! That said, Fin Fang Foom wouldn't be just another member of editor/writer Stan Lee's giant monster menagerie. No sir! As things would turn out, he'd become the king of all the goofily named monsters that roamed Marvel's pre-hero landscape, eventually coming to represent the era as a whole. In a way, Fin Fang Foom was the culmination of the giant monster trend at Atlas (as Marvel was termed in those years), what the whole movement had been building up to since

Lee had begun to have fun playing around with names such as Googam, Gargantus, Grog, and Taboo. But in coming up with FFF's name, Lee said he was inspired by one thing in particular: a movie he saw as a child called *Chu Chin Chow*. Struck by its lilt and alliterative meter, Lee came up with his own version and Fin Fang Foom was born! Whether that was how it happened or if Lee subconsciously recalled such other rhythmic names as Rin Tin Tin or Fee Fi Fo Fum, it doesn't really matter; what readers were left with was the delightfully named Fin

Fang Foom! But what's in a name without a visual to go with it? Enter penciler Jack Kirby who gave form to Lee's idea. And what a form! Kirby outdid himself this time in the creation of an Atlas giant monster, creating one that dwarfed a battleship and that sprawled the length of a football field from its ugly head perched on a long, snakelike neck, to its barbed tail. Lee however, merely plotted FFF's initial outing, choosing to place the action in Red China as a Nationalist youngster, accused of cowardice by his family, uses his knowledge of Chinese legend to revive the greatest monster of all time and get it to destroy a Communist invasion fleet preparing to attack

Formosa (today's Taiwan). Larry Lieber was tasked to turn Lee's plot into a script which he does here with seemingly more effort than was usual in these giant monster tales. Providing a more densely written

textured script, Lieber manages to infuse the tale with an air of timelessness, like an Ernest Bramah fantasy with a modern setting and succeeds in delivering a classic in giant monster annals; enough, along with the creature's name, to cement Fin Fang Foom in the memory of nascent Marvelites allowing him to be revived a number of times over the coming years, most notably in a late entry *Iron Man* run by writer John Byrne. Kirby's 13-page lead story was followed by a much quieter 5 pager by Lee and penciler Steve Ditko called "The Green Things" in which a crook and would be killer gets his comeuppance among his victim's greenhouse plants. This



LIFTING A SECTION OF THE ANCIENT GREAT WALL OF CHINA, THE INCREDIBLE FIN FANG FOOM SNAPPED IT THROUGH THE AIR-- LIKE A GIGANTIC BULL-WHIP!!

HE SHATTERS THE WALL TO BITS!

BEHOLD MY POWER, MORTALS! THINK YOU TO DEFY ME NOW?? HA! HA! HA!

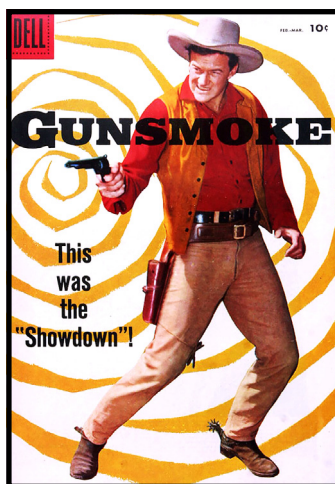
STRANGE TALES #89, PAGE 7: FIN FANG FOOM LASHES OUT! A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE AMOUNT OF WORK ARTIST JACK KIRBY WAS PUTTING INTO THESE TALES OF GIANT MONSTERS! DICK AVERS' INKS WERE CERTAINLY COMPLIMENTARY ADDING IMMEASURABLY TO THE HECTIC GOINGS ON.

story is typical of the Lee/Ditko collaborations that dotted the monster titles and filled *Amazing Adult Fantasy* before the introduction of Spider-Man; light and well-drawn in Ditko's unique, quirky style, but airy in substance. As was the final story drawn by Paul Reinman and scripted by Lieber. There, a greedy man seeks out the Midas touch that will allow him to turn all he touches into gold. He thinks he's beaten the problem that was King Midas' doom, but of course, he was wrong!

Gunsmoke Western #67

"The Hunted!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)
"Montana Brown, Gunslinger Without Fear!";
 Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"They Called Him Wolf!"; Stan Lee (script);
 Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)
"Somewhere Wait the Rustlers!"; Stan Lee (script);
 Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Gunsmoke Western #67 (Nov. 1961) was released the same month as *Fantastic Four* #1, but unlike that new superhero book, it was part of Marvel's line of bread-and-butter western comics. At the time, westerns were hugely popular in books, at the movies, and especially on television (indeed, *Gunsmoke Western* owed its name to one of the most watched westerns then on weekly TV), and young readers couldn't get enough of them. Thus, Marvel, in its Atlas days, peddled dozens of different titles until publisher Martin Goodman's calamitous decision to sell off the company's distribution wing to rely on an outside service. When that service went belly up, Atlas was left high and dry. As a result, Goodman had to go begging, asking rival DC Comics' distributor to sell his comics as well. An agreement was reached, but the catch was that Atlas would only be allowed a handful of titles each month. Immediately, the company's vast line of product was cut back, with only a handful of its westerns surviving: those that had proved the most durable over the years, including



**JAMES ARNESS
 STARRED IN TV'S
 GUNSMOKE FOR
 AN INCREDIBLE 20
 SEASONS. TESTAMENT
 TO THE ENDURING
 POPULARITY OF THE
 WESTERN GENRE
 BOTH AMONG ADULTS
 AND KIDS.**

not only *Gunsmoke*, but *Kid Colt Outlaw*, *Rawhide Kid*, and the *Two-Gun Kid*. And as with the equal number of fantasy/monster comics, many of the same artists contributed to both genres, including Jack Kirby, who provides this issue's standout tale "Montana Brown, Gunslinger Without Fear." In this Stan Lee scripted tale, Montana Brown is shot while being driven off his land. Later, a doctor tells him due to his injury, he can't live long. With nothing to lose, Brown finds the courage to stand up to his tormentors and winds up becoming sheriff, living to the ripe old age of 78! Kirby tells the story with his customary aplomb, with Dick Ayers sharpening his pencils suitably for one of Lee's western morality lessons. (Kirby also drew this issue's cover, an unusual layout, one he used now and then in the pre-hero era: a four-panel grid showing Kid Colt in the process of being lassoed. Was the artist uncertain which of the four images was the most exciting to use for a full cover? If so, it can be understood. He made them all look good!) Dick Ayers also provides both pencils and inks to "Somewhere Waits the Rustlers", managing to hand in a decent job that's easy on the eyes. The rest of the issue, including its lead tale starring Kid Colt, is penciled by Jack Keller. As the Marvel Age progressed, Keller would be confined to the westerns... thankfully! His dull layouts and simple style would not have been suitable for the up-and-coming superheroes. It was best to have him relegated to the westerns, a genre that would soon begin to fade under the growing popularity of Marvel's new costumed characters.

Amazing Fantasy #7

"The Last Man on Earth"
"The Icy Fingers of Death"
"Journey's End"
"Why Won't They Believe Me?"

"Witch Hunt"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)
 Although editor/writer Stan Lee enjoyed collaborating with the three mainstay artists working in Atlas' line of monster books that included Jack Kirby and Don Heck, it was Steve Ditko with whom he had the most affinity. Ditko's artistic approach fell somewhere between Kirby's action-oriented style and Heck's down-to-earth approach. Combining the two along with a strong sensitivity to ordinary people that was on full display in his detailed facility with facial expression and body language, Ditko was the perfect fit to visualize Lee's own preference for exploring human emotion and frailties, albeit in the simplistic morality tales of the five-page comics story. For that reason, it was Ditko, and not Kirby or Heck, whom he chose to

share a new title, one in which the artist would be spotlighted by having him draw the entire book, and not merely one or two segments. Moreover, each issue would be clearly bylined as being by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, a rare acknowledgement by management to the people who wrote and drew their comics. It was to be the precursor of Lee's policy to credit creators in the months to come, as Atlas evolved into Marvel. Meanwhile, back in *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, Lee's concept for the new title was to present stories slightly more sophisticated than those in the company's other fantasy books. Thus, the initial issues of the new feature included the word "adult" in the title to indicate the difference. But really, there wasn't much difference between the stories here and others by the Lee/Ditko team elsewhere in the line-up. In any case, by *Amazing Adult Fantasy* #7 (Dec. 1961), the team had already been producing their stories for over a year and would go on doing them well into 1962. It was a pretty good run as far as the company's track record was concerned, but one that would end with #15 when history was made again. Yes, again. For the irony was, *Amazing Fantasy*'s days became numbered with the near simultaneous release of *Fantastic Four* #1, a book that would change comics history forever. But it was proof, perhaps, that recognition of the FF's groundbreaking nature would be slow in coming, as *Amazing Fantasy* would continue for almost another year before the trend begun by the FF became indisputable. In the meantime, though, for readers who cared more about other things than superheroes, there were the teen romance books, westerns, monsters... and the type of ironic fantasy presented in this issue, as Stan and Steve serve up tricky stories about the end of the world, amnesiac aliens, time travel, and the wisdom of children.



IN THE BEGINNING, EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE WORKED WELL WITH ARTIST STEVE DITKO, PRODUCING COUNTLESS FANTASY SHORTS IN THE PRE-HERO DAYS, A RELATIONSHIP THAT WOULD BECOME STRAINED AS THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS PROGRESSED.

Rawhide Kid #25

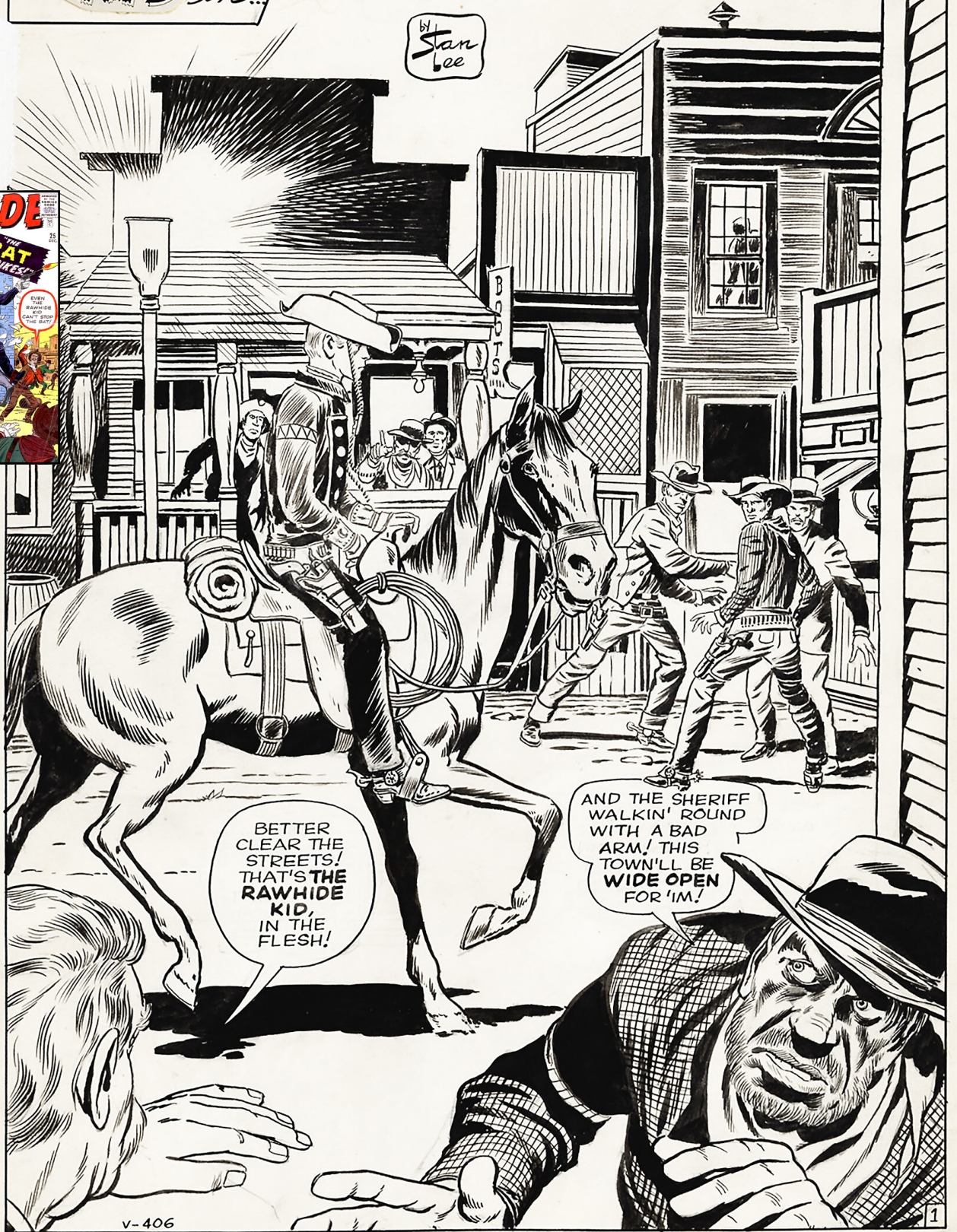
"The Bat strikes!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Twister!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Man Who Robbed the Express!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)
"Those Who Live by the Gun..."; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

The very same month that *Fantastic Four* #1 debuted with somewhat lackluster art by Jack Kirby, *Rawhide Kid* #25 (Dec. 1961) hit the stands like a thunderbolt! With three of its four stories penciled by Kirby (who was clearly more enthused by its subject matter than he'd been with the FF), the issue was another five-star effort by scripter Stan Lee and Kirby (duly inked by his regular partner, Dick Ayers). Revamped and reignited back in issue #17, the *Rawhide Kid* feature, like its contemporaneous fellows *Kid Colt* and especially the *Two-Gun Kid*, had moved more definitely into the realm of fantasy than straight-up westerns. *Two-Gun*, for instance, claimed a secret identity and its concurrent problems: a trained horse that could act lazy or dynamic depending on which identity his master chose, and hidden closets where the hero kept his quick-to-don costume. The "powers" of the *Rawhide Kid*, whose shooting and fighting abilities were practically unbelievable, was no less larger-than-life. And as the months passed and Marvel's superhero line grew in popularity, their success would infect the westerns too, as costumed villains of a sort would begin to populate their pages. Here, for instance, the *Kid* battles the masked *Bat*. In "The Twister," the *Kid* saves a wagon train from an Indian attack, but he gets some divine help after he advises the pioneers to pray. It works, and just in the nick of time, a tornado comes up to save the *Kid* and the wagon train. In "Those Who Live by the Gun," the *Kid* displays his impossible fighting abilities by

(OPPOSITE PAGE) RAWHIDE KID #25, PAGE 1: THIS OPENING SPLASH BY PENCILER JACK KIRBY SETS THE TONE FOR THE SERIES WITH THE CLASSIC LONER RIDING INTO TOWN, SEEMINGLY HEEDLESS OF THE CHAOS HIS ARRIVAL CAUSES. MEANWHILE, PASSERSBY SCATTER IN PANIC AS HIS REPUTATION PRECEDES HIM. ALL LONG ESTABLISHED TROPES OF THE WESTERN GENRE THAT WRITER STAN LEE AND ARTIST JACK KIRBY CONTINUED TO KEEP VIBRANTLY FRESH IN MARVEL'S WESTERNS. IN A GENRE THAT WAS SOON TO BE ECLIPSED BY THE RISING SUPERHEROES, LEE WOULD FIND A WAY TO KEEP HIS WESTERNS FRESH BY INTRODUCING FANTASY ELEMENTS ON A MORE REGULAR BASIS.

THE RAWHIDE KID in... THE BAT STRIKES!

by Stan Lee



BETTER CLEAR THE STREETS! THAT'S THE RAWHIDE KID, IN THE FLESH!

AND THE SHERIFF WALKIN' ROUND WITH A BAD ARM! THIS TOWN'LL BE WIDE OPEN FOR 'IM!

turning the tables on a gang of owlhoots who get the drop on him. This story is marked especially by a fantastic opening splash by Kirby and Ayers of a dozing Kid about to be jumped by the gang. Wow! Finally, perhaps inspired by Kirby's contributions, Ayers submits a really well rendered tale called "The Man Who Robbed the Express." Providing the inks over his own pencils was the charm here, as Ayers really lays it on thick. And throughout, of course, scripter Stan Lee's mastery of western lingo betrays a lifetime of watching movie and TV horse operas. Truly, Marvel's westerns of this period were where the action was, even as their superheroic competition was just gearing up. But who at the time would ever have thought that such low-rent books as the early *FF* could ever have outpaced these beautifully produced westerns? Only time would tell...

Tales to Astonish #27

"The Man in the Ant Hill!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "Mirror, Mirror, On the Wall..."; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
 "The Talking Horse"; Stan Lee (script); Bob Forgione (pencils/inks)
 "Dead Planet"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

It was intended as just another issue of just another of Atlas' pre-hero monster books. Even the plot of the issue's lead story was familiar, having already been used at least once, involving a man caught in a

hornets' nest. But something about "The Man In the Ant Hill" caught reader attention and made *Tales to Astonish* #27 (Jan. 1962) one of the most important landmarks in the development of early Marvel. In it, Dr. Henry Pym is experimenting on a potion that can shrink and then enlarge any object. It works on inanimate objects, so the next step is to see if it will work on living things as well. He tests it on himself and immediately shrinks down to the size of an ant! Disoriented, he wanders outside and flees into an ant hill. There, he manages to hold off the maddened insects until finally escaping, uses the enlarging potion to grow himself back to normal. Convinced that the potion is too dangerous to use, he pours it down the sink. (Although he's seen removing it from a safe in his first appearance as Ant-Man; did he save some?). Such is where the story (scripted by Larry Lieber) ends and where it should have remained, except that months later, fan mail reaction to the Jack Kirby drawn/Dick Ayers inked tale was far more intense than for any other fantasy stories that had been appearing in Atlas' monster books for the past few years. Fatefully, that reaction came just as Atlas was transforming itself into Marvel, with the company already having introduced its first superhero features, including the *Fantastic Four* and the *Incredible Hulk*. Casting about for ideas for new characters to help capitalize on the trend, Lee, in his capacity as editor, seized on the inexplicable popularity of Henry Pym (and perhaps influenced also by the recent introduction of the Atom at rival DC), and called in Kirby to turn Pym into a size changing superhero. And yet, as of this issue, all of that was still months in the future. For now, *Astonish* was still just another monster book with Kirby's lead-off ant hill story looking somewhat on the rushed side. By contrast, "Mirror, Mirror On the Wall," both penciled and inked by Don Heck, looked well-crafted in its detail and shadowy mood. A shot of a darkened ranch home on page 4, panel 3 perfectly illustrates Heck's sleek, up to date style as compared to Kirby's more old-fashioned brick and mortar house belonging to Pym. Finally, penciler/inker Steve Ditko's "Dead Planet" is a five-page classic. A simple morality tale of the kind Lee was expert at by this time, tells the tale of Mopox, a warrior who'd come to an unnamed planet, all set to conquer. Instead, he finds it empty despite readings that there is life present. After years of frustrated waiting, he gives up. "Without battle, without conquest," says Mopox in his final breath, "(a Komok) cannot live...". The irony is that life was all around him in the shape of living rocks, but he never recognized it.



THOUGHT HENRY PYM HAD PROBLEMS IN AN ANT HILL? THINK AGAIN! RELEASED IN 1957, RICHARD MATHESON'S THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN WAS LIKELY NOT FAR FROM STAN LEE'S THOUGHTS WHEN HE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF A SHRUNKEN HERO VS INSECT MENACE.

Dick Ayers



A mainstay in the early years of Marvel Comics as both penciler and inker, it was only Dick Ayers' misfortune to be part of an art team that included stars Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck when the superheroes rose to prominence.

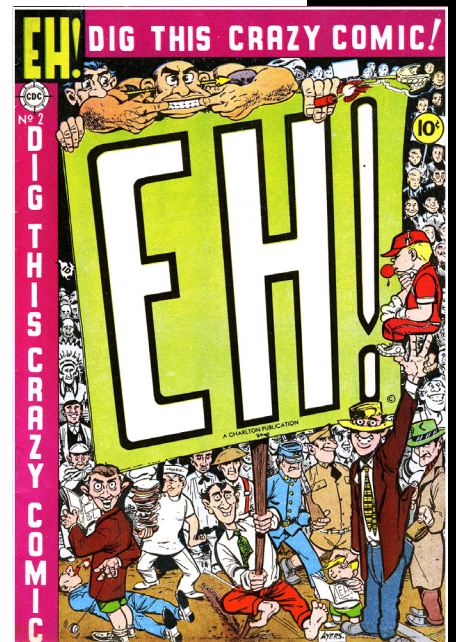
Ayers was in the army when he received his first formal art training. After his discharge and a near miss at employment with Dell Publishing, he attended New York's Cartoonists and Illustrators School operated by famed strip artist Burne Hogarth. A job at Magazine Enterprises led to a regular gig on its *Jimmy Durante* feature before Ayers moved on to the company's western titles, a genre that would prove to be his bread and butter over the years. It was at ME that he scored his first major hit, the creation of the western hero Ghost Rider (which he would return to again years later under the Marvel banner). In the early 1950s, Ayers began to freelance for Atlas Comics, the precursor to Marvel.

At Atlas, Ayers branched out into horror and mystery and even had a hand in reviving the Human Torch, a character he'd return to again in the Marvel Age. Then came the Atlas implosion and Ayers found himself practically the only man left standing. Along with fellow penciler Jack Keller, he helped keep Atlas' western titles alive. When artist Jack Kirby returned to the fold, Ayers inked his work on an issue of *Wyatt Earp*. Editor Stan Lee recognized Ayers' compatibility with Kirby and had him continue in that capacity, an association that lasted well

into the early years of the Marvel Age.

But as Marvel's stable of superheroes expanded, there was too much work for Kirby, Ditko, and Heck to handle. Something had to give. That was the Human Torch feature in *Strange Tales* and then *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos* (and later still, *Capt. Savage and His Leatherneck Raiders*). It stood to reason that Kirby's long time inker might pencil somewhat in his style making the transition easier but such was not the case. Ayers own art style and layouts proved unsuitable for straight superheroes and even for the hyper action now expected of the company's war titles. (Despite remaining on *Sgt. Fury* for over 100 issues) His was a staid, by the books approach that was being left behind not only by the cosmicism of Kirby and Ditko, but by the realism of newcomers Gene Colan, John Buscema, and John Romita.

Less and less would be seen of Ayers as Marvel moved into its twilight years of the 1970s and 80s where his main legacy would remain among such legended Atlas/Marvel westerns as *Wyatt Earp*, *Rawhide Kid* and the *Two Gun Kid*.





Rawhide Kid #26

"Trapped by the Bounty Hunter!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"Shoot Out In Scragg's Saloon!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"Strong Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Paul Reinman (pencils/inks)

"The Bullet Proof Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

The fourth story in *Rawhide Kid* #26 (Feb. 1962) was called "The Bullet Proof Man" but this whole issue ought to have been rated as 100 proof due to its being crammed with not one, not two, but three out of four stories scripted by the master, Stan Lee, and penciled by the soon to be crowned King Kirby! At this point in Kirby's career, his style was still on the rise. When he first broke into the business in the 1940s, his work was noted more for its dynamism than its realism. In the early 1950s, his work improved, becoming more natural as he moved into the more down-to-earth romance comic field. In the late '50s, he continued to improve, first with the inks of fellow artist Wally Wood on the *Sky Masters* newspaper strip, and then the odd comic assignment. It was in those comics he did, including *Fighting American* for Harvey and "Green Arrow" and *Challengers of the Unknown* for DC, that his style crystallized—settled down, so to speak—now combining action and realism for a more accessible look. It was this intermediate style that came between his raw, early endeavors and his final grandiose work that's on full display here. In fact, it's all right there on the splash page of this issue's opening yarn, "Trapped by the Bounty Hunter": a foreground three-quarter close-up of the Kid walking down the street of a frontier town flanked

IN THE LATE 1950s, JACK KIRBY'S ART WAS IN TRANSITION MOVING FROM A LOOSER, MORE EXAGGERATED STYLE EMBLEMATIC OF HIS WORK IN THE 40s, TO A MORE RESTRAINED FORM USED IN THE ROMANCE COMICS HE HELPED PIONEER IN THE 50s. IT WAS THAT MORE DOWN TO EARTH STYLE THAT HE USED IN COMICS SUCH AS CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN AND HERE IN THE SKYMASTERS COMIC STRIP FROM 1959. HELPING TO KEEP KIRBY'S FEET ON THE GROUND (NO PUN INTENDED!) IS INKER DICK AYERS. HIS FREQUENT PARTNER THROUGH THE EARLY YEARS AT MARVEL.

by a rough, suspicious lot of owlhoots. The Kid's eyes, barely seen beneath the brim of his Stetson, almost make Stan Lee's dialogue superfluous: "Somewhere in this town a bounty hunter is waiting for me, but I don't know who he is! He could be anybody!" Inked by Dick Ayers in rough-edged detail, Kirby's combination of panel arrangement and body language infused the otherwise static scene with lingering menace. And the rest of Lee's story doesn't disappoint as the tension mounts and the Kid is actually captured by the bounty hunter, only to have the tables turned by the end. Kirby's work in "Shootout at Scragg's Saloon" is a shade sketchier, but no less fun for all that. The Kirby/Ayers team was back at the top of their game with the issue's final story, "The Bullet Proof Man," with the artist diversifying the storytelling with six- and nine-panel pages. For sure, Kirby watchers at the time must have felt disdain for the artist's concurrent work on the *Fantastic Four*, which continued to lag behind his westerns in terms of quality, but soon enough, his and Lee's realistic take on the superheroes there

would begin to catch fan attention, and as interest grew, Kirby would switch his own enthusiasm away from cowboys and begin to devote more attention to strips such as the *FF*. As for the westerns, Kirby's imminent and permanent departure from the books would mark the beginning of the end for the venerable genre, which would finally peter out of existence by the end of the decade.

Gunsmoke Western #69

"I'm Callin' Ya Yellow, Kid!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)
"The Betrayer!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Toledo Kid!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
"The Gunslinger"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Gunsmoke Western #69 (March 1962) hit browsers at the comic racks between the eyes with its classic Jack Kirby cover design that places Kid Colt at the center of a circle of owlhoots intent on his destruction. Backed by a featureless, all white background, the cover couldn't help but stand out among other more colorful offerings and was one that Kirby would revisit now and then after he turned his full attention to the rising superhero comics. But the insides of this ish didn't disappoint either, even though only a single story was penciled by Kirby this issue, a simple six-pager scripted by Stan Lee that Kirby and inker Dick Ayers open with a beautifully rendered close-up of a couple of drunken yahoos yukking it up over some private joke. In the background is the calm, erect figure of the story's protagonist, Jeb Hart, who soon learns that his uncle is the dreaded leader of the Simon Hart gang. Made a member of the gang, young Hart is accused of betrayal by Simon after he turns on his plan to rob the local bank. But Hart doesn't see it that way. "Yore the betrayer, Simon. You betrayed every honest man in town when yuh tried to rob and shoot them." Kirby's tale was followed up by "The Toledo Kid," a tale penciled and inked by Don Heck, who was at the near peak of his powers here with a well rendered tale of local gunmen's fear of the Toledo Kid and their attempt to hire another gunslinger to ward him off. A Dick Ayers penciled and inked solo outing is next, about the idolization of feared gunman Yukon by a local boy... until his father takes him out, proving that the bad man was nothing to look up to. Sure, it was a familiar plot by Lee (who used it frequently over the hundreds of western tales he cranked out through the long years before the advent of the *FF*), but no less satisfying for all that.



NO TIME FOR DUCKING UNDER DESKS: THOUGH DIFFICULT FOR MODERN SENSIBILITIES TO RECONCILE, COMICS READERS IN THE 1950S AND EARLY 60S, HAD NO TROUBLE MOVING COMFORTABLY FROM WESTERNS TO THE ATOMIC AGE AND BACK AGAIN. WITH GUNSLINGERS TAMING DODGE ON THE ONE HAND AND RADIATION CREATING NEW SUPERHEROES ON THE OTHER!

Strange Tales #94

"I Was a Decoy for Pildorr, the Plunderer From Outer Space!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)
"Save Me From the Weed!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"He Came From Nowhere!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils/inks)
"Help!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Even as the new *Fantastic Four* book was struggling to find its way artistically, the team that would someday lift it far beyond the expectations of readers was quietly assembled for the lead story in, of all places, *Strange Tales* #94 (March 1962). The tale was another weird monster, this time called "I Was a Decoy for Pildorr, the Plunderer From Outer Space!" But the historical importance of this story wasn't its plot about alien invaders being tricked into triggering an atomic bomb, thus ending their plans to ravage the Earth. It was the fateful recruitment of Joe Sinnott to ink over Jack Kirby's pencils. A graduate of the Cartoonists and Illustrators School, Sinnott began working in the comics field at Dell before moving over to Atlas as an artist in the early 1950s. It was after some years drawing westerns and horror stories that he and Kirby's paths crossed in this issue, with Sinnott on the inks. Although there's nothing special that can be noted about this early teaming between the two (at this point, Dick Ayers' inks over Kirby were more satisfying), Sinnott did bring a clean, hard-edged line to the artist's pencils that would serve them both well in coming years. Sinnott would be reunited with

Kirby briefly in a couple months for *Fantastic Four* #5 before the inker became a penciler again for a while. But when he and Kirby were reteamed permanently on *Fantastic Four* #44, just as Kirby's art began its final evolution into its grandiose style, together, they would help demonstrate beyond a doubt just how great comics could be. By contrast, in this issue's second offering, "Save Me From the Weed," Ayers shows why he was Kirby's preferred inker in these early years, providing the overlay of detail done with a finer line that the penciler's work needed to prevent it from appearing somewhat flat, as it did when he was rushed. As had become usual by this time, penciler Steve Ditko brought up the rear for this issue with a Simple Simon Stan Lee fable called "Help!" About teeny tiny aliens stuck inside a telephone receiver, Ditko makes the best of it, turning the five-page story into a *tour de force* of growing tension, as the protagonist moves from annoyance to anger at what he thinks are prank calls. It's classic surrealistic Ditko imagery: a symbolic splash page with the protagonist surrounded by floating mouths, all shouting for "help!"

Rawhide Kid #27

"When Six-Guns Roar!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "The Girl, the Gunman, and the Apaches!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "The Fury of Bull Barker!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
 "The Man Who Caught the Kid!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Wow! C'mon down, pards, and help yoreselves to a heaping helping of Lee/Kirby larrupin' magic with three—count 'em, three—out of four rip-roarin' yarns in *Rawhide Kid* #27 (April 1962)! By this point in Atlas/Marvel's history, editor/scripster Stan Lee had the western genre down cold, with smooth as silk wordsmithing that echoed the TV shows of

nightly television that in those days could include programs like *Rawhide*, *Gunsmoke*, *Wanted Dead or Alive*, or any of a dozen series that were playing on the three national broadcasting stations any day of the week. Likewise, penciler Jack Kirby must have had his TV set on while working those long hours at the drawing board, and what he was watching was most likely... you guessed it! Westerns. How else to explain the bewildering costuming he gave to the numerous characters in his westerns, many of which could be found on the Hallelujah Trail or the streets of Dodge? Both men's influences were clearly on display in this issue's lead-off tale, "When Six-Guns Roar", as western "superhero" Rawhide Kid joins a cow-punching outfit, only to be hazed for his small size. Later though, when the ranch is attacked by outlaws, he swings into action and saves the day. In doing it, Kirby often utilized series of small panels to show hand-to-hand fighting in a step-by-step fashion, much as he'd later use in fights between the likes of Captain America and Batroc. He does the same thing



ARTIST JACK KIRBY WAS NO STRANGER TO WESTERNS. EARLIER IN THE 1950S, HE'D TAKEN HIS IDEA OF KID GANGS BACK IN TIME FOR BOYS' RANCH AND LATER DID BULLSEYE FOR MAINLINE. BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL JOINING ATLAS/MARVEL AND TEAMING WITH SCRIPTER STAN LEE THAT KIRBY'S PENCHANT FOR WESTERNS REALLY KICKED IN TO HELP CREATE SOME OF THE MOST EXCITING ENTRIES IN THE GENRE EVER!

in the issue's second story, "The Girl, the Gunman, and the Apaches" as the Kid goes *mano-a-mano* with an Indian brave to save a woman from captivity. Lee, however, in his best lone wolf fashion, manages to have the Kid avoid romantic entanglement by brushing off the girl's obvious interest, due to his being undeserving of her love. It was the one thing these great Lee/Kirby tales failed to share with the success of Marvel's up-and-coming superhero books: their lack of continuity and regular supporting cast. Although Lee would eventually bring those elements to the westerns, particularly for the *Two-Gun Kid*, the loss of Kirby (and even Don Heck, who penciled one of the other stories this ish) would undercut those efforts and condemn Marvel's westerns to eventual irrelevance.

Love Romances #99

"The Teenager and the Truck Driver!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
 "In My Sister's Shadow"; Stan Lee (script?); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
 "Fun Girl"; Stan Lee (script?); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

"Don't Break My Heart"; Stan Lee (script?); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

If any reader paying attention at the time thought that Jack Kirby only drew westerns or monsters (or maybe even superheroes), this issue of *Love Romances* #99 (May 1962) would have set them right! Of course, any fan worth his salt would have been familiar with Kirby's long career that stretched back to the dawn of the Golden Age, and so would have known that the artist was no stranger to more reality-based stories, including those found in romance comics. It was a genre he helped translate from pulp fiction to comics, along with then-partner Joe Simon. Of course,

in the 1950s, those early romantic efforts were far more involved plot-wise and character-wise than those of later years, making them eminently readable even decades later. Unfortunately, by the early 1960s, with the advent of the Comics Code Authority, that could not be said with the same assurance. After the imposition of the Code, publishers became more skittish on all fronts, including affairs of the heart. Thus, romance comics were watered down considerably, leaving only the bare bones of plots that had long since become familiar to readers. Nevertheless, writers like Stan Lee adapted and managed to crank out hundreds of stories of broken hearts, misunderstandings, and petty jealousies that were entertaining, and that still captured the interest of youthful readers with their naive dreams of romantic love—which brings us to *Love Romances* #99, which bears all the hallmarks of a rush job. At



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LOVE ROMANCES #9, PAGE 5: HAVING INVENTED THE ROMANCE COMIC GENRE EARLIER IN THE 1950S, ARTIST JACK KIRBY WAS NO STRANGER TO THE SUBJECT. IN THE NATURE OF A LAST MINUTE FILL IN JOB, KIRBY'S ART HERE IS RATHER SPARSE (AS IS STAN LEE'S SCRIPT AND VINCE COLLETTA'S INKS). MARVEL WOULD SOON MOVE ON FROM STRAIGHT ROMANCE BOOKS TO SOMETHING AKIN TO DRAMADY WITH ITS PATSY AND HEDY AND MILLIE THE MODEL TITLES.

Vince Colletta



Although artist and inker Vince Colletta became a controversial figure in later years when fans became more familiar with original art, in his heyday, he was celebrated not only as one of penciler Jack Kirby's greatest embellishers, but also as the go to man who could make many lesser artists look better.

Colletta learned his craft at the New Jersey Academy of Fine Arts before crashing the comics industry at Better Publications.

There, and elsewhere, he earned a reputation for being able to draw attractive females on various romance titles that swamped the magazine racks at the time. His facility with the female form gave him entry to Marvel Comics, then referred to as Atlas, where he continued to hone his penciling and inking skills on the company's many romance titles. When Atlas imploded in the mid-1950s, Colletta freelanced with DC before returning to the Atlas fold where giant monsters roamed.

It's not known what Colletta's first inking job over artist Jack Kirby's pencils was, but it could have been over Kirby's many western stories he was cranking out in those years (in addition to giant monsters!) What is known, is that Colletta inked a handful of beautiful *Daredevil* covers over Kirby pencils before being assigned to the "Tales of Asgard" back up feature in *Journey Into Mystery*. There, he provided mouth watering inks over Kirby's strong pencils, a

perfect fit that unfortunately, didn't extend to his work on Kirby's *Fantastic Four* resulting in his being replaced there by Joe Sinnott and being assigned instead to Kirby's regular *Thor* strip. There, his fine line style, combined with frequent cross hatching, perfectly captured the old world feel of the *Thor* feature, just in time for the strip to enter its grandiose phase. It was there too that the controversy began when it was latterly discovered by fans that Colletta began to cut too many corners while inking Kirby, frequently simplifying the artist's finished work or eliminating elements of it completely.

Meanwhile, Colletta continued to ink many other artists and earning editors' esteem by getting rush jobs done to make deadlines. Still, Colletta's style was such that it aided immensely in making lesser artists than Kirby look good.

In 1970, Colletta moved to DC where he later served as art director. He arrived just in time to again ink Kirby after that artist had also left Marvel to begin his "Fourth World" titles at DC. For the first few issues of such books as *New Gods* and *Forever People*, Colletta's style gave Kirby's art a Marvel sheen but due to his penchant for cutting corners, he was soon removed from the books.

Colletta continued to work as an inker at DC and freelanced for many years after.



this point in his career with the nascent Marvel comics, Kirby had nothing to do with the company's romance titles, which were left to such stalwarts as Al Hartley and Vince Colletta. But suddenly, amid his Rawhide Kid, monster books, *Fantastic Four* #4, and *Incredible Hulk* #1, he appears here, penciling four out of four stories. Obviously, the artist must have been rushed for time, and it shows here with its sparse artwork—but this being Kirby, it was all still visually fun to look at. Stan Lee signed his name to the first story, "The Teen-Ager and the Truck Driver," but not the others, so it might be interpreted that he only scribed this first tale. But who knows? He could very well have signed the first story and felt no need to repeat the credit in the rest. After all, Kirby is also only credited in the first story, but not the following which he obviously drew.

Be that as it may, Lee delivers a by now classic tale of how Pamela Drake falls in love with a truck driver whom her rich father forbids her to see again. Of course, there's a misunderstanding until the father has his comeuppance at the end and learns to judge people by the content of their character and not their station in life. Kirby starts things off with a nice splash page before settling down for a few fairly static pages, until the final three panels showing a door in the process of closing on the young couple as they embrace beyond the reader's sight. The artist pulls off the same multi-panel trick at

the end of "Fun Girl" as a train slowly recedes into the background, leaving the foreground figure of Barbara Jones weeping after being left behind by her college-bound friends. Kirby is aided and abetted by the inks of romance artist supreme Vince Colletta, who will (in-)famously team with Kirby months later for a celebrated run on the *Mighty Thor*. But if readers liked Kirby in this romantic offshoot, they'd have to be satisfied with these four stories, because it would be a loong time before the artist revisited Lonesome Town again—in fact, not till 1970 when, after leaving Marvel, he'd produce the aborted *Soul Love* and *True Divorce Cases* projects for DC.



Gunsmoke Western #70

"When An Outlaw Escapes!"; Stan Lee (script);

Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

"The Return of Darrow, the Gunfighter!";

Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"Moose Mangum, the Ambusher!"; Stan Lee (script);

Paul Reinman (pencils/inks)

"The Montana Kid!"; Stan Lee (script);

Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Gunsmoke Western #70 (May 1962) might start off with an arresting Kirby-drawn cover and a brilliant coloring job by Stan Goldberg, but its lead feature was handled by regular Kid Colt penciler Jack Keller. Far from the most exciting artist in Marvel's stable, Keller was self-taught and had been in the business since the Golden Age. What he lacked in creativity,

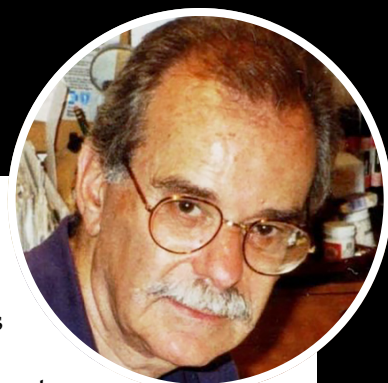


EXTINCTION LOOMED FOR THE INDUSTRY'S LOVE FACTORY: ROMANCE COMICS WOULD BE AN EARLY CASUALTY AFTER THE RISE OF THE SUPERHEROES (FOLLOWED BY WESTERNS AND WAR). WAS THEIR END HASTENED AFTER EDITOR STAN LEE RAIDED RIVAL DC'S BENCH FOR ARTISTS LIKE JOHN ROMITA, GENE COLAN, AND WERNER ROTH? MAYBE!

though, he made up for in dependability, perhaps the most prized quality any artist could provide a publisher. For that reason, he owned the Kid Colt feature, remaining on it for over a dozen years from 1953-on. Another of Marvel's below-the-radar artists was Paul Reinman, who turns in a decent job for "Moose Mangum, the Ambusher." Also self-taught, Reinman fled the Nazis in 1934 and made his way into the comic book industry during the 1940s. He soon found himself at Atlas as a penciler, but it was as an inker that he'd be known during Marvel's early years and years of consolidation, working mostly over Kirby. Don

Heck provides the issue's last story, "The Montana Kid," both penciling and inking a beautifully rendered story by scribe Stan Lee. But as usual with Marvel's westerns, it was those stories penciled by Jack Kirby that stood head and shoulders above the rest, and so it happens again here with "The Return of Darrow, the Gunfighter." Lee tells the tale of gunfighter Davy Darrow who returns to town after bad guy Clugg stole his land, in the process killing his father. But Darrow refuses to rise to Clugg's challenge and is branded a coward. Of course, his accusers are wrong. It was a tale with not much action, but plenty of drama that

Stan Goldberg



All hail Stan Goldberg, genius of the color wheel! Unsung hero of the early years and years of consolidation of Marvel Comics! He took Marvel from the era of dull greens, grays, and browns to vibrant, gradient color. Together with the company's penchant for filling its covers with the prominent figures of its new superheroes, Goldberg's colors made Marvel's titles stand out on crowded magazine racks. Also, Goldberg's use of solid background colors, especially yellows and pinks, helped figures drawn by the likes of Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko literally pop off the printed page.

But that's not all! Goldberg was also an accomplished penciler, albeit with a style more suited to teen humor than superheroics. It all started at the School of Industrial Art; then, still a teenager, Goldberg began working for Atlas, precursor to Marvel Comics, where he soon became the coloring department manager. It was in that capacity that he colored the pre-hero monster and western books and soon thereafter, the new, rising superhero titles. It was he who gave Spider-Man, Hulk, the Fantastic Four, and others the color schemes now familiar to millions.

During the 1950s, Goldberg attended the School of Visual Arts and diversified by drawing such teen humor features as those for Patsy Walker and Millie the Model. Eventually, he began to script them as well.

In the late 1960s, Goldberg left Marvel to devote himself full time drawing for Archie Comics. His association with Archie lasted nearly forty years and included drawing many key books including Archie's celebrated team up with twilight era hero the Punisher as well as celebratory issues of Archie featuring the eponymous teenager wedding Veronica and/or Betty.

But it was his association with Marvel that will remain Goldberg's lasting legacy. Not only did he have an unerring eye for color coordination, but his special ability to gradate colors on the covers so that deep purples for instance, would slowly merge into lighter blues, created a semblance of three dimensionality. It all made for a distinctive look that set Marvel's product apart from the competition and no doubt contributed the company's swift rise in popularity.

Kirby has no trouble keeping interesting, especially with Dick Ayers once again on the inks. Compared to Kirby's concurrent effort on *Fantastic Four* #4, the art here is sharp and detailed with nary a panel with empty backgrounds—a contrast to the still skimpy looking art on the *FF*. (Which, along with the new *Hulk* feature, were enigmatically advertised this issue with mysterious scrawls such as “The Hulk is coming!” hand-lettered at the top or bottom of some pages.) For art watchers, Marvel's westerns were still the place to be, as the new superheroes were still trying to prove themselves. In fact, sales numbers on *FF* #1 were likely only then reaching publisher Martin Goodman's desk. What would they indicate? Only upcoming months would tell!

Journey Into Mystery #80

“Won't You Step Into My Parlor?”; Stan Lee (script);

Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

“Propaganda”; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils);

Dick Ayers (inks)

“I Spent the Night In a Haunted House”;

Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

“For the Birds”; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

As the company's monster books began winding down toward mostly superhero content (though no one knew it at the time), *Journey Into Mystery* #80 (May 1962) was a by now typical powerhouse presentation featuring not only the scripting of editor Stan Lee, but all three members of the artistic triumvirate that would jump start the Marvel Age of Comics. The issue is led off with a double whammy by penciler Jack Kirby and

inker Dick Ayers beginning with "Won't You Step Into My Parlor," a story of deliberate misperception in which a businessman sets a trap for a rival by making him think he's been shrunk to the size of a mouse. Interestingly, this plot would be revived by Lee for later issues of Spider-Man when Mysterio tries the same gambit. Meanwhile, Kirby's use of forced perspective here would serve him well when he helped launch the Ant-Man feature a few months down the road. The second story is a slight affair about commie agents provocateurs threatening an African tribe only to have the tables turned on them. Don Heck both pencils and inks "I Spent a Night in a Haunted House," a humorous tale that pokes gentle fun at readers by having a boy named Tom mock other kids for wasting their time reading such comics as *Journey Into Mystery!* Seeking to prove that there is such a thing as the supernatural, the kids dare Tom to spend the night in a haunted house. He takes up the challenge and returns the next day to report seeing nothing out of the ordinary. That's when the kids lower the boom and hand him a newspaper that states the house itself was the ghost. Having learned his lesson, Tom becomes an avid reader of Marvel's monster comics! The issue's final entry is another fantasy by Lee and Steve Ditko involving an intergalactic poacher who ends up marooned on an alien planet after the bird he was hunting mistakes his ship for one of its eggs and crushes it. Lee must have considered his teaming with Ditko something special because he spotlighted it on the cover



("Also, another off-beat gem by Lee and Ditko!") something he never did with Kirby or Heck. In fact, he felt so strongly about his partnership with Ditko that he dedicated the whole of *Amazing Adult Fantasy* to their collaborations. The newly re-titled *Amazing Fantasy* was duly advertised at the conclusion of "For the Birds" with Lee telling fans: "Like this type of story? Then don't miss *Amazing Adult Fantasy* comics...on sale now!"



WON'T YOU STEP INTO MY PARLOR...???

JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #80, PAGE 1: "LIKE THIS TYPE OF STORY?" ASKS EDITOR STAN LEE AT THE END OF THIS ISSUE'S FINAL TALE. HE WAS PITCHING FOR THE NEW AMAZING ADULT FANTASY TITLE, BUT IT WAS IRONIC IN THAT READERS WHO DID LIKE THESE KINDS OF TALES WERE DOOMED TO DISAPPOINTMENT AS SUPERHEROES WOULD SOON BE REPLACING THEM! IN FACT, IN A MERE THREE ISSUES HENCE, THE NEW THOR FEATURE WOULD BEGIN CROWDING OUT THE FANTASY STORIES.

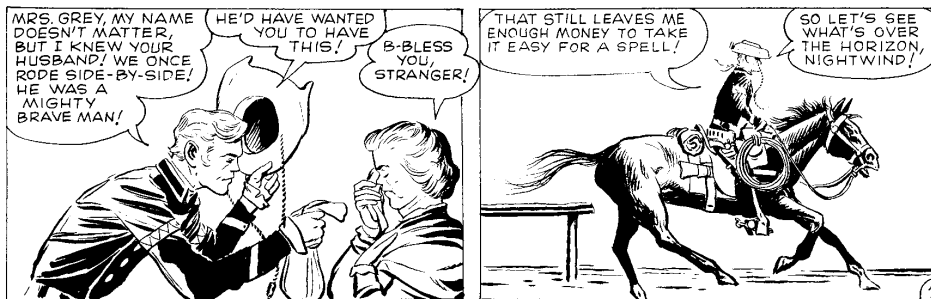
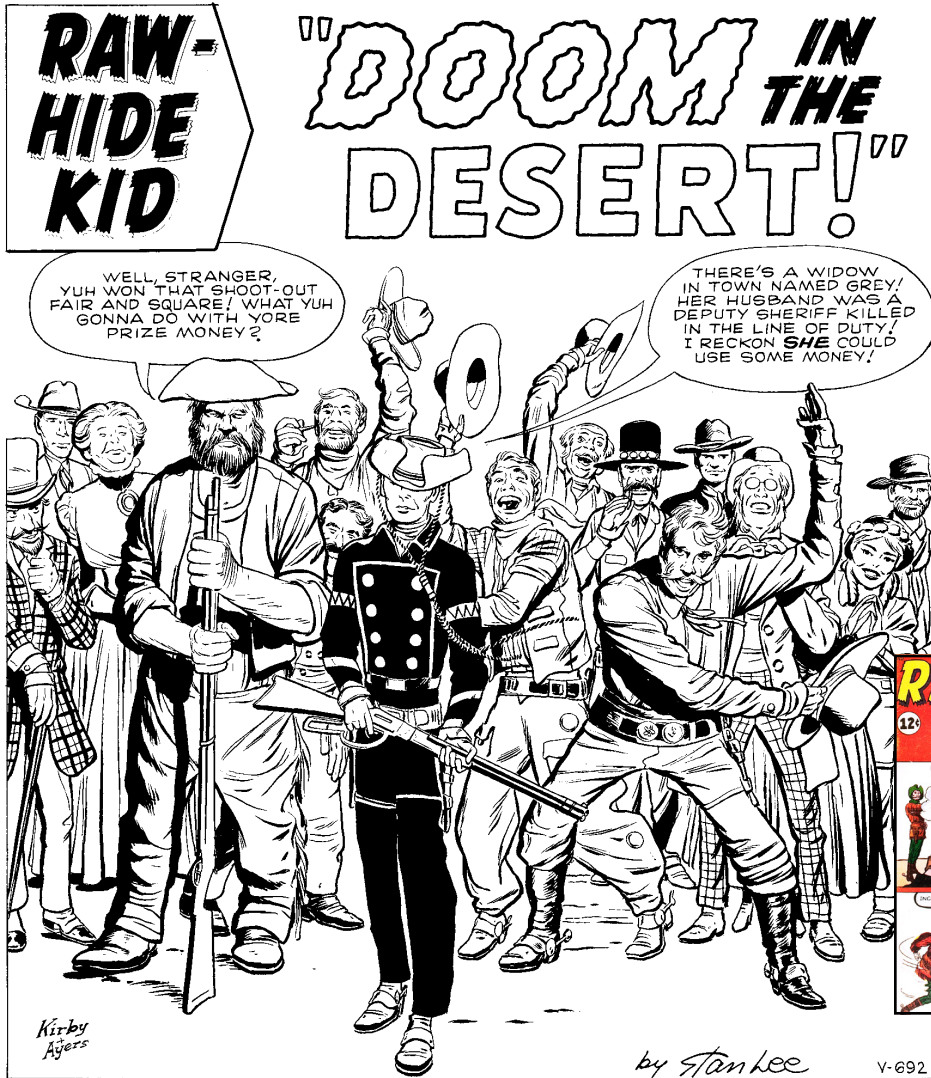
Rawhide Kid #28

"Doom in the Desert!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Guns of Jasper Jelko!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Silent Gunman"; Stan Lee (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

"When Gunslingers Get Mad!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)



RAWHIDE KID #28, PAGE 1: ARTIST JACK KIRBY DOESN'T STINT ON THE ACTION IN THIS OPENING SPLASH. NOTE THE DETAIL BOTH IN COSTUMING AND BODY LANGUAGE OF THE CROWD HOOTING AND HOLLERING BEHIND THE KID! CLEARLY, THE KING HAD SEEN HIS SHARE OF TV WESTERNS!

It was another cornucopia of art in *Rawhide Kid* #28 (June 1962) as Jack Kirby provides the pencils for three out of four Stan Lee scripted stories and Dick Ayers inks. How long could comics fans' luck hold out? Luckily, they had no idea this early on how Marvel's new superheroes would catch on, otherwise they might have been somewhat depressed when they realized that these wonderfully scripted and penciled gems were due to come to an end in mere months. Sure, the westerns would go on. The various Kids would continue to oppose injustice on the high plains, but the magic would leave them along with Kirby and Don Heck. Soon enough, Jack Keller and Dick Ayers mostly would take over on the art and though Lee himself would continue to provide the scripts, the new artists' more pedantic styles would make sure that the stories



wouldn't exactly catch fire (even after Lee tried to import elements such as characterization and costumed villains that were proving successful with the new superheroes). But that was in the future. For now,

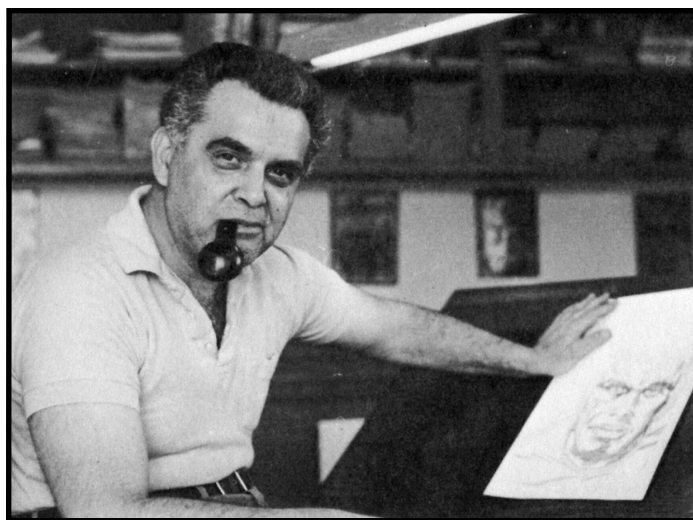
readers had the Kirby/Ayers team at the top of their games (namely penciling and inking respectively). Not convinced? Then take a gander at the opening splash page to "Doom in the Desert" where Kirby crams sixteen individually distinctive characters onto a single page with the Rawhide Kid front and center. And the rest of this rootin' tootin' yarn ain't bad either, as the Kid encounters desperado Luke Gorby. For Gorby's sister's sake, he refrains from shooting

the outlaw but later, Gorby escapes into the desert where he's lost and presumed dead in a sandstorm. "Perhaps it's better this way," muses the sister. "He'll die as he lived and no one will care. No one will remember, except me." "In time, you too will forget," replies the Kid. "For a man such as Luke leaves nothing behind to remember, nothing except sorrow and the emptiness of a wasted life!" In contrast, "The Guns of Jasper Jelko" was a more straightforward actioner. Jelko, a carny sharpshooter, fancies himself the best until he runs into the Kid. But the Kid's slight frame causes people to underestimate him and locals joke that only one person could have outshot Jelko and the stranger looked nothing like Annie Oakley! Finally, Kirby just lets out all the stops with "When Gunslingers Get Mad" as the Kid gets riled by local bullies making fun of him for ordering milk in a bar. Yeah, it'd be a cryin' shame on the day Kirby retreated permanently from Marvel's westerns, the nigh forgotten precursors to its overshadowing superheroes.

Tales of Suspense #30

"The Ghost Rode a Roller Coaster!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Creature From Krangro!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Man Who Couldn't Grow Old!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
"Inside the Fallout Shelter"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Jack Kirby does it again (in conjunction with inking partner Dick Ayers) turning one of plotter Stan Lee's ironic concoctions into gold with a nicely laid out lead story for *Tales of Suspense* #30 (June 1962). But within those panels, the artist and inker don't exactly stint on the artwork that only seems to falter on the last page when the heartless owner of the amusement park in "The Ghost Rode a Roller Coaster" takes his last ride. And what was it about Kirby's covers for all of Marvel's monster/fantasy books? This issue's cover is another eye catcher as the haunted roller coaster car looms so high over the world below that the reader can see the curvature of the Earth! By contrast, DC's often goofy covers on their own mystery books looked staid and artificial (even when they were grey toned). Marvel's, and more specifically, Kirby's, with their often-muted colors, seemed more visceral, depressing, and in your face. Be that as it may, the Lee/Kirby/Ayers team were at it again for the issue's second tale, "The Creature From Krangro!" Scripted by Larry Lieber (as was the first



ARTIST JACK KIRBY AT HIS DRAWING TABLE: THE KING OF COMICS LONG BEFORE HE WAS OFFICIALLY CROWNED BY STAN LEE! NOTE THE SHELVES BEHIND HIM. WERE THOSE STACKS OF MAGAZINES FOR REFERENCE OR WERE THEY COMPLIMENTARY ISSUES OF THE THOUSANDS OF COMICS HE'D DRAWN IN HIS LONG CAREER?

story), the tale tells of a hapless alien general who captures a trio of humans and attempts to have them cringe in fear before his king. He fails due to the fact that the "humans" he paralyzed were actually statues but that's okay. The aliens can't tell the difference and assume that they'll never be able to defeat such a stiff-necked people and give up their plans of conquest. Although the Kirby/Ayers team do a nice job here, the standout is the splash page with its looming figure of the alien general symbolically striding across the globe! In "The Man Who Couldn't Grow Old," penciler/inker Don Heck previews what his upcoming assignment on the new Iron Man feature might look like in a tale located in ancient Egypt. Another five-page fantasy story by Lee and Steve Ditko winds up this perfect ish with a *Twilight Zone*-ish tale about a man who locks himself inside a bomb shelter only to discover that he has no can opener for the canned goods he intended to use while waiting for the Earth to become livable again. Hoo boy!

Gunsmoke Western #71

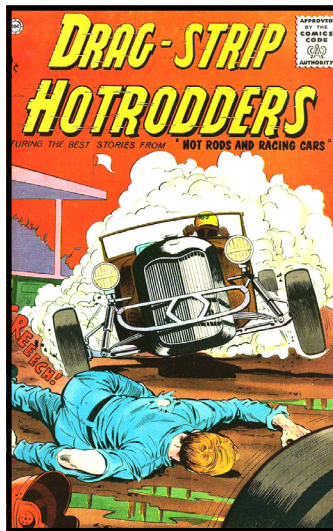
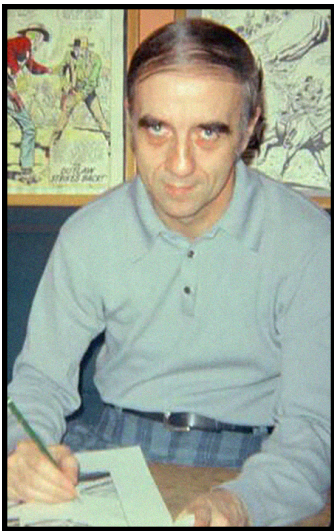
"The Rage of Billy the Kid!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)
"The Life and Death of Ape Cantrell!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Night Raiders!"; Stan Lee (script); Paul Reinman (pencils/inks)
"A Hiding Place For Hondo!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

As usual, the lead off story in *Gunsmoke Western* #71 (July 1962) is scripted by Stan Lee and penciled and inked by Jack Keller. Nothing really to write home about here except its use of the historical Billy the Kid as the villain. As the months would go on, Lee would introduce various famous western outlaws as villains in his stories using them more or less interchangeably with villains that slowly became as “super” as his western heroes, i.e. they began to wear costumes of sorts or displayed some fantastic power. In the case of the historical bad guys such as Billy the Kid, their fame was enough to lift them into the ranks of memorable arch villains. Of course, in introducing them, Lee had little concern for factual accuracy, the most famous incident being that of using the Alamo in a Two-Gun Kid story that was wildly out of its time. He was far better off sticking to his own invented western cosmology including the morality tale he does this ish with penciler Jack Kirby, “The Life and Death of Ape Cantrell.” Here, Ape Cantrell is tired of being made fun of due to his appearance. He learns to shoot and in his first and last day as a gunfighter, he learns that a local serving girl has admired him all along. With the girl’s love to bolster him, he quits the life of a gunfighter. “And thus ended the short life of Ape Cantrell, gunfighter. And thus began the long, happy life of Mr. Cantrell, decent citizen and husband. Thanks

to the woman who taught him that there is a far more important beauty than the one we see on the surface. There is the beauty of the soul and in that, every man can be rich!” The Don Heck penciled and inked story that winds up this ish, “A Hiding Place For Hondo,” is no less sermonistic as Hondo makes off with a thousand dollars in gold dust. But as he soon realizes, he can’t spend it without identifying himself as the thief. Eventually, hungry, wounded, and tired, he’s captured and winds up behind bars. “Ten years of freedom swapped for a bag of yellow dust. Ten long years to realize what a bad bargain he had made with fate!” For the money, Marvel’s westerns still carried a punch. Well written by the experienced Lee and often drawn by Marvel’s stable of top talent, the books could still hold their figurative heads up against the upstart superhero line. But how long could it last? Answer: quite a while! In fact, Lee and Kirby weren’t done with westerns, not by a long shot as they’d soon introduce an all-new character who’d be strongly influenced by what the pair were slowly beginning to realize worked with their superheroes.

Tales of Suspense #31

“The Monster in the Iron Mask!”; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 “The Man Who Found Shangri-La!”; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 “The Crackpot!”; Stan Lee (script); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
 “The Missing Link!”; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)



Was it an Iron Man prototype? A Shellhead precursor? It was neither. Just “The Monster in the Iron Mask!” It was the lead feature in *Tales of Suspense* #31 (July 1962) in which plotter Stan Lee has Larry Lieber script the rather doubtful tale of an alien come to conquer Earth who appears to be completely invulnerable. The only thing that can stop him, he helpfully tells the Earthmen, is gas but against that possibility, he wears an iron mask. Unfortunately for him, a magician guesses the truth and urges the authorities to use gas anyway. It works! Turns out not only was the mask the alien’s real face, but that he pointed out gas on purpose in an attempt at misdirection. Were the twists Lee could come up with for these giant monster stories endless or what? Meanwhile, the art team of Jack Kirby and Dick Ayers were still on the job as penciler and inker respectively just as they were on the issue’s second story, “The Man Who Found Shangri-La.” Nicely rendered by Kirby, the tale is a slight one about two brothers, one good, one evil,

UNSUNG HERO...OF MARVEL'S WESTERNS ANYWAY. ARTIST JACK KELLER'S STYLE WOULD NEVER SET THE WORLD ON FIRE, BUT EDITOR STAN LEE APPRECIATED HIS WORK ON WESTERNS WHERE HE DREW THE KID COLT FEATURE FOR OVER A DECADE. WHEN MARVEL'S WESTERNS BEGAN TO WANE, KELLER SUCCESSFULLY SHIFTED GEARS AND BEGAN A LONG ASSOCIATION WITH CHARLTON COMICS DRAWING FOR THEIR LINE OF HOT ROD COMICS. A GENRE THEY HAD ALL TO THEMSELVES!

who find Shangri-La but once there, the evil brother sees only squalor and leaves while the good brother sees the reality, paradise. As penciler and inker, Don Heck stars on "The Crackpot" while Steve Ditko provides the same services on the issue's last story "The Missing Link!" The Lee scripted tale involves the discovery of an ape-like missing link that turns out to be a man from the future after the race has devolved following atomic war! Slight as they were, these monster/fantasy tales continued to entertain and were surely missed by many when they finally yielded to the more popular superheroes. Marvel would return to weird stories later in the twilight years but by then the particular magic of this pre-hero era would be gone, never to be recaptured save in the many reprint titles with which the company flooded the comics racks through the 1970s.

Rawhide Kid #29

"The Trail of Apache Joe!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "The Little Man Laughs Last!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "Yak Yancy, the Man Who Treed a Town"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)
 "The Fallen Hero!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Even as Marvel's superhero features were beginning to take root, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's best work was still to be found among the company's western titles, particularly the Rawhide Kid. In fact, the same month as *Rawhide Kid* #29 (Aug 1962) came out, Marvel introduced Spider-Man in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 and Thor in *Journey Into Mystery* #83 and the following month, *Fantastic Four* #6 would be released along with *Incredible Hulk* #3 and the debut of Ant-Man in *Tales to Astonish* #35. It was clear that the superheroes were on the rise, catching a wave of interest from readers who had been too young to remember their previous revival in the 1950s let alone their Golden Age incarnations from the 1940s. It was all new to them as opposed to the westerns, a genre that had been around in comics since the industry's inception. And so far, readers were showing no sign of abandoning them outright for the new superheroes. Thus, Lee and Kirby as well as the other two Marvel stalwarts, Don Heck and Dick Ayers, continued to turn out material. But like the superhero stuff, the main excitement would be generated by those stories penciled by Kirby and inked by Dick Ayers. Need proof? Then just take a gander at the three stories this ish that the team produced beginning with "The Trail of Apache



WAR HERO AUDIE MURPHY (SEEN AT RIGHT) BECAME A WESTERN FILM STAR IN THE 1950S AND MAY HAVE BEEN THE INSPIRATION FOR LEE AND KIRBY'S FREQUENT DESCRIPTION OF THE RAWHIDE KID AS A "LITTLE GUY" AS IN "THE LITTLE MAN LAUGHS LAST" IN RAWHIDE KID #29.

Joe!" Kirby opens it up with a no holds barred splash page crowded with figures before moving on to a neat six panel page 2 grid that builds up tension and climaxes in the Kid's arm-wrestling contest with the local bully done in triptych style. Later, offered a pardon, the Kid agrees to hunt for the outlaw Apache Joe. After some exciting Kirby action, he captures the crook, but wouldn't you know it? When he takes him in, he discovers that the man who offered him the pardon died and left nothing in writing to prove what he'd promised. So the Kid once more hits the outlaw trail. Kirby does it again for "The Little Guy Laughs Last," a story built around nothing more than two bruisers who find leaning on the smaller figure of the Kid the height of entertainment. They quickly learn the error of their ways when the stagecoach is held up and it's the Kid who overcomes the crooks and the bruisers who ended up crawling in fear of them. Still, the Kid wasn't without fear himself as he hightails it out of there after receiving a thank you kiss from the lady who'd been riding in the stage with him! Even Dick Ayers managed to turn out a decent story with "Yak Yancy, The Man Who Treed a Town." Penciling and inking, Ayers seems to have displayed far more verve here than for any of the Torch stories he'd do some months down the line in *Strange Tales*. Finally, it's Lee/Kirby/Ayers again for the last story, "The Fallen Hero," in which the Kid discourages a boy's hero worship



BY 1962, WESTERNS STILL RULED THE ROOST ON TELEVISION AND WERE RIDING HIGH ON THE BIG SCREEN WITH THE RELEASE OF INSTANT CLASSICS SUCH AS *RIDE THE HIGH COUNTRY*, *LONELY ARE THE BRAVE*, AND *THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALENCE!*

of him by acting the coward and letting the boy's father seemingly beat him up and chase him off. But the father wasn't fooled: "Only a man would do what the Kid did," thinks the father. "Would purposely lose a fight to help a man keep the love of his son." Yup, the superhero features still had a ways to go before they could catch up to the overall quality of the westerns. But that time was coming quickly!

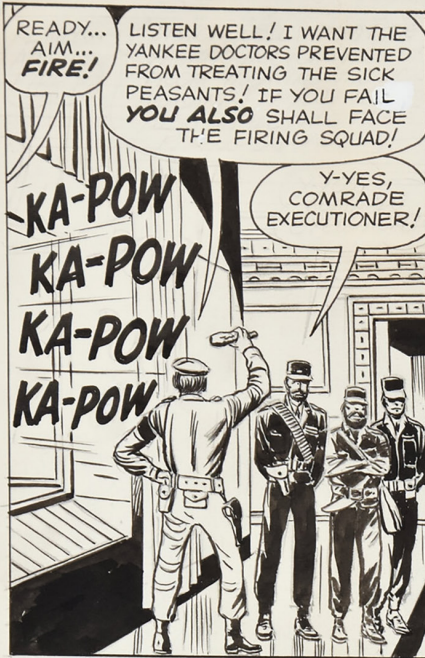
Fantastic Four #6

"Captives of the Deadly Duo!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

With most of the Fantastic Four's basic tenets settled with the first five issues, it seemed time for scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby to fill in the gaps and begin building on the foundation they'd established. First off, *Fantastic Four* #6 (Sept. 1962) finally gave a name to the group's skyscraper headquarters: the Baxter Building! Next, they introduced the Yancy Street Gang. (Well, not in the flesh; and not much more of them beyond a hand or arm would ever be seen in the future. They were only mentioned here as the Torch reads from one of their taunting letters. The never-seen gang would remain a thorn in the Thing's side for years) Finally, Lee or Kirby came up with an all-purpose explanation for why the FF's uniforms could survive the use of their powers without falling apart: unstable molecules! In fact,

so useful would this Reed Richards invention be that other heroes such as Ant-Man would rely on it for their own use. Here, unstable molecules are mentioned as the reason why the FF don't need anything but a helmet in order to survive in space! (The invention of unstable molecules alone would have been enough to finance the FF's operations indefinitely, thus explaining how the team could afford the constant repair of their headquarters, not to mention Reed's ongoing research projects.) On other formative fronts, Kirby redesigned Dr. Doom's armor/costume from its first appearance last ish, something he'd continue to tweak as the years went on, but it had essentially reached its final form here. Finally, the creative team added a dash of romance to the book. Even as they abandoned an earlier flirtation with a rivalry between Ben Grimm and Reed Richards over Sue Storm's affections, they created a new one between Reed and the Sub-Mariner. This romantic triangle would be allowed to simmer over the next two years until coming to a boil in issue #27. Meanwhile, Lee and Kirby began to hint of a broader Marvel Universe as they present the first team-up of supervillains with Doom and Subby joining forces to defeat the FF. And even as that possibility may have begun to dawn in the minds of early readers, the characters also blurred the line between hero and villain, a new element that would become a Marvel hallmark. With their lives beholden to the Sub-Mariner, the Thing wonders "I still don't know if I'd shake his hand or try to smash him." "Oh, he isn't our enemy," counters Sue. "I just know it. He's so full of pain and bitterness that it blinds his better instincts. Sub-Mariner needs time, time to heal." While the existing titles in the company's superhero lineup (including those of the Hulk and the soon to be added Thor, Ant-Man, and Spider-Man) were not yet plainly interconnected, that time would come soon. But here was its earliest intimation with the first team-up of villains who had only appeared separately before. If Doom and Sub-Mariner occupied the same world, then how much of stretch was it to believe that the company's other heroes might also...?

(OPPOSITE PAGE) JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #84, PAGE 8: IN ONLY HIS SECOND APPEARANCE, THOR TOOK HIS TURN TO CONFRONT "THE EXECUTIONER," A TYPICAL LATIN STRONG MAN USING COMMUNISM AS COVER FOR HIS BRUTAL REGIME. IN LINE WITH THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY, PENCILER JACK KIRBY IS SURE TO LEAVE THE BRUTAL EXECUTION BY FIRING SQUAD OF HAPLESS CITIZENS OFF PANEL BEFORE SHOWING THE SMOKING GUNS OF THE FIRING SQUAD IN PANEL 2.



READY... AIM... **FIRE!**

LISTEN WELL! I WANT THE YANKEE DOCTORS PREVENTED FROM TREATING THE SICK PEASANTS! IF YOU FAIL **YOU ALSO SHALL FACE THE FIRING SQUAD!**

**KA-POW
KA-POW
KA-POW
KA-POW**

Y-YES, COMRADE EXECUTIONER!



COMRADE-- WORD HAS JUST ARRIVED! THE YANKEES HAVE LANDED!

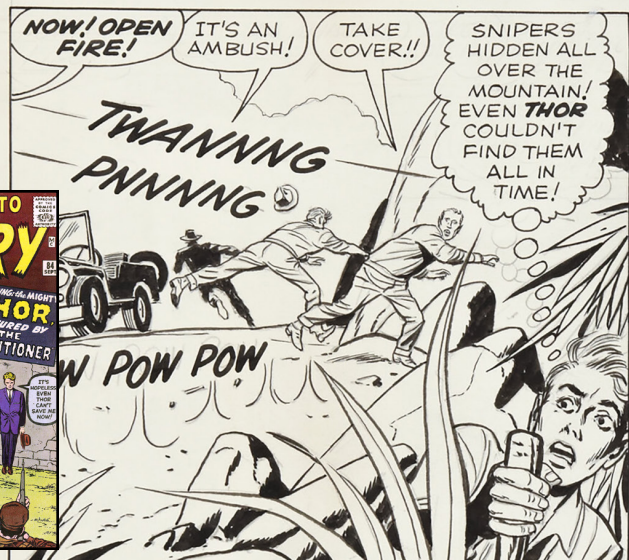
FEAR NOT! WE WILL DRIVE THEM BACK BEFORE THEY CAN CURE ANYONE!

DO NOT DARE FAIL!!



LATER... **LOOK! THE YANKEES ARE COMING THROUGH THE PASS!**

HOLD YOUR FIRE... WAIT... WAIT...



NOW! OPEN FIRE!

IT'S AN AMBUSH!

TAKE COVER!!

SNIPERS HIDDEN ALL OVER THE MOUNTAIN! EVEN THOR COULDN'T FIND THEM ALL IN TIME!

**TWANNING
PNNING**

POW POW



THERE'S ONLY ONE THING TO DO-- CREATE A **THUNDERSTORM!!** *

**THUD
THUD**

NOTE: WHEN THE ANCIENT CANE IS STAMPED TWICE, IT CREATES THE WIND, RAIN, LIGHTNING AND THUNDER... THE SYMBOLS OF MIGHTY THOR! *



IT'S STARTING! IT'S BUILDING UP! COME, YOU FURIES-- **COME!!**



THE WIND HOWLS... THE THUNDER ROARS... THE LIGHTNING FLASHES ...THE MOUNTING STORM RAGES ON AND ON...

IT'S RAINING SO HARD, I CANNOT SEE THE YANKEES!

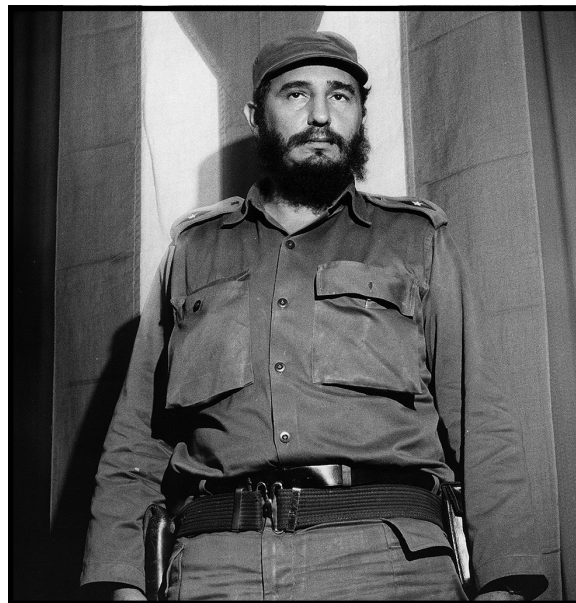
I-I CAN'T SEE **ANYTHING!**

Journey Into Mystery #84

"The Mighty Thor vs. The Executioner"; Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

As opposed to his encounter with the Stone Men from Saturn in his first appearance last ish, Thor's second outing in *Journey Into Mystery* #84 (Sept. 1962) plunges him directly into the heart of human affairs as he tackles Communist revolutionaries in a Central American nation called San Diablo. At the time, the free world, headed by the United States, was in the midst of a Cold War with the Soviet Union that had been getting colder ever since the end of World War II. In fact, it was about to enter the real deep freeze only a few months after the release of this issue as the US found itself amid the Cuban Missile Crisis. Revolutionary leader Fidel Castro had overthrown the Cuban government in 1959 and declared its replacement a Communist one. Unable to abide a Communist government so close to its shores, the US planned a counter revolution that met failure in 1961 with the Bay of Pigs. Fearful following the attempted coup, Castro then invited a Soviet presence on the island including positioning of nuclear missiles there that could strike the US mainland. Discovering the missiles via U2 overflights, the United States demanded their removal and announced a blockade of Cuba until they were. A tense standoff resulted until the Soviets relented and agreed to remove the missiles. It was within the context of these events that *JIM* #84 is to be understood. Unlike DC, almost from its inception, the Marvel superhero universe existed in the real world, or as close to the real world as superhero comics could get and so Communist based bad guys, as they were in real life, became a natural source of villainy. Thus, this issue, Cuba was the obvious inspiration for the fictitious San Diablo and its leader, the Executioner, a stand in for Castro. (But not later Thor villain, the Executioner, who was a fellow Asgardian) Like the

organization Doctors Without Borders, founded in 1971, Dr. Don Blake volunteers for a medical mission to San Diablo to help treat the people caught between warring forces. Jealous of any outside interference, the Executioner orders the group to be bombed but luckily, Blake's presence also means that Thor is on hand to protect the would-be victims. Unfortunately, Blake's nurse, Jane Foster is captured and when Blake goes after her, he's captured as well. About to be executed, he manages to change into Thor and destroys the revolution by triggering a volcanic eruption. Just then, the freedom forces arrive and in the ironic aftermath, it's the Executioner who ends up before a firing squad. While not exactly the kind of story filled with Asgardian otherworldliness or cosmic scope that future stories would offer, this issue's down-to-earth tale helped to give the Thor



FIDEL CASTRO, WITH HIS TRADEMARK MILITARY FATIGUES AND KEPI STYLE HAT AND BEARD BECAME THE STEREOTYPE FOR EVERY CENTRAL AMERICAN WOULD BE STRONG MAN. AN IMAGE EASILY APPROPRIATED FOR COMIC BOOK VILLAINS. A STRONG ANTI-COMMUNIST IN HIS EARLY DAYS, EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE HAD NO COMPUNCTIONS ABOUT USING THE SHORTHAND IMAGERY IN A NUMBER OF STORIES THROUGH THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION.

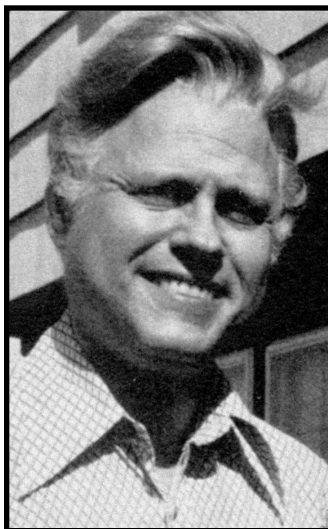
feature a solid foundation in reality, one that would go a long way to preserve a human scale to outsized fantasy to come. And helping it along was a really fine job on the art by penciler Jack Kirby and inker Dick Ayers who gave this offering the same attention to detail that they were giving their concurrent contributions to the *Rawhide Kid*. At the same time, Kirby's action scenes were this side of spectacular as Thor rips apart jet planes and platoons of tanks with equal abandon. And scribe Larry Lieber packed a lot of story and characterization in the brief thirteen pages he had to work with. All in all, this was a really good entry in the nascent series and one readers were quick to appreciate. By contrast, as decent as they were, the two fantasy offerings, "The Witching Hour" and "Somewhere Hides a...Thing," penciled by Don Heck and Steve

Ditko respectively, were pretty bland. Although the *Fantastic Four* strip was still coming along, the Thor yarn this ish showed that the creative energy at Marvel was clearly shifting to its new superhero characters as new features like Spider-Man and Ant-Man would only confirm.

Gunsmoke Western #72

"How Kid Colt Became an Outlaw!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Keller (pencils/inks)
"The Nevada Jailbirds!"; Stan Lee (script);
Don Heck (pencils/inks)
"Yellabelly!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers
(pencils/inks)
"Slap Leather at Sundown!"; Stan Lee (script);
Gene Colan (pencils/inks)

The very fact that while editor Stan Lee was delegating some scripting chores on the superhero features to brother Larry Lieber while still writing all of the westerns himself seems to be all the evidence needed that he didn't have the interest nor the faith in the durability of the former just yet. Take this issue of *Gunsmoke Western* #72 (Sept. 1962) for instance. Under a nice Jack Kirby cover, Lee begins with a Jack Keller penciled and inked special origin tale for lead feature, Kid Colt. On the heels of that he follows up with a Don Heck tale called "The Nevada Jailbirds" and a Dick Ayers drawn "Yellabelly." In the former, escaped convicts learn that when a community sticks together in the face of danger, there can only be a positive outcome. In the latter, braggart Crasher Cragg learns that just because he calls a man yellow doesn't necessarily make it true. But absent a story penciled by Kirby, the attention getter this ish is the last story, "Slap Leather at Sundown." Why? Because it features pencils and inks by an unnamed artist but whose unique style is, or would be, instantly recognized by any discerning fan paying even a modicum of attention! We speak of none other than Gene "the Dean" Colan who, at the time, was still laboring in the romance comic vineyards at DC. A past Atlas stalwart, Colan was forced to find work elsewhere when the company imploded following publisher Martin Goodman's decision to divest himself of his distribution branch, only to have the distributor he signed up with instead go belly up. But the editors at DC were stone blind when it came to Colan's exciting layouts, realistic faces, and dramatic compositions. Moonlighting at Marvel from time to time, he managed to squeeze in the occasional western saga as he does here in a Lee scripted tale of a bully who picks on the wrong schoolteacher to have a gunfight with. Colan's art here is as advanced and nuanced as it ever would be when he finally made the move back to Marvel a few years hence. (He even inked himself, something he'd rarely if ever be able to do in later years) Fans who noticed got a preview of things to come right here, in *Gunsmoke Western* #72!



WITH SUCH A DISTINCTIVE ART STYLE, THE AUTHOR ONCE ASKED FORMER MARVEL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF ROY THOMAS IF COLAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORRIED ABOUT BEING SPOTTED BY HIS THEN DC BOSSES MOONLIGHTING FOR MARVEL. BUT THOMAS REPLIED THAT HE DOUBTED PEOPLE AT DC BOTHERED TO LOOK AT COMICS PRODUCED BY THEIR COMPETITORS!

Kid Colt Outlaw #106

"The Circus of Crime!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

The standout feature in *Kid Colt Outlaw* #106 (Sept. 1962) comes immediately in the lead, two-part story: "The Circus of Crime!" Sure, a Circus of Crime had been featured during the Golden Age when Jack Kirby and Joe Simon were the masterminds behind the Captain America title but the concept's use here has added significance in light of the looming Marvel Age. As Circus of Crime fans would come to know, the one fronted by the mesmeric Ringmaster and ramrodded by the Crafty Clown would come later (but not much later) in *Hulk* #3. But the idea was revived here as Kid Colt, on the run from the law, is forced to lie low as a member of a shady circus. When he learns that it's actually a criminal enterprise, he decides to play along until things come to a head and it's him and his six guns versus the circus performers and their various skills. It was a nice, low-key precursor to a group that would become a staple of the growing Marvel Universe. Besides a follow-up tale of the Kid at the end of the book, his two adventures sandwich a story about "The Black Mask," a sort of a western supervillain that hints of things to come as the superhero trend continued to build momentum. It's nicely drawn by Dick Ayers in a manner one wishes he could have applied to his later Torch/Thing stories but never did.

Fantastic Four #7

"Prisoners of Kurrgo, Master of Planet X"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Hands up anyone who remembers Kurrgo from the Planet X! Don't remember him? It's not surprising as his appearance in *Fantastic Four* #7 (Oct. 1962) is pretty unremarkable. In what might have been a holdover plot idea from Marvel's pre-hero monster books (even

Kurrgo's name sounds like one of Lee's goofy monsters complete with odd double "R" spelling), the villain of the title comes to Earth to recruit the FF in order to save his home world which is due to be destroyed in a collision with a renegade asteroid. But Kurrgo does it the hard way. Instead of just asking for their help, he embarks on an elaborate plan to kidnap our heroes. Dispatching a robot to Earth, Kurrgo has it bathe the planet in a ray that turns the population hostile toward the FF. Meanwhile, the team members are being feted in Washington D.C., but when the audience suddenly turns on them, they flee only to encounter the robot back at the Baxter Building. It gives them the lowdown on the plight of Planet X and seeing no choice while the whole world is against them, they agree to go. But Kurrgo has figured right at least: the FF can help, or more specifically, Reed Richards can. Quickly, he develops a shrinking formula that permits the entire population of the planet to fit in only two rocket ships

allowing escape from their impending doom. He gives the antidote to Kurrgo who intends to keep it so he can lord it over his tiny fellows, but in an ironic twist, he's caught in the fiery end of his planet

and misses his ride on one of the ships. Yeah, it sure felt like one of those giant monster stories but with the FF wedged into the plot instead of some nameless human who manages to prevent the alien invasion or whatever. Fun, but not quite what the FF ought to have been about. Something was becoming obvious even at this early date. And was it wise to



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FANTASTIC FOUR #7, PAGE 1: AN EARLY MISSTEP BY EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE. THIS ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR READS MORE LIKE A PRE-HERO MONSTER OR FANTASY TALE THAN A SUPERHERO YARN. A DEFINITE COME DOWN FROM THE PREVIOUS ISSUE'S DR. DOOM/SUB-MARINER TEAM-UP.



THE PHANTOM PLANET, RELEASED IN DECEMBER OF 1961. FEATURES BOTH ALIENS AND SHRINKAGE. ELEMENTS AT THE CORE OF THE STORY IN FANTASTIC FOUR #7 (RELEASED IN 1962) COINCIDENCE? YOU BE THE JUDGE!

have Reed invent a shrinking gas only a month after the debut of Ant-Man over in *Astonish*? Luckily, this incident will be forgotten by the time of *FF* #16 when the team calls on the aid of Ant-Man to help shrink them down into the micro world of Doctor Doom. Whew! Proof perhaps that things were still in flux for editor/writer Lee who had yet to fully realize that a key ingredient of the emerging universe he, Kirby, and others were creating was realism. Or at least something resembling it. In regard to that, before this issue, the *FF* strip had been on a slow upward climb, reaching tentatively toward a shared, coherent universe. First, the Sub-Mariner was introduced in issue #4, then Dr. Doom in #5, and then both of them teaming up for #6. After that, Kurrigo could only be a step backward, despite Kirby's growing interest in the strip as the art this issue demonstrates. Check out the splash pages of its individual chapters, especially that of chapter four. Unfortunately, the strip would flatline somewhat, chugging along for a while until hitting issue #12 and a crossover with the Incredible Hulk!

Journey Into Mystery #85

"Trapped by Loki, the God of Mischief!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

As they were doing over in the *Fantastic Four*, editor/plotter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby began to broaden the scope encompassed by their new Thor feature that at the same time, also contributed to a widening of the emerging Marvel Universe. Only

hinted at in Thor's initial appearance in *JIM* #83 wherein a more Blake-ified Thor recalls the ancient legends regarding the Norse gods, here in *Journey Into Mystery* #85 (Oct. 1962) they're made explicit. The story, scripted by Larry Lieber, opens with the earliest depiction of Asgard as a floating island in space connected to Earth by a rainbow bridge. From there, the scene shifts to another first: Loki, the god of mischief/evil trapped in a tree according to the will of Odin, a situation that, if not based on genuine myth, it ought to have been. Loki escapes with the unknowing help of another first appearance, that of Heimdall, guardian of the rainbow bridge (who must have been off duty that day) Escaping, Loki immediately travels to Earth for some revenging on half-brother Thor. To lure Thor into the open, Loki turns some hapless bystanders into negative versions of their positive selves. (A neat SFX by Kirby not usually found in regular comics in this period) Thor shows up to reverse the effect but then falls under his brother's hypnotic spell. Loki then tricks Thor into releasing his hammer, which causes Thor himself to revert to his Don Blake identity. Strangely, Thor's hammer remains a hammer throughout rather than changing with him into a walking stick as it would do in later issues. Anyway, Blake finds the hammer, changes back to Thor and dispatches Loki to Asgard. Lieber's script is good (this is where he comes up with the word "Uru" to describe what Thor's hammer is made of) and the Jack Kirby/Dick Ayers team really begins to apply itself to the art as they did in the previous issue. There was likely a realization at this point that something was going on with the company's new superheroes with the creators now beginning to apply themselves more thoughtfully to their appearance and storytelling. Such that, this issue's two fantasy backup stories now pale by comparison. (Even the neat little Lee/Steve Ditko entry) Clearly, their time was drawing to an end.

Rawhide Kid #30

"When the Kid Went Wild!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "Showdown With the Crow Magnum Gang!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "This is...a Gun!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
 "Riot in Raintown!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

The team of scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby continued to spin out near complete issues of the *Rawhide Kid* punctuated by a non-Kid filler

usually by Don Heck (as he counted down the months to picking up his first regular superhero gig with the debut of Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense*). Although the Kid stories were uniformly of high quality and excitement, they lacked elements that would mean success for the concurrent superhero features and eventual fadeout for Marvel's westerns. From the beginning, Lee's tenure over the superheroes included a form of continuity either with ongoing character development with the FF or supporting cast as were introduced right from the beginning in Thor and Spider-Man and the upcoming Iron Man (Ant-Man would remain the exception to all of this and suffered the same consequences as the western characters). In the three Kid stories in *Rawhide Kid* #30 (Oct. 1962) for instance, there are no recurring characters and little development of the Kid himself beyond the by now expected trope of the needed hero comes to town, does his thing to help folks, then wanders away when he's no longer needed. Sure, there was the underlying theme of his being wanted, but beyond teasing readers with the occasional offer of a pardon (that invariably fell through by the end of a story) there was no through line. There was not even a dogged marshal or bounty hunter who could make regular appearances in the strip to provide continuity or an unrequited romance with a girl out there who pines for the Kid but whom the Kid must stay away from due to his outlaw status. Little things like that would have helped to hold interest in the strip but for some reason, Lee never bothered to include them. He'd try later as elements of characterization and soap opera proved successful in building and holding the interest of readers with the superheroes. But it would really be too little too late in regard to the westerns especially after Kirby and Heck left them for the superheroes. Regular artists Jack Keller, Dick Ayers, and later Larry Lieber weren't strong enough visually to promote the excitement needed to keep the strips alive. If only those elements had been present here and in issues immediately prior as Kirby fills his pages with action and movement as he does especially for "Showdown With the



DON HECK WAS THE THIRD LEG OF EARLY MARVEL'S MIGHTY ARTISTIC TRIUMVIRATE, SHARING REGULAR SPACE IN THE PRE-HERO FANTASY MAGS WITH JACK KIRBY AND STEVE DITKO. LIKE THEM, HE'D GO ON TO MAKE HIS MARK WITH THE NEW SUPERHEROES, IN PARTICULAR IRON MAN AND THE AVENGERS.

Crow Magnum Gang." Teaming with Heck, Lee also provides a nice stand alone, EC style story called "This is...a Gun!" "You are looking at a .45 caliber revolver, one of the most important man-made devices in the history of the old west. Tooled to precise tolerances by a master craftsman, this gun had only one function; to fire a bullet with speed and unerring accuracy." The story follows the career of one particular gun as it is first owned by an outlaw who uses it for evil purposes and comes to a bad end. But in doing so, he loses the gun. It's then found by a law-abiding man who uses it to herd cattle, frighten away wolves, defend himself against rattle snakes until as an old man he remarks on the gun being a tool for good. "For a gun, like any other device made by man, is nothing without the human who uses it. And it can be used in many ways, for good or evil. Let us pray that all of man's creations will always be used only for good. For after all, the choice is always up to...us." It was a nice little morality tale (one that Lee had already addressed in a number of previous stories) that unfortunately, didn't add anything to the Kid's storyline. As the superhero features continued to grow in popularity, the demand for full length stories would grow making such tales as "This is...a Gun," an anachronism.

Tales to Astonish #36

"The Challenge of Comrade X!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

A theme was developing in the Ant-Man feature, even after only two of the character's costumed appearances. That theme was Communism in general and the Soviet brand in particular. If readers recalled, in the character's initial appearance in costume the issue before, Henry Pym was forced to go into action as Ant-Man when Communist agents invaded his lab and held his assistants hostage. In *Tales to Astonish* #36 (Oct. 1962), Soviet agents strike again. This time, ordered by his commie masters, the fabled Comrade X will try to defeat Ant-Man and steal the secret of his size changing powers. In a tale that established many of the tropes that would

become familiar with readers in the months to come, it's revealed that Ant-Man is able to take advantage of the city's ant population and its presence everywhere to keep up to the minute with crime news and shop talk at local police precincts. As a result, he gets wind of a plan by Comrade X to trap him aboard an old freighter. We also learn that Pym has further developed his reducing formula to a gas form and contained in capsules at his belt, can more easily allow him to shrink and grow. Next, readers are introduced to Ant-Man's new miniature catapult system built into the wall of his lab. (Penciler Jack Kirby kindly provides readers a schematic for the gizmo on page 5) Loading himself into the cannon-like device and entering the coordinates of the spot in the city where he wants to land, he's shot like a bullet high over the rooftops and by contacting the ants on

the way, makes sure there's a pile of them to land on to break his fall! Through clever combination of his powers not only to shrink and control the ants, but in retaining his full-size strength at ant size, scripter Larry Lieber and Kirby (with inking assist by Dick Ayers) provide a thrilling Ant-Man adventure filled with action, intrigue, new concepts, and even a surprise ending. For sure, with such strong starts in the character's first two appearances, Ant-Man seemed headed for a long career in the growing Marvel stable of superheroes. Unfortunately, Ant-Man still didn't command the entire issue but only thirteen pages of it. The rest of the book featured negligible fantasy tales; one with art by Paul Reinman and the other penciled and inked by Steve Ditko with Stan Lee scripting. "The Search for Pan" certainly had art by Ditko near the top of his game, but the clock had nearly run out on the pre-hero type fantasy story with the type of quirky ironic ending this one has.

Fantastic Four #8

"Prisoners of the Puppet Master!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

After Kurrigo last ish, anything else ought to have been a step up right? Well, yeah, *Fantastic Four* #8 (Nov. 1962) might have been considered an improvement. After all, it did feature a supervillain of sorts. Unfortunately, the Puppet Master wasn't exactly evidence that either scripter Stan Lee nor penciler Jack Kirby were yet firing on all burners regarding their superheroes. Despite evidence that they were up to it (re: Sub-Mariner and Dr. Doom) it would take them a few more issues yet to get the real hang of it on any kind of a regular basis. That said, Lee did manage to zero in on the element of characterization that he and Kirby continued to develop all through these early, formative issues. For instance, this issue shows Mr. Fantastic working to find a way to restore the Thing's human appearance, something he'd continue to do for years. In the meantime, feeling morose, the Thing disguises himself in order to go for a walk. The Invisible Girl decides to keep him company on the QT, but the Thing senses her presence and orders her away. Add to this, the introduction of the blind sculptress Alicia Masters, who will become the Thing's romantic interest and an integral member of the group's growing cast of characters. In a pivotal scene here, the Thing is briefly returned to normal and turns to comfort Alicia. But it's only when Ben turns back into the Thing that Alicia's anxiety is



NIKITA KRUSHCHEV, FIRST SECRETARY OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIST PARTY FROM 1953 TO 1964, WAS A VILLAIN MADE TO ORDER FOR MARVEL'S SUPERHEROES. NOT ONLY WAS HE THE LEADER OF AN EVIL EMPIRE THAT SOUGHT TO EXTEND ITS TENTACLES EVERYWHERE ON EARTH, BUT HIS SECRET MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX COULD BE THE SOURCE OF ANY NUMBER OF SPIES AND HOME GROWN SUPERVILLAINS. IN ADDITION, HE WAS PHOTOGENIC TOO, MAKING PERSONAL APPEARANCES IN A NUMBER OF MARVEL MAGS DURING THE EARLY YEARS AND YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION!

allayed. "I'm back to bein' the Thing again," thinks Ben. "But the clinker is, she likes me better as the Thing." This conundrum was something Lee would use to set doubts in the Thing's mind for years to come. Meanwhile, it just so happened that Alicia was the stepdaughter of the Puppet Master, who becomes angry when the FF interferes with one of his plots. This becomes the trigger for his lifelong animus against the group. Taking control of the Thing by the use of a puppet likeness made from radioactive clay (which the Puppet Master somehow uses to form a psychic connection with his victims), he takes over the Thing and sends him to the Baxter Building to kill his comrades. But an accident restores his mind and the FF proceeds to rescue the Invisible Girl (who was captured by the Puppet Master along with the Thing) and stop a prison riot instigated by the villain. Confronting the Puppet Master back at his apartment, the FF are saved when Alicia knocks a puppet out of his hands and, angered at her betrayal, her stepfather lunges at her but misses. Tripping over the fallen puppet, he falls out the window and is presumably dashed to death on the sidewalk below. While the Puppet Master wouldn't exactly set the world on fire as a supervillain (his appearance and powers were unremarkable) FF #8 at least showed that penciler Jack Kirby (along with inker Dick Ayers) was spending more time on the art making the feature at least fun to look at.

Kid Colt Outlaw #107

"The Giant Monster of Midnight Valley!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

It'd been almost a year since the launch of the *Fantastic Four*. Since then, editor Stan Lee had felt the pulse of reader interest, and it was decidedly



THE BRIEF DRY SPELL IN THE FF RUN CONTINUED IN FANTASTIC FOUR #8 WITH THE INTRO OF THE SOMEWHAT LACKLUSTER PUPPET MASTER. UNFORTUNATELY, HE'D CONTINUE TO MAKE FREQUENT APPEARANCES AS THE YEARS WENT BY. HIS ONLY USEFULNESS WAS THAT HE PROVIDED A MEANS TO GET MARVEL'S HEROES TO FIGHT ONE ANOTHER! THIS ISSUE'S REAL SAVING GRACE HOWEVER, WAS THE INTRODUCTION OF HIS BLIND STEP-DAUGHTER, ALICIA WHO WOULD GROW TO BECOME A KEY ELEMENT IN THE LIVES OF THE FF.

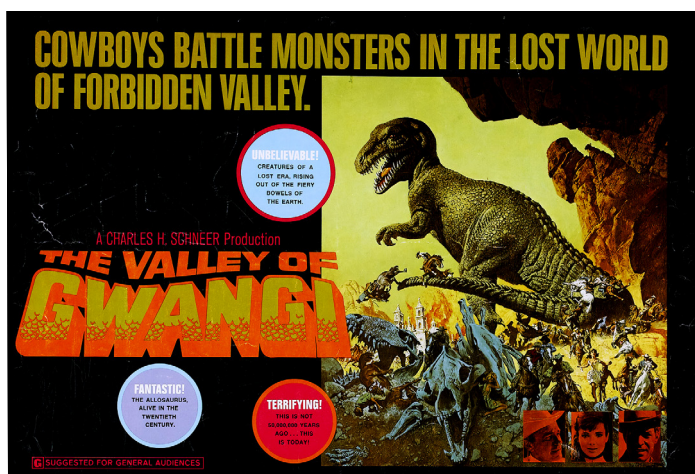
in favor of superheroes. As a result, one by one, Marvel's fantasy/monster books were given over to new superhero features: *Journey Into Mystery* had Thor, *Tales to Astonish* had Ant-Man, and *Strange Tales* had the Human Torch. Slowly, the non-superhero features were being squeezed out and would soon become irrelevant. That left the westerns and the romance comics. It was fairly safe to say that the fantastic elements common in the superhero titles would not soon find their way into romance comics such as Millie the Model or Patsy and Hedy. But the same might not be said of the westerns. Just this month, Lee and penciler Jack Kirby would launch an all new Two-Gun Kid feature that eventually, along with Rawhide Kid and Kid Colt, would dip more and more into the tropes popularized by the superhero books: costumed villains, more fantastic scenarios, secret identities and powers. However it was still a tad early for all that, but early enough that isolated cases might be observed. Take *Kid Colt Outlaw* #107 (Nov. 1962) for instance. In the lead story, "The Giant Monster of Midnight Valley," scripter Lee takes a giant step into outright fantasy as he combines the old west with science fictional elements. Anticipating the later film *Valley of the Gwangi*, Lee has the Kid chased into a lost valley where roams a towering, green monster! (Unfortunately, penciler Jack Keller isn't up to designing such creatures; Jack Kirby does a much better job of it on this issue's cover) Seems the monster is actually an alien whose ship has crash landed on Earth and is awaiting rescue. Later, the Kid takes a bullet for the alien and in thanks, the

alien cures him. In the end, the alien is rescued by his own kind and the Kid makes his getaway. The kicker comes in the final panel wherein Lee is shown in his office pondering some sheets of paper that had been dropped through the window and written in an alien script! No explanation about how he was able to translate it and tell the tale, however. By comparison, the rest of the stories in this issue are familiar western fare such as "Thundering Hoofs" telling about a typical ride of a pony expressman filled with Indians, wolf packs, and thieves. And in "Doom Around the Bend," the Kid returns to save a train from an unsafe bridge only to be blamed for its collapse. It was plain that Lee was still firing on all burners in regard to Marvel's westerns. Something that would be proven with the launch of the new Two-Gun Kid feature.

Strange Tales #102

"Prisoner of the Wizard!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

It was a measure of the tentative popularity of any individual member of the Fantastic Four that in only the second installment of his new feature, the Human Torch didn't rate top billing on the cover of *Strange Tales* #102 (Nov. 1962). (In fact, the Torch was shoved to the bottom of the Jack Kirby drawn cover where presumably, he wouldn't be seen by customers checking out the typical comics spinner rack; instead, it'd be the two fantasy stories browsers would see first) Why exactly the Torch was the first chosen for the honor of headlining his own strip and not the Thing or Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Girl wasn't clear, except possibly that the Torch had been one of Marvel's top stars back in the Golden Age of comics. It was likely felt by Lee (and possibly publisher Martin Goodman) that the Torch had a built-in audience due to name recognizability over his team mates. If that was the case, it was where any resemblance to the earlier incarnation of the character ended. The new Human Torch was a hot-tempered teenager, a callow youth prone to a know it all attitude that often led him into trouble before thinking things through. Such was the case here when the Torch rushes to rescue the Wizard from a failed stunt involving drilling deep into the ground. The grateful Wizard invites the unsuspecting Johnny to his super futuristic home where he traps him by keeping him doused with water. As the Torch fumes, the Wizard, jealous of the Torch's popularity, embarks on a campaign to impugn the hero's reputation then returns to taunt him with evidence that would prove Johnny innocent. But the evidence is taken out of



STAN LEE AND JACK KELLER ANTICIPATED THE LATER FILM VALLEY OF THE GWANGI (1989) (NOT TO MENTION A MUCH LATER ENTRY SIMPLY CALLED COWBOYS AND ALIENS) WHEN THEY BROUGHT KID COLT FACE TO FACE WITH AN ALIEN CREATURE RIGHT OUT OF THE GIANT MONSTER BOOKS THEN BEING REPLACED BY SUPERHEROES!

his hand by the Invisible Girl leaving the Wizard a broken man: "I...I challenged the Human Torch and I lost. I'm beaten!" It was a great little story that at once laid the groundwork for the series, including the fact that Johnny and his sister lived in their own home outside the city. Eventually, this suburban community would be revealed as Glenville. Also, in the story, the Wizard states that no one knows the Torch's identity and as far as the Torch is concerned, no one does. In reality, as would be revealed in *Strange Tales* #106, everyone in town does know it but pretends not to in order to help Johnny and his sister maintain their privacy. Maybe the Wizard had been gone for a while so that when he returned to his super-futuristic home he wasn't yet up to speed with local gossip? And speaking of the Wizard, this was the inventive genius' first appearance but not his last. He'd become a regular Torch villain before graduating into a costume and becoming "the Wingless Wizard" and leader of the Frightful Four. Overall, penciler Jack Kirby (inked by Dick Ayers) does a great job on the art seeming to apply himself more in this month's superhero offerings than heretofore. His depiction of the Torch's life in Glenville in this and upcoming issues will end up being a wonderful evocation of American suburban life in the early to mid-1960s. Perhaps a reflection of his own neighborhood located in Mineola, Long Island? Meanwhile, one of the other stories in this issue that squeezed the Torch out of top billing was "The Secret of the Hidden Planet" which was significant mostly as another early uncredited art

job by Gene Colan. It can easily be seen here how his work was unfit for the stodgier requirements of DC and more in line with the permissive atmosphere at Marvel, where a particular house style would never really emerge. Sure, artists would be asked to copy Kirby's manner of action, of always keeping things in motion, but not his individual artistic style. Don Heck and Steve Ditko for instance, could never be mistaken for Kirby and neither would artists like Colan, John Buscema, or John Romita. And speaking of Ditko, the artist winds up this issue with a final fantasy tale, "Who Needs You?" a tale about human obsolescence in the face of improving computer technology.

Two-Gun Kid #60

"The Beginning of the Two-Gun Kid!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Outcast!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

"I Hate the Two-Gun Kid!"; Stan Lee (script);

Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

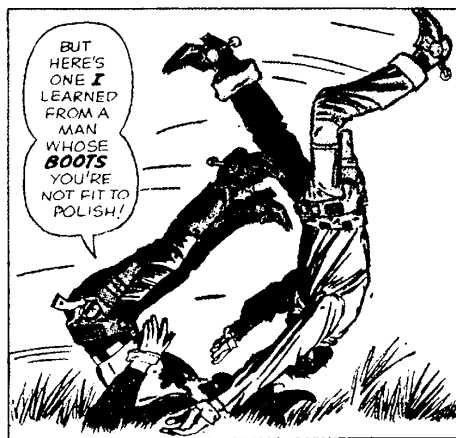
Just because Marvel's new line of superheroes was off and running didn't mean that editor Stan Lee was ready to give up on other genres. Sure, the handful of romance titles such as *Millie the Model* were safe for the time being, but the fantasy/monster books were slowly being edged out with apparently little protest from readers. Westerns, however, were another story. Although they'd soon be whittled down to three main titles, those titles would go on for years, side by side with the dominant superheroes. To prove the durability of the westerns, Lee decided to re-introduce a title that had been temporarily canceled. It had been discontinued in 1961 to make room on Marvel's constrained distribution slate for a new fantasy title called *Amazing Adventures* (which eventually changed to *Amazing Adult Fantasy*). But when *Amazing (Adult) Fantasy* itself was canceled with issue #15, it opened up a place for a new title. Significantly, instead of making that new feature a superhero book, Lee chose to revive one of the company's western titles. More importantly, Lee decided to give the new book his full attention as well as his top artistic team in penciler Jack Kirby and inker Dick Ayers. True, Lee and Kirby were already doing gangbusters over on the *Rawhide Kid* strip but it was no small thing, now that the superheroes were rising, to commit Kirby's time to another western. Not only that, but in addition to scripting the new series himself, Lee was inspired to bring in elements he'd begun to explore in the superhero features and apply them to the new western. Although the name of *Two-Gun Kid* was a venerable one for Marvel, having belonged to an earlier gunslinging incarnation, the new *Two-Gun*



IF THE INVISIBLE GIRL AND HER BROTHER, THE HUMAN TORCH, WERE TO LIVE IN THE SUBURBS AS REVEALED IN THE TORCH FEATURE IN STRANGE TALES, EDITOR STAN LEE LIKELY HAD A TYPICAL 1950S NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE THIS IN MIND. AFTER ALL, IT WAS THE KIND OF NEIGHBORHOOD WHERE BOTH HE AND ARTIST JACK KIRBY LIVED ON NEW YORK'S LONG ISLAND.

would be tenderfoot attorney Matt Hawk come to a raw western town to practice law. Bullied as soon as he stepped off the stagecoach and having to be rescued by school teacher Nancy Carter, he'd despaired of making it in his new home. Later, he vainly tries to keep an old man from being similarly bullied but surprisingly, the oldster was perfectly able to defend himself. Named Ben Dancer, the old man is impressed with Matt's courage and offers to teach him to shoot. Over the next few months, Matt not only learns to be an expert shot, but learns how to fight and build up his body. When his training is completed, Ben warns Matt that his ability to shoot would attract every man trying to earn a reputation by challenging him. To prevent that, he presents him with a costume and mask as well as a trained horse called Thunder. Thus a new western "superhero" was born. The new Two-Gun Kid made his debut in *Two-Gun Kid* #60 (Nov. 1962) in a most unostentatious manner: the Kirby-rendered cover had the air of being cobbled together at the last minute complete with hand scrawled numbering in the issue number box. But despite that, the insides were a different story! In a 13-page lead feature, Lee and Kirby tell the Kid's origin, with the latter pulling out all the stops with page after page of action as the Kid shows off not only his shooting ability but his skill in hand-to-hand combat. Totally thrilling stuff that put the artist's concurrent work on the superhero books in the shade! Then, in a second five-page story, the Kid goes after a gang who'd robbed his office and, in the melee, one Clem Carter is killed. In

short order, Lee has set up a continuing conflict for the Kid. Just as he and Nancy Carter's friendship blossoms, the specter of the Kid comes between them as she blames the masked man for the death of her brother whom she believes was innocent. Thus, in a pair of stories, Lee and Kirby have applied to westerns the elements that were slowly beginning to emerge with their line of superheroes. Something Lee would eventually make standard, creating continuity and the sense of a shared universe even among Marvel's western stars.



TWO-GUN KID #60, PAGE 11: A BEAUTIFUL ACTION PAGE BY PENCILER JACK KIRBY AS HE PUTS THE NEW TWO-GUN KID THROUGH HIS PAGES! DICK AYERS' INKS HERE ARE PERFECTLY COMPLIMENTARY, GIVING KIRBY'S WORK A SLIGHTLY RAGGED EDGE NEEDED FOR A ROOTIN' TOOTIN' WESTERN YARN!

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Journey Into Mystery #86

"On the Trail of the Tomorrow Man!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Four issues into the Thor series and our hero finally meets his first bona fide supervillain. Well, okay, maybe Loki was the first, but he was an Asgardian. Anyway, editor/plotter Stan Lee apparently decided to take a breather from Communists and invading aliens to give Thor his first time-traveling workout. Time travel was okay as a concept, but ultimately it came with an air of unreality about it, as if what happened in the past or future didn't count, and that's the feeling here as Zarrko, a denizen of the year 2262, arrives at a military proving ground to steal the Army's experimental cobalt bomb. Seems the future is too peaceful a place for the ambitious Zarrko and he wants the bomb to blackmail his time period into accepting him as warlord of the world...or something like that. The problem: Thor is on hand when he shows up in his time machine to steal the bomb. In a first for the strip, readers get their first glimpse of Odin as Thor seeks him out for advice about time travel. Odin tells him he can do it by swinging his hammer just so and lickety-split, Thor arrives in exactly the right year he needs to confront Zarrko. A couple battles follow, a little subterfuge and Zarrko is defeated, losing his memory in the bargain. There was a lot going on here in only 13 pages, but penciler Jack Kirby crams it all in (with the help of Dick Ayers on inks) displaying an increasing assurance in his depiction of Thor. Yeah, Thor isn't as bulky as Kirby would later draw him, still displaying the wiriness of an earlier period in the artist's career, but it would come as a gander at the cover of *Journey Into Mystery* #86 (Nov. 1962) shows. Kirby himself seems to display a growing interest in the strip with his art more fully rendered, more detailed, with more dynamism in his layouts. Meanwhile, Larry Lieber was doing a good job on the scripting. So good, it would be a distinct loss when Lee replaced him permanently on

the various superhero features. Strangely enough, Lee confines himself here to the two fantasy backup stories: "Humans Keep Out" and "The Changeling." In the former, Don Heck provides the pencils and inks in a tale about first contact with Venusians and in the latter, Steve Ditko does the honors in an ironic fairy tale about a king who wants to be handsome. But the lameness of these two stories was only the latest indicator that the bloom was off the rose for Marvel's excursions into fantasy. Soon enough, they'd be pushed out of most of its titles for good.

Strange Tales #103

"Prisoner of the Fifth Dimension!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

At the start of the early years, Marvel went through a period when it seemed as if every superhero was either time traveling or crossing into other dimensions to meet their foes. (Usually to overthrow an oppressive government). That is, when they weren't fighting Communists. Likely, it was a quick way for busy editor/writer Stan Lee to come up with plots to feed scripter Larry Lieber and artist Jack Kirby while he busied himself scripting westerns, romance books, the remaining fantasy shorts, and the Fantastic Four. Just recently, Thor went into the future to fight the Tomorrow Man and the FF went into the past in search of Blackbeard the Pirate. More would follow, including the Human Torch here in *Strange Tales* #103 (Dec. 1962).

Not that these stories weren't interesting. How could they not be with penciler Jack Kirby detailing the wonders of (usually) advanced civilizations? Take, for instance, "Prisoner of the Fifth Dimension." Here, Johnny Storm, the Human Torch, investigates a housing project where newly built homes keep sinking into otherwise solid ground. He catches the culprits in the act and soon finds himself whisked to the fifth dimension where he learns that the homes

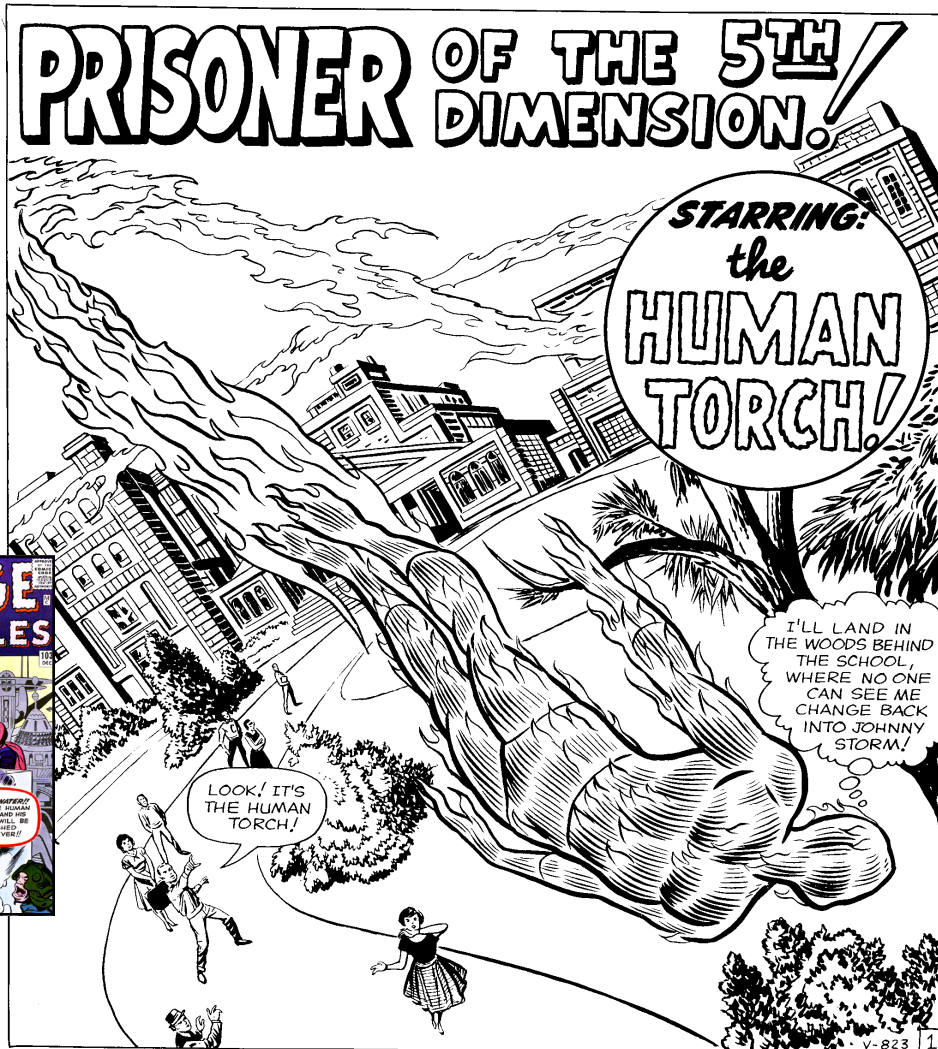


THE CONCEPT OF TIME TRAVEL WAS OLD NEWS BY THE TIME SCRIPTER LARRY LIEBER AND PENCILER JACK KIRBY GOT AROUND TO HAVING THOR JOURNEY INTO THE YEAR 2262. IN FACT, THE POPULAR FILM ADAPTATION OF H.G. WELLS' NOVEL, THE TIME MACHINE, HAD JUST BEEN RELEASED IN 1960.

were being built in an area needed by forces planning to invade Earth. Captured by superior technology, the Torch is imprisoned but is freed by Valeria, the attractive daughter of the dimension's former democratic ruler. In quick time, the Torch defeats the forces of the evil Zemu and restores freedom to the fifth dimension and in the process, saves Earth. It was another fast-paced, 13-page story, that doesn't feel that short. Despite a suspicion that the Torch strip here may have been created as an afterthought, no reader could tell that from Kirby's art with a number of chapter leading splash pages that are just eye poppers. With Dick Ayers inking, nearly every panel is crammed with detail and Lieber's script flows and leaves nothing out. So far, with three stories under its belt, the Torch series was off to a strong start, one that would propel it onwards for years to come. Lieber is on hand again for the first of the issue's two fantasy shorts, this time teaming with penciler/inker Don Heck for a tale about a forgetful Gulliver.

Heck's art is good but wasted on these stories. How long will fans have to wait until he too can join the superhero band wagon? Penciler/inker Steve Ditko was already on board with the spanking new Spider-Man feature, but he was still on duty with the fantasies as he is here with "Jasper's Jalopy." Scripted by Lee, it's a slight tale of a car with a will of its own. A will that saves its owner's life when it refuses to cross a weakened bridge. **Fun fact:** This issue features some of the earliest creator credits at the bottom of page one of the Torch story. There, we learn that Stan Lee plotted, Larry Lieber scripted,

Jack Kirby did the art, and Dick Ayers inked. Even letterer Artie Simek is mentioned. Revolutionary at the time, credits would soon become formalized in all of Marvel's books thanks to editor Lee. Due to his magnanimity, many of Marvel's heretofore anonymous creative staff would become household names to Marvel readers.



• PLOT: STAN LEE • SCRIPT: LARRY LIEBER • ART: JACK KIRBY • INKING: DICK AYERS • LETTERING: ART SIMEK

STRANGE TALES #103, PAGE 1: NO MATTER HOW FAR INTO THE PAST OR FUTURE, NO MATTER HOW ALIEN SOME OTHER DIMENSION WAS, MARVEL'S HEROES WERE ALWAYS GROUNDED IN REALITY AS WE SEE HERE WITH THE TORCH HOPING NOT TO MISS THE OPENING BELL AT SCHOOL! SOON ENOUGH, HE'D BE A "PRISONER OF THE FIFTH DIMENSION," BUT NOT TO WORRY! THAT OTHERWORLDLY EXPERIENCE WOULDN'T PHASE HIM A BIT. HE'D BE BACK IN GLENVILLE WORKING ON HIS HOT ROD OR SHARING A COKE WITH GIRLFRIEND DORRIE AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED!

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Journey Into Mystery #87

"Prisoner of the Reds!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Those evil Communists strike again in *Journey Into Mystery* #87 (Dec. 1962)! This time it's the Soviets who've managed to kidnap a number of American scientists by the simple use of a hypnotic gas. After Dr. Don Blake volunteers to be their next victim (by way of a phony story of having invented a new kind of virus for use in germ warfare), he's kidnapped too. (It was a different time then, folks!) Taken behind the Iron Curtain, he switches to Thor in order to rescue the other scientists. But he's forced to surrender after the prison commander threatens to blow the place sky high. Held captive with "electronically treated" shackles, Thor finds himself helpless as the clock begins to tick on the sixty seconds that will elapse before he changes back to Don Blake. (Apparently Blake didn't yet know the extent of his strength as the thunder god, otherwise the shackles could hardly pose much of a hindrance on him) Luckily though (in a trick that the Hulk would also experience later in *Tales to Astonish* #62) when he does change back to Blake, he's thin enough to slip between the shackles and escape. Regaining his hammer, he becomes Thor again and helps the scientists escape before going back and wiping the floor with their rotten commie jailers. In an epilogue of sorts, Blake and the scientists make their way to a port where partisans help sneak them onto a western bound ship. "How can we ever repay you?" asks Blake. "Just remember that even in a slave nation, the spirit of freedom never dies," replies one of the partisans. He was right. It would take another 27 years before the Berlin Wall came down and only a few years later, the Soviet Union as well, but the spirit of freedom would blossom again in Russia. Back home, Blake finds the woman he secretly loves as fickle as ever. Admiring Thor for freeing the prisoners, she apparently forgot that the unassuming, lame Don Blake risked his life to help save them and gives him zero credit for the deed. Sigh. Again, penciler Jack Kirby and inker Dick Ayers come through with flying colors. They hit the ground running with the story's splash page showing Thor, held by the electronic shackles, filling up the full-page spread. Stan Lee's story, scripted by Larry Lieber, is straightforward but fun. In fact, commie-bashing stories were always entertaining not to mention satisfying. Aside from Earth bound supervillains, the most excitement a Thor fan could expect was when their hero smashed his way into some new Communist plot! The two follow-up fantasies are a distinct letdown after the Thor lead

story even though the Lee/Steve Ditko drawn final tale, "The Man on the Endless Stairway," is fun. **Fun Fact:** Whatever became of the fifth scientist that was captured? When shown in the story and when they escape, there are only four besides Don Blake. Was the fifth one always off panel or was he just shy? Only Kirby knew for sure!

Tales of Suspense #36

"Meet Mr. Meek!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

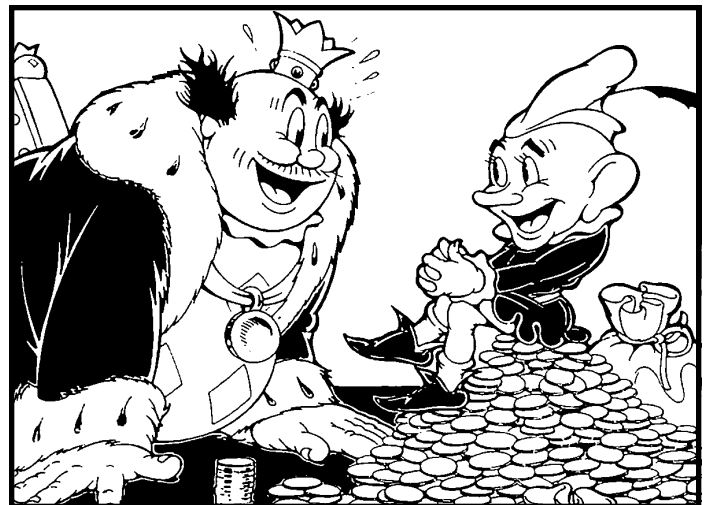
"The Final Weapon"; Stan Lee (script);

Paul Reinman (pencils/inks)

"The Gorilla From Outer Space!"; Stan Lee (script);

Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

In one of the last books that would still feature all pre-hero, fantasy stories, *Tales of Suspense* #36 (Dec. 1962) is somewhat of a doozy! The lead off tale, "Meet Mr. Meek," is a 13 maxi-pager scripted by Larry Lieber from a plot provided by editor Stan Lee. Sylvester Meek finds a book of spells and, taking it home, tries one out. He creates a concoction and swallows it (!) He soon finds that anything he touches turns to gold. Well, even the youngest reader knew where this was going! Then the story takes a left turn as Mr. Meek's scientist friend figures out that aliens are behind the whole thing and chases them off. Whew. Slight as the story might have been, it was the art that made all the difference. It was both penciled and inked by Don Heck who'd soon leave such stories behind for good. Indeed, for the rest of his long career, Lee soon tapped him to pencil the new Iron Man feature due



ACQUIRING THE POWER TO TURN ANYTHING A PERSON TOUCHES INTO GOLD IS AN OLD STORY AS DISNEY'S 1935 ANIMATED SHORT, THE GOLDEN TOUCH, DEMONSTRATES. ALTHOUGH IT LIKELY TOOK PLOTTER STAN LEE TO DRAG ALIENS INTO IT!



CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, THE ALIEN GORILLA IN THE STORY "THE GORILLA FROM OUTER SPACE," WASN'T THE FIRST PRIMATE INTO SPACE. NO, IT WAS ACTUALLY HAM, THE "ASTROCHIMP!" ON JANUARY 31, 1961, HAM BECAME THE FIRST ANTHROPOID TO FLY INTO SPACE, MAKING A SUB-ORBITAL FLIGHT ON A NASA ISSUES MERCURY-REDSTONE ROCKET! HIS CAREER IN SPACE WAS A SHORT ONE HOWEVER, AS HAM RETIRED IN 1963.

to debut in issue 39. An event from which Heck's name was destined to live forever in the annals of comics history as he joined Kirby and Steve Ditko as the triumvirate of foundational Marvel creators. The issue's second story, "The Final Weapon," though scripted by Lee, was penciled by Paul Reinman and so made somewhat forgettable. But the last story, penciled and inked by Steve Ditko is a hallucinogenic delight. Scripted by Lee, "The Gorilla From Outer Space" begins one day when promoter Mike Mullins finds a gorilla at the zoo. The gorilla begins to speak and claims that he's an alien from Vega who landed on Earth to repair his spaceship and was caught, mistaken as an Earth simian. Convinced the gorilla is telling the truth, zoo officials release him. Immediately, he grabs Mullins and leads him to his ship. Seems he wants to reward Mullins as being the only person who believed his story. Then, as he leaves Earth in the ship, Mullins tells readers that it was his ventriloquism that seemed to make the gorilla talk and convince officials to release him! Anyway, all this late period wonderment is topped off by one of the best pre-hero covers ever. Penciled by Kirby, it's colored by Stan Goldberg in totally eye-catching style: an all yellow color scheme highlighted with dashes of orange. That was arresting enough but it's all headed by a pinkish logo against a deep purple background. Totally awesome!

Tales to Astonish #38

"Betrayed by the Ants!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

The emerging problem with the Ant-Man feature, one that would become more apparent as the series progressed, was the absence of any kind of supporting cast. No secretary with a secret crush on the hero, no crusading newspaper editorialist, no snoopy reporter, no irate member of a Congressional sub-committee, not even a romantic interest. All that was bad enough in regards to attracting and holding on to reader interest but add to that the lack of traditional costumed villains and you have a recipe for slow sales. Oh, sure, Ant-Man as a hero, was more suited to low level threats such as cops and robbers and Communist spies, and those stories had already proven to be of interest when done right, but nothing really beat a straight-out supervillain. In *Tales to Astonish* #38 (Dec. 1962), editor / plotter Stan Lee tried to thread the needle and have the best of both worlds. In it, Ant-Man encounters Egghead, an evil genius who'd prove to be durable enough to return time and again to threaten him over his career. And though scripter Larry Lieber and penciler Jack Kirby manage to make this first encounter interesting, Egghead just didn't have the juice to really jump start the Ant-Man feature. That would have to wait until the Human Top, some months down the road. By then, Ant-Man will have expanded his powers and acquired a partner/romantic interest (intended to solve the supporting cast problem). Meanwhile, readers got another street level tale this issue as mobsters (fronted by an Edward G. Robinson lookalike) hire a disgraced Egghead to defeat the Ant-Man. Egghead accepts the job for \$10,000 (cheap!) and proceeds with a plan to capture Ant-Man by getting some ants to lure him into a trap. He succeeds, but Ant-Man turns the tables on him with the aid of some spring-boots and his loyal ants. You see, as Ant-Man explains to the police, Egghead "misunderstood the psychology of ants." They don't suffer from the same base emotions as greed or vanity that humans do and so would never even consider betraying their friend and partner, Ant-Man. In short, they squealed. As for Egghead, he evades capture only to end up a broken man drifting among Bowery flophouses! Both Lieber and Kirby do it again with Kirby providing some eye-catching forced perspective shots including this issue's cover. The book is rounded out by a Don Heck delineated "I Found the Impossible World" and the Steve Ditko drawn "Secret of the Statues!" Both fun, but increasingly anachronistic at this stage of Marvel's development.

Rawhide Kid #31

"Shootout With Rock Rorick!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"Trapped by Dead Eye Dawson!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"No Law In Lost Mesa!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Meanwhile, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby were still lavishing much of their attention on at least a pair of Marvel's westerns including *Rawhide Kid* #31 (Dec. 1962). Notwithstanding the obviously rushed nature of this issue's cover (what's with the Kid clenching his .45 between his teeth?), the team of scripter Stan Lee, penciler Jack Kirby, and inker Dick Ayers deliver some great six-gun action. Right off the bat, we've got "Shootout With Rock Rorick" as Kirby let's out all the stops in a page 2-3 barroom brawl that's a mini-masterpiece of wild sequential fisticuffs! That multi-panel fighting layout continues on the final two pages of the story as the Kid finishes up with land grabber Rock Rorick and restores stolen ranches back to their proper owners. In "Trapped by Dead Eye Dawson," the Kid is finally cornered by special deputy Dawson. But when push comes to shove, the Kid uses his last bullet to kill a snake that threatens Dawson's son, thus exposing himself to Dawson's attack. But his sacrifice doesn't go unappreciated by the special deputy who decides to let him go. Telling his son that he'd intended to make him proud of his father for capturing a famous outlaw, the son dismisses his protestations saying, "I reckon no one could be as proud of his dad as I am of you right now." In "No Law in Lost Mesa," the Kid arrives in town only to be tricked out of his guns by the gang who's treed the town. But he holds his own anyway, until retrieving his irons, he faces down the entire gang and disarms them in a fusillade of bullets. Town saved. Not to be outdone, even by Kirby, penciler Don Heck does the honors for the Lee scripted "Return of the Outlaw" about two brothers, one who remains on the farm and the other taking the "easy way" of outlawry. Needless to say, in the end, the bad man returns to admit he was wrong before collapsing with a bullet in him. Providing his own inks, Heck uses them beautifully, often dropping background detail for sharp blacks on his figures. Heck was never better than he is here in his depiction of facial features and body language. All in all, for the time being, Marvel's westerns were as much a delight as its superheroes.

Fantastic Four #10

"The Return of Dr. Doom!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Fantastic Four #10 (Jan. 1963) is another so-so issue despite a rather convoluted plot by Dr. Doom to destroy our heroes. Ironically, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby themselves seem to acknowledge the dry spell when, as characters in the story, they complain of not being able to come up with any more really good villains for the FF (with Kirby even volunteering a lame master of disguise called False-Face). The two, however, muddle through, not only bringing themselves into the world of the FF (and thus adding to the strip's verisimilitude) but Dr. Doom as well. In fact, Doom shows up in their Madison Avenue offices and threatens to reveal his face to them if they don't call Mr. Fantastic and lure him to their offices. (Stan and Jack hide their eyes from the horrible sight, holding their arms before their eyes) In the end, they accede to Doom's request and Mr. Fantastic is duly captured. It seems Doom escaped from space after their last encounter when he was rescued by an alien race who taught him certain mind tricks. Tricks like switching minds with someone, in this case Reed (Something he'd try again later with Daredevil). Anyway, as Reed, Doom tricks the rest of the FF into believing Reed in Doom's body is Doom



NOW AND THEN, STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY SPOOFED THEMSELVES IN VARIOUS MARVEL COMICS AS THEY DID IN FF #10 AND MOST FAMOUSLY IN FF ANNUAL #3. BUT WRITERS AND ARTISTS INSERTING THEMSELVES IN THEIR OWN COMIC BOOK STORIES WASN'T NEW. KIRBY HIMSELF DID IT IN BOY COMMANDOS #1 (DEC 1942). INCLUDING BOTH HE AND PARTNER JOE SIMON MOURNING THE (APPARENT) LOSS OF THE BOYS.

and imprisons him. Meanwhile, he prepares a trap to shrink the rest of the team down into nothingness. But Reed escapes his prison, and the team is convinced that their "Reed" is really Doom. In the fight that follows, Doom loses mental control and he and Reed's minds are switched back even as Doom is caught in the rays of his own machine and shrinks to nothingness. Kirby still paces the action by dividing the story into chapters and due to the lack of opportunity for exotic

vistas and action, spends much of his energy drawing talking heads and people just standing around. (Even the cover wasn't anything to brag about, although it did feature Stan and Jack!) But this being Kirby, even that makes for attractive visuals, especially inked by Dick

Ayers who, at this time, not only was the artist's main artistic collaborator, but the most sensitive to Kirby's nuances. One virtue of these early issues was that even though colorful villains and adventures were somewhat lacking, the situation gave Lee time to concentrate

on characterization, providing the strip with a grounding that, in later months and years, would not need to be constantly revisited. Readers would already have a firm grasp of character dynamics leaving Kirby to open up his layouts for more awe-inspiring sets and action.

Journey Into Mystery #88

"The Vengeance of Loki!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Well, Loki lives up to his rep as the trickster god of Norse legend as he first tricks Heimdall by slithering past him as a snake intent on returning to Earth to again tackle Thor. Having spied on his brother from Asgard, Loki has discovered Thor's earthly identity as Don Blake. Using that information, he meets Thor and the two spar some before Loki separates the thunder god from his hammer. At that point, he presents Thor with a Hobson's Choice: either retrieve his hammer or save Jane Foster from a charging tiger. Doing the latter would take more than sixty seconds and Thor will revert to his helpless Blake persona. Well, it's no choice at all for a



FANTASTIC FOUR #10, PAGE 5: STAN AND JACK DID THE FF ONE BETTER BY SEEING DR. DOOM WITHOUT HIS MASK! OR DO THEY, BEHIND THOSE UPRAISED ARMS? IN ANY CASE, THIS BREAKING OF THE FOURTH WALL SUGGESTING TO READERS THAT THE ADVENTURES OF THE FF WERE "REAL" AS RELATED TO STAN AND JACK, WOULD CONTINUE FOR YEARS OR AT LEAST WELL INTO THE TWILIGHT YEARS WHEN WRITER/ARTIST JOHN BYRNE USED IT AGAIN IN FF #262 WHEN HE WAS WHISKED INTO SPACE TO WITNESS THE TRIAL OF REED RICHARDS!

hero. Thor chooses Jane and reverts to his mortal guise. Immediately, Loki traps the hammer in a spell that prevents Blake from touching it and then goes off to terrorize the world. But fear not! Blake manages to trick the trickster god into removing his spell, touches the hammer, and becomes Thor again. In an unlikely finish but one perhaps fitting the sometimes-kooky antics of mythological gods, when Loki transforms himself into a pigeon, Thor throws peanuts on the ground and while all the other pigeons scramble for the morsels, the one that held back was revealed as Loki! Scriptor Larry Lieber does the most that can be expected with this ho-hum Stan Lee plot while Jack Kirby manfully illustrates it in his usual interesting style. (His splash page featuring full size figures of Loki and Thor is a standout hinting at grandiose things to come) Special bonus! *Journey Into Mystery* #88 (Jan. 1963) features the first regular appearance of Odin not only on the inside, but on the cover as well! Here, Kirby dresses the king of the Norse gods in garb more in keeping with earthly Vikings (i.e. furs and leather leggings). As the series continued, the artist would dress Odin in wilder and wilder outfits until there was no resemblance at all between Norse haberdashery and Marvel haute couture.

Kid Colt Outlaw #108

"The Kid Goes East!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

Behind a great cover by Jack Kirby depicting the Kid riding pell-mell through the streets of New York City being chased by uniformed gendarmes and gawked at by more cultured folks than was usually found in raw cow towns, lies a good deal less visually interesting artistic effort by Jack Keller. The contrast made for a perfect illustration of why Kirby was emerging as the most exciting penciler in comics at this time. Oh, sure, his style had always excited from back in the Golden Age when he drew Captain America to his days inked by Wally Wood on *Challengers of the Unknown*. But still, with his comings and goings, his "dry spells" from

superheroes when he was doing romance comics and later, his less than enthralling work for DC's mystery books and Green Arrow backups (admittedly, they were still more interesting to look at than most of DC's other features) and then his handful of Harvey assignments, it was easy for him to have slipped from the minds of fans. But now, with Marvel's return to superheroes and a year's worth of issues under his belt, readers were sitting up and taking notice. It wasn't coincidence that editor Stan Lee soon had Kirby

drawing all of the covers for his books, be they superheroes or westerns (with the exception of the romance titles). Kirby equaled action and excitement, as can easily be seen on this cover of *Kid Colt Outlaw* #108 (Jan. 1963). Oh! If only the promise of this cover could have been fulfilled with the Lee scripted lead story inside as "The Kid Goes East!" What an adventure Kirby would have made of that! Alas, it was not to be. Kirby couldn't be everywhere at once, after all. He was already doing four of the superhero titles and two of the westerns. Plus all those fabulous covers.

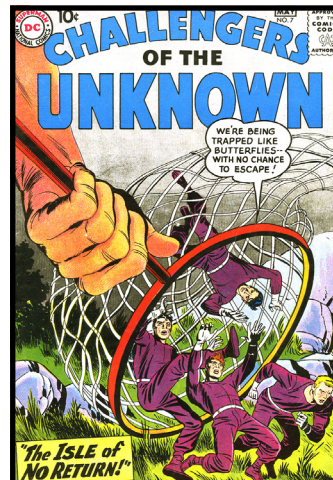
And so, readers had to

settle for Jack Keller and Paul Reinman on the backup stories this ish and be thankful at least, that Kirby had somehow found his way back to Marvel when he did, just in time for the biggest revolution in comics since the birth of Superman!

Strange Tales #104

"The Human Torch Meets Paste-Pot Pete!";
Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Things were picking up for the Human Torch strip, but slowly. In his debut installment, the Torch faced a saboteur, and in the third, he took a trip to another dimension. In his second installment, he met the Wizard, his first "genuine" supervillain... kinda. Over time, the costume-less Wizard would eventually evolve into an honest to gosh supervillain. But here, in *Strange Tales* #104 (Jan. 1963), the



THE ART WORK OF JACK KIRBY, NO MATTER THE ERA OR VENUE, IS ALWAYS FUN TO LOOK AT, BUT SOME ERAS OF HIS CAREER WERE BETTER THAN OTHERS. INKED BY WALLY WOOD FOR INSTANCE ON CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN, HIS ART LOOKED SPECTACULAR, BUT ON THE KIND OF FILL IN JOBS HE DID FOR BOOKS LIKE HOUSE OF MYSTERY OR HIS GREEN ARROW BACK UPS IN WORLDS FINEST, IT VARIED IN QUALITY.

Torch's rogues gallery took another small step forward. Paste-Pot Pete was a supervillain, but his presentation left much to be desired. Was it because editor Stan Lee hadn't been keeping his eye on the ball, or was it a failure of imagination on the part of penciler Jack Kirby? In any case, villains across the board for Marvel's growing line of superheroes were decidedly on the lackluster side with perhaps Loki and Dr. Doom being the sole standouts. Like the Wizard, Paste-Pot Pete would eventually don a costume and retool himself (including a name change) into a more fitting supervillain image later on, but here, also like the Wizard, he was costumeless with an actual open bucket of paste that he carried around with him to "fuel" his paste gun. In keeping with the book's title, the Torch's villains so far and somewhat into the future, were definitely on the "strange" side! And in case readers didn't get the message, they were hit with a pretty bizarre cover image by Kirby showing victims of Paste-Pot Pete glued to the walls, accompanied by an outline of white paste. Weird! Pete himself looked more like a mad French sculptor than anything else. No wonder the Torch didn't take him too seriously...at first. But after Pete performs some amazing feats with his paste including stealing an Army missile, catching a ride on a high-flying plane, and pasting him to a runaway missile, the Torch wises up and bears down, putting an end to Pete's plans. Only problem is, Pete manages to make his escape meeting a fast launch off shore. You wouldn't think such a kooky villain could be made very interesting (and if Marvel were DC, you'd be right) but this being Marvel, even nascent Marvel, scribe Larry Lieber and Kirby (inked by the ubiquitous Dick Ayers) turn it into a little gold nugget. Kirby's full figure rendition of Pete on the story's opening splash page is pretty awesome. Pete really looks like someone to be taken seriously despite his name! (Also, Kirby here has refashioned the Torch from his early man on fire look to the streamlined version that would remain unchanged forever afterward) Obviously, by now, the Kirby/Ayers team was spending more time on the art, with every page a delight. (Page 11, panel 1 with the Torch melting down the semi Pete is using to make his escape is great) By the time they were finished, any doubts readers had about a villain named Paste-Pot Pete were removed and they had to have been clamoring for more! By comparison, the remaining fantasy backups were becoming increasingly uninteresting, including "Markham's Magic Crayon" drawn by Paul Reinman and even "The Frog-Man" (Not a Leap-Frog precursor!) penciled and inked by Steve Ditko.

Tales to Astonish #39

"The Vengeance of the Scarlet Beetle!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Well, they couldn't all be winners. In a cross between the now defunct giant monsters of the pre-hero Atlas days and the new lineup of superhero features, editor/plotter Stan Lee slipped up. Maybe he was thinking that after a string of Communist adversaries and garden variety mobsters, the Ant-Man needed something grander, more colorful to shake things up. Whether the Scarlet Beetle could be considered either grand or colorful is anyone's bet, but it did shake things up...for the worse. Our tale begins with Ant-Man receiving a distress call from the ants. Arriving on the scene, he discovers the Scarlet Beetle, which has been exposed to radiation that has given it human level intelligence and the ability to control every kind of insect. Filled with hubris, the Beetle orders his insect slaves to attack the human race. Meanwhile, Ant-Man is captured and his size changing gas canisters confiscated by the Beetle. Ant-Man escapes and rallies his still loyal ants against the insect army. They win but an enraged Scarlet Beetle uses Ant-Man's gas to grow himself to human size and pounce after our hero. Ant-Man leads him into a toy store, where he uses various toys to hold the Beetle at bay until he's able to trigger the canister holding his shrinking gas



THE GRAND DADDY OF ALL GIANT INSECT STORIES WAS UNDOUBTEDLY THEM! (1954) BUT THE HEROES IN THAT FILM WEREN'T AS SOFT HEARTED AS HENRY PYM WHEN HE CHOSE TO LET THE SCARLET BEETLE GO AFTER RENORMALIZING HIM. IN THE MOVIE, OUR HEROES SIMPLY TORCH THE LAST OF THE GIANT ANTS LEAVING NO SURVIVORS TO MENACE MANKIND AGAIN! ACTUALLY, THERE WOULD BE ANOTHER "GIANT MONSTER" FOR HENRY PYM TO FIGHT IN TALES TO ASTONISH #44. NAMELY "THE CREATURE FROM COSMOS!"

and shrinks the Beetle back down to his normal size. Capturing it, he takes it to his lab where he cures it of its irradiation and then releases the now harmless Scarlet Beetle into his back yard! Well, penciler Jack Kirby (inked by Dick Ayers) manages to make this seemingly embarrassing yarn an exciting read but let's face it, this wasn't the Ant-Man's finest hour despite his convincing win. What the hero needed were colorful,

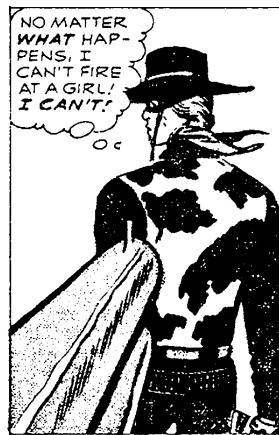
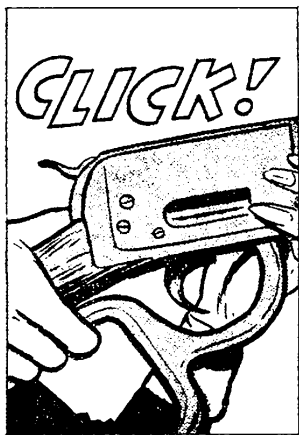
costumed villains (commies and thugs were okay for variety). Unfortunately, it would be a while before that happened. The good news was that there wouldn't be any more giant monster stories for Dr. Pym. That said, even fantasy backups "Ozamm the Terrible," and "The Toy Soldiers" drawn by Don Heck and Steve Ditko respectively, were marginally better than this issue's lead story.



Two-Gun Kid #61

"The Killer and the Kid"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "When the Apaches Strike!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

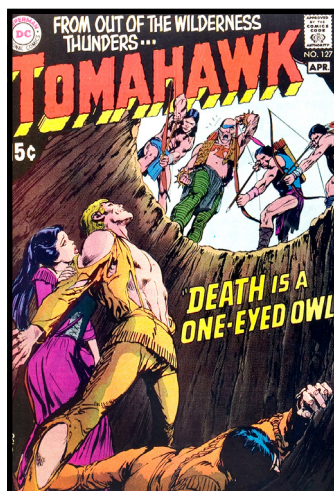
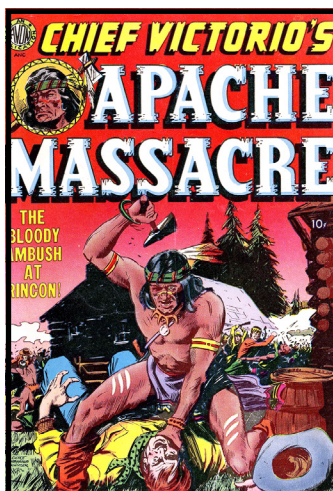
Two-Gun Kid #61 (Jan. 1963) was the second installment of the adventures of editor/scripster Stan Lee's new cowboy star. Clearly labeled on the cover as "America's most unusual western hero," Lee obviously planned it as a kind of experimental title, a fusion of the westerns Marvel had been publishing for years and things he'd been learning with the ongoing



development of the company's new superhero line. For the Kid himself was nothing less than a masked western superhero who came not only with a secret identity, but with the familiar accoutrements of the typical superhero including a secret closet with hidden, sliding door where he keeps his costume, and a specially trained horse that could look powerful when being ridden by the Kid or meek and low on energy when taking attorney Matt Hawk to visit a client. Moreover, a situation set up in the previous issue has school teacher Nancy Carter sweet on Matt but hateful toward the Kid whom she

TWO-GUN KID #61, PAGE 4: IN THIS DRAMATIC PAGE, PENCILER JACK KIRBY EXPERTLY DIRECTS THE NEW DYNAMIC THAT EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE HAD DECIDED TO BRING TO MARVEL'S WESTERNS, NAMELY WRITING THEM MORE AND MORE FROM A SUPERHERO PERSPECTIVE. HERE, THE KID FACES A DILEMMA THAT WOULD BECOME FAMILIAR TO HEROES SUCH AS SPIDER-MAN: THE WOMAN WHO LOVES HIM BUT DESPISES HIS MASKED ALTER-EGO!

blames (wrongly) for the death of her brother. It's that circumstance that's highlighted in this issue's lead story "The Killer and the Kid" wherein bank teller Will Webb is falsely accused of robbery and murder and is being chased by a mob out to lynch him led by Jeb Snark. But the Kid prevents the hanging, depositing Webb in the local jail for his own safety. In court, Matt proves Snark is the actual guilty party and confronts him in the empty courthouse, guns drawn. Just then, Nancy appears with a shotgun and appears ready to believe Snark over the man she thinks killed her brother. However, at the last second, she relents and holds her fire. Nevertheless, shots are exchanged, and Snark is killed by the sheriff just as he was about to get the drop on the Kid. The tale ends with Nancy in Matt's arms, lamenting the fact that she almost shot the Kid. The final scene is a trio of panels by penciler Jack Kirby as we see a close-up of the dying Snark's hand trailing downward on the courthouse door. "Well, I suppose that if Snark had to die," says Matt, "it couldn't have happened in a more fitting place than here, in a court of justice." A great story told in an amazingly economical ten pages with Kirby and inker Dick Ayers at the top of their respective games. Little recognized over the years, but for sure, the Two-Gun Kid and its companion Kirby-drawn title, *Rawhide Kid*, were the equal, if not the superior, to any of the concurrent superhero titles. But that lead story wasn't all there was to this jam-packed issue! The second Two-Gun story (by the same creative team) was called "When the Apaches Strike." This time, a tryst between Matt and Nancy is interrupted by an Indian attack. Matt manages to get Nancy to safety before scrambling behind a rock and getting into his Two-Gun Kid garb. With a combination of gunplay and fighting skills, he holds off the entire war party until help arrives. Ironically, with the Indians driven off by the Kid, the rescue party believes that tenderfoot Matt exaggerated the menace. But Nancy knows better, or does she? "Oh, Matt. You're so much



INDIANS, OR NATIVE AMERICANS, AS THEY APPEARED ON FILM AND TELEVISION, WERE OFTEN PORTRAYED IN COMICS IN WHATEVER MANNER SUITED THE PLOT. IF ACTION WAS NEEDED, THEY PROVIDED THE VILLAINS. IF SENTIMENTALITY WAS CALLED FOR, THEY WERE THERE TO PROVIDE LESSONS IN UNDERSTANDING AND THE SADNESS OF A VANISHING PEOPLE. AS OFTEN AS INDIANS WERE PORTRAYED AS WANTON SAVAGES, THEY WERE ALSO SHOWN WITH NOBILITY, COURAGE, AND PRIDE.

braver, so much more heroic than that swaggering bully. (i.e. the Kid) You were ready to give your life to save me. I'll never forget you for that." It all leaves Matt in a familiar pickle: "No matter what I do or say, I can't make her think well of myself as the Two-Gun Kid. How can I ever let her learn the truth about me?" All that was missing for this issue to be a completely realized superhero type book was a letters page...and that was coming. In the meantime though, there were the special features including a "How Matt Becomes the Two-Gun Kid" page with in depth diagrams of how the Kid's costume was made so that he can don it in seconds! Then there was the two-page feature, "Two Lives Has He" showing the two sides of Matt Hawk/Two-Gun Kid in side-by-side panels, one side showing the meek lawyer and the other the rough and tumble Kid! And as if all that wasn't enough, Lee provides a different kind of five-page story called "And Not a Word Was Spoken." For this story, penciled and inked by Ayers, Lee let the pictures tell

the tale of a bully who picks on the wrong skinny greenhorn. Man! A reader just couldn't get a better bargain than this issue of the Two-Gun Kid!

Rawhide Kid #32

"Beware of the Barker Brothers!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks) "No Guns For a Gunman!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

While not on the cutting edge of experimentation as was the Two-Gun Kid feature, the Rawhide Kid, produced by the same creative team of scripter Stan Lee, penciler Jack Kirby, and inker Dick Ayers, represented the distillation of decades

of more traditional western comics produced by Marvel/Atlas over the years. That said, with the aforementioned creative team on duty, it represented Marvel's second top flight western feature that ranked near the top of the company's heap of comics titles, including those starring the new superheroes. Behind the rather rushed nature of the cover for *Rawhide Kid* #32 (Feb. 1963), lies another action extravaganza that

includes everything but the kitchen sink! In “Beware of the Barker Brothers,” the Kid takes a job with the siblings of the title (against warnings from town) and soon finds out that through trickery, they virtually enslave their workers. In a nice page by Kirby designed with only four big panels (usually reserved for action), the Kid tries to tell the sheriff of what’s going down at the Barker ranch, but the law is too busy to listen: the Apaches are on the war path! Back with the Barkers, the Kid discovers that the family is running guns to the Indians and confronts them on it. Just then, the Apaches attack! Next, it’s “No Guns for a Gunman” by the same creative brain trust. Here, badmen Grizzly, Skull, and Blackie think they can make a name for themselves by killing the Kid. To make sure, they connive to empty his guns before challenging him in public. But sensing his guns are out of balance and guessing they’ve been emptied, he charges his foes instead, taking them by surprise. What follows is out and out Kirby action as the Kid teaches the bunch a lesson in humility. But with the ever-rising popularity of Marvel’s superhero line, how long could Kirby remain on the westerns before becoming too valuable to spend his time on a genre that would soon begin to fade? For sure, western fans needed to cherish these last remaining months with both Lee and Kirby on board before it all came to an end.

Strange Tales #105

“The Return of the Wizard!”; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Editor/plotter Stan Lee must have seen something in the Wizard that no one else saw, because not three issues after his debut in #102, he was back for a rematch against the Torch in *Strange Tales* #105 (Feb. 1963). It was the first indication for the feature that a rogues gallery of sorts was building. And though there’d be another issue or two of slow going, the feature would find its feet after that and host a regular parade of costumed and/or super powered foes. In the meantime, the Larry Lieber scripted, Jack Kirby penciled, and Dick Ayers inked story here of the Torch’s rematch with the Wizard is a blast. Challenged once again by the Wizard (after readers get a wonderful two-page sequence of his escape from prison) Johnny fails to heed his sister’s warning to disregard the crook. “Members of the Fantastic Four don’t get into fights just to satisfy their own pride,” she scolds. Of course, the Torch is having none of it and flies off to confront the Wizard. Hoping to head him off, Sue calls Reed to ask him to stop her rash brother. “No, Sue,” replies Reed. “Johnny has to grow up and stand on his own two feet sometime. The Thing and I won’t interfere in this.” Result: Sue

goes off herself and is promptly captured. But then, so is the Torch. Happily, the two escape and the Torch puts the kibosh on the Wizard. Fun stuff as were the two backup fantasy tales including “Man Alone” penciled and inked by Don Heck and “Supernatural,” where Steve Ditko does the honors. The Ditko story in particular has a somewhat unsurprising ending but that doesn’t prevent it from being a minor classic of the Lee/Ditko fantasy era! (The unsettling opening splash page alone is a delight)

Tales to Astonish #40

“The Day That Ant-Man Failed!”; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Sol Brodsky (inks)

After the less-than-impressive Scarlet Beetle affair in the previous issue, it was back to what the Ant-Man did best for *Tales to Astonish* #40 (Feb. 1963). This time, editor/plotter Stan Lee is on firmer ground with scribe Larry Lieber easily switching gears to cover a more down-to-earth story of the Highjacker, a gas masked criminal who uses a memory loss gas to rob armored cars. Notified about the series of heists by his ants, Ant-Man volunteers his services to stop the robberies but just as his plan is about to go into effect, he’s struck down by appendicitis. Ant-Man

has failed! Not to worry though, picking up a clue in the armored car offices, Ant-Man faked his illness and sneaks aboard the departing armored car in time to catch the Highjacker unaware. Unaffected by the gas due to using a gas mask of his own invention, Ant-Man overpowers the Highjacker and tears his mask off. Surprise! (or maybe not so surprising to long time readers of old pulp magazines and B crime movies) The Highjacker turns out to be the owner of the armored car line! Seems his company was losing money and he figured robbing from his own trucks was the ticket to solvency. Uh, uh. Again, readers had Jack Kirby to thank for the exciting visuals (led off by a cool



USE OF GAS, WHETHER POISON, SLEEPING, OR KNOCKOUT, WAS ALWAYS A PREFERRED METHOD FOR SUPER-VILLAINS. IT WASN'T OFTEN USED BY HEROES (NOT COUNTING THOSE WHO ACTUALLY TURNED INTO A GAS THEMSELVES!) WITH THE GOLDEN AGE SANDMAN BEING AN EXCEPTION.

cover depicting Ant-Man struggling inside a giant sized truck engine) then an opening splash page with an outsized Highjacker reaching for a fleeing Ant-Man. Inked this time by Sol Brodsky (with little diminution of quality from those of Dick Ayers) Kirby entertains by using a lot of forced perspective shots of towering buildings, looming faces, reaching hands, and outsized engine parts, all from the Ant-Man's POV. So, yeah. This was more like it. A ground level story for the Ant-Man that was made as exciting as any featuring a costumed criminal. So long as an artist of Kirby's caliber remained on the strip, that is. The Ant-Man feature was followed up by a pair of fantasy tales including the *Twilight Zone*-ish "I Was Trapped in the Mad Universe" drawn by Don Heck and "The Worst Man on Earth" by Steve Ditko. **Fun Fact:** In the Ant-Man story, Hank Pym says he created his new gas mask using unstable molecules. He also used them in designing his costume in issue #35. Later, it'd be established that the process was invented by Reed Richards, obviously one of the key sources of the FF's wealth. Once available on the open market, the substance proved ideal for superhero costumes such as the size-changing Ant-Man as well as his new gas mask design!

Journey Into Mystery #89

"The Thunder God and the Thug"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Journey Into Mystery #89 (Feb. 1963) marked a partial retreat by penciler Jack Kirby from Marvel's new line superhero characters. Despite their obvious and growing popularity (due in no small part to Kirby's own action-oriented artwork) the artist couldn't go on doing them all plus a pair of westerns. Something had to give as features began to multiply and books went from bi-monthly to monthly status. Thus, Kirby would give up the Ant-Man feature to Don Heck in the following month and here, surrender Thor to Al Hartley with #90. Also, aside from the Spider-Man feature, for the first time, it wouldn't be Kirby drawing the introduction of a new character, but Don Heck, when the new Iron Man feature debuted in *Tales of Suspense*. Whether Kirby knew these changes were coming up or not, his stark cover here seemed to suggest an envoi of sorts what with the thunder god's dramatic pose swinging his hammer and ready to fly off after some unknown menace. That said, the story inside is rather prosaic with escaped con Thug Thatcher barging in on Dr. Don Blake's office for emergency medical treatment. What follows is a series of hostage taking, escapes, and chases until Thor finally captures Thug and hands him over to the authorities. Pretty low-level stuff, at least by later



IT WASN'T OFTEN THAT MARVEL INDULGED IN CHARACTERS DAYDREAMING ABOUT WEDDED LIFE WITH A SUPERHERO (INSTEAD THEY DID IT IN "REAL LIFE" WHEN MR. FANTASTIC ACTUALLY DID MARRY THE INVISIBLE GIRL) BUT DC ON THE OTHER HAND, TURNED THE CONCEPT INTO A REGULAR SERIES OF IMAGINARY STORIES WITH THE MARRIED LIFE OF SUPERMAN AND LOIS LANE.

standards but as always, Kirby's art and storytelling ability make it a barrel of fun. He even throws in a little comedy relief by showing Jane fantasizing about being married to Thor: polishing his hammer, ironing his cloak, even giving him a haircut! (Shades of the imaginary stories DC liked to tell about Lois Lane and Superman!) As usual, the issue is rounded out with a pair of fantasy shorts including "Barker's Body Shop" and "When the Switch is Pulled." The latter, penciled and inked by Steve Ditko, is an ironic little tale of the seeming failure of a time machine... Ditko was at the top of his game for this story, a work ethic he was due to carry over first to the upcoming *Spider-Man* feature and later to the Doctor Strange strip.

Tales to Astonish #41

"Prisoner of the Slave World!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

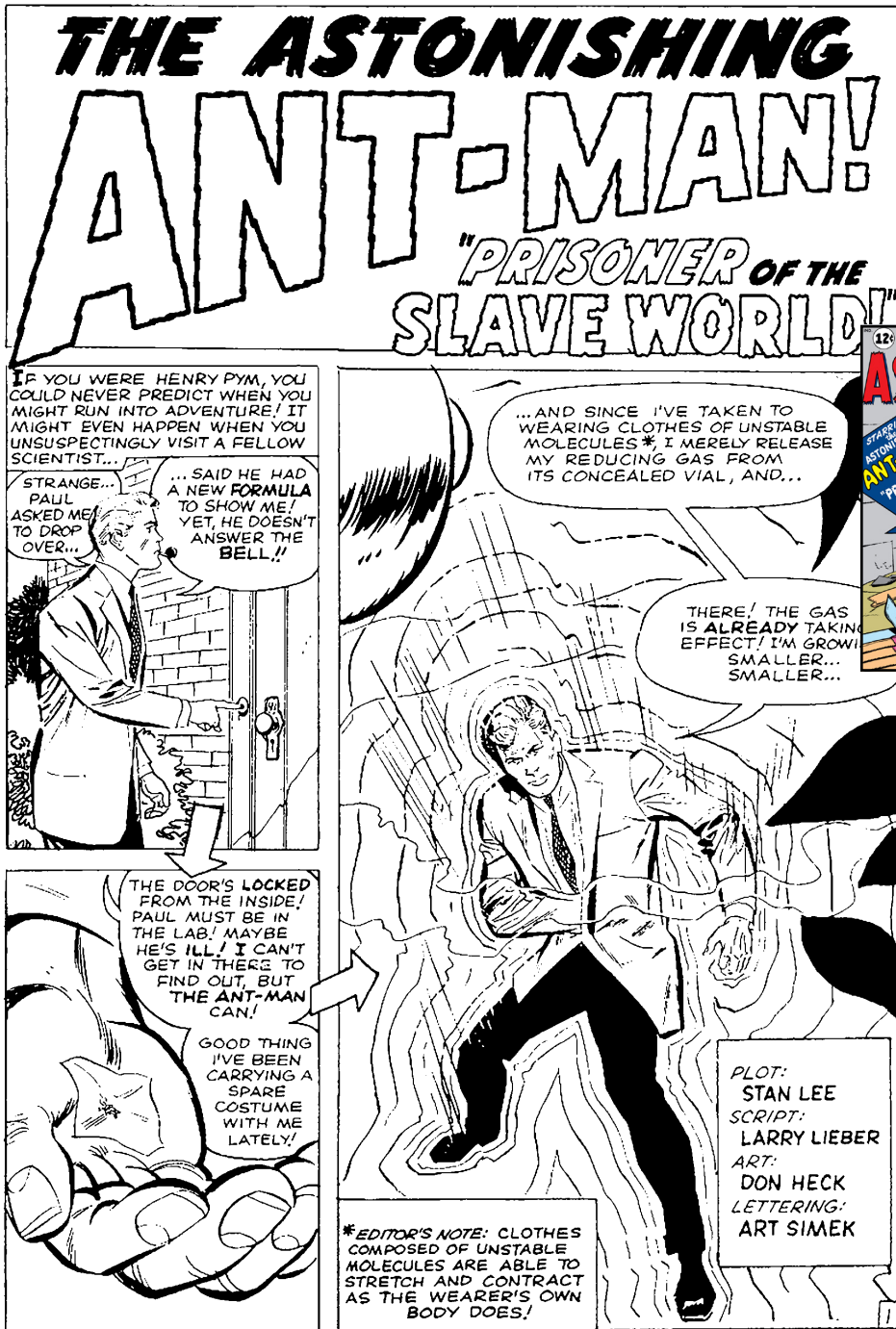
The latest issue of *Tales to Astonish* hit eager fans between the eyes with its great, but unorthodox, Jack Kirby cover depicting the Ant-Man cornered by what might have been a giant cockroach. What was weird about it wasn't necessarily its subject matter but its presentation and how in the world it got past the sharp editorial eye of Stan Lee. For instance, did Lee really go for the super tiny figure of Ant-Man tucked away in the deep background, so that no one who wasn't familiar with the character would be able to spot him quickly when perusing the comic racks? Or was this a rush job of some kind? Whatever the circumstances, it

sure made for an unusual eye grabbing visual by the soon to be crowned King! Inside, there was another surprise for regular readers. Cutting back on Kirby's workload, Lee pulled his number one artist from the Ant-Man feature (and did the same over on Thor in *Journey Into Mystery*) and handed the reins over to trusty Don Heck. Heck had been a mainstay at Marvel for decades, back when it was known as Atlas and, together with Kirby and Steve Ditko, had been among Lee's top three go to artists for

his line of monster / fantasy comics. Now, as the superhero era dawned, Heck was called in to take his turn at bat. (Interestingly, Ditko had been called upon before Heck but until this month, had only drawn a single appearance of Spider-Man in the final issue of *Amazing Fantasy*; both artists received their first regular superhero gigs at the same time: Heck on this month's Ant-Man feature and Ditko on Spidey) Although the plot for the Ant-Man strip in *Tales to Astonish* #41 (March 1963) was good, it was hardly original. In fact, plotter Stan Lee must have liked it so much, he

used it again later in a story that would transform Ant-Man to Giant-Man. In the meantime, it's Ant-Man's turn to be whisked to an alien dimension and help to overthrow the local strong man. It seems Earth scientists are

being kidnapped by one Kulla to help him devise a weapon to use against his enemies. Henry Pym is one of the kidnapped victims but therein Kulla has made a mistake! He goes into action as Ant-Man, discovers that he can still control the albeit alien insect life, and uses them to win out over the dictator. For his initial effort with a superhero, Heck does a neat job grabbing readers' attention right off with a half-page opening panel of Pym using his shrinking gas. In following panels, he liberally spots blacks that add a touch of film noir to the proceedings and did a fine job with the kinds of forced perspective shots that Kirby was so good at. Unfortunately, his alien creatures weren't as inspired. Heck would always struggle in designing aliens which just weren't in his wheelhouse. But that hardly detracted from the telling of



TALES TO ASTONISH #41, PAGE 1: ARTIST DON HECK DEBUTS ON THE ANT-MAN STRIP DOING BOTH PENCILS AND INKS. CHOOSING TO BREAK UP THE OPENING SPLASH PAGE INTO THREE PANELS, HECK DID A NICE JOB ON PANEL 3 USING BOTH RADIATING AND SPEED LINES TO INDICATE HENRY PYM'S RATE OF SHRINKAGE.

the story here which was a feather in Heck's cap and proof that he could be an exciting addition to Marvel's bullpen of superhero delineators! "When the Beast Walks" and "The Curse" which filled out the balance of the issue, were typical pre-hero fantasy yarns that would soon be doomed to extinction.

Two-Gun Kid #62

"Moose Morgan, Gunman at Large!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Man Who Changed!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

An uncharacteristically unimaginative Jack Kirby cover fronts *Two-Gun Kid* #62 (March 1963). That, however, didn't mean there was no Kirby magic on the inside! Far from it. In a month that saw Kirby release the artistic reins of both superhero features Ant-Man and Thor, editor / scripter Stan Lee saw that he continued to headline the pencils for Marvel's two top western titles including this issue of the Two-Gun Kid. Here, backwoods creep Moose Morgan is terrorizing local youngsters and keeping them from attending school. Despite a plea by teacher Nancy Carter, local officials find reasons not to do anything about it. Looks like a job for the Two-Gun Kid! Inked as usual by Dick Ayers, Kirby tells the story in expected fashion until page 8, where the action really begins. Unusual for the westerns, Kirby restricts himself to big quarter page panels on page 9, as the Kid and Moose go mano a mano. That's followed by page 10, where Kirby goes in the opposite direction, breaking down the page into a nine-panel grid the better to illustrate move by move, the Kid's fight with Moose. After Moose has been vanquished, locals lament that the fight only proved that one bad man was tougher than the other. But the Kid demurs: "It proved that you can't ever rely on brute strength alone, because there's always someone stronger. It's only through knowledge that a man can really ever be superior to another. The kinda knowledge that you find in that little red school house!" Even after all the years and all the westerns Lee had written, he could still turn



ARTIST AL HARTLEY HAD BEEN A REGULAR FACE AROUND THE BULLPEN IN THE PRE-HERO DAYS BUT WAS UNABLE TO ADAPT TO THE KIRBY INSPIRED ACTION FORMAT OF MARVEL'S NEW SUPERHERO FEATURES. AFTER DIPPING HIS TOES BRIEFLY IN THE HERO TITLES, HE QUICKLY RETREATED TO MARVEL'S REMAINING ROMANTIC COMEDY FEATURES.

a phrase and wind up an otherwise rip-roarin' yarn with an important lesson. More than the superhero stories, the westerns were the perfect vehicle for such morality tales. On a lighter note, in "The Man Who Changed," the issue's second Kid story seemed a set up to show how much like a superhero Two-Gun was as the same creative team has him tackle some bank robbers...but not before a page showing how the Kid performs a quick change and gets into costume. The switch from meek lawyer Matt Hawk to the Two-Gun Kid and the foiling of the robbery take place so fast

that Matt is able to leave in the middle of a trial and reappear afterwards without anyone in court noticing his absence! **Fun Fact:** The artist for this issue's filler tale between the two Kid stories was Al Hartley. An old Atlas standby, Hartley was scheduled to relieve Kirby on the Thor strip in this month's *Journey Into Mystery*! Unfortunately, Hartley wouldn't make the grade and fell by the wayside as Marvel's big three artists eventually took over the entire superhero lineup.

Strange Tales #106

"The Threat of the Torrid

Twosome!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Well, *Strange Tales* #106 (March 1963) was a definite climb down from the preceding issues when Jack Kirby drew the Human Torch feature. As part of an across-the-board retrenchment, Kirby retreated from doing the pencils on a number of strips including Ant-Man, Thor, and now the Torch. Still penciling the full length *Fantastic Four* comic as well as most of the Two-Gun Kid and Rawhide Kid features, plus all of Marvel's covers across the board, Kirby still had his hands full. In addition, behind the scenes, he was working with editor Stan Lee on a number of new features including *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos*, which was set to debut in May. Then, a few short months after that, both the *Avengers* and *X-Men* books were set to appear in September. Marvel, it seemed, was on the cusp of a major expansion. Meanwhile, however, those features abandoned by Kirby would need to be covered by

others and so, for the Torch, Dick Ayers was allowed to step in. On the surface, the choice of Ayers would seem to have been a good choice. As Kirby's regular inker, it could be presumed that Ayers might have picked up a few similar flourishes from the soon to be crowned King making the artistic transition an easy one for readers. Unfortunately, that was not to be the case. Although Ayers was okay as the penciler on the odd western tale, he lacked the tropes to be a successful superhero artist. His awkward figure work and flat layouts failed to excite the way Kirby's dynamic yet more realistic looking work did. Such was the case here in a story where the Torch is convinced by new villain Carl Zante (who goes by the name of the Acrobat) that his partners on the FF take him for granted. He joins the Acrobat in a new crimefighting partnership calling themselves the Torrid Twosome. But the Torch soon discovers that he's been had. All Zante wants is to use him to help commit crimes, not to prevent them. Refusing to go along, the Torch turns on him. It was an okay story but one that a superior artist, such as Kirby, could have made much more palatable. Although Kirby would return to the Torch strip from time to time over the coming months, Ayers, for all intents and purposes, would now be the regular artist. **Fun Fact:** Correcting an ongoing problem in continuity, Lee and Lieber have the Torch finally discover that everyone in his home town of Glenville know that he's the Human Torch. From the start of the strip, despite the FF's position as public figures, the Torch character was treated as if he had a secret identity to protect. But as the nascent Marvel Universe began to coalesce, Lee had a growing consciousness of its basis in reality. Thus, the Torch having a secret ID conflicted with his approach to the Fantastic Four. Something had to be done to reconcile the two features. That's taken care of rather bluntly this issue as Zante drops by Johnny's home startling him. "How did you know who I was?" he asks. "Surely you jest!" replies Zante. "Everyone knows that Johnny Storm and the fabulous fire boy are one and the same person." Then sister Sue lowers the boom: "Of course, Johnny! All Glenville knows your dual role! No one ever mentioned it to you because you yourself never spoke of it! They assumed you wanted privacy -- and they respected your desire!" As Johnny himself says after learning all of this: Holy cow!

Gunsmoke Western #75

"When the Dragon Gang Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

"The Deputy and the Desperado!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

"The Saga of the Sycamore Kid"; Stan Lee (script);
Paul Reinman (pencils/inks)



AS A PENCILER, PAUL REINMAN HAD WORKED ON MANY A PRE-HERO WAR AND FANTASY TALE FOR EDITOR STAN LEE. BUT IN THE MARVEL AGE, HE MOSTLY INKED, NOTABLY OVER JACK KIRBY ON EARLY ISSUES OF THE AVENGERS, X-MEN, AND THE HULK. BEFORE AND AFTER HIS WORK FOR MARVEL, REINMAN ALSO HAD LONG STINTS AS AN ARTIST FOR OTHER COMPANIES SUCH AS ALL AMERICAN AND ARCHIE.

"The Hunter"; Stan Lee (script); Sol Brodsky (pencils/inks)
The only thing of real note in *Gunsmoke Western* #75 (March 1963) is the cover, drawn by Jack Kirby. Why exactly Kirby chose to design the cover the way he does here is a mystery, but it works! Kirby had used multi-panel covers in the past, but few (if any) composed of nine panels! True, the first panel is left empty for editor/scripster Stan Lee's copy, but the rest present a super mini tale of "the greatest gunslinger of all time" in which Kid Colt enters a town apparently crawling with enemies lying in ambush. He disposes of them one by one until the final three panels, in which he walks up to someone with a gun trained on him. The last panel ends with the Kid holding his own gun, beating whoever it was to the draw! Compared to all that, the insides of this ish were an artistic letdown with Jack Keller drawing the lead story self-explanatorily titled "When the Dragon Gang Strikes!" That's followed by a Dick Ayers penciled and inked tale called "The Deputy and the Desperado." Though the art is merely adequate, Ayers does manage a nice opening splash page that indicated he could rise to the occasion if he wanted to. Paul Reinman strikes next with "The Saga of the Sycamore Kid" before Marvel production manager Sol Brodsky pinch hits on "The Hunter," in which Lee tells a neat little yarn about a wanted man hiding in plain sight.

Journey Into Mystery #90

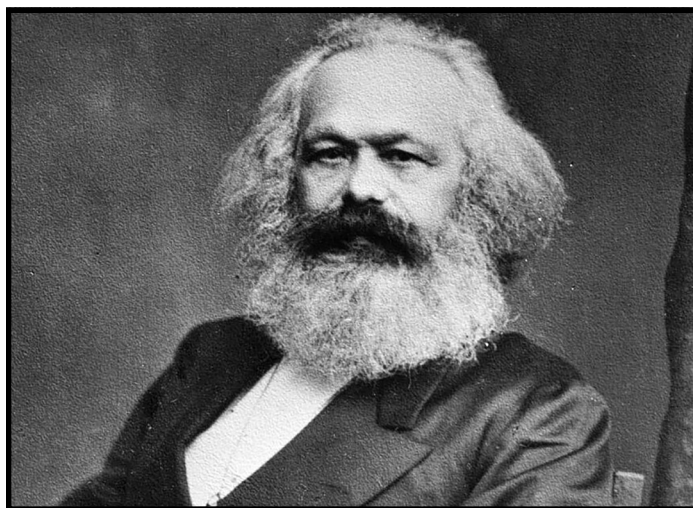
"Trapped by the Carbon Copy Man!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Al Hartley (pencils/inks)

It's the return of the Stone Men from Saturn! No, wait. It's not the Stone Men, it's the Carbon Copy Man. Readers might be forgiven for making the error as Jack Kirby's cover for *Journey Into Mystery* #90 (March 1963) does make the Carbon Copy Man look vaguely stone-like. And though Kirby's cover is nice, the story inside, plotted by Stan Lee and scripted by Larry Lieber, wasn't exactly going to set the world on fire. (After all, no one bats a 1.000) So it was just as well that Jack Kirby didn't waste his talent on this one, as Lee replaced him on the strip with Al Hartley. Unfortunately, Hartley wasn't one of Marvel's shining lights. Hartley had been a mainstay at Atlas/Marvel for years before catching this latest assignment on Thor. This was to be his only job on the feature, so perhaps he was called in by Lee to pinch hit until a permanent replacement for Kirby could be found. Freely admitting that superheroes were not his forte, Hartley spent years toiling in the romantic comedy vineyard on such titles as *Patsy and Hedy*, which indeed he ended up being associated with both as artist and writer for over a decade. His cartoony style, suitable for light comedy, was inadequate for a strip like Thor as he fills this issue with dull layouts and goofy looking alien villains. Worst of all was his depiction of Dr. Don Blake, whom he depicts as some kind of hunched gnome. His rendition of the Carbon Copy Man was especially non-threatening. Not that the story itself was anything for Lee to crow over. In a call back to the more clichéd fantasy stories of the now fast fading pre-hero era, Lee's plot has shapeshifting aliens taking over key positions and giving out crazy new regulations. Thor investigates, defeats the aliens, and then (similar to the ending of *Fantastic Four* #2 when Reed Richards hypnotized the shape shifting Skrulls and ordered them to turn themselves into cows) tricks those aliens he took prisoner to change themselves into harmless trees. It was not Lee's finest hour, and, for a brief moment, the usual fantasy backup stories were superior to the lead tale: The Lee scripted story "The Midnight Caller" for instance sports top notch Steve Ditko pencils and inks and a simple but not unexpected ending. Even the "I Am A Robot" story that follows drawn by Joe Sinnott is more fun than this issue's lead feature! So, at this point, issue #91 couldn't come fast enough for patient fans!

Fantastic Four #13

"The Fantastic Four Versus the Red Ghost and His Indescribable Super-Apes!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Steve Ditko (inks)

This was more like it! With issue #11's day in the lives of the FF feature and even more with #12's match up with the Hulk, *Fantastic Four* #13 (April 1963) set the FF firmly on the path to superhero/supervillain territory this time with the introduction of the Red Ghost and his trained super apes. Granted, Ivan Kragoff starts out as just another Communist bad guy, but in bathing himself and his apes in the same cosmic rays that gave the FF their powers, he becomes more than a simple commie spy or saboteur. Anyway, he succeeds and becomes endowed with the power to make himself immaterial and to walk through solid objects. (Hence his double meaning moniker: the "Red Ghost," get it?) At the same time a trio of apes he's trained to help operate his spaceship also end up with powers: the gorilla with super strength, the baboon with shapeshifting, and the orangutan with magnetism. Thus endowed, Kragoff proceeds toward the Moon intent on claiming it "for the Communist empire!" Meanwhile, Reed Richards has developed a super-rocket fuel squeezed from the juice of a recovered meteorite (or whatever!) and plans the same thing, except in his case it's to "win the space race" (and incidentally "explore the mysterious blue area of the moon!") Whether scripter Stan Lee or penciler Jack Kirby were aware of it, they'd set up a parable dealing with the differences between



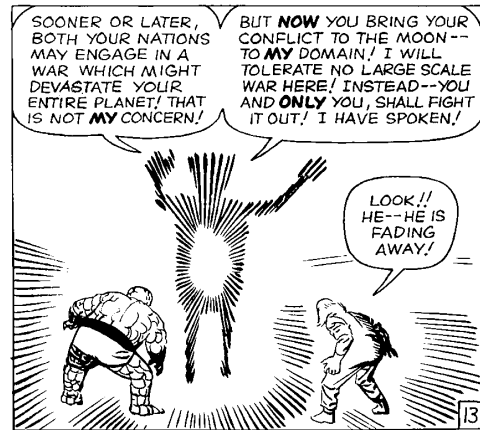
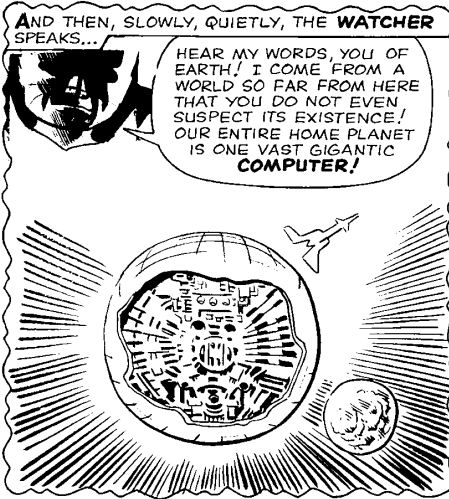
WAS KARL MARX A RED? THAT'S DEBATABLE AS THE AUTHOR OF THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO LIVED AND DIED BEFORE THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION WHOSE PREDOMINANTLY RED COLORED FLAG GAVE THE EPITHET TO THOSE PROMOTING COMMUNISM. THEIR OPPONENTS, FITTINGLY, WERE REFERRED TO AS WHITES.

capitalist democracy and collectivist communism as represented by the FF and the Red Ghost respectively. Far from being a capitalist exploiter though, Reed is a heroic explorer and inventor, the embodiment of the American entrepreneurial spirit, whose adventurous and inquisitive nature allows him to discover and create new mechanisms to realize the human good. His fellow teammates, far from being the witless pawns of an oppressive system, are dignified citizens, laborers fully conscious of their own worth, enthusiastic members of a dynamic and productive

society. Ivan Kragoff, on the other hand, is the personification of Karl Marx's Red Spectre come to life, a Soviet commissar commanding unthinking loyalty through force and intimidation. His use of trained apes as his subhuman minions is a highly suggestive metaphor for the plight of the workers under communism. Not a "dictatorship of the proletariat" as Marx had envisaged, but instead, a dictatorship over the proletariat. Whether or not readers picked up on all of that, Lee and Kirby provide a rollicking good adventure yarn aside from the heaviosity as the FF and the Red Ghost contend for lunar supremacy. Their battle is interrupted by a mysterious being called the Watcher who ejects them from his outpost. Seems he considers Earth people primitive and intends to let them fight it out to see which political system

is the superior one. (You're right, the Watcher sounds like a hypocrite.) Luckily for the free world, the FF wins, as the super apes turn on the Red Ghost who's last seen being chased into the lunar wilderness! Despite

its sometimes-silly trappings (after all, some relief was probably necessary after the team's repeated engagements in earlier issues with such gloomy characters as Dr. Doom and the Sub-Mariner!) and the Watcher's confusing motives, the most important thing to take away from this issue is the earliest stirrings of the optimistic confidence in the human race expressed by Lee and Kirby. An attitude (sprung no doubt, from America's can-do atmosphere following its recent victory against fascism in the Second World War and the optimism then prevalent



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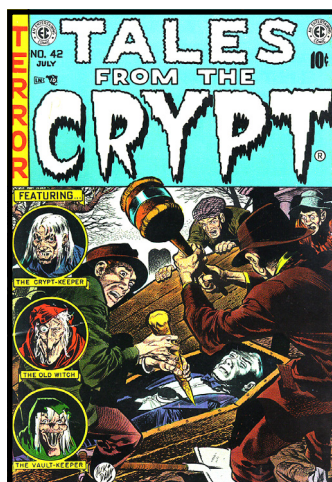
FANTASTIC FOUR #13, PAGE 13: THE NEWLY INTRODUCED WATCHER SEEMS TO ECHO THE WORDS OF KLAATU IN THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951) IN HIS WARNING TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMUNISM AND CAPITALISM.

in the years of the Kennedy administration) that would become the hallmark of Marvel in the years to come and which would endear the company all the more to its youthful audience. The company (and the world!) would do a lot of growing up in the years ahead and the Watcher's final words here ("Space is your heritage...see that you prove worthy of such a glorious gift!") would be repeated by him again later in much more ringing cadences and in a far more serious and convincing context.

Tales to Astonish #42

"The Voice of Doom!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

The two bright spots for *Tales to Astonish* #42 (April 1963) were the cover drawn by Jack Kirby (very cool forced perspective as Ant-Man is forced off the end of a pier by the persuasive voice of Jason Cragg; add to that Kirby's placement of a protruding nail right beside the figure of Ant-Man giving the viewer a hint at the hero's proportionate size) and interior pencils and inks by Don Heck. Editor Stan Lee's plot is okay but no substitute for a fracas involving a costumed villain. Jason Cragg, he of the golden voice, is pretty drab as bad guys go and carries more than a whiff of the fantasy tales that populated pre-hero Marvel. Here, Cragg receives the power to mesmerize people within the sound of his voice when a lab accident sends a radioactive particle into electrical wires with one eventually finding its way to the microphone he's using to speak into. Initially, Ant-Man is immune to his siren song due to his cybernetic helmet but when he loses it, he too comes under Cragg's thrall resulting in the scene on this issue's cover. Fans breathed a sigh of relief when their hero is saved by his loyal ants and then turns the tables on Cragg. Fun, but the story (scripted by Larry Lieber) reads more like a place holder until Lee gets his act together and begins developing a more interesting rogues gallery for Ant-Man. Of slightly less interest, but only slightly, is one of the fantasy tales that back



ARTIST JACK DAVIS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN BEST SUITED FOR THE NEW MARVEL SUPERHEROIC PARADIGM, BUT HE'D SHOOT UP LIKE A ROCKET OUTSIDE THE SMALL WORLD OF COMICS WHEN HE MOVED INTO THE MORE LUCRATIVE AREA OF MOVIE POSTERS, MAGAZINE ILLUSTRATION, ANIMATION, AND MAD MAGAZINE.

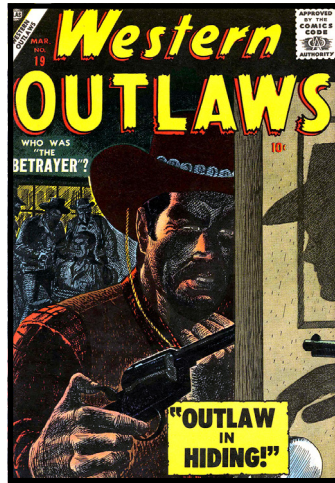
up this ish: "I Am Not Human," by Lee and drawn by Steve Ditko. Here, a robot who wishes to be human, disguises himself to move among them. He becomes so disillusioned by human behavior that he gives up deciding that the effort wasn't worth it. Of note is Ditko's robot design: very cool looking. Something that shouldn't have been wasted and forgotten here but used elsewhere in the growing superhero line. **Fun Fact:** Henry Pym's home/lab is said to be located in fictitious Central City. Lee would soon drop all references to such fake sites, preferring to suggest that Marvel's heroes resided in the real world. Thus, when next it's mentioned, readers will find that Pym moved his lab to downtown New York City!

Rawhide Kid #33

"The Guns of Jesse James!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Davis (pencils/inks)

"The Gunfight and the Girl!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Davis (pencils/inks)

Disappointingly, except for the cover, artist Jack Kirby was nowhere to be found on the pencils for *Rawhide Kid* #33 (April 1963). Instead, Jack Davis did the honors. Davis had difficulty breaking into comics early in his career, due largely to his highly eclectic style one that on first look would seem inappropriate for serious stories like the ones found in such comics as *Frontline Combat* and *Shock SuspenStories* published by EC Comics in the 1950s. But publishers there saw something in his style and took Davis on. The artist's true forte soon emerged first in the company's horror comics and then especially in a new humor mag called *Mad*. From there, his career as a cartoonist skyrocketed but between the demise of EC and the rise of *Mad*, Davis needed to keep working and now and then found it with pre-Marvel Atlas. Thus, he wasn't a stranger when editor/scripter Stan Lee brought him aboard to spell Jack Kirby on the *Rawhide Kid* feature here. Davis' work here can be most kindly described as...interesting. But



EDITOR STAN LEE CONSIDERED SOL BRODSKY AS HIS "RIGHT HAND MAN" IN THE MARVEL BULLPEN. THE COMPANY'S PRODUCTION MANAGER THROUGH THE 1960S, BRODSKY WOULD END UP A VICE-PRESIDENT AND HAVE A HAND IN NEARLY EVERY FACET OF MARVEL'S PRODUCTION. AS AN ARTIST HIMSELF, HE COULD ALSO PINCH HIT WHEN A DEADLINE LOOMED.

if it weren't for Lee's straightforward script about the Kid vs. Jesse James, a reader could look at the illustrations and not help wondering if they were intended for one of *Mad's* parodies. The bottom line: Davis' style had evolved past dramatic situations and was more suited for humor and caricature, which is where he ended up making his real mark as the 1960s wore on. Strangely, Sol Brodsky, who penciled and inked the middle story this issue, "There's A Shoot-Out Comin'!" strikes one as more suitable to the western genre than Davis was! Sadly, except for the aforementioned covers, Kirby was to permanently abandon the Kid with this issue. A sign of the times, as Marvel's superhero features stole a march on the westerns.

Strange Tales #107

"The Master of Flame vs. the Monarch of the Sea!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Oh, what Jack Kirby could have done with this story! After appearing a number of times over in the *Fantastic Four* book, the Sub-Mariner finally breaks free to go *mano a mano* with the Human Torch here in *Strange Tales* #107 (April 1963) only to have the Stan Lee plotted, Larry Lieber scripted story penciled and inked by the lackluster Dick Ayers, the strip's new regular artist. For a hint at how the story could have looked, all readers had to do was take a gander at the Kirby-produced cover for the dramatic possibilities in matching up the two characters. Subby is bold, regal, and radiates strength while the Torch is

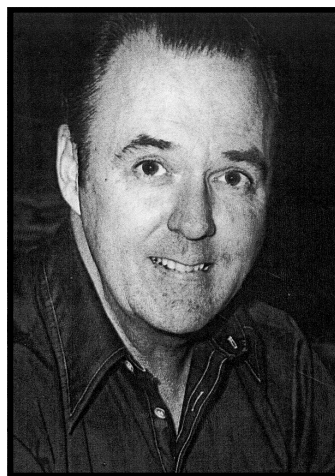
obviously confident in his new powers and rearing for a fight. All old-time fans needed to do to imagine the dramatic qualities inherent in the story was to harken back to the Golden Age comics when earlier versions of the characters tussled across multiple issues of Timely comics. Unfortunately, though Lieber's scripting is up to snuff, Ayers' stiff figure work and funny way of drawing the Torch robs his battle with Sub-Mariner not only of drama but visual enjoyment as well. Of course, scenes where Subby imitates the powers of a puffer fish didn't exactly help. Fans would have to settle for intermittent appearances by Kirby on the art in the future. Luckily, those few appearances took place on key stories making his absence from the book a little easier to take. Meanwhile, the most satisfying offering of the issue is actually one of the two fantasy yarns that bring up the rear. In particular, "The Treasure of Planetoid 12" penciled and inked at the height of his powers by Steve Ditko. Fans would have only a few more months to enjoy these little gems before the artist became too busy with superheroes to spend any more time on them. (That is, unless they cared to venture over to Charlton Comics, where Ditko would continue to moonlight on such stories over the years.)

Tales of Suspense #40

"Iron Man Versus Gargantus!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Don Heck (inks)

Echoing the problems editor Stan Lee had with the coloration of the Hulk when that character appeared as grey in his first issue before being changed to green in his second, so too does Iron Man benefit by a change in pigmentation in *Tales of Suspense* #40 (April 1963). This time though, the hero goes from grey to gold. Though Lee actually made the change mostly for commercial reasons, in the story he plotted, Iron Man makes the change for reasons of aestheticism; namely, the ordinary citizens he wants to protect are more frightened by his somber coloration than the villains he's fighting. ("Ugh! He looks like a creature in one of those science fiction films!" "Mamma! Mamma! Save me from the ugly man!") "Great scott!" thinks Iron Man. "I never noticed it before, but my appearance terrifies women and children as if I were a monster!" Other changes, or rather new additions to the Iron Man canon were also introduced this issue. Changes that in themselves would become forever identified with the strip: Tony Stark's womanizing (and inability to go too far in romance without revealing his identity as Iron Man), the recharging of his life

saving chest plate, his quick change into Iron Man, and use of various built in tools and weapons that would become synonymous with the character as the years went on. So, was it coincidence that all this new stuff was being introduced just when Jack Kirby was brought in to do the pencils in replacement of Don Heck (who penciled the first installment in #39)? Did Lee feel the strip needed a quicker boost than Heck was able to provide? To do it, Kirby had been pulled from the *Rawhide Kid*, a strip that Lee was clearly more interested in than the superheroes at this point. Was it evidence that the pendulum had finally swung fully in the direction of the superheroes over the westerns that Lee felt comfortable in using Kirby for Iron Man? That said, Heck himself was not completely absent from the strip, providing the inks over Kirby giving some visual continuity from the issue before. But Kirby would stay on Iron Man for a couple more issues, suggesting that Heck needed some guidance on the superheroes' new action style, a service Kirby would offer over the years by providing layouts for new, incoming artists. Tellingly, Lee was still absent in the scripting department. As he was doing on all the other superhero books with the exception of the *Fantastic Four*, he was having others do the writing while he just dreamed up the story. (Lee himself was still scripting all the westerns though) This issue, Robert Bernstein (or R. Berns as he's credited here) steps in for the scripting and doing a good job not only in keeping the action moving but in clearly explaining all the new elements being added to the strip. Bernstein bounced around between EC Comics, DC Comics, and Atlas before Marvel's early years, so he was no neophyte when Lee assigned him Iron Man and some Thor scripts. Except for its Jack Kirby/Don Heck artwork, Bernstein's debut this ish isn't on a story that would, on the face of it, excite anybody: After reading how the town of Granville has walled itself off from the outside world, Tony Stark decides Iron Man needs to look into the matter. Tunneling under the wall, he breaks out only to discover that the townsfolk are under the thrall of a giant caveman calling himself Gargantus! The two tussle for a couple of pages before Iron Man learns the villain's secret. (Hint: it involves invading aliens again) So, nothing too extraordinary here for IM's second appearance. That said, all the extra additions about Tony Stark's private life, Iron Man's new gold color, and details about how he operates were intriguing enough obviously to keep readers coming back for more. And their patience would be amply rewarded as the strip progressed.



ARTIST JOE SINNOTT HAD BEEN A LONG TIME FREELANCER FOR MARVEL IN ITS PRE-HERO ATLAS DAYS UNTIL HE WAS LAID OFF IN THE MID-1950S. DURING THAT TIME HE FOUND OTHER WORK, MOST NOTABLY WITH CATHOLIC PUBLISHER TREASURE CHEST. HE RETURNED IN THE LATE FIFTIES BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL HE MADE HIS MARK AS JACK KIRBY'S INKER ON THE FANTASTIC FOUR THAT HIS CAREER TRAJECTORY AS PERHAPS MARVEL'S #1 INKER WAS SET.

Journey Into Mystery #91

"Sandu, Master of the Supernatural!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils/inks)

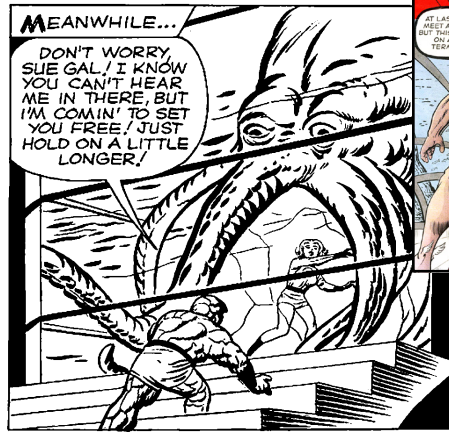
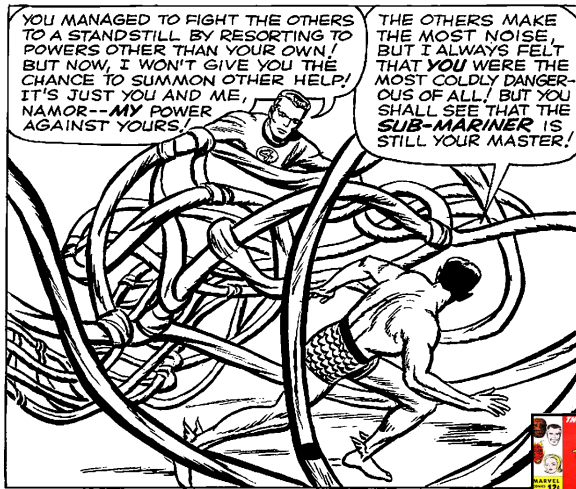
Joe Sinnott proves he was a better inker than he was a penciler in *Journey Into Mystery* #91 (April 1963). Sinnott took over the art chores on the Thor strip following Al Hartley's emergency job in the previous issue. Sinnott would stay on for a number of issues. Not that that was a good thing. His flat, uninteresting art style coupled with boring layouts that often relied on close ups rather than widescreen action made for ponderous reading despite Larry Lieber's professional script. Not that the Stan Lee plotted story provided material to inspire the artist. Unlike someone like Jack Kirby, who could boldly add his own flourishes to a story no matter what kind of script he was given, Sinnott lacked that kind of initiative and seemed to stick strictly to whatever script he was given. No more, no less. And this tale of Sandu the magician didn't present much to start with as Loki increases the performer's power allowing him to challenge Thor. (This trick of having Loki grant some unsuspecting human special powers would be used more than once over the years) Needless to say, he fails (although Thor does cheat a bit after Odin sends him his "belt of strength" via the Valkyries) Ho hum. But if readers were underwhelmed by the main feature, at least they still had a couple fantasy backup tales to make up for it. In this case, it's the creepy Lee penned, Steve Ditko penciled and inked story "The Manikins."

Fantastic Four #14

"The Merciless Puppet Master!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Steve Ditko (inks)

It was another double team match up in *Fantastic Four #14* (May 1963) as the Puppet Master returned using his radioactive clay to control the Sub-Mariner. Seems the Puppet Master somehow survived his fall

from the window back in *FF #8* and, after being released from hospitalization, now seethes with the desire for revenge against the FF. To do it, he takes control of the Sub-Mariner and has him kidnap Sue Storm. This is fairly easy to do, as Sue is still uncertain of her feelings that are divided between Reed and Namor. Of course, when Subby challenges the FF to come and rescue their teammate where he holds her beneath the sea, they do it. Battling their way through a plethora of patented Jack Kirby aquatic creatures (including a giant octopus watching over Sue), the FF win out, but just as they're about



to tackle the Sub-Mariner himself, Sue intervenes begging them to hold off. Frustrated, the Puppet Master commands Subby to attack, but Namor resists to the point of breaking the villain's hold on him. In a reversal



of fortune, the giant octopus crushes the Puppet Master's sub, presumably with him inside and Namor allows his foes to leave in peace. This story ends with Sue wishing that the FF and Namor could be friends. But the status of her relationship with the sea lord is still up in the air clearing the way for more developments in issues to come. By this point the Stan Lee as scripter and Jack Kirby as penciler team was running like a well-oiled machine on the strip with stories rapidly becoming tighter and more coherent. A small but shared universe was slowly coming into being, with characters now more defined and increasingly nuanced. All of it something being noticed by readers including one in this issue's letters page who called the FF comic "the most inventive comic in the history of the business." Adding

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FANTASTIC FOUR #14, PAGE 17: FANS AGREED: THE FANTASTIC FOUR WAS "THE MOST INVENTIVE COMIC IN THE HISTORY OF THE BUSINESS!" AND WHO COULD ARGUE WITH THAT SENTIMENT AS EDITOR STAN LEE MOVED QUICKLY TOO CONSOLIDATE HIS GAINS WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF NEXT ISSUE BLURBS, LETTERS PAGES, AND CHUMMY NEWS FEATURES THAT WOULD ONE DAY EVOLVE INTO ITS BULLPEN BULLETINS. ALL THAT AND A GIANT OCTOPUS TOO! FANS MUST JUST HAVE BEEN LIVING RIGHT!



GIANT OCTOPI (AMONG OTHER GIANT MONSTERS) WERE IN THE AIR (OR IN THE SEA AS THE CASE MAY BE) BY THE TIME OF FF #14 LED OFF BY THE 1954 DISNEY FILM, 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA AND FOLLOWED QUICKLY BY 1955'S IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA STARRING THE GREAT KENNETH TOBEY!

to the sense that Marvel's superheroes were not just a passing fad but were here to stay, this issue of the FF not only hosted its own letters page (which acted as a clearing house for letters to the company's other superhero features), but also the earliest beginnings of what would become the Bullpen Bulletins page, complete with next issue blurb (which in itself was a somewhat revolutionary innovation). In addition, the issue also included a colorful, full page house ad that showed off all of the company's superhero features and where readers could find them. **Fun Fact:** The house ad also shouted out how Marvel's comics could be easily spotted on crowded spinner racks: "Watch for the greatest symbols in comics," declared Lee's boastful blurb as an arrow pointed at head shots of the FF contained in a new corner box feature that would be placed on all of Marvel's comics beginning this month. Rumored to have been the brainchild of artist Steve Ditko, the box located in the upper left hand corner of every Marvel comic, would host a picture of the star of whichever book it was on, making it easy for fans to spot their favorite features.

Tales to Astonish #43

"The Astonishing Ant-Man vs. the Mad Master of Time!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Lieber (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

A slight tale by editor/plotter Stan Lee for *Tales to Astonish* #43 (May 1963) with Larry Lieber again providing the scripts. This time, a Prof. Elias Weems

is laid off his job just as he's expecting the arrival of his grandson, whom he had been eager to show around his lab. Angered at a policy that shelved people just because of age, he tests an invention he created that moves time forward to prematurely age plants and animals. The tests are a success and, rather grandiosely calling himself the "Time Master," he next threatens to age everyone in the city unless the municipality turns control over to himself. But Ant-Man learns of the threat through his network of ants and moves to thwart Weems. He fails, but only temporarily, catching up to the Time Master just as he turns his ray on a crowd in the street, among which is his young grandson. When he realizes what he's done, Weems tries to reverse the process but loses control of his device and drops it. It's recovered by Ant-Man and handed over to the people who turn themselves back to their former selves. There's a happy ending though: When Weems is brought up on charges, the law goes easy on him and he gets his old job back, where we leave him giving a tour to his grandson. Eh. Clearly, Lee was floundering with the Ant-Man strip, turning what started off on the right foot with Communists and saboteurs into a series of fantasy stories not unlike those that still backed up many of Marvel's superhero books at the time. In the long run, this current take would not do. The new readers that were beginning to take notice of the company were demanding more colorful villains and more memorable stories not to mention some human development on the order that Lee and Jack Kirby were giving to the Fantastic Four and Lee and Ditko were just beginning to give to Spider-Man. The only saving graces for this issue were the attention-grabbing cover by Kirby and the Don Heck artwork on the insides that was lush with detailed linework and the penciler's architectural sense that gave the suburbs a clearly modern feel with its ranch homes and wide open spaces. Still, something would need to be done soon if the strip was going to catch on bigly with readers. A fun plus this issue was the usual Steve Ditko-drawn fantasy entry, this time entitled "My Fatal Mistake," in which a man is replaced by a computer only to become its caretaker.

Kid Colt Outlaw #110

*"Behind the Iron Mask!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)
"The Revenge of Rio Bates!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils/inks)*

Behind a neat Jack Kirby/Dick Ayers cover for *Kid Cold Outlaw* #110 (May 1963) lies another Stan Lee scripted/Jack Keller penciled and inked opus

featuring the titular six-gun totin' hero versus what could only be, by any estimation, a "supervillain." Sure, Iron Mask didn't have true super powers, but he did sport a Dr. Doom-like mask and bulletproof body armor. By the terms of Marvel's westerns at the time, all that constituted something "super" as did the uncanny shooting and fighting ability of western heroes such as Kid Colt. The Kid's battle versus Iron Mask is pretty good, only losing much of its implicit oomph by Keller's less than stellar art. Still, Lee manages to keep the reader interested as the Kid hunts Iron Mask after learning that he mistreated a doctor who'd helped the Kid recover from an injured arm. The Kid finally stops Iron Mask by the simple expedient of shooting his exposed arms and legs which the villain neglected to sheathe in the same metal as his torso! Still, the gem of this issue isn't one of the two Keller drawn Kid stories but the five-page standalone "The Revenge of Rio Bates" that was not only scripted by Lee but penciled and inked by Gene Colan. Curiously, unlike the Keller drawn main story, this short piece features a formal credit box (that includes an early nod to letterer Artie Simek). Even stranger, Colan is given straight credit with his real name not a pseudonym like the Adam Austin moniker he'd effect when he took over the Iron Man strip from Don Heck later during the years of consolidation. That said, Colan's art here is as advanced as it would ever get, short of the wide-open, innovative layouts he'd use on *Dr. Strange* and his mid-range *Daredevils*. It still boggles the mind that the editors at DC where he spent much of his time between his early stint at Atlas and his triumphant return to Marvel in another couple years, didn't recognize his talent for action and drama, exiling him to their romance comics!



ALEXANDRE DUMAS MAY HAVE BEEN FIRST WITH HIS NOVEL, THE MAN IN THE IRON MASK, BUT HE HAD NOTHING ON STAN LEE AND JACK KELLER WHO DID HIM ONE BETTER BY ENCASING THE VILLAIN IN KID COLT OUTLAW #110 ENTIRELY IN IRON ARMOR! SLOWLY, MARVEL'S WESTERN VILLAINS WERE GETTING MORE "SUPER" BUT A HALLMARK OF THESE VILLAINS WOULD BE THAT THEY WERE ALWAYS KEPT LOW KEY, AND NEVER OVERPOWERED SO AS TO FIT MORE EASILY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY MILIEU OF THE WESTERNS.

Strange Tales #108

"The Painter of a Thousand Perils!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Kirby was back! After being spelled on the pencils in the previous ish by Dick Ayers, Jack was back for *Strange Tales* #108 (May 1963). Unfortunately, it wasn't for a Stan Lee plotted tale involving some costumed super menace, instead, it was a story more like the short fantasies that still backed up most of Marvel's superhero headlined books. It was the same problem that was concurrently plaguing the Ant-Man feature over in *Tales to Astonish*. Could Lee finally kick the habit and get with the costumed villain groove that his new heroes demanded? For now, that question was still up in the air as the Human Torch faced off with yet another strange character, this time known only as the Painter. The Painter was actually a counterfeiter previously caught and jailed by the Torch. He manages to escape prison and while doing so, finds himself in a cave with funny hieroglyphics on the walls. They tell about a set of painting tools stored there by (what else?) an alien race and what can be done with them; namely, anything a person can draw with them becomes real. Using them, the Painter depicts himself traveling freely through rock to the surface and so it happens. He hires himself out to crooks seeking revenge on the Torch and through a series of fantastic paintings, the Painter puts the hero through his paces. That is, until the Torch realizes that as the Painter, the ex-counterfeiter showed the same flaws in his work that got him captured before. Namely, he forgets to put nozzles on giant hydrants he used to douse the Torch's flame and to place the number "4" on the uniforms of the Fantastic Four when he created duplicates. It was a good story but by this time, readers were expecting more from Marvel than the Painter or Paste Pot Pete. These villains would need to be dressed up considerably or dumped for more challenging fare soon if such strips as the Human Torch and Ant-Man were to survive. Just as the FF and the rest of the company's stable of heroes had to eventually don costumes, so would the villains. Up to now, many, if not all, of the bad guys from the Wizard and Egghead to the Mad Thinker, had gone costume-less. Luckily, as the early years progressed, that would change. The issue's backup features were somewhat interesting in that Larry Lieber not only scripted "The Silent Giant," but penciled it as well. Something he'd be doing on an increasingly regular basis as the months went on. Meanwhile, the Lee scripted "Iron Warrior," had penciler Steve Ditko still giving it his all despite the fast-rising popularity of his *Spider-Man* feature, for which he penciled and inked

20 plus pages every month. How long would he have the time to devote the attention he does here to the short fantasy pieces? **Fun Fact:** Despite the twist in the Torch story wherein the Painter is caught because he forgot to place the numeral "4" on the uniforms of his faux FF, cover artist Jack Kirby does the opposite: he forgets to leave the symbol off the uniform of the faux Invisible Girl!

Tales of Suspense #41

"The Stronghold of Dr. Strange!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

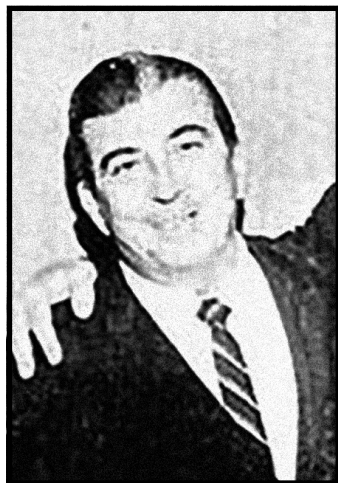
Was he a Dr. Strange prototype? Luckily, no. But he could have passed for the Wizard without a beard and a widow's peak! Though penciler Jack Kirby (with the inking assist of Dick Ayers) makes the latest Iron Man entry in *Tales of Suspense* #41 (May 1963) enjoyable, even they can't hide the fact that the Stan Lee plot was cut from the same cloth as his Wizard stories over in *Strange Tales*. That is, a mad scientist type plots to escape from prison, this time building a device that hypnotizes Iron Man into helping him to escape. Later, at his island headquarters, he launches a nuclear-type bomb and uses it to blackmail the planet into having him take over. It's all done, he says, for his daughter whom he hopes to impress and win back her affections. Reading her badly, he ends up being the target of Iron Man, who uses a number of new devices (including those that grant him flight

and underwater capabilities) to defeat him. However, IM is helped in the end by Strange's daughter after his power is dangerously drained. It was a good story, solid, but more attention was going to be needed if Iron Man was going to stay for the duration. Making up for whatever lack of imagination the IM story might have had was one of the fantasy backup stories penciled and inked by Steve Ditko called "The End of the Universe," in which a man with nothing to lose is chosen to pilot a rocket ship to the end of the known universe. He succeeds and returns declaring "I know! I know!" He has clearly been driven out of his mind with the knowledge (the same way Johnny Storm would be when he did the same thing in *FF* #50...but he recovered) but is clearly a happier man now than when he left.

Gunsmoke Western #76

*"The Capture of Kid Colt!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)
"The Rustler's of Red Gap"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)
"The Sheriff's Secret!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils/inks)*

Although the lead feature in *Gunsmoke Western* #76 (May 1963) was the usual Kid Colt oater, at this point in the title's history, it was the backup stories that were deserving of more interest. Not that Stan Lee's scripts weren't solid, they were as good as they ever were (and since he was still scripting them here instead of doing the up and coming superheroes, was an indication of what he thought were his priorities both as a writer and an editor), it was Jack Keller's art style that failed to make any sparks. Add to that, his penchant for laying out pages in six panel grids but instead of square panels, they were composed of narrow, vertical panels making for uninteresting visuals and story flow. "The Life and Death of Blast Larkin," was made marginally more interesting with its Dick Ayers art but it isn't until "The Rustler's of Red Gap" that the issue really picks up in quality with Don Heck both penciling and inking the Lee scripted tale of how a wronged Indian foils the plans of rustlers by use of a rain dance. Here, Heck is at the top of his form, one that would soon be submerged beneath the work of other inkers when he moved over to the superheroes. The story is filled with action and movement, detail and facial expressions showing the full range of human emotion. No wonder that Heck would command a great deal of fan admiration when he came to their full attention after taking over Iron Man and *The Avengers*. The Heck story was followed up by another beautiful Gene Colan penciled and inked tale called "The Sheriff's Secret!" Here, Lee tells



SOMETIMES SIGNING HIMSELF AS "R. BERNS.," WRITER ROBERT BERNSTEIN CAME BY WAY OF EC AND DC COMICS. SPECIALIZING IN WAR STORIES IN THE LATTER 1950s. WITH LEE TRYING TO BRING ON NEW WRITERS FOR HIS GROWING SUPERHERO LINEUP, BERNSTEIN FOUND TEMPORARY LODGING DURING MARVEL'S EARLY YEARS SCRIPTING STRIPS LIKE IRON MAN AND THOR.

the story of Sheriff Brand Dixon, whom everyone in town thinks is a coward because he has his deputy, Nevada Nesbitt, do his gun totin' for him. Turns out they were wrong... For anyone interested in seeing what their favorite Marvel artists were doing before they turned to superheroes, the westerns were the place to look! **Fun Fact:** This issue sports Marvel's new upper left corner box symbol, here depicting a generic close up of a man shooting off a six-gun. Could anyone imagine such a politically incorrect image on a comic book cover in 2024?

Journey Into Mystery #92

"The Day Loki Stole Thor's Magic Hammer!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils/inks)

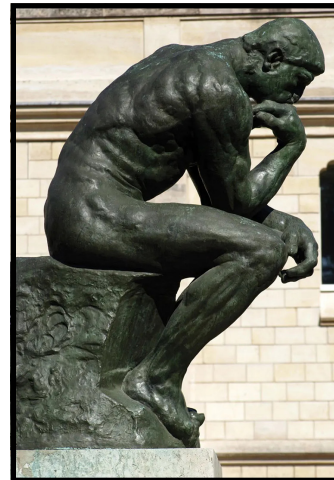
In a story by editor Stan Lee that captures somewhat the fantastical nature of many Nordic myths, *Journey Into Mystery #92* (May 1963) misses the mark due to sub-standard art by Joe Sinnott. (To get an idea of the dramatic potential the story had, just take a gander at Jack Kirby's cover image) Inside art is rather pedestrian with the fantastic elements showing a distinct lack of imagination (re: the movie dragon Thor fights; Heimdall and Neri; and even Odin) as Thor battles Loki to retrieve his lost hammer. In this first adventure that takes place entirely in the land of Asgard, readers learn that while there, Thor stays himself and doesn't change back to Don Blake after being out of touch with his hammer for more than 60 seconds. The difference in tone and style between Kirby and Sinnott will be clearly seen when comparing this ish with the next. We're talking light-years in difference here! But where has former scripter Larry Lieber been keeping himself since Robert Bernstein took over the Thor feature? The answer: he was scripting (and more frequently as the months went on) and penciling the fantasy backup stories that most Marvel comics still sported. This issue, he can be found scripting on "The Man Who Hated Monstro" while artist Steve Ditko illustrated one of his most fondly recalled classics: "I Used to be Human!" This is one of Lee's patented morality tales in which a man finds himself stranded on an alien planet and, forced to eat the native fruit, changes into a hulking brute. When rescue arrives, he decides not to identify himself, preferring the contentedness of his newly peaceful existence. As the Earth ship leaves, he broods on how humans cannot conceive that any other life form might be as good or better than their own.

Fantastic Four #15

"The Fantastic Four Battle the Mad Thinker and His Awesome Android!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

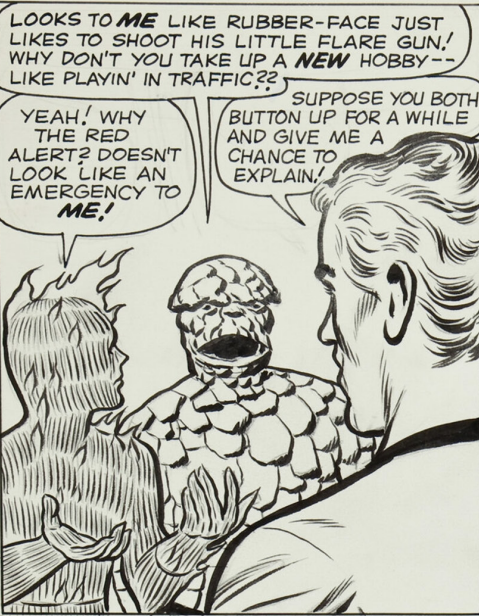
(OPPOSITE PAGE) IN DEVELOPING THE MARVEL MANNER OF PUTTING TOGETHER COMIC BOOKS. A COMBINATION OF NOT JUST ART OR EVEN SCRIPTING, BUT OF AN EDITORIAL VIEWPOINT THAT STRESSED PERSONALITY, CHARACTERIZATION, EMOTIONAL CONFLICT, AND SUPPORTING CHARACTERS. STAN LEE CREATED AN ATMOSPHERE THAT MANAGED TO ENDOW ITS LINE UP OF MAD SCIENTISTS WITH DISTINCT PERSONALITIES SO THAT VILLAINS SUCH AS THE MAD THINKER, THE WIZARD, AND EVEN DR DOOM COULD NEVER BE CONSIDERED AS CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH.

This is it! This is where editor/writer Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby really begin to step on the gas! The point in the early years where everything comes together, and the two creators finally realize that their company's superhero features were definitely the wave of the future. Perhaps signaling the change is an eye grabbing cover by Kirby accentuated by a bright yellow background provided by colorist Stan Goldberg. Now, there's no doubt that Kirby is fully on board as the quality of his art matches his previous efforts on the westerns. For his part, besides obviously spending more time scripting such books as the FF, Lee would soon begin to drop his own work on the westerns and to take up instead the reins of all the superhero features. In particular, besides the Mad Thinker featured in *Fantastic Four #15* (June 1963), the title would finally launch into a string of super-powered adventures featuring more Dr. Doom, the Ant-Man, the Molecule Man, and others. For the most part, monsters and aliens, remnants of the company's former fantasy/giant monster books, would be



gone, replaced by more pseudo-scientifically based villains and threats. That said, even though this issue's new villain, the Mad Thinker, doesn't sport a fancy costume, he doesn't need one. Instead, through the use of computers and his own brain, he has the unique ability to predict to near certainty everything that happens

ARTIST JACK KIRBY LEFT LITTLE DOUBT WHAT WAS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE MAD THINKER INTRODUCED IN FANTASTIC FOUR #15: AUGUSTE RODIN'S FAMOUS SCULPTURE OF A MAN IN DEEP THOUGHT TITLED LE PENSEUR (1904) PROOF? JUST CHECK OUT THE MAD THINKER'S POSTURE ON THE COVER OF FF #15!



LOOKS TO **ME** LIKE RUBBER-FACE JUST LIKES TO SHOOT HIS LITTLE FLARE GUN! WHY DON'T YOU TAKE UP A **NEW HOBBY**-- LIKE PLAYIN' IN TRAFFIC??

YEAH! WHY THE RED ALERT? DOESN'T LOOK LIKE AN EMERGENCY TO **ME!**

SUPPOSE YOU BOTH BUTTON UP FOR A WHILE AND GIVE ME A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN!



I DIDN'T WANT TO INTERRUPT WHAT I WAS DOING ANY MORE THAN **YOU** DID!

I'M RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF A CRUCIAL EXPERIMENT WITH D. N. A., THE BASIC CELLS WHICH ARE THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF **LIFE** ITSELF!



I'VE **ALREADY** MANAGED TO CREATE A PRIMITIVE FORM OF ONE-CELLED LIFE WHICH LIVED FOR A FEW SECONDS!

DO YOU THINK I FEEL LIKE STOPPING **NOW?**

" BUT I RECEIVED AN URGENT CALL FROM THE CHIEF OF POLICE! HIS DEPARTMENT REPORTS THAT TOP MOBSTERS AND GANG LEADERS FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY ARE FLOCKING TO NEW YORK! THERE'S SOMETHING **BIG** IN THE WIND, AND HE WANTS US ALERTED!"

AND, EVEN AS **MR. FANTASTIC** SPEAKS...

IT'S EXACTLY 12:42 P.M.! THEY SHOULD BE ENTERING IN ONE AND ONE-HALF SECONDS!

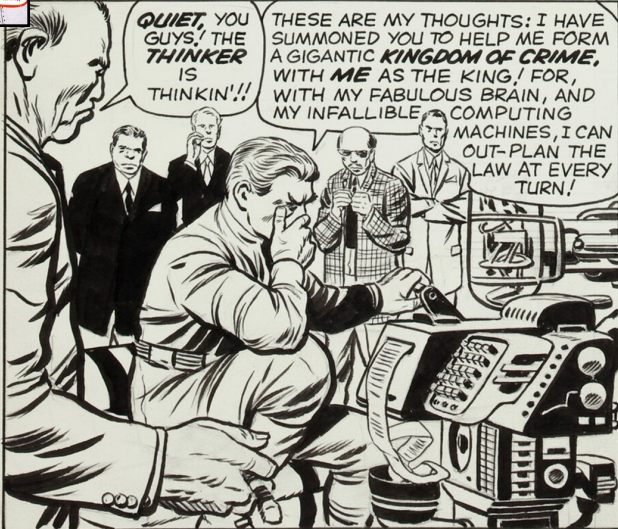
ONE AND ONE-HALF SECONDS LATER...

OKAY, **THINKER**, HERE WE ARE!

START THE BALL ROLLIN'! IT AIN'T HEALTHY FOR US TO BE TOGETHER UNDER ONE ROOF!



AND NO FUNNY STUFF, SEE? WE GOT BOYS POSTED ALL AROUND THIS JOINT!



QUIET, YOU GUYS! THE **THINKER** IS THINKIN'!!

THESE ARE MY THOUGHTS: I HAVE SUMMONED YOU TO HELP ME FORM A GIGANTIC **KINGDOM OF CRIME**, WITH **ME** AS THE KING! FOR, WITH MY FABULOUS BRAIN, AND MY INFALLIBLE COMPUTING MACHINES, I CAN OUT-PLAN THE LAW AT EVERY TURN!

UNTIL THIS MOMENT, THE POLICE HAVE NOT EVEN DREAMT OF MY EXISTENCE! BUT I SHALL REMAIN HIDDEN NO LONGER! WITH YOU, THE MOST POWERFUL GANG LEADERS OF ALL, I SHALL DEVISE A FOOLPROOF PLAN TO CAPTURE AND TAKE CONTROL OF **NEW YORK CITY** ITSELF!!



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4.

around him. (In case anybody missed the reference in his name, Kirby introduces him in the opening splash page sitting in the same posture as Auguste Rodin's famous sculpture of "Le Penseur" or "The Thinker!") Setting a plan in motion to defeat the FF (they stand in his way of conquering the world, natch), he breaks up the team by luring them away with alluring alternative employments including big time wrestling for the Thing and the circus for the Torch. With their headquarters empty, the Thinker moves in, accessing all of Reed's inventions, using them to equip his henchmen against the FF when they return. They do, of course, and battle their way to the Thinker, including subduing a giant, weird looking android that the Thinker created using Reed's own DNA research. Finally, the Thinker is defeated by the only factor he was unable to predict: a contingency plan laid by Mr. Fantastic in which Willie Lumpkin, the mailman, presses a button every day, temporarily shutting down everything in the team's headquarters thus disarming the Thinker. "The X-factor," muses a defeated Thinker. "The unexpected, the human element. The one thing I didn't count on!" It was an exciting and thoroughly satisfying story covering a lot of ground but more importantly, laid the groundwork for the new era of superheroics soon to follow. **Fun Fact:** This issue's letters' page featured a missive penned by one Roy Thomas commenting on issue #11 (that he called "one of the best yet" despite featuring the Impossible Man [whom he liked]) Thomas, of course, was later hired by Lee as his assistant and became, after him, Silver Age Marvel's most important writer. Still later, he replaced Lee as editor-in-chief and became the father of a host of new innovative features in Marvel's later twilight years.



ROY THOMAS' CAREER AT MARVEL ACTUALLY BEGAN MUCH EARLIER THAN HIS TIME FIRST AS A WRITER THERE AND LATER AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF. EVEN BEFORE ALL THAT, HE WAS AN OCCASIONAL LETTER WRITER, DASHING OFF MISSIVES MOSTLY TO DC (WHERE HIS FAVORITE CHARACTERS RESIDED) THEN TO MARVEL'S NEW SUPERHERO LINEUP WHERE THE FF INITIALLY CAUGHT HIS ATTENTION.

Rawhide Kid #34

"The Deadly Draw of Mr. Lightning!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Davis (pencils/inks)
"Man of the West!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

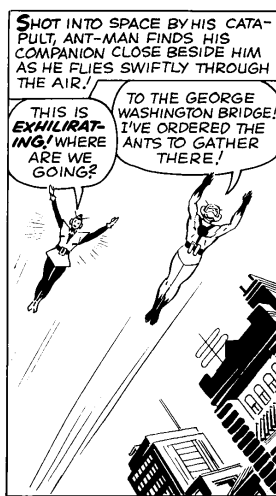
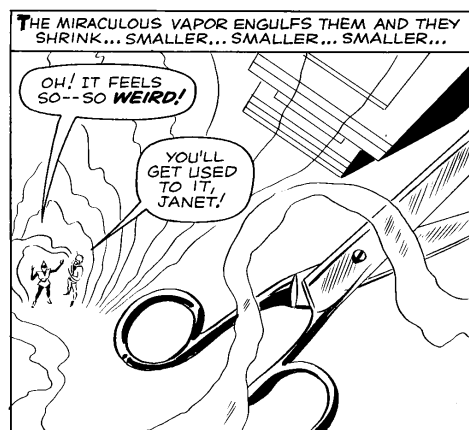
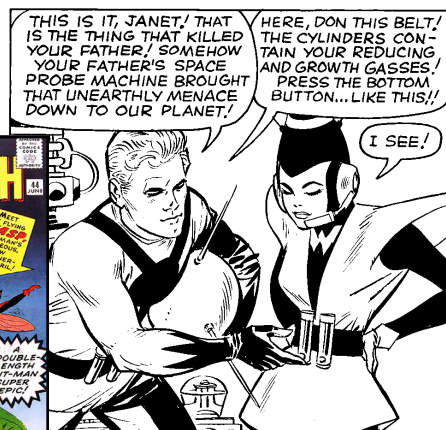
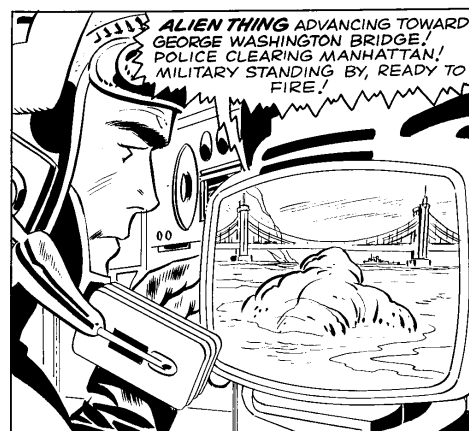
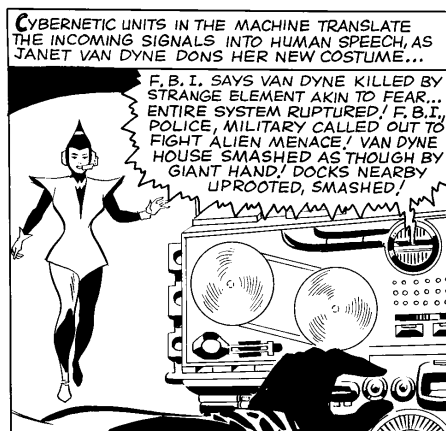
Artist Jack Davis, unfortunately, was still on duty as of *Rawhide Kid* #34 (June 1963). Unfortunate in that it seemed that Jack Kirby was in the process of retreating permanently from Marvel's westerns. He was gone from the lead feature this issue and if he hadn't yet, he would soon be gone from the Two-Gun Kid as well. It was a sign of the times as it became increasingly obvious that superheroes were the next wave the company needed to ride. That said, what Kirby was working on, besides the Fantastic Four and special pacesetter issues of *Journey Into Mystery* (Thor), *Tales to Astonish* (Ant-Man), and *Strange Tales* (Human Torch), was a new war comic called *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos*. And soon to follow would be *The Avengers* and *X-Men*. Clearly, editor Stan Lee had been given the green light from the company's accountants and publisher Martin Goodman to proceed full speed with superheroes. But that didn't mean Lee himself, unlike Kirby, had abandoned his westerns. He'd remain as scripter on them for months to come, and this issue is no exception, as he turns in another tale of the *Rawhide Kid* tackling Mr. Lightning. A dead ringer for Torch villain the Wizard, Mr. Lightning can juggle and tumble and isn't dumb either: "With my brain, I could probably learn to handle a gun in no time. And nobody would be faster on the draw!" You guessed it! Mr. Lightning is an egomaniac of the first water. In their initial encounter, the Kid loses and is wounded but judges it for the best. Now, he wouldn't always be challenged by gunsels on the make everywhere he went. Later, he meets Mr. Lightning again, but this time beats him because "You depend so much on your speed, you get careless with your aim!" Lee and Davis team-up again in the issue's second story "Prisoner of the Apaches" before the issue's real gem brings up the rear: "Man of the West!" Scripted by Lee, penciled by Kirby, and inked by Dick Ayers, it tells the story of Mark Morgan, who finally finds just the right spot in Nevada to build his ranch. With the sweat of his brow, he fells trees, fashions logs, plows fields, and when ready, goes to town to find himself a wife. Over the years, the pair face such hardships as Indian raids, rustlers, and the loss of a child. With another grown son, he stems a flood by building a dam and saving the whole community. By that point, Morgan is grey haired

and tired but somehow restless. "What's wrong, Mark?" asks his wife. "It's...it's the land, Nancy," he replies. "We've got to leave. I'm a frontiersman, a pioneer. I gotta be makin' something out of nothing, turning a wilderness into a place to raise a family. But when it's finished, there's nothing left. I crave to be movin' on to find me a new wilderness." And so, the little family leaves the community they helped to settle to look for another home site in the wilderness. "But this time there is a difference," concludes Lee. "This time he has a wife, and a son, and of such sturdy human thread was woven the fabric of the glory of the west!" It was a fitting envoi, a final tale summarizing the inherent symbolism and metaphor of Lee's cannon of western stories. And like the character of Mark Morgan riding into the sunset, the team of Lee and Kirby would do the same. In the past, Lee had collaborated with many wonderful artists such as Al Williamson, Gene Colan, and Doug Wildey, but somehow, none had the spark of real excitement that Kirby could bring to almost anything he drew. Their dozens of collaborations in the western genre would stand the test of time as monuments to their creative partnership. Thus, the great days of Marvel's westerns were over. Though Kirby would give their remaining years a veneer of interest by continuing as cover artist, pencilers such as Jack Keller and Dick Ayers (and with Larry Lieber largely replacing Lee on the scripts) would ensure that the line remained moribund, a backwater to Marvel's growing concentration on superheroes.

Tales to Astonish #44

"The Creature From Cosmos!"; Stan Lee (plot); H. E. Huntley (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Don Heck (inks)

Obviously realizing that something more needed to be done to liven up the Ant-Man strip and bring it into conformity with the humanistic approach he was exploring with the Fantastic Four, Iron Man, and Spider-Man,

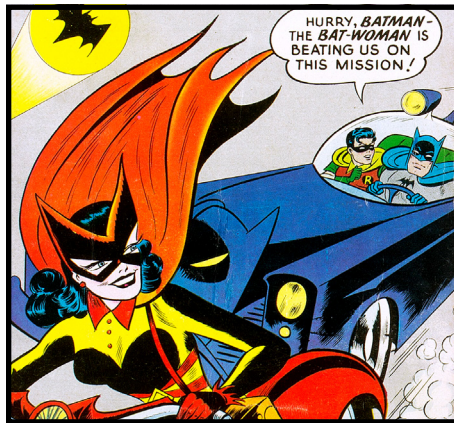


TALES TO ASTONISH #44, PAGE 13: THE ANT-MAN TAKES A...WASP! PENCILER JACK KIRBY (WITH DON HECK ON INKS) RETURNED TO THE ANT-MAN FEATURE TO HELP RE-LAUNCH THE STRIP WITH MORE PERSONAL COMPLICATIONS FOR HANK PYM. THE CHIEF OF WHICH IS THE WASP HERSELF AS INTIMATED IN THE FINAL PANEL HERE AS SHE QUICKLY PROFFESSES HER LOVE FOR OUR TROUBLED HERO!

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editor Stan Lee took *Tales to Astonish* #44 (June 1963) to make the change. Up to this point, the Ant-Man feature had been a solo act with no supporting characters, no special problems to plague the hero on a continuing basis, and little ongoing continuity. Looking at the other more successful superhero features, Lee deduced that Ant-Man lacked a human dimension that could only be brought out by interaction with other people. In a stroke, the story this issue not only provides the hero with a tragic back story that still haunts him, but a new female partner with whom he is not completely on the same wavelength. More specifically, readers learn that Henry Pym had been married before, and after he and wife Maria returned to her native Hungary, she was kidnapped and murdered by local Soviet officials as a lesson to others who might seek to leave the country. And though Pym makes an effort to find the killers, he's ultimately helpless to do anything about the tragedy. Back in the States, he decides to create a persona for himself in order to fight crime and injustice and creates his Ant-Man persona. But that's not enough. Fearing that there won't be anyone else to carry on after him should he ever fail, he begins work experimenting with wasp characteristics to be endowed on some future partner. That partner then appears in the unlikely form of a spoiled rich girl named Janet van Dyne, the daughter of scientist Vernon van Dyne, who tries to interest Pym in his astronomical theories. Pym turns him down, but back in his lab, van Dyne proceeds with his experimenting unleashing a giant, amorphous alien by the name of Kosmos onto the Earth. Kosmos kills van Dyne and upon discovering his body, Janet turns to the only person she knows for help. At first dismissing the flighty girl, Pym changes his mind after hearing reports from his ants about a rampaging creature about town. Realizing that Janet wished to fight the thing that killed her father, Pym reveals his identity and offers to make her his partner. She accepts and becomes the Wasp, growing wings and antennae when she shrinks down to insect size. Together, they defeat Kosmos but by that time, Janet convinces herself that she's in love with Pym. Meanwhile, Pym can't deny being attracted to his new partner but

dismisses his feelings, considering himself too old for the girl and fearing her loss the way he lost his wife. It all amounted to a reboot of the strip that injected a much-needed dose of human interest in the Ant-Man feature with the unrequited relationship between Pym and Janet providing needed continuity from issue to issue and ongoing interest for readers. The menace of Kosmos, however, was unfortunate in that it continued the strip's pattern of confronting threats straight out of Marvel's pre-hero monster/fantasy stories. Luckily though, that was soon to end as well as Henry Pym made his way to his next big change. With a wordy script by H. E. Huntley, a pseudonym



OF COURSE. THE CREATION OF FEMALE COUNTERPARTS TO SUCCESSFUL MALE SUPERHEROES WAS A TIME HONORED TRADITION. ALTHOUGH THE WASP WASN'T EXACTLY A PERFECT COPY OF ANT-MAN, THE SAME MIGHT NOT BE SAID FOR SUCH CHARACTERS AS MARY MARVEL, BULLETGIRL, HAWKGIRL, SUPERGIRL, OR BATGIRL. LATER, IN ITS DISTANT DARK AGES, MARVEL WOULD LOSE ALL RESTRAINT AND WOULD END UP WITH A PLETHORA OF MORE EXACT DISTAFF COUNTERPARTS OR EVEN OUTRIGHT REPLACEMENTS.

for long time Atlas employee, Ernie Hart, this issue's extra length story (up from the usual 13 pages to 18) was guest illustrated by Jack Kirby, this time inked by Ant-Man regular artist Don Heck. The two prove to be a fine team with Kirby's drama and action melding perfectly with Heck's scratchy ink lines and shadows. The results confirm that Kirby was now taking Marvel's superheroes seriously, boding well for the future.

Tales of Suspense #42

"Trapped by the Red Barbarian!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Communists were back and Iron Man had them in *Tales of Suspense* #42 (June 1963)! And there were no bones about it! Just check out this story's title "Trapped by the Red Barbarian!" Our villain wasn't just a dirty commie, but a barbarian to boot. And lest some were hesitant about labeling other people with such derogatory terms as barbarian, all they had to do was check their history books about the millions killed in the Russian Revolution, the murder of the royal family, and the subsequent millions who were allowed to starve to death in the Ukraine because they were too outspoken against the Soviet regime. And that doesn't even take into account the purges, the torturing of prisoners in Lubyanka prison or the untold thousands who disappeared into gulags. So, yeah, our villain was getting off lightly being referred to as a barbarian! Anyway, Tony Stark is once again made a target of Soviet espionage as Russian



THERE WERE PLENTY OF REAL LIFE RED BARBARIANS STAFFING THE INFAMOUS LUBYANKA PRISON IN MOSCOW. HERE SHOWN AS IT WAS IN 1961. THE WINDOWLESS TOP FLOOR WAS WHERE THE PRISON CELLS WERE LOCATED.

agent, the Actor, impersonates him to steal his latest invention, a disintegrating device. Discovering the theft, Tony switches to Iron Man and arrives in the USSR ahead of the Actor. He captures him and then appears as himself claiming to be the Actor to the Red Barbarian setting up the real Actor to take the fall when the Red Barbarian finds out he's failed in his mission. It was a good Stan Lee plotted story with a nice twist ending (that would later become the MO for the *Mission: Impossible* TV show a few years later) with nice Don Heck pencils and self-inking. Kirby had switched strips with Heck to spell the latter on this month's Ant-Man feature, but it hardly mattered to fans who were rapidly coming to appreciate Heck's style. This ish was also backed up by a pair of winners in the fantasy category: "I Speak of the Haunted House" with art by Steve Ditko and "Escape Into Space." This latter, scripted by Lee, is a fairly simple tale of the ironic variety with a convict escaping and ending up in the very spot the authorities wanted to put him in the first place. The main attraction of the story however is the art. Penciled by Larry Lieber, it's among the first or maybe the first of his fantasy stories to be inked by Matt Fox, who completely transforms Lieber's uninspired work into something cool, giving his art the feel of a science fiction fairy tale. Fox began his career as an illustrator for pulp magazines, in particular *Weird Tales*. From there, he found his way into comics and Atlas. His teaming with Lieber here was a stroke of genius on someone's part (and since Lieber has said he didn't care for Fox's heavy-handed style, it's safe to assume it wasn't him). As Ditko, Heck, and Kirby retreated from the fantasy backup stories the Lieber/Fox team became the final flourish, the major bright spot, as they began to fade from view.

Journey Into Mystery #93

"The Mysterious Radioactive Man!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Obviously now, artist Jack Kirby had solidly emerged as editor Stan Lee's go-to man when he wanted to kick start new or faltering series in Marvel's still growing superhero line. Not that Kirby wasn't a factor from the beginning. No doubt he had strong input in the stories and initial design work on the Fantastic Four, Hulk, Ant-Man, and Thor. He was even in on initial conferences surrounding the genesis of Spider-Man. Also, in drawing the covers for all of the superhero features (as well as the westerns), Kirby had long since imprinted his style on the look and feel of the new Marvel comics. But all that grew organically out of his relationship with Lee from the time he first returned to the fold during the pre-hero, giant monster phase of Atlas comics. Now, his role had emerged as a firm partnership with Lee, a conscious recognition by Lee that Kirby's action art style had now become the Marvel house style in general. So much so, that down the road, as new artists were hired, they would be put through a period of apprenticeship with Kirby to learn his tropes which were to become Marvel's tropes. But that importance to the burgeoning Marvel line up was only becoming truly apparent to readers now. Looking back, they could see that it was Kirby who'd drawn the first few issues of all the features, save that of Iron Man. Or that he quickly returned to them on occasion for short stints to keep the ball rolling. Then, suddenly, this month alone, he filled in for single issues of both *Tales to Astonish* (where he and Lee teamed to give the Ant-Man feature a reboot) and *Journey Into Mystery* #93 (June 1963) (where he helped reset the tone for the Thor strip by giving him his first real, honest to gosh, supervillain mix up.) Lee's plot begins where all good plots began in Marvel's early years: the commies! This time, it's the ChiComs. Riffing off recent headlines involving cross border battles between India and China, Lee has Dr. Don Blake volunteering in the region of the conflict. When the Chinese attack again, Thor throws them back. Frustrated, Mao Tse Tung himself asks his officers how Thor can be neutralized. A scientist named Chen Lu says he can do it, and proceeds to bombard himself with radiation, thus transforming himself into the Radioactive Man! Delivered into New York via torpedo, the villain goes on a rampage until Thor shows up. But all of Thor's powers prove useless against him including his hammer. Then the Radioactive man reveals another of his powers, hypnotism. He orders Thor to toss away his hammer,

which he does, but farther than the Radioactive Man intends. While he goes off in search of the hammer, Thor reverts back to Blake and shakes off the hypnosis. Recovering his hammer from the bottom of the Hudson River, Blake becomes Thor again, and this time creates a tornado that scoops up the Radioactive Man and deposits him back in China, with only a mushroom cloud to indicate where he hit. Whew! Throughout, Kirby seems reenergized with a story and villain more to his liking (the opening splash alone is pretty thrilling and should have been used for the cover). The story by Lee as scripted by Robert Bernstein was like a breath of fresh air after all the stories featuring Communist warlords, gangsters, and Loki, Loki, Loki. For a time through the years of consolidation, Thor's stories would be held earthbound with earthbound supervillains. Tales that took place in Asgard would be relegated to the "Tales of Asgard" backup stories that would soon be introduced. The split would only be beneficial to the Thor strip, waking it up from its early doldrums and turning it into one of Marvel's top-drawer features, right behind the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man. But was Kirby's outing this ish enough to change the strip's course permanently? Only time and next month would tell. In the meantime, if the Lee/Kirby turnaround lead feature wasn't enough, readers could glom onto the second outing by the new art team of Larry Lieber and Matt Fox with "The Man Who Wouldn't Die" and a Steve Ditko penciled and inked "I Saw a Martian!" Yeah, with art like there was here and Lee still in the scripter's chair, there was still some life left in the fantasy shorts.



MAO TSE TUNG. AS HIS NAME WAS PRONOUNCED AT THE TIME, WAS CHAIRMAN OF COMMUNIST CHINA IN THE 1960S AND SO A LEADING CANDIDATE (AS WAS THE SOVIET UNION'S KRUSHCHEV) FOR MAJOR MARVEL VILLAIN. AT THE TIME THE RADIOACTIVE MAN MADE HIS DEBUT, CHINA WAS STILL CLOSED OFF FROM THE WEST AND WHAT WENT ON THERE WAS CONSIDERED BY MANY AS MYSTERIOUS AND CONJECTURAL.

Fantastic Four #16

"The Micro-World of Dr. Doom!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Editor/scripter Stan Lee did it with issue #12 and he does it again here for *Fantastic Four* #16 (July 1963)! What does he do? Why, another crossover event this time featuring the FF teaming up with the Ant-Man. Only a month after Lee and penciler Jack Kirby kickstarted the Ant-Man feature over in *Tales to Astonish* with a special issue introducing the Wasp and giving Henry Pym an interesting backstory, they granted him a guest-starring role here helping the FF to shrink to sub-atomic size, allowing them to get at Dr. Doom, who's been holding up on a world at the atomic level of smallness. Seems Doom didn't die back in issue #10, but only shrank down and entered a sub-atomic world. (Much like the more officially named Sub-Atomica of the Psycho Man later seen in *FF Annual* #5; here, Doom is even seen looking through a giant viewer at the world above the way Psycho Man would do) There, he conquered one of its worlds and built a device that allowed him to control the size of anyone back on Earth, including the FF. That's how Reed was able to deduce that Doom was still alive and where he likely was. Contacting the only size-changing expert he knew, Reed asks the Ant-Man for help. Ant-Man gives him some of his size-changing formula and the FF use it to reach Doom. (No mention of how they wind up on the one atomic world where Doom happens to be) But Doom manages to overcome them, throwing them into a prison beneath a sea of acid. Meanwhile, worried about the FF, the Ant-Man follows them, but ends up a prisoner himself. Not to worry though, the FF escape, pull Ant-Man's fat out of the fire, and defeat Doom, forcing him to escape back to Earth. At 22 pages, Lee's plot was dense with plenty of ground to cover, but Kirby has no problem doing it (with Dick Ayers providing the usual embellishments). In fact, Kirby this issue provides one of his best cover images yet. One of his specialties was the symbolic cover, and he delivers a doozy this time, with a giant Dr. Doom holding shrunken figures of the FF in his armored hand. Stan Goldberg's colors enhance the image immeasurably, contrasting the dark green hues of Doom's cloak and grey of his armor with a background that begins as pastel pink on the bottom behind the looming hand before gradually deepening to red at the top behind the FF logo. The final effect was one that was sure to catch the roving eye of anyone browsing the local comics racks! **Fun Fact:** This issue also includes an extra bonus page

explaining the stretching powers of Mr. Fantastic plus what had by now become a very interactive double-sized letters page. Soon, all of Marvel's superhero books (as well as its westerns) would sport letters pages of their own, proving that the line had caught fire with readers. Not only that, but Lee seemed to sense the growing enthusiasm, and began plugging Marvel's other books on the letters page in a section that would one day graduate to a feature of its own and be known as the Bullpen Bulletins page.

Tales to Astonish #45

"The Terrible Traps of Egghead!"; Stan Lee (plot); H. E. Huntley (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

The Ant-Man feature in *Tales to Astonish* #45 (July 1963) was definitely a letdown following the Jack Kirby penciled issue before that introduced the Wasp. Not that Don Heck's

pencils and inks were so much inferior to Kirby's (though Kirby was still admittedly the master when it came to superheroes), but that the return of former Ant-Man foe Egghead wasn't much of a step up from the creature from Kosmos.

That said, the Stan Lee plotted story is rather complicated, with Egghead's scheme to kidnap the Wasp and use her as bait to capture Ant-Man, and H. E. Huntley's script is suitably dense (no one could complain he wasn't giving readers their money's worth). But the real interest here is the relationship between Henry Pym and Janet van Dyne (aka Ant-Man and the Wasp). In this first installment apart from the previous issue's Wasp origin tale, readers get a glimpse into their evolving relationship. Here, it's still rather formal on Henry's part as he considers Janet primarily as his crimefighting partner. But it's quite the opposite for Janet who admits being in love with Henry: "He treats me like a scatterbrained little girl, and I want him to think of me as a full-fledged woman...a woman in love!" After Janet tries to do some investigating on her own and is captured, Henry scolds her: "Don't you ever try anything like that again! We're a team, and we'll work as a team, understand?" The Ant-Man strip finally had something going for it other than straight adventure and the dynamic between the reluctant Henry Pym and the determined Janet would finally grant the strip some continuing interest for fans.



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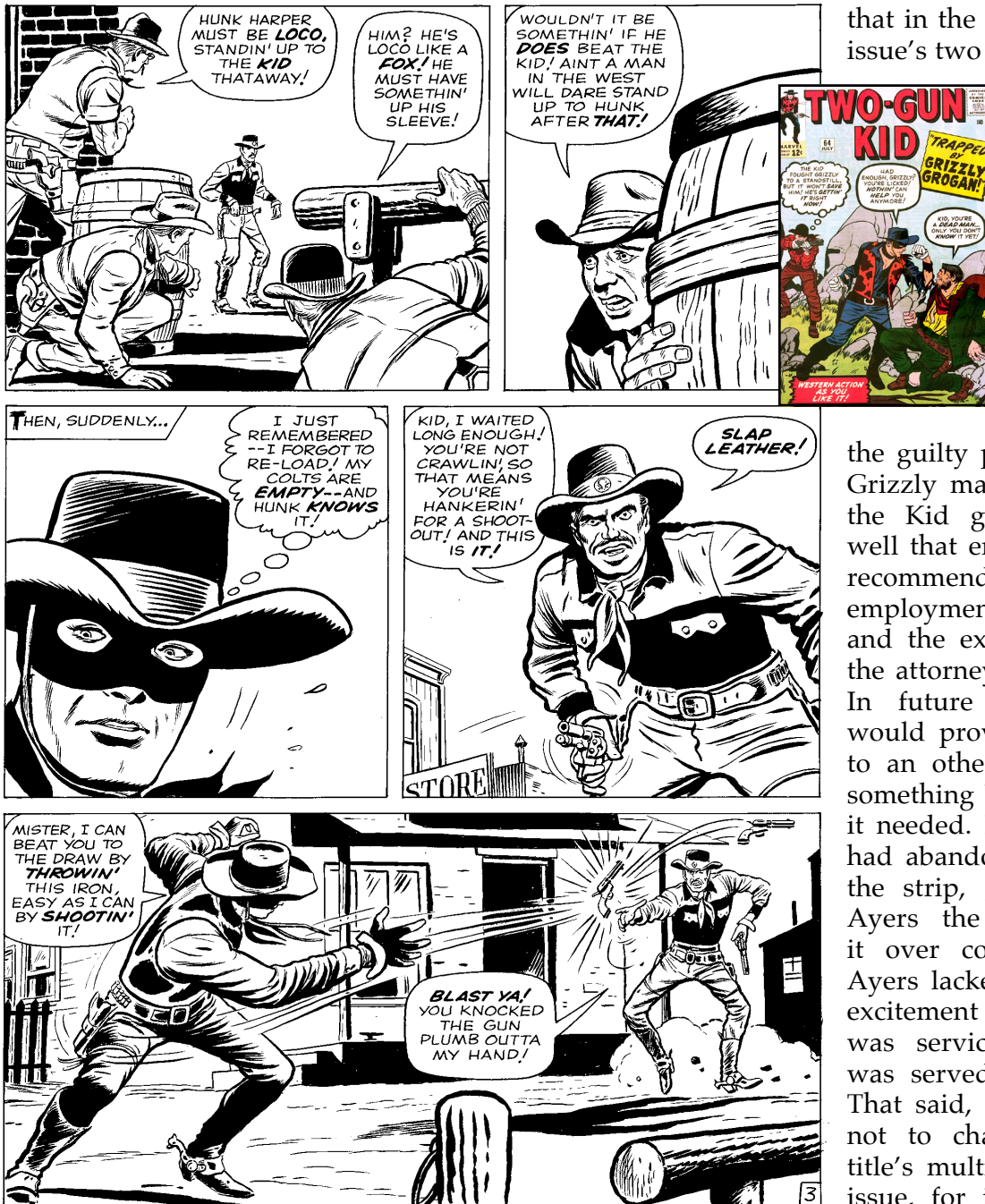
FANTASTIC FOUR #16, PAGE 13: IN WHAT WOULD BECOME A MARVEL MAINSTAY, DR. DOOM EXPLAINS HOW HE SURVIVED APPARENT DEATH IN HIS PREVIOUS ENCOUNTER WITH THE FF. SUCH EXPLANATIONS WOULD BECOME ROUTINE AS VILLAIN AFTER VILLAIN APPEARED TO BE KILLED AFTER MIXING IT UP WITH OUR HEROES ONLY TO RETURN WITH SOME NEAR PREPOSTEROUS EXPLANATION ABOUT HOW THEY MANAGED TO SURVIVE!

Two-Gun Kid #64

"Trapped by Grizzly Grogan!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Like the Ant-Man feature over in *Tales to Astonish*, editor Stan Lee decided to shake things up a bit in *Two-Gun Kid* #64 (July 1963). Sure, the Kid already had his hands full, what with keeping up the pretense of being timid lawyer Matt Hawk while fighting crime under the guise of the Two-Gun Kid. Plus, he had school teacher

Nancy Carter to be concerned about, including trying to figure out how he'd ever be able to tell her the truth about himself while she continued to harbor negative feelings toward the Kid. But Lee must have felt something more needed to be added, so he did just that in the script he wrote for this issue's two part story "Trapped by



Grizzly Grogan." In it, he introduces the big and brawny, top-hatted ex-pugilist, Boom Boom Brown, to the mix. When Grizzly Grogan frames newcomer Boom Boom as a bank robber, Matt manages to prove

Grogan himself was the guilty party in court. Caught, Grizzly makes a break for it and the Kid goes into action. All's well that ends well when the Kid recommends Boom Boom seek employment with lawyer Hawk, and the ex-prize fighter becomes the attorney's bodyguard of sorts. In future issues, Boom Boom would provide some comic relief to an otherwise humorless strip, something Lee must have thought it needed. Meanwhile, Jack Kirby had abandoned the art chores on the strip, giving his inker Dick Ayers the opportunity to take it over completely and though Ayers lacked much in the artistic excitement department, his style was serviceable so long as he was served with Lee's scripting. That said, one thing Lee decided not to change as yet was the title's multiple story format. This issue, for instance, also featured a second *Two-Gun Kid* story that was almost all action and little plot, and a standalone tale called "Gunslinger" penciled by Paul Reinman. Kirby, of course, was still on hand to set the tone with this issue's cover image.

TWO-GUN KID #64, PAGE 3: WITH HIS DUTIES ON THE SUPERHERO STRIPS GIVING HIM MORE WORK THAN HE COULD HANDLE, PENCILER JACK KIRBY RELINQUISHED THE ART CHORES ON TWO-GUN TO INKER DICK AYERS. AYERS DID A SERVICEABLE JOB BUT FAILED TO CAPTURE THE BRAND OF EXCITEMENT ONLY KIRBY COULD GENERATE. FOR EXAMPLE: WHAT THE HECK WAS GOING ON WITH HUNK'S LEGS IN THE FINAL PANEL?

Tales of Suspense #43

"Iron Man Versus Kala, Queen of the Netherworld!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Don Heck (inks)

In a familiar Stan Lee plot, Iron Man follows a number of Tony Stark's workmen after they all have been taken by one Kala, queen of the netherworld, and now must find a way to defeat the queen's plan to invade the surface world and get them all back to the safety of their own world. Lee already used this plot, and relatively recently, with both the Human Torch in *Strange Tales* and Ant-Man in *Tales to Astonish* (and would again after Ant-man became Giant Man). Also, a variation of it was used for Thor in *Journey Into Mystery*, except that time, it was commies who did the kidnapping and not aliens, subterraneans, or beings from other dimensions.

Besides all that, the existence of Kala's netherworld would cause problems with other subterranean realms in the future including those of the Mole Man and Tyrannus. Also, Kala's claim that her realm is actually fabled Atlantis that had sunk into the earth conflicted, even at the time, with Sub-Mariner's kingdom! Which all went to show that even at this point in the early years, when the concept of continuity was just beginning to gel in Lee's mind, he hadn't yet figured it all out. Eventually, it would it would fall to his successors such as Roy Thomas, to explain away the inconsistencies and contradictions introduced in these years, but for now, that was some ways off. In the meantime, penciler Jack Kirby was again on hand to delineate Iron Man's latest adventure in *Tales of Suspense* #43 (July 1963) and he doesn't spare the horses in this 13-page tale filled with made to order alien cityscapes, strange weapons, and out of this world costumery. And all



WAS ATLANTIS UNDER THE EARTH OR UNDER THE SEA OR WHAT? THE FABLED CITY/CONTINENT HAD DIFFERENT LOCATIONS IN DIFFERENT TELLINGS OF THE STORY. (EVEN PLATO, WHO FIRST RAISED THE SUBJECT, WASN'T SURE WHERE IT WAS). EDITOR/PLOTTER STAN LEE DIDN'T SEEM TO KNOW EITHER. LOCATING THE FABLED CITY IN DIFFERENT PLACES AT DIFFERENT TIMES!

of it was more than ably inked by Don Heck, whose thin ink line seemed to bring out more of Kirby's fine points than even Dick Ayers did. Or was it Heck's own style superimposed over Kirby's that created a pleasantly unique look? Whatever the case, it made this story a looker no matter how creaky the plot! But even familiar stories could still yield some interesting tidbits such as that shown on page 3, panel 2. There, Tony Stark is depicted donning his Iron Man armor: pieces of it are lying around in collapsed condition as if they were no different than ordinary clothes, including his helmet piece. All of which somehow become rigid when fully worn giving IM his robotic look. It was just a throwaway scene, but it revealed a lot about IM's operations. And if all the preceding weren't enough, readers also had a Lee scripted, Steve Ditko drawn mini-masterpiece to enjoy: "You Can't Change the Past!" But that wasn't all! There was also a new Larry Lieber/Matt Fox collaboration in "I Was a Victim of Venus!" Man! If anyone needed more evidence of how Fox could transform the dullest of Lieber penciling into something to behold, this story was it! All any unconvinced reader needed was to take a gander of the opening splash page with its rocket zooming through space toward the planet Venus. Wow!

Gunsmoke Western #77

"Don't Draw Against Drago!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

It was the end of an era. Although penciler Jack Kirby would continue to provide the covers for Marvel's western lineup (soon to be reduced to three titles), in fact, he made his final interior appearance among the westerns here, in *Gunsmoke Western* #77 (July 1963), the title's last issue. Canceled, no doubt, to make way for new books to be added to Marvel's growing superhero lineup including the soon to arrive *Avengers* and *X-Men* titles. In the meantime, it was fitting that Kirby be included in this final issue, as he'd been such a big part of the company's westerns over the past several years. Teaming with long time partner editor/scripter Stan Lee for "They Call Him...Dude," this final effort was obviously a rush job for both men. There was ample evidence here that even for a penciling speedster like Kirby, there were only so many hours in a day and that he was likely maxing out his capacity for work. A quick glance at the story's opening splash page shows the head and hand of the man in the right foreground out of proportion to the rest of his body. Over the rest of the panels in the story, figures look hastily drawn as well, with blank backgrounds and mere slashes

indicating clothing. Page 5, panel 4, with its stretched-out cowpoke, is simply way out of character for the usually more meticulous Kirby. Unfortunately, Paul Reinman was no Dick Ayers, and his clunky inking style helped the pencils not at all. The rushed nature of the story was also evident in Lee's plot, an overly familiar one from among the hundreds of western yarns he'd written over the years. This issue's lead Kid Colt story, also scripted by Lee, is familiar as well, with the Kid facing down badman Don Drago. But both Lee and Kirby were headed for a new invigoration of their scripting and penciling responsibilities. With sales momentum becoming clearer by the month that reader energies were concentrated primarily on the company's superheroes, Lee would take over scripting on them all, while making sure Kirby's energies weren't wasted on fading genres such as westerns. But it was a sign of the times that not only would the shrinking popularity of Kid Colt relegate him to a single title, but that this issue's Kirby-drawn cover featured one of the first appearances of the blurb: "Marvel Comics Group ushers in the Marvel Age of Comics!" As the months passed, however, it would become increasingly uncertain if that age included anything else but superheroes.

Journey Into Mystery #94

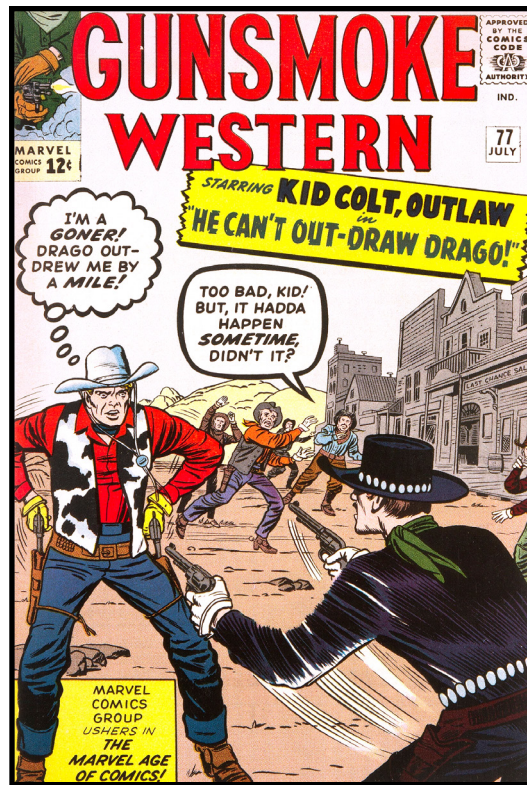
"Thor and Loki Attack the Human Race!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils/inks)

This was the month that editor Stan Lee formally ushered in "the Marvel Age of Comics." Don't believe it? Then just check out the cover blurb to *Journey Into Mystery* #94 (July 1963). (Not to mention *Gunsmoke Western* #77) That, however, didn't mean that the implied greatness of the Marvel of Age of Comics was being applied equally across the board. Take this issue's Thor feature for instance. Sure, it

includes for the first time, major participation of the Asgardian gods in a story, with Odin himself taking a commanding role. And sure, it did sport a Jack Kirby cover. But the story itself, another plot by Loki to trick Thor and brainwash him to do his

bidding, was already getting tiresome. Yeah, it did include some clever bits by plotter Stan Lee and Robert Bernstein does a good job on the script, but the mythological Asgardian fairy tale nature of the story was unsatisfying, especially coming after the Lee/Kirby masterpiece introducing the Radioactive Man. Now there was an exciting story with scope for the imagination! Clearly, at this point, it was the direction in which the Thor strip needed to go, and it couldn't start to go there soon enough. (That said, the Asgardian mythology angle would return later and in a much better, more serious format, when the "Tales of Asgard" feature replaced the fantasy shorts in the back of the book) Not helping again this time, was the art by Joe Sinnott who just lacked the imagination for scenarios and even costuming that someone like Kirby could design in his sleep. Sinnott would soon enough become a star when he moved over to inking Kirby, but as a penciler, he left much to be desired. As for this issue's backup features, the Larry Lieber-drawn "Dinner Time on Deimos," only went to show how much new partner Matt

Fox was missed when he wasn't available to ink Lieber's work. In contrast, Steve Ditko was still at the top of his game for "The Gentle Old Man" where he was, as usual, teamed with scripter Lee to tell a tale of a heartless landlord who gets his comeuppance when he encounters a time traveler from the future. The story is noteworthy especially for a number of trademark panels in which Ditko uses close ups of the landlord under different kinds of lighting conditions to create varied moods and emotions from greed and menace to fear.



WITH ARTIST JACK KIRBY STILL DRAWING THE COVERS AND EDITOR STAN LEE STILL DOING THE SCRIPTS, IT WAS NOT EASY TO TELL THAT THE TIDE WAS GOING OUT ON MARVEL'S WESTERN TITLES WITH GUNSMOKE WESTERN #77 BEING THE LAST ISSUE OF THE VENERABLE FEATURE. AND SO, DESPITE AN EARLY BLURB DECLARING "MARVEL COMICS GROUP USHERS IN THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS!" IT WOULD PROVE TO BE INCREASINGLY DOUBTFUL THAT THE NEW AGE MIGHT BE FRIENDLY TO WESTERNS.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #2

"7 Doomed Men!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

It was only the feature's second issue, and already scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby were touching on sensitive issues usually ignored by other comics including the scores of war comics that had been produced by various companies over the years since the end of World War II. In the upcoming issue #6, the team would tackle racism and antisemitism, but here, the two touch on the Nazi concentration camp system and its inhuman treatment of dissenters and any class of people the regime deemed undesirable. Over the course of Nazi rule in Europe, some sixteen million people were killed in the concentration camp system, including six million Jews. In the early years, only rumors of the camps filtered out to the rest of the world, but even after they became known, it was still with shock that Allied soldiers finally began to overrun them and saw the results measured in human misery that the full horror of what the Nazis did dawned on the West. In the immediate aftermath of the war, trials were held that found many officers and men who ran the camps guilty and condemned them to death. Over the decades since, many more were hunted down and captured. So, it wasn't as if the Nazi crimes were unknown to comics writers and publishers. The subject was likely deemed unsuited for the youngsters who were the comics' chief audience. So it was only on rare occasions that the subject was mentioned at all, making its appearance here, in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #2 (July 1963) unusual. Even more striking was its appearance so soon in the new strip's run. To be sure, the horrors of the camps were glossed over when the Howlers are captured and sent to the fictitious "Heinemund" concentration camp but on page 16, panel 1, Kirby draws what are obviously the gas chambers and ovens with their distinctive smokestacks and series of identical doorways. In the foreground is the long line of prisoners being herded into the camp (familiar to anyone who'd seen documentary footage of the real camps). Inside the barracks, Kirby barely suggests the human misery to be found there, with brief glimpses of prisoners again with the familiar caps and striped pajama camp uniforms. "It's hard to believe that human beings can treat other men like this," muses howler Dum Dum Dugan. "In case you ain't heard about it, Dum Dum, this is one of the reasons we're fightin' this war," replies a grim Fury. But soon enough, the story returns to its fantasy war



BEGUN AS HOLDING PENS FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS, THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMP SYSTEM SOON BECAME CENTERS FOR THE EXTERMINATION OF WHOLE POPULATIONS INCLUDING JEWS, WHOSE DEATHS THERE WOULD EVENTUALLY TOP SIX MILLION. ITS DEPICTION IN SGT. FURY #2, NO MATTER HOW OBLIQUE, WAS STILL FAR MORE DIRECT THAN THE MANNER IT HAD BEEN ADDRESSED, IF AT ALL, IN MOST OTHER WAR COMICS.

hijinks. The Howlers have been given the assignment to destroy a shipment of heavy water headed for Germany's project to develop a nuclear bomb. With ease, they lead a breakout from the camp and successfully conclude their mission by blowing up the nuclear facility and its supply of heavy water. But if the strip's youthful readers needed any reminding why the Nazis made such good bad guys in so many war books (and long after, in such latter-day Nazi villains as the Red Skull, Baron Strucker, and Baron Zemo), their glimpse into the concentration camps this issue gave them more than a clue. **Fun Fact:** Perhaps significantly, the *Sgt. Fury* strip was the only other title besides the *Fantastic Four* and *Spider-Man* that featured full length stories that were scripted by Lee himself! All of Marvel's other main features were still stuck at 13 pages or less, with Lee scripting the westerns while confining himself only to the plotting of the superhero features.

Tales to Astonish #46

"...When Cyclops Walks the Earth!"; Stan Lee (plot);
H.E. Huntley (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Still in pre-hero giant monster mode, plotter Stan Lee took the easy way out again in *Tales to Astonish* #46 (Aug 1963) as Ant-Man and the Wasp tackle what appears to be the Cyclops of Greek myth. Actually, it's just a giant robot again, this time controlled by a new set of aliens planning to invade the earth. Ho hum.

Ant-Man enters the robot through its mouth (!) and finds that he can control it via his cybernetic helmet and thus is able to turn the thing onto its masters. The move convinces them that Earth's human population will be tougher to conquer than they thought. Consequently, they decide to abandon their scheme to move in. (Amazing how easily all these alien invader types give up on the slightest show of resistance!) Even though this tired plot was familiar to older fans, it was still new to the vast majority of Marvel's younger readers who, at the time, had likely never encountered it before. And besides, didn't it still feature that new superhero Ant-Man plus an exciting Jack Kirby drawn cover? On top of that, it was all made to seem newly exciting by Lee's continued use of "the Marvel Age of Comics" blurb prominently branded on the cover. But what probably went over the heads of the book's youthful readers was the fact that Henry Pym and Janet van Dyne decided to go on a vacation together... while unmarried! Luckily, this being 1963 and well before the sexual revolution, it was a safe bet that the two had separate reservations while in Greece. Whew! Also helping to ease whatever disappointment there might have been about the plot, was Don Heck's art which, while inking himself, was exemplary throughout, especially regarding his Alex Raymond-ish looking Henry Pym in polo shirt! Heck only stumbles in his design of the Cyclops whose visage is singularly odd looking. The ish is topped off with a new Lee/Steve Ditko short called "The Most Dangerous Weapon," about a man in the year 2050 who steals a disintegrating pistol with the intention of making himself ruler of the world. But when his opponents force him to use it, he discovers too late, that as a safeguard, it's been fixed to destroy whoever pulls the trigger!



H.E. HUNTLEY WAS A PSEUDONYM FOR ERNIE HART. A PRE-MARVEL, TIMELY/ATLAS MAINSTAY BEFORE DRIFTING OFF TO OTHER PUBLISHERS. HE RETURNED BRIEFLY IN MARVEL'S EARLY YEARS TO PEN A FEW TORCH AND ANT-MAN STORIES BEFORE MOVING ON TO CHARLTON COMICS.

Fantastic Four #17

"Defeated by Dr. Doom!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

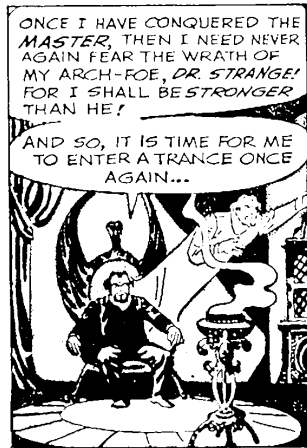
Fantastic Four #17 (Aug 1963) grabs the reader's attention right off with a clever cover design by penciler Jack Kirby in which the separate members of the FF are shown caught in various traps set by Dr. Doom: the Invisible Girl is confronted by "the menace of the moving bars," Mr. Fantastic by "the threat of the swirling cement," the Thing by "the peril of the room without a floor," and the Human Torch by "the panic of the deadly whirlwind!" Each of the four scenarios was arranged in a circular pattern around the central figure of Dr. Doom at the controls. Who could resist a come on like that? Answer: no one with an ounce of imagination and curiosity! Inside, Stan Lee's plot wastes no time following the conclusion of the previous issue's adventure, in which Doom escaped the FF by growing his way out of the micro world. Back on Earth, he quickly devises another plan to further his goal of world domination by kidnapping Alicia Masters and holding her hostage against any attempt by the FF to stop him. But he reckons against the brain of Mr. Fantastic, and the FF manage to storm his flying fortress only to end up in the traps foreshadowed on this issue's cover. Inside, Kirby (with the help of inker Dick Ayers) turns in a densely packed adventure filled with the kind of imaginative weapons and perils that would soon make "Kirby" a household name (Among Marvel fanatics at least). And speaking of fanatics, fan Paul Gambacini, who had been one of Marvel's harshest critics, came over to the side of the angels with this issue's letters page, where he contributes a lengthy epistle extolling the virtues of Lee and Kirby over issue #14. Gambacini was perhaps representative of the rest of the fan community, the last holdouts of which seemed to finally be crying uncle as Marvel's offerings really began to gel. And definitely part of that process was the announcement this ish of the upcoming *FF Annual #1* (as well as a *Strange Tales Annual*), which was destined to knock fandom for a loop. Not only that, but in that same announcement section, Lee mentions the growing popularity of the Hulk (whose own feature had been canceled some months before) and his intention of bringing him back on a regular basis somewhere. This was the first official hint of the coming debut of the new *Avengers* book. Yesiree, Marvel was on the move! **Fun Fact:** Pres. John F. Kennedy makes one of a handful of appearances in Marvel's comics at this time at the bottom of page 11. Pulling the same coy

trick as he did whenever he and Lee made similar appearances, Kirby manages to avoid showing Kennedy's face focusing rather drolly on one of his most distinctive features: his hair! Page 11, panel 8 shows readers a profile of the famous coiffure...but only from the forehead up! Kirby even gave equal time to USSR dictator Nikita Khrushchev, as his military leaders gloat over Doom's seeming success in holding the USA at bay.

Strange Tales #111

"Fighting to the Death With the Asbestos Man!"; Stan Lee (plot); H.E. Huntley (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks) "Face to Face With the Magic of Baron Mordo!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Jack Kirby's art on the cover of *Strange Tales* #111 (Aug 1963), the first thing that the reader's eyes set upon, likely created a psychological predisposition to enjoy the less than exciting story inside, penciled and inked by Dick Ayers. On the cover, the formidable and even cool looking Asbestos Man, with his distinctive gas mask and deep purple Stan Goldberg coloring, becomes inside, only a pale shadow of that initial introduction. Ayers' interpretation of the character, in which the villain's bulk is slimmed down, becomes a poor man's Roman gladiator. Even Ayers' Human Torch is less impressive than Kirby's, with his cartoony flames and indistinct figure.

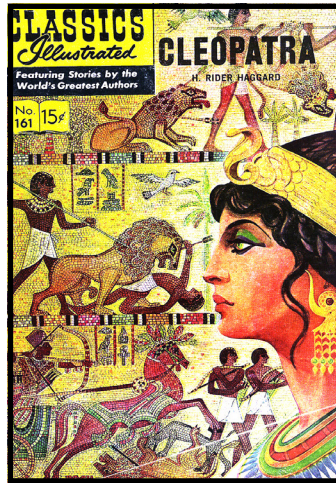


That said, Ayers had his strengths. His depictions of ordinary people standing around talking for instance are okay. The plot by Stan Lee is okay too, with its most interesting feature being the fact that he finally gets back to giving the Torch an honest to gosh supervillain to tangle with. (Which begs the question: were those issues featuring the Painter and Pandoras Box with their *Black Magic* feel, Kirby inspired stories?) While the Asbestos Man might not have been the most successful bad guy, he did join the increasing ranks of minor, one shot super baddies that Lee, Kirby, and Heck would create over the next year or so who would provide

STRANGE TALES #111, PAGE 1: ARTIST STEVE DITKO WASTES NOT AN INCH OF SPACE IN PRESENTING THIS SECOND INSTALLMENT OF THE NEW DR. STRANGE FEATURE: CHOOSING TO BEGIN THE ACTION ON THE SPLASH PAGE WITH THREE SCRIPT PACKED PANELS OF ARCH-FOE BARON MORDO! (AND DIG THE WEIRD DETAIL WORK THE ARTIST USES IN THE FIRST PANEL OF THIS TRIPTYCH!)

membership for fun groupings of supervillains, such as the Frightful Four and the Masters of Evil. Beyond the dull Ayers effort up front, this issue also includes a more visually interesting fantasy backup in the form of the Larry Lieber/Matt Fox effort "Beware, the Machine!!!" Plotted by Lee and scripted by Lieber, it tells the simple story of a computer that seeks to dominate mankind until an organ grinder's monkey pulls its plug! But it's Lieber and Fox's art that takes the cake. Their at once simple and elaborate design for the computer, especially as depicted on the symbolic opening splash page, is just terrific! In fact, it's so eye catching, it even stands well in comparison to the second installment of the new Dr. Strange feature by Lee and artist Steve Ditko.

Here, Strange meets his arch-enemy, Baron Mordo, handing him the first of many defeats to come. Well, technically, his second defeat because as readers would learn in issue #115, the two met previously, before Strange became the pupil of the Ancient One. (Here referred to only as "the Master") Utilizing a nine-panel grid format for each page of this five page story, Ditko manages to cram more plot in the limited space allowing further exploration (along with Lee) of a number of tropes that would become basic elements of Strange stories for decades to come.



ALL THINGS EGYPTIAN HAD LONG FASCINATED THE WEST BEGINNING AS FAR BACK AS NAPOLEON'S INVASION OF EGYPT IN 1798 BUT IT WAS LIKELY THE ADVENT OF THE FILM CLEOPATRA (1963) AND/OR THE PUBLICITY BUILD UP TO ITS RELEASE THAT PLACED THE EGYPTIAN QUEEN ON STAN LEE'S RADAR WHEN HE CAME UP WITH THE PLOT FOR TALES OF SUSPENSE #44.

Tales of Suspense #44

"Iron Man Faces the Menace of the Mad Pharaoh!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Don Heck was back as penciler (and inker) of the Iron Man feature in *Tales of Suspense* #44 (Aug 1963), following a few issues drawn by Jack Kirby (inked by Heck) who was, presumably, given the assignment to give the strip a boost. It was only Heck's misfortune to return to the helm with another Stan Lee misfire this time with the hero traveling back in time to face the "Mad Pharaoh" and romance Cleopatra. The story joins two other plot devices favored by Lee in these

early years (inter-dimensional travel and subterranean lost civilizations) that could be interesting but had run their course in the rising "Marvel Age of Comics." Without a colorful supervillain in sight, Heck was left to his own devices but luckily, he excelled at realistic, down-to-earth settings, as well as depicting attractive women. Thus, his opening pages that take place in present day Egypt are nice (his visualizations of Tony Stark on these pages are especially on target). Also fun are the various new devices Iron Man puts to use this issue, including a miniaturized fluoroscope, a transistorized handheld diamond drill, transistorized propellers, and magnetically attached roller wheels! The story made up in plenty of action what it lacked

in imaginative plotting, as Iron Man tackles the Roman Empire's army and navy. Helping to bolster the issue though is "I Come From the Sky," a fantasy backup by scripter Lee and artist Steve Ditko about a Communist provocateur in Africa who tries to impress a native tribe using a gun and cigarette lighter. He succeeds. They treat him like a god. He receives his comeuppance when the natives lock him away expecting him to use his "magic" to defeat some huge, unseen beast on the other side of a huge wall. But he's used the last of his lighter fluid and bullets, making him helpless! We leave him

banging on the closed gate begging for the natives to let him out.

Journey Into Mystery #95

"The Demon Duplicators!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils/inks)

The Thor feature was still finding its way as of *Journey Into Mystery* #95 (Aug 1963). In a somewhat convoluted plot by editor Stan Lee, Thor finds himself facing off against a duplicate of himself, a duplicate with two magic hammers to his one! Seems a mad scientist type named Zaxton has invented a duplicating device and by holding Jane Foster hostage, forces Dr. Don Blake to modify it so that it can duplicate human beings. Blake



UNLIKE LATER IN THE DECADE, THE MUSIC SCENE IN 1963 WAS STILL QUITE DIVERSIFIED WITH HITS BY THE LIKES OF HERB ALPERT, RICKY NELSON, AND RAY CHARLES, ALL ON BILLBOARD'S TOP 100. IT WASN'T UNTIL THE BEATLES REVOLUTIONIZED POP MUSIC BEGINNING IN 1964 THAT ROCK N ROLL WOULD EVENTUALLY SWAMP EVERYTHING ELSE, MUCH THE WAY SUPERHEROES WOULD EVENTUALLY WIPE OUT COMPETING GENRES IN COMICS.

complies but when he turns into Thor, that's when Zaxton duplicates him and sets the duplicate against Thor. Hmm. Okay. But it's the type of story that only someone of the caliber of Jack Kirby could have made interesting. (Just check this issue's cover to get an idea of what a Kirby drawn version would have felt like) Unfortunately, penciler/inker Joe Sinnott wasn't up to the task, making this latest entry in the Thor saga another snoozer. Adding to the story's problems are logical and ethical concerns. For instance, since when does Dr. Blake have the scientific expertise not only to design an android but also to work on an invention as complicated as the duplicator? And what about that ending that leaves the real Zaxton dead and his own duplicate alive to take his place? Is the duplicate a legitimate human being or what? Luckily, readers had a little more to enjoy in addition to the disappointing Thor story: a Lee/Steve Ditko fantasy backup called "The Tomb of Tut-Amm-Tut!" Obviously the name is a riff off the more famous (and real) pharaoh, King Tutankhamun, but in this case, Tut-Amm-Tut is a bad guy who puts himself into suspended animation for thousands of years to escape his enemy only to awaken and find out his enemy did the same and is now ready to exact his long awaited revenge!

Tales to Astonish #47

"Music of Scream By"; Stan Lee (plot); H.E. Huntley (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

This was the month that Marvel Comics really exploded with all of its major early years titles in place (with the exception of *Daredevil*, slated for the

years of consolidation, and *Captain Marvel* in the grandiose years). It was also the month that editor/scripster Stan Lee took on the most responsibility so far in scripting his comics including full length stories in *Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*, and *Sgt. Fury* as well as for new books *Avengers* and *X-Men*, both of which debuted at the same time. In addition, Lee also scripted the intermittent Dr. Strange feature that was slated soon to become a regular occupant of *Strange Tales*. Not only that, but Lee also scripted the first *Fantastic Four Annual* and *Strange Tales Annual #2* that also went on sale this month. And on top of all that, he was still scripting the company's three western titles and plotting for the Human Torch, Thor, and Ant-Man features in *Strange Tales*, *Journey Into Mystery*, and *Tales to Astonish*. Whew! Seeing the writing on the wall, Lee would soon throw in the towel (to mix a metaphor) and end up scripting all of the superhero features leaving the westerns and comedy/romance titles to others. In the meantime, he was still working the fantasy side of the street with the Ant-Man feature in *Tales to Astonish #47* (Sept. 1963) as the diminutive hero (and his sidekick, the Wasp) tackle Trago "one of the strangest villains of all time!" Or so it says on the cover. Shrug. Seems Trago traveled to India (where else?) to learn the art of playing music that can hypnotize people. Back in the states, he uses his new power over the radio to entrance everyone in the city, including Ant-Man. Well, suffice it to say, with the help of his loyal ants, our hero manages to overcome Trago's power and defeat him. The only thing that kept this dull affair from being completely uninteresting was Don Heck's pencils and inks, where the low-level action played to his strengths. Meanwhile, a Larry Lieber/Matt Fox collaboration for "The Smiling Gods" was another artistic success for the team with a quite nice opening splash page. Bringing up the rear was another Lee/Steve Ditko effort titled "Target: Earth" in which a lucky accident saves the human race from being conquered by aliens. **Fun Fact:** Published only a year before the culture-shaking arrival of the Beatles to American shores (and the subsequent "British Invasion"), popular music in the United States was still quite diversified. Besides a still quiescent rock and roll scene (populated by the likes of the Beach Boys, Ricky Nelson, and the Motown sound), there were also folk music and show tunes. Bubbling below the surface, though, were less mainstream fare such as blues and Jazz. It was the latter that Trago was playing in a local nightclub before deciding to go to India and learn some new riffs!

Fantastic Four #18

"A Skrull Walks Among Us!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

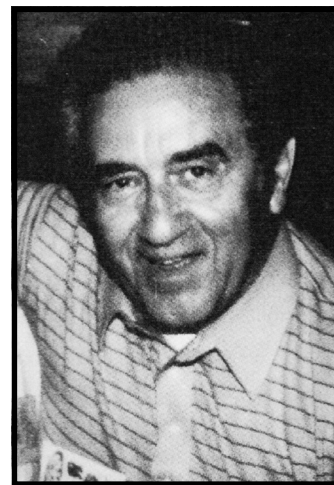
Scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby hit the ground running in *Fantastic Four* #18 (Sept. 1963) even as Lee himself ramped up his direct involvement across the entire line of Marvel's superhero offerings. Here, the two take a no-holds-barred plunge into outright supervillainy (albeit with a villain who was actually an alien space invader rather than an Earthly bad guy) with the introduction of the Super-Skrull. Although the Super-Skrull would end up having a long history in the Marvel Universe, including classic matchups with Thor and Captain Marvel, this was only Earth's second run in with the alien Skrulls, whom the FF first encountered in issue #2. Since then, after licking their wounds, the Skrulls had found a way to give one of their own all the powers of the FF and sent their agent to Earth to look for trouble. He finds it with the FF and after some inconclusive tussling, Mr. Fantastic deduces that the Super-Skrull's power is being broadcast to him by an invisible beam emanating from his home world. Reed finds a way to jam the beam and the others lure the Super-Skrull into a dormant volcano and seal him inside. End of problem. Throughout, Lee and Kirby (inked by Dick Ayers as usual) show every sign of having settled in comfortably to the FF routine. There are characterization bits (the Four go shopping at a local department store (Macy's?) where Sue expresses interest in the latest fashions, Reed heads for the book department, the Thing looks for a new bowling ball, and Johnny admires the young salesgirls. Earlier, Reed took Sue on a "date." Using the group's new ICBM, they rocket to Hawaii to do some swimming! (No word on where they parked the rocket) But when the scene switches to the Skrull home world, the setup for the remainder of the tale takes over with a fun three panel vertical triptych by Kirby at the bottom of page 5 showing the Super-Skrull pulling a giant generator further and further out of its housing. Finally, the real action starts on page 10 (but where Kirby again uses the three-panel sequence trick again; first showing Mr. Fantastic ballooning himself up to giant proportions and then showing Super-Skrull changing his head into a ram's and shoving it practically out of the final panel into the viewer's face!) Yesiree, Stan and Jack were really getting the hang of things by this time. And fans were the beneficiaries as they were bombarded this issue with house ads heralding the arrival of *The Avengers* ("Another big one from Marvel!") and then the new *FF Annual* #1 and *Strange Tales Annual* #2,

with notice of *X-Men* #1 barely squeezed in at the bottom of the page ("Sure to be a sellout!") Man oh man! It was great to be alive in 1963 and a Marvel fan to boot!

Strange Tales #112

"The Threat of the Living Bomb!"; Stan Lee (plot); Joe Carter (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Who in the world is Joe Carter? That was the question that discerning Marvel fans likely asked themselves when they read the credits for the Human Torch story in *Strange Tales* #112 (Sept. 1963). Turns out that the name, not surprisingly, was a pseudonym for Superman co-creator Jerry Siegel. The pseudonym was likely used because Siegel had only recently returned to scripting chores over at DC Comics, where he frequently contributed to its Legion of Super-Heroes feature, among others. Editor Stan Lee had a track record of trying to give work to struggling professionals, and Siegel was struggling financially in these years. Be that as it may, Siegel manages to capture some of the developing Marvel style in this Lee-plotted story torn from newspaper headlines, or to be more exact, the movies. In his effort to catch up with a new costumed villain, the Eel, the Human Torch must convince him that the nuclear-powered Project X he's stolen poses a threat both to him and anyone around him. The plot is reminiscent of the movie *Panic in the Streets* (1950), in which star Richard Widmark must track down an unknowing patient zero before he can spread the bubonic plague far and wide. In addition,



BOLSTERED BY STAN LEE PLOTS, SUPERMAN CO-CREATOR JERRY SIEGEL FILLED IN ON A COUPLE TORCH STORIES DURING MARVEL'S EARLY YEARS BUT HIS OLD FASHIONED SCRIPTING STYLE EXEMPLIFIED IN HIS CONCURRENT LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES WORK, FAILED TO MEASURE UP TO MARVEL'S STANDARDS.

there's a subplot where the public is being turned against the Torch by a local news commentator. But unlike a similar problem faced by fellow hero Spider-Man, the Torch manages to change the commentator's attitude after risking his life to save others. This dichotomy between the two heroes, one that never catches a break and the other who seems to lead a charmed life, would be played up by Lee as the months went

on, a contrast that would deepen the connectivity between the company's two teen heroes while delighting fans of each character, and a relationship that was due for further exploration in *Strange Tales Annual #2* on sale this very month! Meanwhile, readers were given their usual extra bonuses this ish, including a cover by Jack Kirby and a fantasy short by the team of Lee and Steve Ditko called "The Man Who Dared" about a jewel thief who ends up on the receiving end by his "victim!"

Strange Tales Annual #2

"On the Trail of the Amazing Spider-Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Steve Ditko (inks)

Fast on the heels of *Strange Tales #112* came *Strange Tales Annual #2*. And unlike the title's first annual, this one featured a Human Torch lead story made doubly special due to the Torch's first ever team-up with Marvel's other teen sensation, Spider-Man! The teaming of Spidey and the

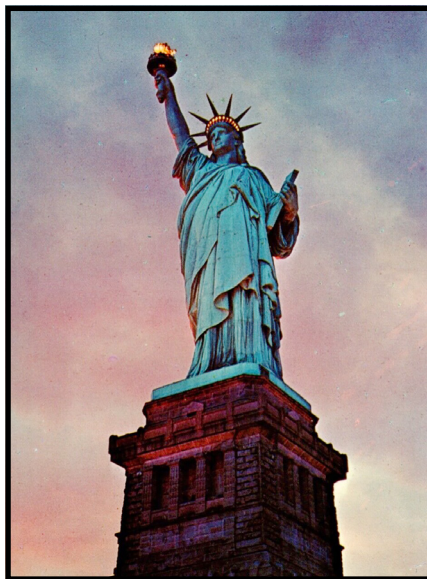
Torch here was a natural and a theme that editor/scripter Stan Lee would continue to explore in the months and years to come. To be sure, the two heroes' relationship would not always be a smooth one, based largely on competition and professional jealousy in its earliest stages. Though Peter Parker can be open and friendly, when he puts his Spider-Man mask on, his personality suffers a slight change. He becomes a bold smart-aleck that tends to put off other heroes who are only trying to be his friends. (Check out the *Amazing Spider-Man Special #3* where Spidey himself admits to having his short temper



STRANGE TALES ANNUAL #2, PAGE 9: IN WHAT WOULD BECOME A REGULAR SCHTICK WITH MEETINGS BETWEEN SPIDEY AND THE HUMAN TORCH, THE TWO TANGLE AND SWAP BARBS UPON MEETING BEFORE GRUDGINGLY TEAMING UP TO COLLAR THE BAD GUYS. NOTE IN PANEL 3 HOW ARTIST JACK KIRBY HAS INTERPRETED SPIDER-MAN'S MASK TO LOOK MORE LIKE A HOOD THAN A PULLOVER!

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get the best of him) That change in personality was what drove his “friendship” with the Torch in the early years and that can be seen here. Of course, it’s the Torch who antagonizes Spidey first by assuming he’s behind a series of art thefts based on the bad press he’s been getting from the *Daily Bugle*. (Despite the same publisher’s *Live* magazine spread cited by the Torch at the start of this issue’s tale) But the Torch should have at least given him the benefit of the doubt, seeing as how he received the same treatment by the media in *Strange Tales* #112 on sale the same month. Lee effectively captures the teenaged vernacular bantered back and forth between the Torch and Spidey first as they battle and then as they become allies in the hunt for the Fox, the actual art thief. Meanwhile, though penciler Jack Kirby was the best artist to take on any of Marvel’s heroes, he always had a difficult time capturing Spider-Man’s look and body language. Luckily, however, Lee managed to corral Spidey artist Steve Ditko to ink Kirby and he no doubt smoothed over any awkwardness that might have filtered in on Spidey’s figure. (An interesting example of how Kirby’s take on Spidey differed from Ditko’s can be seen on page 8, panel 5, where Spidey is sticking to a wall using tiny webs around his ankles. Not something Ditko would ever use over in the regular Spidey book but for some reason, left them in here. Also left in was the way Kirby showed Peter Parker slipping on his mask on page 9, panel 3: as if it were a hoodie rather than a detached, pullover mask) Though this issue’s tale was good, the Fox proved somewhat lame as a villain. Why couldn’t Spidey and the Torch have had a more demanding supervillain to tackle? Oh, well. Maybe next time! The rest of this issue’s 72 pages featured a half dozen fantasy masterpieces from Marvel’s pre-hero days with work by Kirby, Ditko, Don Heck, and others on display. Luckily for fans though, this pattern would not be followed in Marvel’s other early annuals which featured all new material. Reprints, however, would creep in soon enough. **Fun Fact:** This issue shows our two heroes getting together at the top of the Statue of Liberty, a spot that would become their regular meeting place in future stories.



ALTHOUGH SOMETIME RIVALS SPIDER-MAN AND THE HUMAN TORCH WOULD TAKE TO MEETING ATOP THE STATUE OF LIBERTY AS THEY DO IN THE STRANGE TALES ANNUAL, IT WAS ONLY ONE REAL LIFE LOCATION FEATURED IN MANY MARVEL COMICS INCLUDING THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING AND BLEECKER STREET IN NEW YORK CITY AND LATER, COIT TOWER AND THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE IN SAN FRANCISCO.

Tales of Suspense #45

“The Icy Fingers of Jack Frost!”; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

The Iron Man strip took a giant step forward with its appearance in *Tales of Suspense* #45 (Sept. 1963). As he did for the Ant-Man feature when he introduced the Wasp to spice up Henry Pym’s off duty life, Lee does the same for Iron Man, whose civilian activities had been limited to vague references to his playboy lifestyle. Now, he’d have new supporting characters in the form of Pepper Potts and Happy Hogan to work off of and supply him with both romantic and secret identity problems. Happy is brought in

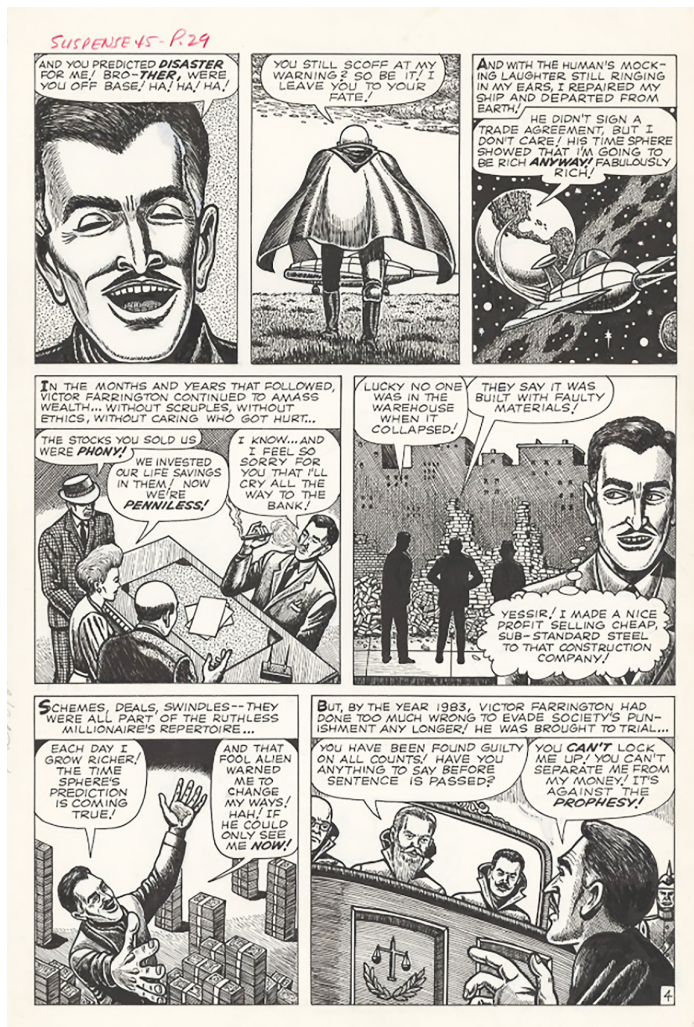
after he saves Tony Stark from an automobile crash during a race car tournament. Stark offers him a reward, but Happy turns it down saying he’d prefer a steady job. So Tony hires him as his chauffeur. On his first visit to Stark’s office (at Stark Industries, identified as being located in Flushing, Long Island) Happy meets the boss’ secretary, Pepper Potts, with whom he immediately begins to feud. The two new characters would prove quite durable, with Pepper getting close to her goal of becoming Mrs. Tony Stark, but falling short when Stark decides it would be unfair to saddle her with a man who could die from heart failure at any moment. Ultimately, Pepper would end up marrying Happy, but not before the two received a complete makeover. As presented here by penciler/inker Don Heck, Happy has a broken nose and cauliflower ears, as befits an ex-pugilist, while Pepper is freckle-faced and schoolmarmish. Dissatisfied with their looks, Lee would later have Heck improve them. (In Pepper’s case, no doubt to give her a believable shot at Tony’s affections) But all that was

but window dressing compared to this issue’s menace, namely IM’s first real supervillain. In the tradition of Paste-Pot-Pete, Stark employee Gregor Shappanka, after being fired by Stark, invents a special “freezing suit” and calls himself...what else? Jack Frost! In addition to all the foregoing, the Lee plotted Iron Man story has been expanded to

Fantastic Four Annual #1

"Sub-Mariner Versus the Human Race!";
 Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
 "The Fabulous Fantastic Four Meet Spider-Man!";
 Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Steve Ditko (inks)

This was it! The leader of the new Marvel group of superhero comics gets their first, honest to gosh annual chock full with "72 big pages" of stories and special features. No one could complain that readers didn't get their money's worth paying a paltry .25 for all the wonderment featured in *Fantastic Four Annual* #1 (Sept. 1963)! Not only did the annual include an all-new lead feature starring the FF but an expanded version of the first meeting between the FF and up-and-comer Spider-Man from *Amazing Spider-Man* #1. But that wasn't all! There was a gallery of FF villains, each suitable for framing (and many fans actually did cut out the full page profiles, tacking them to their bedroom walls), a reprint of *FF* #1, a two page question and answer feature about each member of the team, and a schematic of the interior of the four's Baxter Building headquarters! But no question, the main event was the 37-page epic lead feature in which Lee and Kirby flesh out hero/villain Sub-Mariner's backstory even as they updated the look of his Atlantean subjects from bug eyed ichthyic caricatures to semi-serious looking, blue skinned homo-mermanus. After finding Atlantis and regaining his throne, Sub-Mariner declares all the world's seas as his domain, warning off surface dwellers from trespassing. But Reed Richards refuses to give in to the demands and urges the human race to resist. This prompts a full-scale invasion of the surface by Atlantis (although readers only saw the New York City portion of the war). A timely invention by Mr. Fantastic that evaporates the water contained in the Atlanteans' head gear forces a retreat, but not before Subby kidnaps the Invisible Girl, forcing a showdown between himself and her three partners. Jealous of Subby's affections for Sue Storm, Lady Dorma floods her prison with water. Sue barely makes it to the surface in time, where the FF's battle with Sub-Mariner is suspended as Subby speeds Sue to a hospital. There, after recovering, Sue suggests to Reed that her past infatuation with Sub-Mariner might have been a mistake. There was a ton of stuff going on here, the culmination of nearly two years' worth of plot and character development by Lee and Kirby, including the saga of the Sub-Mariner (while introducing the new menace of Warlord Krang and future romantic interest Lady Dorma), the evolving relationship between Reed and Sue, and the continuation of the relationships among the Four themselves. (For instance, the story opens with



TALES OF SUSPENSE #45, PAGE 4: MATT FOX EMPLOYS A NUMBER OF INKING TRICKS TO TRANSFORM LARRY LIEBER'S AWKWARD PENCILS IN THIS BACK UP TALE GIVING THE OTHERWISE DULL PROCEEDINGS A TINGE OF THE OUTRE.

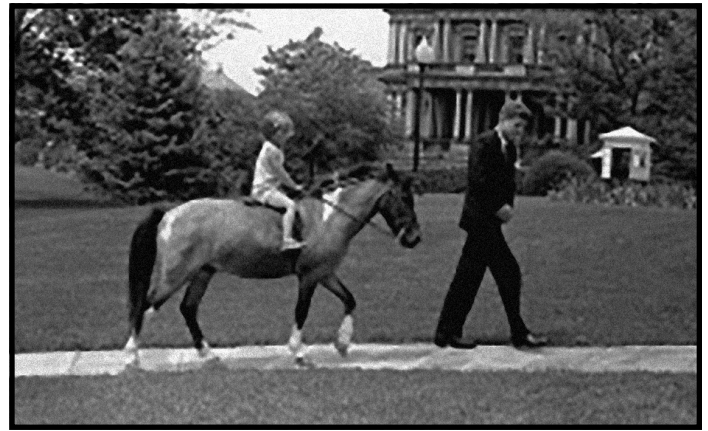
18 pages and the Heck artwork is better than ever, especially those scenes without Iron Man: the race car scenes, the intro of Happy and Pepper, the scenes at the offices of Stark Industries, etc. Not that his Iron Man scenes are anything to sneeze at either! Heck's only problem there is his habit of using too many lines to draw Iron Man that have the effect of making his armor look dirty. But that's being nitpicky. Robert Bernstein's script is solid (it would be a shame to see him go after Lee took over) for this novel length story really sets the pace for all IM adventures to come. The icing on the cake is the fantasy backup with art by the eye grabbing team of Larry Lieber and Matt Fox. Only a single tale this ish, as the usual second story was squeezed out by the extra length IM lead feature. But at this point, who was going to complain?

another violent feud between the Thing and Torch, making a shambles of their Baxter Building living quarters including destruction of Sue's wardrobe: "My clothes! My expensive Dior and Saks Fifth Avenue dresses. Ruined!" moans Sue. "They were all original, exclusive creations. [sob] Men! You're all beasts!") Meanwhile, Kirby lets out all the stops, particularly for his depiction of Atlantis. Taking a cue from creator Bill Everett's original vision, he goes beyond that, adding his own veneer of grandeur to the opening splash page with a guard blowing a conch heralding the arrival of Prince Namor astride a pair of giant sea turtles. That's immediately followed by a two-page spread (the first of the Marvel Age) of Namor ascending the throne, with his subjects thronging in welcome. Later, as a disguised Namor tells the story of Atlantis, Kirby chooses to use big, bold panels to cover the key events in its history. Throughout, Kirby shows that he can handle the small scenes as well as the big ones in his depiction of the off-duty Four as well as Sue as a prisoner, imploring Krang to believe in her concern for Sub-Mariner's safety and later, her desperate dash to safety and life-threatening condition afterward. All in all, readers could hardly expect anything else that could have topped this story. In fact, it was so good, it launched a tradition at Marvel that reserved annuals for special stories topping the goings on in the regular titles. Future annuals would feature life-changing events, team-ups of arch villains, crossovers, or the climax to long running subplots. **Fun Facts:** The reprint this issue of the time Spider-Man tried to join the team is actually an expanded version of that original tale with new art by Kirby and inker Steve Ditko! Also, the schematic of the Four's Baxter Building headquarters has been modified to include six of the building's top stories instead of four!

Journey Into Mystery #96

"Mad Merlin!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Joe Sinnott (pencils/inks)

They didn't know it yet, but readers said goodbye to the meandering course most Thor stories followed since the strip's inception. That is, the eclectic mix of Communists, Loki, and weird menaces. Beginning with the next issue, the strip would feature a steady procession of genuine supervillains, leading into the feature's flowering after issue 101. In the meantime though, *Journey Into Mystery* #96 (Sept. 1963) had one more weird menace to contend with: the arrival from the past of legendary magician Merlin. Plotted by Stan Lee and scripted by Robert Bernstein, the story recounts a ho-hum adventure in which Thor



RELEASED ONLY A FEW MONTHS BEFORE HIS TRAGIC DEATH, JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #96 FEATURED AN APPEARANCE BY JOHN F. KENNEDY AND DAUGHTER CAROLINE. THE YOUNGEST MAN TO BE ELECTED PRESIDENT UP TO THAT TIME, KENNEDY'S YOUTH WAS A KEY ELEMENT OF HIS POPULARITY AS WELL AS SUCH ATTITUDES AS OPTIMISM AND FUTURISM HE INVOKED IN THE PUBLIC. FUN FACT: THE "MACARONI" MENTIONED BY KENNEDY IN THIS ISSUE REFERS TO A PONY GIVEN TO CAROLINE BY VICE PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON!

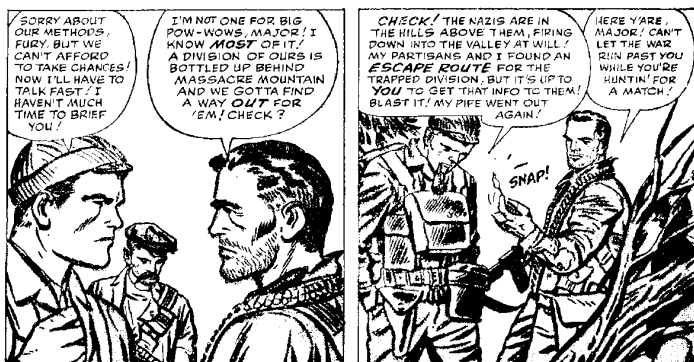
must contend with the mutant power of Merlin, who manages to animate various Washington D.C. monuments until Thor tricks him into surrendering. Shrug. The only interesting facet of this tale was revealed a few years later in the *X-Men* book, where Merlin not only reappears as the Maha Yogi but with the explanation that he wasn't the real Merlin after all. Well, the revelation improved the character some, but too late to help the tale here. Again, Jack Kirby sets a bar with the cover image that interior penciler/inker Joe Sinnott can't possibly match, only adding to the woeful nature of the story. But at least it featured a cameo of President John F. Kennedy and daughter Caroline in the White House. In a humorous aside, seeking an audience with the President, Merlin dismisses Kennedy when he sees him as being too young looking to be the leader of the free world! And in one of the last fantasy shorts to back up a superhero strip, Lee teams up with artist Steve Ditko to produce a time travel piece called "Frederick Fenton's Future."

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #3

"Midnight on Massacre Mountain!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

As the Marvel Age of Comics began to hit its stride, Kirby's responsibilities as its visual pacesetter expanded to the point where he was drawing

almost the entire line of superhero books. Besides *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #3 (Sept. 1963), he was also working on the *Fantastic Four*, *Avengers*, and the *X-Men* books. In addition, for the past several months, he'd been penciling two thirds of the 72-page *FF Annual* and the lead Human Torch story in the *Strange Tales Annual*. And on top of all that, he was drawing all the covers to the superhero books as well as the westerns, lending the line a tight uniformity. But the strain on Kirby's time and abilities all that work must've been causing didn't seem to show here, as the artist weighed in on the squad's third adventure with some of his most elaborate and detailed pencils yet. Starting with an opening splash page, Kirby depicts all of the Howlers about to jump a squad of German soldiers with the page bordered by individual portraits of the commandos including tough as nails ramrod Capt. Happy Sam Sawyer. What follows is page after page of scenes from Army camp life, betraying Kirby's own experiences as a dogface himself. The Howlers' latest impossible mission only begins on page 9, which Kirby leads off with a full, three-quarter page panel showing Fury's fanatics as they hit the beaches of Italy under fire. The story by scripster Stan Lee is no less crammed with the strip's special brand of grim humor, action, and characterization. It opens with a naive private having his mouth covered by a knowing non-com before his critical comments can reach the ears of the haggard Howlers: "Clam up, soldier! Are you tired of livin'? Nobody talks that way about those dogfaces!" Next, the Howlers retreat to a local pub where they end up in a brawl. The next thing the reader sees is a platoon of weary soldiers, bandaged, uniforms in tatters, the results of trying to bring in the Howlers: "If we didn't have this tank backin' us up, we'd never have done it!" comments one soldier. "We got off easy this time," says another. "I remember when it took almost a whole division to quiet the Howlers down!" Later, commanding officer Sam Sawyer gives the Howlers their latest suicide mission: "Holy Hannah," thinks Fury. "He's trying to smile. That's a real bad sign!" When Sawyer gives a further hint of the mission, Fury is convinced: "This is even worse than I thought. He is smiling. That means we're goners!" The Howlers' mission is to find and lead a trapped division off Massacre Mountain, and though Lee and Kirby succeed in making it seem World War II was the greatest boys' adventure of all time, an incidental occurrence not only provided a frisson of insider baseball for Marvel readers, but actually presented an earth-shattering realization for fans. Early in the mission, the Howlers run into an OSS agent named



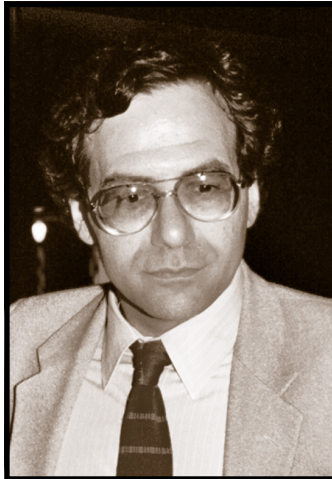
SGT. FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS #3, PAGE 1: ARTIST JACK KIRBY IS NOW FULLY COMMITTED IN HIS DEPICTION OF THE NEW WAVE OF MARVEL TITLES. BESIDES THE CONTINUED PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT OF THE VARIOUS HOWLERS, INCLUDING CAPT. "HAPPY SAM" SAWYER, THIS ISSUE'S GUEST APPEARANCE BY A PRE-MR FANTASTIC REED RICHARDS OPENED UP POSSIBILITIES OF A WIDER, INTEGRATED MARVEL UNIVERSE MERELY HINTED AT WITH THE RETURN OF THE SUB-MARINER OVER IN THE FF TITLE.

Major Reed Richards who points them in the right direction. Of course, regular readers recognized with delight that Richards would, years later, become Mr. Fantastic of the *Fantastic Four*, but what his appearance here really meant was an expansion of the already slowly coalescing Marvel Universe that now not only encompassed superhero books linked into the same present day world (emphasized by team-ups such as Spider-Man and the Torch in the *Strange Tales Annual* and *The Avengers*, that had heroes from different titles joining together) but also a past extending back to World War II, the era of Sub-Mariner. It opened up possibilities that the past heroes of that era also existed in Marvel's universe, including an as-yet-missing Captain America. Would it be a stretch to wonder if Marvel's westerns could also be included in that extended timeline? Or the events in the various giant monsters of the pre-hero Atlas era? Such possibilities were mind-boggling to contemplate, and opened whole new vistas of excitement for fans who would only grow increasingly more sophisticated as the months went on.

Fantastic Four #19

"Prisoners of the Pharaoh!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Editor/scripter Stan Lee fell back on time travel again for the plot of *Fantastic Four* #19 (Oct. 1963) as our heroes travel back to ancient Egypt in search of a cure for blindness. The hope was to find a cure for the sightless Alicia Masters, the Thing's girlfriend. Unfortunately, when they arrive, they run into another time traveler, one from even further in the future than the present of 1963. It seems the Pharaoh Rama-Tut fled the future in search of adventure and uses his scientific knowledge to render the Four helpless. But they get over that and turn the tables on Rama-Tut, forcing him to flee in his time machine (disguised as the famous Sphinx!). Using Dr. Doom's time platform to return to the twentieth century, Reed Richards learns that radioactive isotopes cannot make the journey, and the serum they hoped to use to cure Alicia's blindness is rendered useless. Although the time-traveling storyline is rather humdrum, what is interesting...or what would become more intriguing with the release of *Fantastic Four Annual* #2, was the revelation that Rama-Tut might have been a future version of Dr. Doom. This speculation arose in a conversation between the two characters after Rama-Tut rescues Doom following his battle with the FF in *Fantastic Four* #23. Although the relationship between the two characters is iffy, a more solid case is later built that Rama-Tut was actually Kang the Conqueror in a previous attempt at conquering an earlier time period. Still later, it would be established that Immortus was also Kang, but from a future time after he reformed his evil ways. Whew! Needless to say, all this backstory would unfold gradually over the years, underlining the fascination Marvel's ever growing, ever expanding, ever more complicated continuity would hold for readers. A unique element that would keep them coming back for more beyond the age when past readers of comics would lose their interest and move on to other forms of distraction. **Fun Fact:** Future twilight years scripter Steve Gerber was among the fans who appeared on this issue's



STEVE GERBER BECAME A PROFESSIONAL COMICS WRITER IN THE 1970S WHEN HE WROTE SUCH TITLES AS MAN-THING, DEFENDERS, AND HOWARD THE DUCK. BUT IN MARVEL'S EARLY YEARS, HE WAS JUST ONE FAN AMONG THOUSANDS WHO WERE MOTIVATED TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES BY WRITING LETTERS TO THEIR FAVORITE MARVEL BOOKS.

letters page. Seems he approved of the introduction of the Wasp to the Ant-Man feature ("formerly your worst effort"). If that development impressed him, imagine his reaction to next month's *Tales to Astonish* in which Ant-Man gains a new power and becomes Giant-Man!

Tales to Astonish #48

"The Porcupine!"; Stan Lee (plot); H.E. Huntley (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Something was up with the Ant-Man feature in *Tales to Astonish*. Only a few issues back, editor Stan

Lee had introduced the Wasp to the strip, giving Henry Pym someone to talk to as well as present him with the possibility of romantic complications. Now, in *Tales to Astonish* #48 (Oct. 1963), he introduces the strip's first honest-to-gosh supervillain in the form of the Porcupine! Sure, on the face of it, the Porcupine didn't look like much, what with a costume that looked more like layers of straw strapped to his body than deadly quills, but he did present an air of mystery and menace Ant-Man needed to elevate him in the eyes of doubting fans. (One such fan, Steve Gerber, had likely voiced the majority opinion over in the *Fantastic Four*'s letter column when he described the feature as one of Marvel's lesser efforts) Finally, in the very next issue, Lee would complete the strip's transformation by expanding Henry Pym's powers so that not only could he shrink to ant size, but he could also shoot up to giant size! Thus, the Porcupine was the only costumed villain who had the opportunity of battling Pym in both his super-powered personas: here as Ant-Man, and then Giant-Man a few issues down the road! In the meantime, though, readers were introduced to Alex Gentry, a military researcher who invents a new combat suit designed on the order of a porcupine with quills loaded with different kinds of built in weapons. But deciding his invention is too good to give away to the Army, he decides to use it to enrich himself by embarking on a life of crime. He makes the mistake of robbing a bank in Ant-Man's stomping grounds and the hero, alerted by his ants, tracks Gentry to his hideout. Although the Porcupine is defeated, he

manages to get away to fight another day. Here, on the cusp of the years of consolidation, Lee began to demonstrate his ability to come up with an array of low level, fun supervillains (some might even describe them as corny) such as the Porcupine that would eventually populate the Marvel Universe with a range of diverse adversaries needed to keep his line of superheroes busy. He's helped along the way with visual designs by artists such as Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and here, Don Heck who manages to give the Porcupine a distinctive look dominated by a creepy looking gas mask over his face. The Porcupine wouldn't likely give Thor a hard time, but he was enough to present a challenge for Ant-Man (and later Giant-Man). After all, someone had to take care of the low-level villains while heroes of Thor's caliber tackled big guns like the Radioactive Man! And Heck comes through here providing a nice, fast-moving story filled with his own richly detailed inks. Yeah, this was one of the fun ones! But that's not all! This issue also includes another eye grabbing Larry Lieber/Matt Fox collaboration on "Grayson's Gorilla" and "The Little Green Man" penciled and inked by Steve Ditko. Top all of that off with another cool cover by Kirby (who managed to mis-draw Ant-Man's glove) and you've got a near perfect Marvel mag!

Tales of Suspense #46

"Iron Man Faces the Crimson Dynamo!"; Stan Lee (plot); Robert Bernstein (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

With scripter Stan Lee and penciler/inker Don Heck on the art, *Tales of Suspense* #46 (Oct. 1963) had essentially the same key creative combo as the concurrent issue of *Tales to Astonish*. Why is that significant? Because both introduce new, colorful supervillains for the respective heroes to tangle with marking a departure from most previous stories that concentrated on time travel, other dimensions, or strange phenomena on the order of Marvel's pre-hero fantasy titles to provide the danger. While this month's Thor battled the Lava Man and Ant-Man tangled with the Porcupine (both newbie villains), here, Iron Man encounters his first armored foe: the Crimson Dynamo! The Dynamo is scientist Anton Vanko who invents a suit of armor based on the principle of the electric dynamo. Impressed, Soviet Premiere Nikita Khrushchev dispatches Vanko to America to sabotage Stark Industries thus damaging American armaments manufacturing. After being thwarted by Iron Man in his first attempts, Vanko goes for a frontal attack and the two adversaries meet head on. Of course, IM defeats the Dynamo while at the same



WITH HIS INCREASING INVOLVEMENT WITH SOVIET SPIES, SABOTEURS, AND KRUSHCHEV (!), TONY STARK (AKA IRON MAN), WAS LOOKING MORE AND MORE LIKE AN INTERNATIONAL AGENT MUCH LIKE THE JAMES BOND CHARACTER WHO BURST ON THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS WITH DR. NO IN 1962 AND THEN FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE, RELEASED ONLY A COUPLE MONTHS AFTER SUSPENSE #46. THE ASSOCIATION WITH SECRET AGENTS WOULD ONLY BECOME MORE APPARENT IN THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION WHEN STARK BECAME INVOLVED WITH SHIELD, MARVEL'S ESPIONAGE AGENCY.

time tricking him into thinking that Khrushchev has betrayed him. He decides to turn state's evidence and defect. In an ironic turn of events, he then becomes a valuable employee of Stark Industries. As he did for the Porcupine over in the Ant-Man strip, Heck designs a bulky but catchy looking outfit for the Crimson Dynamo, whose look involving insulated coils does indeed remind one of electrical dynamos found in power plants. And even more than he was doing over in the Ant-Man feature, the artist really made an extra effort here in detailing his work with ultra-modern looking offices, lush forests, military hardware, and missile launch sites. Was Heck getting more of a charge out of the Iron Man strip than he was with Ant-Man? In any case, here's the first true indication of why Heck would become for many fans, *the* Iron Man artist of the Silver Age. Meanwhile, Robert Bernstein was still doing a bang-up job on the script while introducing Senator Harrington Byrd, a character who'd prove to be a thorn in Tony Stark's side in future issues. (Although one might easily see the parallels between Stark and Trump: both rich, both playboys, both using planes and buildings with their names plastered across them!) This issue is rounded out with yet another Lee/Steve Ditko contribution in the form of "The Gargoyle."

Strange Tales #113

"The Coming of the Plantman!"; Stan Lee (plot); Jerry Siegel (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

The parade of colorful new supervillains continued in *Strange Tales* #113 (Oct. 1963) as the Human Torch meets the Plantman! However, unlike the first appearances this month of the Lava Man, Porcupine, and Crimson Dynamo in Marvel's other books, the Plantman's debut here is somewhat diluted by the fact that in his top coat and slouch hat, he resembles more the Shadow than an up-to-date comics villain. (But that would soon be corrected; in his next appearance, he'd sport the regulation costume!) Unfortunately, Plantman's debut is also muted somewhat by the unexciting art of Dick Ayers. (Check out the cover for an idea of what Jack Kirby could have done with this story!) The Plantman is Sam Smithers, a gardener who apparently tinkers in his spare time, managing to invent a device that stimulates fantastically quick plant growth. Fired from his job, he disguises himself (in the aforesaid Shadow-like outfit) to seek revenge on his former employer by framing him for the robbery of a jewelry store where the man is employed as manager. This is where the story gets interesting on a personal level for the Torch. As Johnny Storm, he's begun dating the daughter of the framed party: Dorrie Evans. With her initial appearance here, Dorrie would become a regular member of the cast, providing the Torch with some human interest in the form of Dorrie's frustrations with his career as a superhero. Although the Torch is easily dispatched in his first encounter with the Plantman, a second meeting ends differently, except that the villain manages to get away. Although it appears that Dorrie has softened her stance against his



ALTHOUGH THE SHADOW WAS HUGELY POPULAR ON RADIO AND IN HIS OWN SELF TITLED PULP MAGAZINE, HIS ENTREE INTO COMICS WAS LESS THAN SPECTACULAR: BUT THE LOOK OF HIS SIGNATURE SLOUCH HAT AND CAPE HAD SOME INFLUENCE IN THE COMICS FIELD MOST NOTABLY WITH BATMAN. IT WAS USED AGAIN WITH MUTED EFFECT IN THE FIRST INCARNATION OF THE PLANTMAN. HOWEVER, WISER HEADS PREVAILED AND THE OUTFIT WAS SOON UPDATED TO SOMETHING MORE IN TUNE WITH MARVEL'S PARADE OF COLORFUL NEW VILLAINS!

superheroing, the Torch is disappointed when she returns to her usual complaint: "You're such a nice boy. Now if only you could conquer your mad desire to keep flaming on all the time!" Oh, well! But regarding the Plantman, he was an effective entry into the growing ranks of minor supervillains that began to populate Marvel's comics at this time and that would form the backbone of challenges to the heroes through the years of consolidation. They may not have amounted to much against such later menaces as Galactus, Mangog, the Super-Adaptoid, or Annihilus, but through the wizardry of Stan Lee's writing and the visual artistry of Jack Kirby and Don Heck, they'd make Marvel comics in these early years a blast to read!

Fantastic Four #20

"The Mysterious Molecule Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Editor/scripser Stan Lee (aided by penciler Jack Kirby) continued this month's explosion of new, colorful supervillains in *Fantastic Four* #20 (Nov. 1963) with the introduction of the Molecule Man. Unfortunately, the Molecule Man proved less satisfactory than his contemporaries over in *Journey Into Mystery*, *Tales to Astonish*, and *Strange Tales*. The problem for Lee and Kirby was that the Fantastic Four were a team, and quite a formidable team at that. For a villain to menace them with any believability, he'd have to register pretty high on the power scale. Thus, the power of the Molecule Man to control everything on the molecular level, to change and rearrange the building blocks of all matter, made him for all intents and purposes, invincible. As a result, Lee and Kirby were forced to resort to a last-minute trick ending of sorts based on the villain's sole weakness. (Not to mention a save by the Watcher who, solving the problem of holding the Molecule Man once he'd been defeated, whisks him away to who knows where) And though the two creators turned in an interesting and exciting story, it somehow fell short of complete satisfaction. Also falling short this ish was Reed Richards' thinking process as, finding a "dehydrated acorn" buried in an asteroid he deduces that "some form of life must exist in outer space!" Apparently, Reed was tired from overwork or something because he conveniently forgot that the FF had already met life in outer space including the Skrulls and the Watcher! **Fun Fact:** This issue's letters' page not only features a missive from future Marvel Bullpenner Mark Gruenwald but also one from future *Game of Thrones* scribe George R. R. Martin, who was finally won over by the work of Lee and Kirby: "You were just about the world's worst mag when you started, but you set yourself an ideal and, by gumbo, you achieved it!"

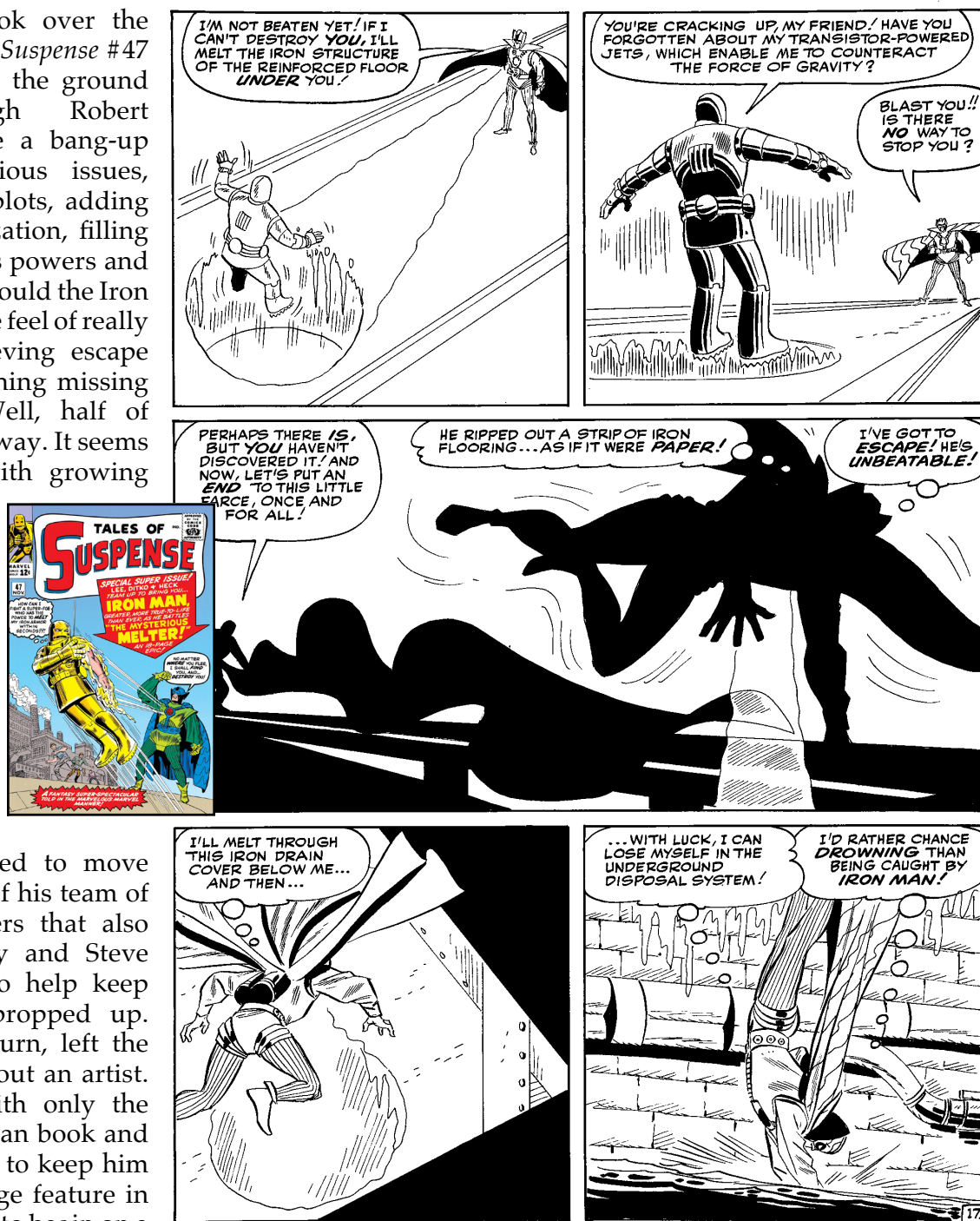
Tales of Suspense #47

"Iron Man Battles the Melter!";
Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko
(pencils); Don Heck (inks)

Editor Stan Lee took over the scripting for *Tales of Suspense* #47 (Nov. 1963) and hit the ground running. Although Robert Bernstein had done a bang-up job scripting previous issues, padding out Lee's plots, adding layers of characterization, filling details of Iron Man's powers and abilities, only now would the Iron Man strip acquire the feel of really taking off, of achieving escape velocity. The only thing missing was Don Heck. Well, half of Heck's services, anyway. It seems that Joe Sinnott, with growing demand for his pencils at other comics companies, including Dell and Treasure Chest, decided he had no time to continue penciling the Thor strip in *Journey Into Mystery*. Scrambling to find a replacement

for him, Lee decided to move Heck, the third leg of his team of powerhouse pencilers that also included Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, over there to help keep the thunder god propped up. But that move, in turn, left the Iron Man strip without an artist. Where to turn? With only the full-length Spider-Man book and lesser fantasy shorts to keep him busy, (the Dr. Strange feature in *Strange Tales* had yet to begin on a regular basis) Ditko was brought over to fill in on Iron Man. And, coincidentally or not, it just so happened that the IM feature was due for an important change in the hero's development. But that would take place next issue, for now, Ditko came in just as Lee

introduced yet another colorful new supervillain to Marvel's roster: the Melter! Making his debut in an elaborately impressive costume thanks to a Kirby drawn cover, the Melter is Bruno Horgan, an unscrupulous competitor to Stark Industries who harbors resentment



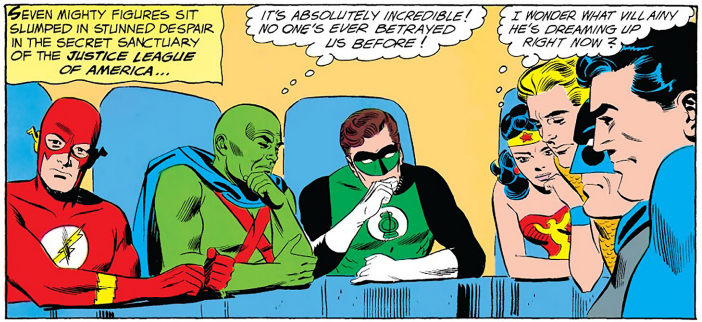
TALES OF SUSPENSE #47, PAGE 17: IRON MAN ACHIEVES ESCAPE VELOCITY HERE AS STAN LEE TAKES OVER AS PERMANENT SCRIPTER AND PENCILER STEVE DITKO IS BROUGHT IN FOR A SHORT STINT TO HELP WITH THE ACCELERATION. REGULAR PENCILER DON HECK REMAINS TO PROVIDE THE INKING ON THIS EXCITING PAGE AS IRON MAN WINDS UP HIS BATTLE WITH THE MELTER. HECK'S UNUSUAL CHOICE TO DEPICT PANEL 3 COMPLETELY IN SILHOUETTE SOMEHOW ACCENTUATES THE DRAMA WHILE FOCUSING ATTENTION ON THE MELTER'S BEAM.

against Stark for uncovering his substandard work for the government. Seeking revenge on his rival, Horgan adapts an industrial melting beam from his factory, disguises himself, and uses his new costumed identity to bring down Stark Industries. With Senator Byrd breathing down his neck for losses brought on by the Melter, Stark goes into action as Iron Man. The Melter gets the better of him at first, but IM eventually turns the tables and defeats him. (Actually, the Melter gets away to fight another day!) By now, the IM feature had expanded from 13 pages to 18 pages, creating more room for characterization in addition to action. (While simultaneously obviating the need for a second fantasy short, giving Ditko more time to work on Iron Man) For instance, there's much more this ish of Pepper and Happy and Stark's problems with Congress. And the art team of Ditko and Heck proves unexpectedly sympatico with beautiful art all the way through the issue. Heck provides new subtlety to Ditko's pencils that softens the artist's hard edges and sometimes lack of detail. It all made for one of Iron Man's most satisfying outings and another reason why this strip was rising fast in popularity among Marvel fans!

Avengers #2

"The Space Phantom!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

Perhaps not as colorful as the string of new supervillains being introduced in other Marvel books this month, the Space Phantom was nevertheless a fun addition to Marvel's growing list of bad guys. And as scripted by Stan Lee and penciled by Jack Kirby, the ability of the Phantom to replace various Avengers and set them to fighting each other (while inadvertently exposing fault lines in their relationship with the Hulk) makes for an exciting, full-length story! Though the Phantom turns out to be yet another advance scout for an alien army planning on taking over the Earth and ends up being defeated by the Avengers through an unexpected twist, between those points lies a rollicking good actioner by Kirby and inker Paul Reinman as the Avengers seemingly fight among themselves for 22 blockbusting pages. Not the best inker for Kirby, Reinman nevertheless captures the artist's chunky approach to the heroes while preserving Kirby's rambunctious style of exploding buildings and wrecked machinery. Meanwhile, Lee already demonstrates his smooth scripting style capturing the voices of the individual Avengers, filling in readers about their backstories as best he



DC'S MOST COLORFUL HEROES GATHER 'ROUND FOR A FRIENDLY BOARD MEETING. SURE, IT WAS NICE TO SEE HEROES COOPERATING AND CALMLY DISCUSSING WHAT ACTION TO TAKE, BUT IT DIDN'T MAKE FOR EXCITING VISUALS. WHILE MARVEL'S AVENGERS WERE OFTEN SEEN SITTING ROUND THE CONFERENCE TABLE, THEIR DIFFERING PERSONALITIES CLASHED AND HARSH WORDS WERE FREQUENTLY EXCHANGED.

can: Hulk's abrasive personality, Ant-Man's new powers as Giant-Man, Iron Man's need to plug in and recharge his armor to stay alive, Thor's imperious nature. "He sounds like a burlesque of a comic hero in *Mad* magazine," thinks an admiring Wasp. "But with those shoulders, those eyes, who cares how corny he talks!" And speaking of the Wasp, despite her almost negligible powers in comparison to her teammates, Lee and Kirby always find something important for her to do. In fact, there's even room for the reintroduction of Rick Jones and the Teen Brigade. Yes sir, this one had it all, making the new Avengers book something for fans to sit up and take notice of. There were none of those dull board meetings for Marvel's heroes that DC's counterparts were always holding! ("This meeting is now in session!") Here, personalities clashed before they hurtled into action as a team (and not splitting up the way DC's heroes did) In fact, that was one of the distinguishing elements that made the Avengers so much more exciting than the Justice League: the team always faced their enemies together, necessitating menaces that were powerful enough to challenge the whole team together. It made for one exciting issue after another just as the Phantom does here in *Avengers* #2 (Nov. 1963). That would eventually lead into the book's other distinguishing feature: the team's ever changing roster. **Fun Fact:** Much later, in the twilight years, this issue's story would have an epilogue of sorts. It happened in *Avengers* #267, wherein the then current roster of Avengers find themselves in limbo. There, they encounter members of the original team as they're replaced each in turn by the Space Phantom during their battle back in issue #2!

Journey Into Mystery #98

"Challenged by the Human Cobra!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

The march of colorful new supervillains continued in *Journey Into Mystery* #98 (Nov. 1963). Sure, these villains were somewhat low-level threats compared to later menaces of the grandiose years, but they'd form the backbone of ongoing challenges to Marvel's heroes for decades to come. Some were destined to be refashioned and updated commensurate with the new rules of the grandiose years while others would either remain as pesky fillers in between story arcs or simply fall by the wayside. But in any case, they would always present the heroes with challenges peculiar to themselves while providing along the way, tons o' fun for readers. Case in point: the Human Cobra! The Cobra would span the entire range of Marvel eras from here in the early years as just another of the company's colorful new roster of bad guys before teaming with Mr. Hyde in the years of consolidation. The Cobra would reach his zenith (alongside Hyde) in the grandiose years over in the *Daredevil* book before falling back into mere peskiness in the twilight years. But here, he was just a cool new menace for a still rising Thor, now completely under the supervision of editor Stan Lee as he takes over the scripting reins on a permanent basis. The Cobra's origin is simple: he's bitten by a radioactive cobra, natch! After that, his powers, such as they are, go to his head: "My power far exceeds that of mortal man," declares the Cobra. "I have the speed and cunning of a serpent, the deadly sting of the king cobra itself, coupled with the brain and cunning of a human being!" His plan: to manufacture a serum with which "to create a vast army of others like myself." Enter Thor to thwart those plans, but the Cobra, surprisingly, gives him a run for his money. In the end, Thor chooses to rescue Jane Foster, allowing the Cobra to escape to fight another day. Artist Don Heck does a decent job here but it's clear that his forte lies more with the up-to-date Iron Man than with a medievalized Thor. Beyond the main story, Larry Lieber and Matt Fox team-up for another mini-fantasy classic, and there's even room for a second installment of "Tales of Asgard," as Lee and penciler Jack Kirby (inked by Heck) reach back to mythological times to tell a tale of Odin vs. the king of the Frost Giants!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #4

"Lord Ha Ha's Last Laugh!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

George Roussos (herein credited as George Bell) inks Jack Kirby's pencils for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #4 (Nov. 1963). It's a Stan Lee scripted tale called "Lord Ha Ha's Last Laugh." Lord Ha Ha was based on real life counterpart, William Joyce, nicknamed Lord Haw Haw by the troops, who propagandized over the radio for the Nazis during World War II. Although Joyce was American born, he affected an upper-class British accent over the airwaves as he worked to demoralize allied soldiers and listeners in England thus, his sobriquet. Here, however, Ha Ha is really Percy Hawley, son of Lord Hawley, who's gone over to the other side. Fury and his fightin' fanatics are ordered to capture Percy and return him to England. What follows is typical Kirby mayhem as the commandos battle their way across Berlin and capture Percy. But at the last minute, Percy escapes and runs out to catch the attention of an approaching German tank column. He's mistaken for the enemy and shot down. Aside from the main plot, this issue's story features two important changes to the strip: The first involves Fury's first meeting with Red Cross worker Pamela Hawley during an air raid. Later, when Fury is taken to Lord Hawley for a briefing, he discovers that the girl he met in an air raid shelter is Hawley's daughter. The ill-mannered sergeant and the sophisticated lady would become



an item as the series progressed with the contrast between the two often forming the basis for both hilarity and a touching tenderness. The other important event this ish is the death in combat of squad member Junior Juniper. The character's demise could have been predicted in that his personality was never sufficiently developed so

BEFORE THERE WAS CHIC STONE, THERE WAS GEORGE BELL, OR RATHER GEORGE ROUSSOS. ALONG WITH DICK AYERS, ROUSSOS WAS KIRBY'S OTHER PRIMARY INKER THROUGH MARVEL'S EARLY YEARS, BUT UNLIKE AYERS, ROUSSOS' INKING STYLE OVER KIRBY SEEMED CRUDE AND CHUNKY IN COMPARISON MAKING FOR AN UNSATISFYING COMBINATION.

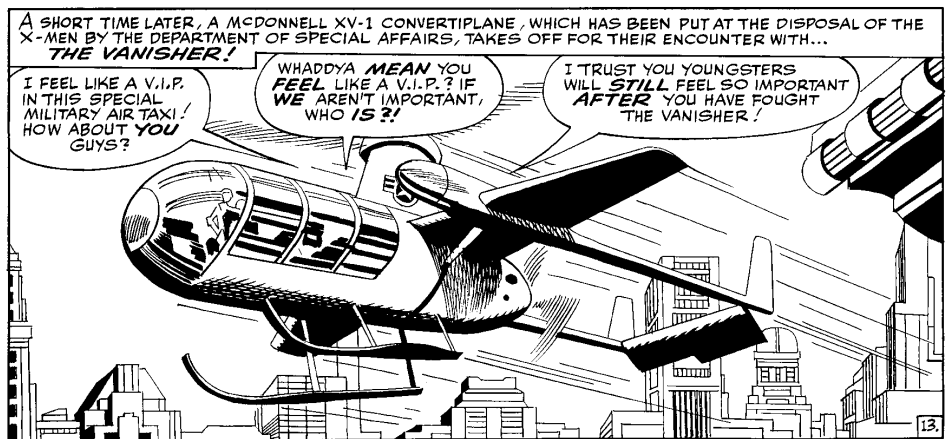
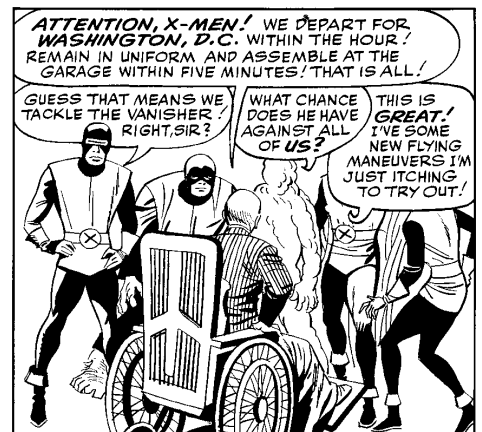
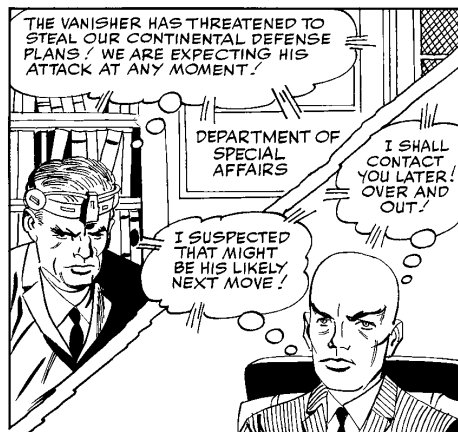
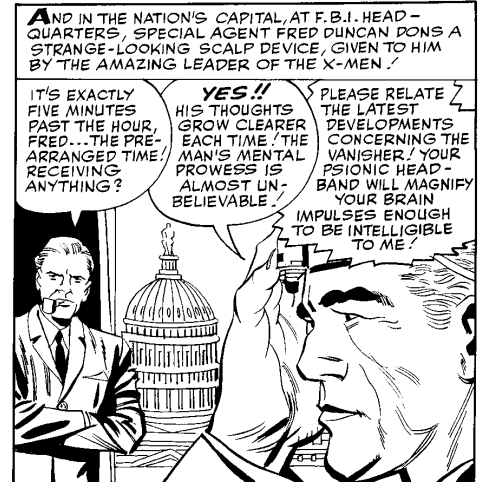
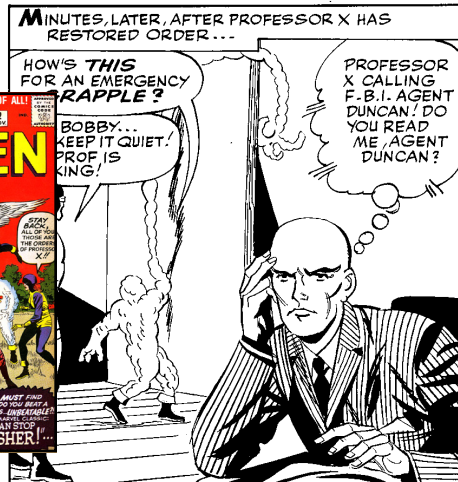
as to allow him to stand out among the other Howlers. His replacement would be. Although Roussos' inks were on the rough side, Kirby's pencils are so strong they not only survive but still manage to convey the artist's familiarity with Army life and scenes involving both barracks life and combat. Clearly, Kirby wasn't so scarred by his own military experiences (that included seeing action during the Battle of the Bulge) that he couldn't throw himself into a full throttle WWII actioner complete with flashes of humor, humanity, and pathos all in a single package. In sum, this ish was another big-time winner for Lee and Kirby's Sgt. Fury!

X-Men #2

"No One Can Stop the Vanisher!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

It was as if the flood gates had opened! After a year or so since Marvel's superheroes first appeared on the scene with *Fantastic Four* #1, editor Stan Lee had presented mostly aliens, subterraneans, other dimensionals, or outright giant monsters as menaces for the heroes to fight. Only occasionally would a costumed supervillain in the traditional understanding of the concept make an appearance. But suddenly, in the closing months of 1963, just as Lee himself took over the scripting chores on all of the superhero features, there was a flowering of colorful villains delightful in the broad range of their powers and abilities. And now, here in *X-Men* #2 (Nov. 1963) was Lee's latest bad guy: the Vanisher! (And he was only the forerunner of a plethora of bad guys to be introduced in the title

over the next year or so!) An acknowledged reader of the old *Street and Smith* pulp magazine devoted to the adventures of Doc Savage, Lee was likely inspired in the creation of the Vanisher by a similar villain that had challenged Doc back in the pre-war era. Be that as it may, the teleportational Vanisher presented an interesting challenge for Marvel's new mutant team as they try to prevent the villain from stealing the Pentagon's war plans. Interestingly, far from being the object of public



X-MEN #2, PAGE 13: ALTHOUGH LATER ISSUES OF THE X-MEN WOULD EMPHASIZE THEIR OUTCAST NATURE, THE EARLIEST STORIES DEPICTED A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEM AND THE US GOVERNMENT. THEIR MISSIONS WERE EVEN SUPPORTED BY ADVANCED AVIONICS SUPPLIED BY "THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL AFFAIRS!"

suspicion, the X-Men are invited by Washington to help in stopping the Vanisher. Of course, they do, but not before the Vanisher and his criminal henchmen give the mutant teens a run for their money. Inside, Kirby's pencils appear rushed in places, but that may have been the final look of his art after Reinman's insensitive inks finished with them. No matter. Kirby's style is so strong, his work ethic so apparent, that it would take a herculean, deliberate effort on the part of a bad inker to destroy it. What results is a fast paced, epic length (22 pages) story that indeed lives up to the blurb on the cover: "In the sensational *Fantastic Four* style!" **Fun Fact:** The only downside to this fun outing is that the Vanisher wasn't defeated by the X-Men proper, but by Prof. X, who mindwipes him so that he forgets his powers and even who he is. This deus ex machina ending was a bit of a letdown, one that Lee wisely avoided in future issues.

Rawhide Kid #37

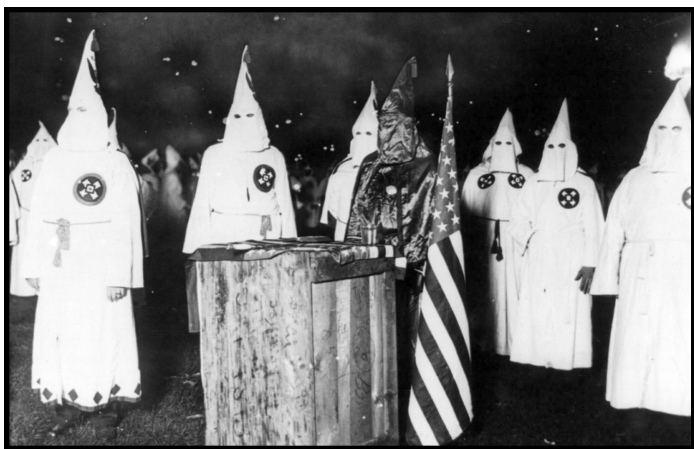
"The Rattler Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Even the Kid was getting into the act! That's right! As editor Stan Lee took over the scripting chores across Marvel's entire line of superhero features, he was still writing the handful of western titles the company published (and that Jack Kirby continued to do covers for). It was likely for that reason that some cross-pollination took place as Lee's approach to superheroes leached over to the westerns he wrote. Case in point: *Rawhide Kid* #37 (Dec. 1963), where the steady stream of new, colorful supervillains that Lee was busy introducing in all of his superhero books extended into the westerns with this issue's introduction of the Rattler! "Never has the Kid fought an enemy as dangerous as the Rattler," screamed a cover blurb shaped like an arrow pointing directly to a scaly, green garbed figure crawling down from a wall onto a bank teller's window. In an epic length 18-page story, we learn that the Rattler, with his fast draw, physical stamina, and speed, has been terrorizing the local community for weeks. After an initial confrontation where the Rattler gets the best of the Kid, a second and final fight sees the villain defeated. The results were good enough, even with the plodding artwork of Dick Ayers, but fans likely wondered how more exciting the story would have been with 18 pages of Kirby style action! Alas! Kirby was being kept way too busy with the superhero line to do more than covers for the westerns. Fans did have one compensating factor though: this issue's backup story called "The Mob Strikes," was drawn by an unsigned Gene Colan!

Fantastic Four #21

"The Hate Monger!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

Anticipating a grandiose years villain called Psycho Man, the new supervillain in *Fantastic Four* #21 (Dec. 1963) is called the Hate Monger ("Don't dare reveal his true identity after reading this tale!" demanded a blurb on the cover), a hooded, Ku Klux Klan-esque rabble rouser who, playing on people's deep seated distrust of anyone who stood out from the crowd as different in some way, spreads hatred and bigotry among the populace. It was a theme that scripiter Stan Lee was toying with at the time. Besides creating other rabble-rousing bad guys in different titles, he also managed to expound on the evils of intolerance in such books as *Sgt. Fury* #6. Unfortunately, the Hate Monger is robbed of the dark power of persuasion (that's all the more dangerous because it could be employed by anyone) by the use of a hate ray in the form of a gun that he uses against the FF, setting the teammates against each other. The action moves to the fictitious South American nation of San Gusto, where the Hate Monger has used his ray to take over the country. His plan is to build a bigger version of the ray and use it to turn whole cities into cauldrons of hate. That's when the story takes an unexpected turn for longtime Marvel fans as one Col. Nick Fury appears, asking the FF to go to San Gusto and stop the Hate Monger! The significance of this appearance cannot be understated, as it firmly places the wartime adventures of Sgt. Fury and his Howlers into the timeline of the current day



IN THE EARLY 1960S, ELEMENTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN WERE STILL ACTIVE IN PARTS OF THE UNITED STATES. AND ALTHOUGH THEY MAY NOT HAVE ALWAYS WORN THE ROBES AND HOODS OF EARLIER INCARNATIONS, THE UNIFORM WAS STILL FAMILIAR ENOUGH TO CONTEMPORARY READERS SO AS TO CONVEY CONNOTATIONS OF INTOLERANCE WHEN USED IN THE COSTUMING FOR CHARACTERS LIKE THE HATE MONGER.

Marvel heroes. Though the revelation had already been established with Richards' appearance in *Sgt. Fury #3*, this reciprocal guest-starring role by Fury in the FF's own book made it more than official. In the meantime, it's Fury who manages to cure Richards of the effects of the hate ray, allowing Mr. Fantastic in turn to use the antidote on his teammates. Reunited again, the four tackle the Hate Monger, and it's the Invisible Girl who manages to turn his hate ray gun onto his bodyguards. Filled with hate, they turn on the Hate Monger and shoot him. Unmasked, the big reveal is that the Hate Monger was actually...well, not to ruin any surprises, but the last person anyone could have expected. "It can't be! It ain't possible!" declares a startled Fury. "And yet, it fits! It all ties in!" replies Richards. "But he was supposed to have been killed years ago!" adds the Thing. "The whole world thought he was dead!" He was "the most evil human being the world has ever known," concludes Richards, which was saying some after the parade of new supervillains then being introduced by Marvel. But Lee had the last word as the FF headed back home in their pogo plane: "Until men truly love each other, regardless of race, creed, or color, the Hate Monger will still be undefeated! Let's never forget that!" It was such sentiments that helped Marvel stand apart from its competitors. Where others maintained a firm wall between their fictional offerings and public service announcements printed off on separate pages, Marvel integrated those messages directly into their stories making their positive messaging more immediate to readers.

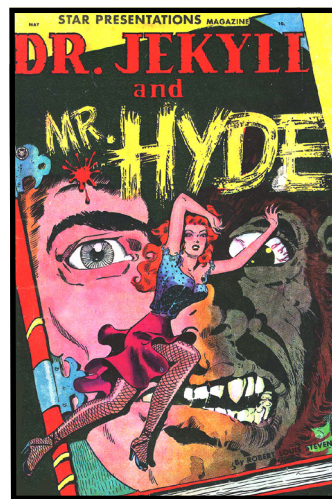
Journey Into Mystery #99

"The Mysterious Mr. Hyde!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

1963 ended with the last in a parade of new supervillains introduced by editor/scripter Stan Lee with Mr. Hyde in *Journey Into Mystery #99* (Dec. 1963). Here, we learn that Hyde is really one Calvin Zabo, who'd been turned down for a job in the office of Dr. Don Blake. (He intended to gain Blake's confidence and then rob him blind!) Zabo has somehow managed to recreate the formula used by Dr. Jekyll in Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novel, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In doing so, he can turn himself into a real Mr. Hyde at will while also increasing his strength a dozen fold. And though he retains the personality of Zabo when he transforms into Mr. Hyde, he becomes far more brutal and murderous. It was just Jane Foster's luck that when Zabo finally pays a visit to Blake's office as Hyde, the doctor isn't in. (As Thor, Blake is in Asgard pleading with Odin to allow him to

marry Jane) Thor returns to Earth, changes to Blake, and arrives back in his office just in time to be thrown out the window by Hyde. Managing to tap his cane against the building, Blake turns into Thor and rescues Jane. Hyde, however, gets away with a new anger now directed against Thor. In a cliffhanger ending, Thor is seen robbing a bank and New York is placed "under siege!" Although continued stories would become a staple for Marvel comics in the grandiose years, here at the dawn of the years of consolidation, Lee began to warily dip his toes into more modest two-part stories. Would readers accept them, or complain and prove the rule in the industry that distribution patterns were too spotty to take chances on continued stories? Only time would tell if Marvel's fans were indeed a new breed of reader whose loyalties would allow them to stick with their favorite books even if they might miss the second part of a continued story. But this issue had other compensations including "Stroom's Strange Solution," a fantasy short with art by the Larry Lieber/Matt Fox team whose work continued to impress. Stroom's solution however, was not so strange to readers of *Fantastic Four #7*, in which Reed Richards arrives at the same solution for a similar problem of too many people. Finally, the issue is topped off by the third installment of the new "Tales of Asgard" featurette. Titled "Surtur the Fire Demon," it tells the tale of how Odin, in defeating Surtur, traps him inside the Earth and inadvertently creates the Moon. Odin

completes the set up by setting the Earth to spin and establishing Bifrost, the rainbow bridge that connects Asgard to Earth. Inspired by the outsized nature of the material, Kirby's art here is all massive set pieces and universe trembling action, elements that he'd bring to the fore in later Thor epics of the grandiose years.



WITH ITS COMPELLING THEME OF THE TWO SIDES OF HUMAN NATURE, COUPLED WITH THE RISE OF THE FILM INDUSTRY, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S 1886 NOVEL, THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE, BECAME A POP CULTURE MAINSTAY, INSPIRING COUNTLESS MOVIE, TELEVISION, AND COMIC BOOK SCRIPTS. AT MARVEL ALONE, IT SERVED AS THE INSPIRATION FOR BOTH THE HULK AND THOR VILLAIN, MR. HYDE.

Kid Colt #114

"The Return of Iron Mask!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

While editor/scripiter Stan Lee was busy creating a whole slew of new villains for his line of superhero comics, he decided to return a previously invented villain in *Kid Colt Outlaw* #114 (Jan. 1964) for a return engagement with the titular hero. Of course, Lee had toyed with outright fantasy in his western titles over the years, but only recently had he begun to self-consciously apply at least some of the quickly gelling "Marvel style" which included colorful supervillains. But aside from obvious examples such as Dr. Doom and Sub-Mariner over in the *Fantastic Four*, few had had a chance to make more than a single appearance. Not so with Iron Mask, whom the Kid first faced in issue #110. Sort of an old west version of Dr. Doom, Iron Mask wore body armor and of course, an iron helmet making him bulletproof...so long as no one shot at his exposed limbs. This time however, as recounted in an origin sequence on pages 4 and 5, we find the imprisoned Iron Mask in a similar situation that many of the superhero villains would find themselves in, namely working in the prison foundry/machine shop secretly improving his armored concept so that it now covered his entire body. Donning his new robotlike armor, the steampunk convict simply walks out of prison, ignoring the guards' bullets that bounce harmlessly off of him. Returning to his life of crime, Iron Mask is unstoppable until the time comes when he's ready to seek out Kid Colt for his revenge. Of course, the two meet and battle to a fare-thee-well over a sprawling 18 pages, until the Kid tricks the villain into wading across a stream that rusts his armor and immobilizes him. It was a good story (even though difficult to believe that rusting would work that fast) by Lee that could have been so much better if executed by a more competent artist than Jack Keller, whose staid style was even less up to the task of the new Marvel approach to storytelling than Dick Ayers was. To give an idea of what a really good artist could have done with the story, all readers had to do was turn to the issue's backup story, "The Day of the Gunfight," with pencils and inks by Gene Colan. (Here credited to his real name and not say, the Adam Austin moniker he'd use later on *Iron Man*) The opening splash is almost 3D in presentation and looking at the foreground figure that dominates the panel, readers could only wring their hands that Colan hadn't been given the assignment of doing the lead feature!

Fantastic Four #22

"The Return of the Mole Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

As it says on the cover of *Fantastic Four* #22 (Jan. 1964), "Celebrate with us the return of the first supervillain the FF ever faced! See how the Mole Man is presented now, in the new, much talked about Marvel manner!" And that "Marvel manner" was on display this ish, as scripiter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby use a full 22 pages to tell the story of the return of the Mole Man and his latest scheme to conquer the Earth. (His plan to lower major cities down into his subterranean realm, while not accomplished this time, would be re-employed to better effect later in issue #31) Script and pacing is fast and breezy with character beats along the way (the Thing utters his famous "It's clobberin' time" battle cry for the first time) with action equally divided between combat with the Mole Man and down-to-earth headaches suffered by the four when neighbors complain about dangerous experimentation and ICBM takeoffs at the Baxter Building (Kirby must have been watching reruns of the TV show *Car 54, Where Are You?* with his depiction of the long faced police officer who brings the bad news about the ICBM looking a lot like actor Fred Gwynne. Did that mean that the TV show was part of the still expanding Marvel Universe?) Many of the



WAS THE LONG FACED POLICE OFFICER FEATURED IN FF #22 INSPIRED BY ACTOR FRED GWYNNE OF TV'S CAR 54 WHERE ARE YOU? THE SERIES AIRED ON THE NBC NETWORK BETWEEN 1961 AND 1963 MAKING IT NOT BEYOND THE REALM OF POSSIBILITY THAT PENCILER JACK KIRBY WAS FAMILIAR WITH THE SHOW!

opening pages are given over to an expansion of the Invisible Girl's powers (no doubt in response to reader complaints about her being useless to the team) which then come in handy in defeating the Mole Man. The Mole Man himself was built up, his motivations clarified, and his costuming formalized qualifying him for inclusion with the army of new colorful supervillains that Marvel was busily introducing at the time. The only drawback to this ish was George Roussos' continued inking over Kirby, which was okay, but not as good as Ayers had been. Overall, it was too rough and ready. A change would be needed before the FF book could fully enter into the more up to date feel of the years of consolidation, a change that luckily, was right around the corner...



Strange Tales #116

"In the Clutches of the Puppet Master!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

"Return to the Nightmare World!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)



Fun Fact: Two future Marvel Bullpen stalwarts were represented in this issue's letters page: Dave Cockrum and Roy Thomas. While Cockrum would come along much later as an artist for a revived X-Men title later in the twilight years, Thomas was due for an early appearance when he was hired by Lee in 1965 as a staff writer. In his letter, Thomas complains of having to shell out \$1.95 in a single week for Marvel comics, including three copies of the FF Annual. Was he trying to butter up Lee for a job? Not likely, as his address was still listed as being back in Missouri, before he took an editorial assistant job at DC and well before disenchantment there compelled him to try for a job with Marvel.

CAN WE BELIEVE OUR EYES?? CAN THIS REALLY BE TRUE?? IS THIS ACTUALLY THE DREADED PUPPET MASTER, BACK FROM THE DEAD TO MENAGE THE WORLD ONCE MORE?? FOR THE STARTLING ANSWER-- READ ON--!!



WRITTEN BY: STAN LEE
DRAWN BY: DICK AYERS
INKED BY: GEO. BELL
LETTERED BY: R. HOLLOWAY

TO LEARN HOW THE PUPPET MASTER ESCAPED THE SEEMINGLY CERTAIN DOOM WHICH AWAITED HIM IN FANTASTIC FOUR #14 TURN THE PAGE!

BASED UPON AN IDEA BY TOMMY AND JIMMY GOODKIND, HEWLETT HARBOR, NEW YORK

STRANGE TALES #116, PAGE 1: DICK AYERS ON PENCILS AND GEORGE BELL (NEE ROUSSOS) ON INKS COULD MAKE FOR A PRETTY ROUGH LOOK AT TIMES FOR THE DOWN AT THE HEELS TORCH STRIP. THE INTERESTING THING HERE IS THE CREDIT AT THE VERY BOTTOM OF THE PAGE: "BASED ON AN IDEA BY TOMMY AND JIMMY GOODKIND OF HEWLETT HARBOR, NEW YORK" WHO WERE REPUTEDLY NEIGHBORS OF EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE AT THE TIME! ONE CAN IMAGINE LEE TALKING OVER THE HEDGE WITH THESE YOUNG FANS AND DECIDING TO GIVE THEM THE THRILL OF A LIFETIME!

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Unfortunately, even Stan Lee's scripting wizardry and editorial sense couldn't make a silk purse out of sow's ear. We speak of the hapless Puppet Master as he appears in *Strange Tales* #116 (Jan. 1964). Inherently boring as a villain, his powers to control the actions of others almost inevitably forced the stories into the same dull trope. Namely, taking over one superheroic character and siccing him onto another. Ho hum. And since this is the Human Torch's starring strip, he's given the coup de grâce that puts the Puppet Master out of action. The sole interesting item here is that the Torch and Thing's battle foreshadows the time not too distant, when the latter becomes the former's permanent partner in the strip. And though George Roussos' inks over Jack Kirby's pencils on the FF hadn't been too noteworthy, his work on this issue's cover is impressive (especially with Stan Goldberg's wonderful color shading that worked to differentiate Marvel's product from its more flatly colored competitors). Roussos is on the scene again on the inside inking Dick Ayers' pencils and here, he affects a definite improvement on the artist's work lending it more heft and body and, dare we say it? Possibly making some figure corrections along the way. The title's co-feature (which still didn't rate any notice on the cover) was a new installment in the Dr. Strange strip by scripster Lee and artist Steve Ditko. This time, the good doctor enters the Dream Dimension after being called in to examine men who've fallen asleep but cannot be reawakened. Strange determines that the men are under a spell that he tracks to his arch-foe, Nightmare. Here, we see that Ditko's art style is beginning to tighten up, giving way to smoother inks over his scratchier, more detail-oriented earlier style. A change perhaps due to the burden of both penciling and inking a full-length monthly comic with Spider-Man and this backup strip for Dr. Strange which has now expanded from five to eight pages. **Fun Fact:** In a note at the bottom of the story's opening splash page, the Torch story idea is credited to fans Tommy and Jimmy Goodkind of Hewlett Harbor, New York. Such credits would be rare at Marvel (beyond the generic acknowledgment by Lee that Marvel's fans were the real writers and editors of its comics) with the most famous being John Romita Jr's suggestion for Spider-Man hero/villain the Prowler later in the grandiose years.



IN AN ERA WHEN TEST PILOTS AND ASTRONAUTS WERE AMONG AMERICAN'S MOST ADMIRED LIVING HEROES. IT WAS NO COINCIDENCE THAT THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S BENJAMIN GRIMM (AKA THE THING) WAS CHARACTERIZED AS BOTH A WWII FIGHTER PILOT AND PRINCIPLE PILOT OF REED RICHARDS' ADVANCED AVIONICS SYSTEMS SUCH AS THE TEAM'S POGO PLANE, ICBM ROCKET, AND THE SPACE SHIP THAT TOOK THE FOUR INTO ORBIT BATHING THEM IN THE COSMIC RAYS THAT GRANTED THEM THEIR STRANGE POWERS. THE THING WAS CUT FROM THE SAME CLOTH AS REAL LIFE ASTRONAUT JOHN GLENN AND TEST PILOT CHUCK YEAGER.

Journey Into Mystery #100

"The Master Plan of Mr. Hyde!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

There was no hoopla surrounding the one hundredth issue of *Journey Into Mystery* as there would be decades later for every milestone in numbering. That may have been because *Journey Into Mystery* #100 (Jan. 1964) wasn't the one hundredth anniversary of the lead feature's presence in the title. The Thor feature, after all, had only been introduced with issue #83, still fresh within the minds of early Marvel fans. Be that as it may, this issue should have been recognized as something worth calling attention to. After all, it featured the second chapter of the two-part Mr. Hyde story begun the issue before. It also featured a colossal cover image by Jack Kirby that seemed to foreshadow his later style in the grandiose years as well as a Stan Lee scripted and Don Heck penciled and inked interior story worthy of a special issue. Top all of that off with a new "Tales of Asgard" installment featuring the boyhood of Thor in a story called "The Storm Giants" and the fact that this issue would be the last before Kirby returned to the strip as regular penciler on a permanent basis. That return would set the stage first for the years of consolidation as Kirby was teamed with Chic Stone, his signature inker of the era, which would in turn set the stage for the artist's incredible work during the grandiose years when the Thor feature, as well as the rest of the Marvel line, reached their apogee of greatness.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #5

"At the Mercy of Baron Strucker!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

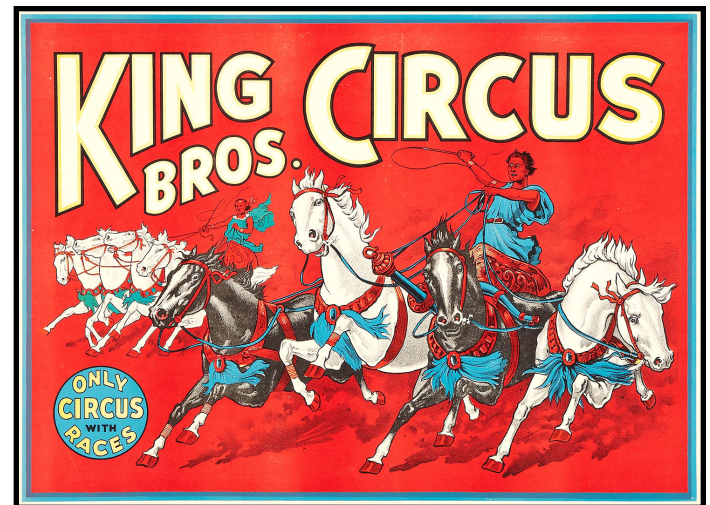
Pushing on with the supervillain bandwagon, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby provide Fury with his very own arch-enemy in the form of Baron Wolfgang von Strucker. But whereas the villains in the superhero titles would invariably sport colorful costumes, the "super" villains in the *Sgt. Fury* book would keep largely to uniforms worn by the *German Wehrmacht*. (Generally considered the best dressed military of the WWII era!) That, however, wouldn't mean that Fury's villains were any less evil or formidable than the superheroes' villains. Well, okay, they were slightly less formidable in that the Nazis almost never got the best of Fury and his Howlers. Case in point: Baron Strucker. Sure, he gets the upper hand temporarily in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #5 (Jan. 1964), but only temporarily and most of his subsequent appearances would be the same, with the Baron ending up having to bear the wrath of an apoplectic Hitler after each of his defeats. Other than Strucker (and later, the members of his Blitzkrieg Squad), villains usually met a permanent end after their initial encounter with the Howlers who, after all, fought with machine guns and grenades and not web lines or repulsor rays. Anyway, the Baron makes a memorable first appearance here as he's ordered by the Fuhrer himself to end the career of the annoying Sgt. Fury. Strucker challenges Fury to meet him man to man on a deserted isle and, disobeying orders, Fury complies. There, he's tricked and is defeated by weapons master Strucker. Back at base, Fury is busted from sergeant to private for disobeying orders and on their next mission, the Howlers are led by Dum Dum Dugan. But by sheer coincidence, they encounter Strucker, and Private Fury demands a rematch. Strucker agrees, offering him a toast which Howler Dino Manelli laughs off as the oldest trick in the book: "I've played this scene in 'B' movies a dozen times," Dino tells a surprised Fury. "Where the schemin' villain challenges the hero to a duel and then gives him a sleeping potion to slow him down." That's all Fury needs to hear to mop up the floor with the Baron. Back at headquarters, Fury is restored to his rank ahead of a visiting general and all's well that ends well. Again, Kirby knocks himself out illustrating this great war epic (Fury and the Baron only have their initial encounter on page 14!) while Lee convinces with dialogue that could've come direct from the mouths of actual combat men.

Even George Roussos' chunky inks seem to add to the story's rugged realism. There's the usual hilarity too as Fury drinks tea with Pam Hawley at a local pub and Izzy Cohen's favorite set of long johns gets perforated by gunfire from the Baron's fighter plane: "They mean a lot to me," Izzy tells Dum Dum just before the tragic event. "I wore 'em across half the battlefields in Europe!" For sure, the competition's war books never read like this! **Fun Fact:** Continuity buffs will be glad to know that the death of Junior Juniper in the previous issue was not forgotten as this issue's story opens with Fury putting his men through an especially tough training exercise to make sure that such a tragedy never again befalls the squad.

X-Men #3

"Beware of the Blob!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

Even as editor/scripter Stan Lee continued to add to the parade of new colorful supervillains to the Marvel roster of bad guys, there seemed to be a whole new subset of villains springing up over in the alt-verse of the new *X-Men* title. Sure, it was still early in the book's run, but a certain feeling of apartness from the rest of the Marvel Universe was already present as the mutant teenagers began to face off each issue with their evil counterparts. First it was Magneto, then the Vanisher, and now in *X-Men* #3 (Jan. 1964), it was the Blob. Not exactly the cleverest of cognomens (as the



HEY RUBE! CIRCUSES SUCH AS RINGLING BROS AND THE KING CIRCUS WERE STILL PART OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE 1960s. TRAVELING FROM TOWN TO TOWN THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES, USUALLY BY RAIL. SO IT WAS TO BE EXPECTED THAT THE AVERAGE READER WOULD NEED NO LONG WINDED EXPLANATIONS TO EXPLAIN THE SETTING OR BIG TOP LINGO!

Beast might say) but the Blob didn't need any fancy code name. In fact, he didn't even need clothes! Just a pair of purple shorts would do. As Prof. X would inform them, the X-Men learn that the Blob is a circus fat man who, once he chooses to stand his ground, cannot be moved. Desiring to recruit the Blob for the X-Men and to keep him out of the ranks of the evil mutants, the X-Men invite him to their headquarters, but the Blob's abrasive personality prevents him from fitting in. In fact, now enlightened as to the nature of his powers, he goes back to the circus with the realization that the X-Men will be coming after him, since he now knows their secrets. He takes over the circus and the X-Men end up having to fight the Blob as well as the rest of the acts, making for a fun Jack Kirby free for all. Except for a repeat of last issue's convenient ending wherein Prof. X uses his powers to erase the Blob's memories of the X-Men and his being a mutant, it was another solid entry in the new series. But the somewhat short-circuited conclusion is made up for in added depth given to the personalities of the X-Men, including the establishment of the Cyclops/Marvel Girl/Angel romantic triangle, which Lee and Kirby would stretch out for a few issues before finally resolving it in Cyke's favor. As Lee blurbed on earlier covers, pointing out that the X-Men were done in the style of the Fantastic Four, so too did this triangle reflect the Mr. Fantastic/Invisible Girl/Sub-Mariner menage from that other title. Here too, is the Beast established as a bookworm-ish character and Iceman as the impetuous youngster of the group. Finally, we discover that even Prof. X harbors a secret attraction to Marvel Girl. Although the professor's age is never mentioned, the context of the stories suggests that he's an adult compared to his teenaged students. Thus, Lee quickly excised such thoughts in future stories. Besides, there was plenty here in the X book to keep readers coming back for more and more they'd have with the very next issue!

Tales to Astonish #52

*"The Black Knight Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)*

Editor/scripter Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby were really coming along as they unknowingly entered the years of consolidation. By now, Lee had a conscious grasp of the elements that were making Marvel such a hit with a growing legion of fans. As a result, he took over the scripting of all the superhero features (while retaining for the time being, those of the westerns as well) in order to make sure that they all conformed to the new paradigm which included character development, the introduction



THE IMAGE OF THE BLACK KNIGHT WAS AMONG MANY SHARED CULTURAL TOUCHSTONES OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION THAT REQUIRED LITTLE OR NO EXPLANATION TO READERS OF THE 50S AND 60S.

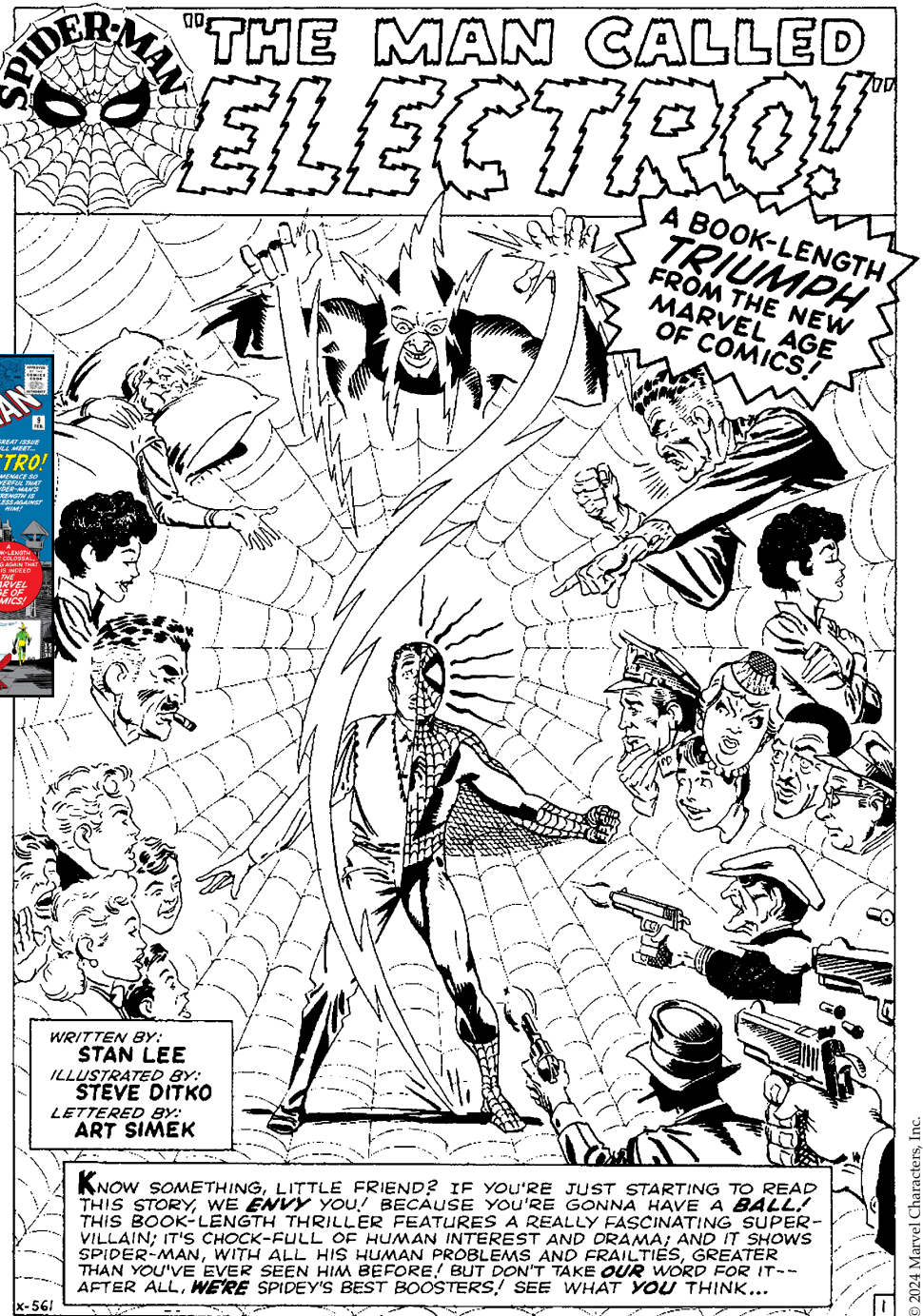
of new colorful supervillains, continuity building, and especially a canny self-awareness. (To do it, he instituted the "Marvel method" in which he'd hand a story synopsis or discuss the plot with the artist in his office or over the phone, let the artist go off and draw the story however he saw fit, and then add the finished dialogue and captions after the art was turned in) He also realized that Kirby's action-oriented style of art was the standard for Marvel's new look. Characters were forbidden to just stand around. Talking heads were to be avoided whenever possible. Wide angle shots came more and more to the fore and continued stories expanded the palette for all of it. The bottom line was that every Marvel superhero comic was a barrel of fun. Well, maybe with the exception of the Ant-Man/Giant-Man strip. There, Dick Ayers had been assigned the art chores. Deprived of Kirby, Don Heck, or Steve Ditko, the strip stagnated even with the addition of the Wasp and the expansion of Henry Pym's powers to include those of Giant-Man. Add to that, the lack of colorful villains (so far, only the Human Top had been assigned to the strip) and you had a recipe for a distinct lack of energy in the feature. Lee tried to shake that up some for *Tales to Astonish* #52 (Feb. 1964) with the introduction of the Black Knight and for once, readers had a glimpse of what the strip could've been if more villains like that had been brought in. Nathan Garrett is a scientist in the commie payroll, but when he's foiled by Giant-Man, he retreats to a castle where he reinvents himself as the Black Knight, complete with winged horse and advanced weaponry built in to his armor.

The villain should have lived up the Giant-Man strip, but fell short due to Ayers' unimpressive art. The Black Knight himself was a throwback to a similarly named character from medieval times that Lee had created with artist Joe Maneely, and would have a long history with Marvel comics in the years to come, but almost none of it would involve Giant-Man. In fact, for some reason, the Black Knight would never return to the Giant-Man strip for a rematch. Instead, with rare exception, the feature would continue to be plagued by lackluster menaces such as Madame Macabre, El Toro, and the Magician with the only rays of light being past villains such as the Human Top and the Porcupine coming back for rare return engagements. Even worse for the Giant-Man strip, it would now be joined at the back of *Astonish* by a new feature in which the Wasp tells weird tales to entertain orphans or shut-ins. These stories, that sported some of the worst artwork in this period, were an utter bore, further piling on to Giant-Man's already burdened reputation. **Fun Fact:** Although Jack Kirby provided this issue's exciting cover featuring a bound Giant-Man hanging for dear life from the bottom of a helicopter, Kirby committed one of his frequent wardrobe malfunctions by giving Giant-Man gloves of two different designs! This quirk would prove to be a recurring problem for Kirby, who was likely finding it hard to keep up with all the different costumed characters that were cropping up across Marvel's line of superhero titles.

Amazing Spider-Man #9

"The Man Called Electro!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Now, at the start of the years of consolidation, with some perspective available on the rapid rise of the Marvel comics phenomenon, any fan at the time could see that the *Spider-Man* book had swiftly become a linchpin of the line. The first issue was a bit wobbly what with its two-story format,



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #9, PAGE 1: ARTIST STEVE DITKO'S SPLASH PAGES WERE OFTEN BETTER THAN HIS COVERS! HERE, HE EXPERTLY SYMBOLIZES ALL OF THE MANY ELEMENTS THAT WENT INTO A TYPICAL SPIDEY ADVENTURE: THE FRIENDS, THE VILLAINS, THE HANG UPS, THE HATREDS, AND RESENTMENTS. IN LESS THAN TEN ISSUES, HE AND SCRIPTER STAN LEE HAD SUCCESSFULLY CREATED A POCKET UNIVERSE OF TEENAGED ANGST.

a leftover from the time when the strip had been planned as the lead feature in the old *Amazing Fantasy* book. So too was the second, although the lead story in that issue featuring the Vulture was light years in story quality even over the first issue. With the third issue, the Spider-Man strip and character was already firmly developed, showing clear signs of being a leader in Marvel's lineup of superhero titles. That was in no small part due to the close partnership between editor/scripster Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko, who had honed their professional association over many years producing highly personalized fantasy stories in the pre-hero era. And with the advent of Spider-Man, Ditko took an even more personal interest in the character, swiftly becoming integral to story development and character beats. Though the degree of his involvement wouldn't formally be recognized for some months, he was no doubt deeply involved in the creation of stories and characters in addition to the art. That said, it was likely Ditko who developed or at least visualized many of the strip's quirky villains, most of whom featured characteristics that were slightly off compared to those Lee may have had more of a hand in creating for Marvel's other strips. Or maybe it was just Ditko's art style that made them seem quirkiest than normal. Be that as it may, after introducing such soon to be classic villains as the Vulture, Sandman, Dr. Octopus, and the Lizard in earlier issues, Lee and Ditko came up with Electro

for *Amazing Spider-Man* #9 (Feb. 1964) Electro is one Max Dillon, a selfish ex-electric lineman who is struck by lightning while working on the wires. Afterwards, he discovers that his body is like a living battery that can generate electrical power. He embarks on a life of crime, robbing banks and releasing prisoners from a local prison. Although he defeated an unprepared Spidey earlier, a second encounter proves the charm. In a scene wherein Peter Parker sells photos of the fight to J. Jonah Jameson, fans get to hiss when Jameson takes advantage of him: "I'm robbing him," thinks Jameson after buying the photos. "I'll make a fortune with his pictures. But I deserve it, 'cause he's a fool!" But Peter isn't fooled. Selling the pics for less than they're worth soothes his guilty conscience for selling Jameson faked photos of an earlier encounter with Electro. And of course, this issue is chock full of the kind of problems Peter would be constantly plagued with, at least so long as Ditko remained on the book. Those kinds of problems were the real reason why fans attached themselves so quickly to the strip, a factor that Ditko lays out beautifully in a symbolic opening splash page showing a half Peter/half Spidey figure bedeviled on all sides by Jameson, the kids at school, Betty Brant, Electro, John Q. Public, and even Aunt May. **Fun Fact:** What would prove to be an ongoing theme of the strip began here when Spidey unmasks Electro, only to discover that he's no one he ever heard of. It'd be a theme that would be revisited in the Crime Master storyline and was once rumored to have been (since denied by Ditko) one of the reasons for the breakup of one of the best creative teams in the history of comics when the question would arise again over the secret identity of the Green Goblin!



BEFORE THERE WERE THE PRE-HERO FANTASY TALES, THERE WAS CHARLTON COMICS! ALTHOUGH ARTIST STEVE DITKO IS NOW WORLD FAMOUS AS THE CO-CREATOR OF MARVEL'S SPIDER-MAN, HE CUT HIS EYE TEETH AT CHARLTON. THERE, BEFORE AND AFTER STINTS AT MARVEL, DITKO EXCHANGED LOWER PAGE RATES FOR MORE CREATIVE FREEDOM. OVER THE YEARS, HE WORKED IN EVERY GENRE FROM WESTERNS AND WEIRD, TO OUTRIGHT SUPERHEROES.

Fantastic Four #23

"The Master Plan of Dr. Doom!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

Beginning with an attention grabbing but somewhat creepy cover showing the FF about to fall into outer space as the floor of their prison gradually dissolves, and after the 23-page epic encounter with Dr. Doom that comes after it in *Fantastic Four* #23 (Feb. 1964), the action, suspense, and drama never stops, making this issue a true milestone in the history of the title. From here on in, tight stories, supervillains, development of the Four, and big ideas would dominate, confirming to readers that the FF book truly was "the leader" (as editor Stan Lee would put it) of the Marvel line. To prove it, Lee and penciler Jack Kirby open the issue with the FF arguing over who should be leader of the team, one that quickly devolves into a fight between the Thing and the Torch that wrecks

their living quarters. Meanwhile, a trio of bad guys are sprung from jail by Dr. Doom. The three, strong man Bull Brogin, charming Harry Phillips, and the somewhat magical Yogi Dakor have their abilities enhanced and then are let in on Doom's latest scheme to defeat the FF. One by one, the three use their abilities to capture individual members of the team, only to be rewarded by Doom with exile into another dimension! Meanwhile, the captured FF are caught in one of Doom's most ingenious, and unsettling, traps: a room placed in the path of a "solar wave" which can temporarily open a passage into outer space! But Mr. Fantastic settles the team's earlier argument about who should be leader by having the Invisible Girl trap Doom on the other side of the wall with her force field, forcing him to open a hatch to try and free himself. Instead, he's grabbed by the Thing and yanked inside. And, as the FF squeeze their way through the opening to safety, Doom is last seen falling away into space. It was a great story no matter how anyone looked at it with a unique menace and manner in which the villain was defeated and would presage a long run of high-quality tales that would only get better and better as the years went on!

Rawhide Kid #38

"Revenge of the Red Raven!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Yes, Marvel was still publishing its line of westerns even as its new line of superhero comics was really beginning to take off. Not only that, but editor Stan Lee was still doing the scripting, ensuring a level of quality in the storytelling on par with his work on the superheroes. And though Dick Ayers' art left much to be desired in the way of aesthetic appreciation, he still maintained his own connection with the superheroes by also being the penciler for the Human Torch and Giant-Man features in *Strange Tales* and *Tales to Astonish* respectively. Thus, it might not have been a surprise to readers that the westerns were coming to resemble their superheroic counterparts when it came to "movie length" stories, increased characterization, and even the introduction of colorful new "super" villains. Take *Rawhide Kid* #38 (Feb. 1964) for instance, with its introduction of a winged bad man named the Raven: "He can actually fly!" exclaims a disbelieving Kid on the Jack Kirby penciled cover. "How can I beat him?" How indeed! It seems that after the Kid sent him to territorial prison, "Red" Raven vowed revenge. Coincidentally, his cellmate turns out to be an Indian who, on his deathbed, bequeaths Raven with an outfit that could make him "the most powerful man of all." (Lee would revisit this plot germ in later issues



THE STEAMPUNK VIBE THAT EDITOR STAN LEE HAD BEGUN TO CULTIVATE FOR MARVEL'S WESTERNS PREFIGURED 1965'S WILD WILD WEST TELEVISION SHOW WHICH COMBINED THE OLD WEST, SF CONCEPTS, AND SUPERVILLAINS INTO A SUCCESSFUL FOUR YEAR RUN.

of *Spider-Man*!) Training in secret, Red Raven finally reaches the point where he's ready to make his escape with the aid of the winged costume given to him by the now expired Indian. What follows is an 18-page steampunk actioner that's carried along mostly by Lee's smooth scripting. Not a bad story for those fans who couldn't stand the long wait between issues of the regular superhero books! And sweetening the deal, is a five-page backup tale called "This Is a Stickup!" Lee, of course, is on the scripting, but artist Gene Colan is in top form as the penciler/inker. He kicks things off with a fabulous full-page splash of a trio of shadowed owlhoots waiting to rob the local bank before moving quickly through the rest of the yarn. Colan's work here is an amazing preamble to what he'd do for Iron Man and Sub-Mariner when he later came to work for Marvel on a permanent basis.

Strange Tales #117

"The Return of the Eel!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

In one of the earliest return matches for the slew of new colorful supervillains Marvel had been introducing over the previous few months, the Eel has his second go round with the Human Torch in *Strange Tales* #117 (Feb. 1964). Here, the Torch (who ought to have known better) pleads with the warden at state prison not to release the Eel after his sentence has been completed. Suspecting strongly that the villain hasn't reformed, the Torch keeps an eye on him, managing to confront

him a number of times during the commission of crimes. But to no avail. Finally, deciding that the Eel was most likely holding up at the local aquarium, the Torch confronts him there and after near defeat, overpowers his foe and sends him packing back to jail. It was a fun story by Stan Lee that turned out to have its most exciting depiction on the issue's Jack Kirby cover. Certainly, the Dick Ayers art inside wasn't anything to write home about. But the real winner in this issue was the latest installment of the Dr. Strange feature wherein he once more battles arch-enemy Baron Mordo. Artist Steve Ditko maximizes use of the nine-panel grid to tell a Lee-penned story of how Strange escapes from a trap set by Mordo and saving the Ancient One by having his astral form travel all the way through the Earth and out by way of China! Of note is the fact that the Strange strip had by this time expanded from a mere five pages to eight!

Tales of Suspense #50

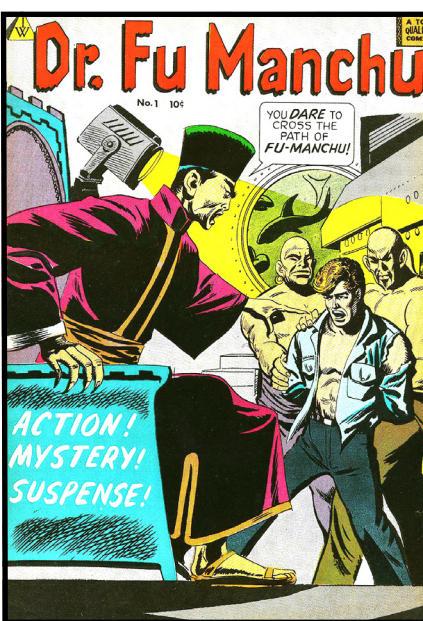
"The Hands of the Mandarin!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

"Iron Man fights for his life in the castle of a madman!" screamed the blurb on the cover of *Tales of Suspense* #50 (Feb. 1964) as the early years gave way to the years of consolidation and the Iron Man feature kicked into high gear! Sure, on the face of it, new villain the Mandarin seemed to be derivative of the Yellow Claw by way of Fu Manchu, but that was only a surface resemblance. They were all Chinese, but that didn't mean they were all the same. He was also not a racist caricature as later critics have contended. The Mandarin was most assuredly his own man. As written by scripiter Stan Lee, the Mandarin didn't speak in pidgin English as stereotyped Chinese characters did. Lee made him a fully rounded character, one with class! Unlike his predecessors, he wasn't out to restore China's former greatness but to conquer the country for himself before moving on to the rest of the world. The Mandarin's independent status is underlined here when agents representing the Communist government of China come to his castle to ask if he'd join forces with their Red masters.

But the Mandarin simply throws them out. The Mandarin's character is also enhanced by the fact that he possesses ten rings, each with a different deadly power, making him a worthy foe of Iron Man. So worthy in fact, that he was destined to join the ranks of Marvel's greatest arch villains including Dr. Doom, the Red Skull, and the Green Goblin. But that would come later after his popularity among fans grew and his appearances became more frequent. And a big part of that popularity was due in no small way to Don Heck, who joins Lee here as penciler and inker bringing the Mandarin to life in his distinctive head piece and flowing green garb. (The letter "M" on his chest was unfortunate though; how likely would it be for a Chinese villain to use an English letter instead of the proper Chinese character to represent his identity? Or were we simply seeing a translation of the actual symbol?)

Anyway, Heck really delivers this issue with IM facing down not only the Mandarin's rings, but his many scientific weapons and traps as well as his own hand to hand fighting prowess. Heck's use of big quarter page panels on page 10 emulates Jack Kirby's own use of them over in "Tales of Asgard," and they work well here amid all the action helping to break the story wide open at a crucial point. Meanwhile, after instructions from Lee, Heck gives Pepper Potts a makeover as she appears at a Stark employee function. Gone are the freckles and schoolgirl pony tail. "Pepper," observes a tactless Tony Stark upon setting eyes on her. "For heaven's sake. I didn't even know it was you. You're beautiful!" Happy Hogan is equally out of step: "I kinda liked you the other way." On the other hand, Happy may have had a point there, as future issues would have Tony falling for the redhead and (temporarily) squeezing Happy out of the picture. **Fun Fact:** As great as the interior of this ish was, the jam-packed cover by Kirby was a great

come on to kids checking out the local spinner rack what with the first appearance of the Mandarin (in a slightly different outfit), Iron Man being trapped behind a falling metal door while being surrounded by the Mandarin's private army!



THE INTRODUCTION OF AUTHOR SAX ROHMER'S FU MANCHU IN 1912. SET THE TONE FOR CHINESE MASTER VILLAINS FOR THE NEXT ONE HUNDRED YEARS. IN THE COMPANY'S TWILIGHT YEARS HE EVEN JOINED THE MARVEL UNIVERSE WHEN HE BECAME THE FATHER OF SHANG-CHI. MASTER OF KUNG-FU!

Journey Into Mystery #101

"The Return of Zarrko, the Tomorrow Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

After a number of intermittent stops and starts over its first 18 issues, the Thor strip in *Journey Into Mystery* would finally settle into artistic regularity. That is, if you consider Jack Kirby just a regular guy! The King had been there for the first appearance of Thor in issue #83 and then going on to pencil a few more of the early issues before taking a break and returning for the landmark Radioactive Man story. Breaking off again, he returned to introduce the Lava Man in the same



JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #101: WITH THE RETURN OF ZARRKO, THE TOMORROW MAN, ARTIST JACK KIRBY KICKS OFF A LONG, UNINTERRUPTED RUN AS THE REGULAR PENCILER ON THE THOR FEATURE. SURE, THE TOMORROW MAN (NO RELATION TO OUR PUBLISHER!) PRESENTED MERE WINDOW DRESSING FOR YET ANOTHER TIME TRAVELING MENACE. BUT HIS APPEARANCE HERE WOULD LAUNCH OVER A YEAR'S WORTH OF EARTHSIDE ADVENTURES FOR THOR THAT WOULD KEEP YOUNG READERS COMING BACK FOR MORE!

issue that he began working on the "Tales of Asgard" backup feature. Perhaps it was doing that feature that solidified the artist's interest in the Norse trappings of the strip, or simply that editor Stan Lee felt the time was right to place the strip on a regular footing. Or maybe it was simply that some time was opening up in Kirby's schedule after *FF Annual* #1 was put to bed. Whatever the reason, he jumped in here on *Journey Into Mystery* #102 (Feb. 1964) with both feet as Zarrko, the Tomorrow Man, returns in a big way. And we do mean big, as evidenced by the size of the robotic hand on the issue's cover! Inside, we learn that Loki restores Zarrko's memory and his burning desire for revenge on the thunder god. Lickety-split, he travels back to the twentieth century in company with a giant mining robot that immediately begins to tip over buildings and otherwise cause trouble. When Thor makes the scene, he discovers he can't overpower the robot. Stymied, he agrees to go into the future with Zarrko rather than see the robot wreak more havoc. Continued next issue! As interesting as Thor's encounter with Zarrko may have been, the real treat here was located in the Stan Lee scripted story's opening pages, where the Avengers appear to try and calm down a frustrated Thor, angry at having his love for Jane Foster denied again by Odin. So readers are treated with some Kirby action as Iron Man and Giant-Man deal with Thor's rampage. (Page 3, panel 3 is especially nice as Giant-Man holds up the cab of a truck smashed to leaky wreckage by Thor) Fun stuff! Meanwhile, Larry Lieber and Matt Fox are still at it with a fantasy short called "The Enemies." Their unique artistic collaboration can still amaze even after months on the job. Finally, Lee and Kirby provide yet another installment in the "Tales of Asgard" feature. Still chronicling "the boyhood of Thor," the youthful thunder god helps to stem an invasion of Asgard by a rogues' gallery of Nordic villains, most of whom would eventually have starring roles in the main feature at the front of the book. Here also, are early examples of Kirby's depiction of Asgard, Odin, its gods, and peoples replete in all their crazy haberdashery!

Tales to Astonish #53

"Trapped by the Porcupine!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

The Porcupine is back! Okay, so maybe it didn't evoke the same frisson of anticipation that the names of Dr. Doom or Magneto did, but the way Jack Kirby drew his encounter with Giant-Man on the cover of *Tales to Astonish* #53 (March 1964) sure made this issue look like one no self-respecting Marvel fan could ignore! Giant-Man straining amid scattered furniture, scraping the roof of an apartment, and grasping his

Merry Marvel Marching Society



Begun in mysterious fashion with strategically placed plugs in stories and then an orange colored stamp on the covers of comics dated from November of 1964, editor Stan Lee began filling in readers on letters pages bit by bit until fully unveiling Marvel's first fan club in February 1965 cover dated books. A response to the ever growing popularity of Marvel Comics, the initial membership package (available for a dollar) included such goodies as buttons, stickers, official certificate, membership card, and best of all, a record featuring the "voices of Marvel!" In the beginning, members' names were listed in the comics themselves until the numbers became too overwhelming. According to Stan Lee gal Friday Flo Steinberg, there were so many order forms coming in that the staff simply threw the money around! Was the club successful? Well, according to Marvel at the time, about 70,000 fans would eventually join! Over time, other Marvel related products were offered for sale to members and member Mark Evanier even came up with rankings for members at different stages of their fannish development. The club eventually petered out around 1969 when the baton was handed off to the short lived and mismanaged Marvelmania International.



throat in agony as the Porcupine stands by below was an image that would grab any discerning comics reader. And if that wasn't enough, the stark white background to Stan Goldberg's colors on Giant-Man's uniform, with its dark reds shaded beneath Kirby's musculature contrasted with the yellow behind the Astonish logo would do it for sure. Inside, the Dick Ayers penciled and inked strip was less impressive. Although Stan Lee's script is good with an interesting, twisty plot that ends unexpectedly after the Porcupine swallows a handful of shrinking pills and shrinks into nothingness (no explanation why his costume shrunk as well...were unstable molecules available on the open market?), Ayers' action scenes were flat with Giant-Man's action poses falling short of dynamic. But at least readers got to see him tackling another colorful supervillain. After all, with his built-in weapons, the Porcupine wasn't that bad. He even presented a different sort of challenge for the hero. But the less said about this issue's backup fantasy tale as told by the Wasp, the better. **Fun Fact:** Readers

learned this ish that Giant-Man had a fan club made up of enthusiastic young people perhaps much like the readers who were scooping up Marvel comics like they were going out of style. Not! It made Giant-Man the only Marvel hero with such a club (notwithstanding the Thor and Hulk fans who turned up at the start of *Journey Into Mystery* #112, but they weren't an official club and came along almost a year later; for sure, they weren't likely to be invited to Dr. Blake's office for a rap session with their favorite hero!). The club's existence was important, as it suggested Giant-Man was a good deal more accessible to the public than his superheroic colleagues. In fact, as seen here, fan club members know where his headquarters is located and don't hesitate at all at visiting him there! Further, they're invited in by the Wasp, with Giant-Man himself expressing delight at their appearance. The only fly in the ointment is the likelihood of an adult Porcupine joining such a club without arousing any suspicions by the kids' parents! It was a different time then!



MOBSTERS. MOBSTERS EVERYWHERE! A POPULAR GENRE FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS OF FILM, THE TRADITIONAL GANGSTER, LIKE WESTERN HEROES, OR HARDBOILED DETECTIVES, HAD BECOME A FAMILIAR SIGHT ON THE AMERICAN CULTURAL LANDSCAPE. THUS, IT WAS SECOND NATURE FOR STAN LEE AND STEVE DITKO TO DRAW ON THE JAMES CAGNEY/HUMPHREY BOGART FILMS OF THEIR YOUTH TO FIND SPARRING PARTNERS FOR OLE SPIDEY!

Amazing Spider-Man #10

*"The Enforcers!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)*

Either editor / scripter Stan Lee or artist Steve Ditko must have watched one late show too many because this key Spidey story introduces underworld enforcers...the Enforcers! Hit men for hire, the trio included the sneaky Fancy Dan, rope throwing Montana, and the dimwitted but musclebound Ox. The three have breezed into town at the behest of New York's crime boss, the Big Man. His object: to unite all of the city's mobs under his leadership. He was the first in a long line of Spidey foes to go for the gold, setting up a major theme for the book that would extend through the Ditko years well into the twilight years namely, Spidey vs. gangsters. The Big Man also touched on another theme of the Ditko years: the criminal figure with a secret identity that, when revealed, might or might not be someone Spidey or the readers knew. This time the latter would prove true as (spoiler alert!) mousy looking *Daily Bugle* reporter Frederick Foswell is revealed as the criminal mastermind. Foswell would return in future issues and be given an interesting character arc. He would seem to reform upon being released from prison but as would be seen, even by issue #50, he was still harboring ambitions to take over the underworld. Anyway, though Spidey manages

to break up the Big Man's operation, the villain escapes only to be caught by the police. Setting up a concluding monologue by J. Jonah Jameson that spelled out the reasons for his hating Spider-Man: he envied him. "I can never climb to his level. So all that remains for me is to try to tear him down, because heaven help me, I'm jealous!" This issue's larger story though, would set up the Spider-Man strip for two types of villains in future stories: the super kind and the gangster kind, sometimes both at once! In the meantime, Lee and Ditko didn't ignore the strip's real bread and butter elements, namely Peter Parker's stack of problems, led this issue by Aunt May's need for a blood transfusion. Fearing his radioactive blood might harm her, Peter hesitates to offer his own, resulting in his character being questioned by Liz Allen ("Peter! It's your own aunt!") and Flash Thompson ("S'matter? Afraid of the big bad needle?") Peter eventually does donate his blood with consequences to follow in subsequent issues. Also on his mind is the reason why he found the Enforcers threatening Betty Brant...something he'd learn more about in the next issue. But man! The Spidey strip had been going great guns almost from the beginning, but with this ish, the literary screws really began to tighten as Lee and Ditko's handle on the feature became more firm. With characters becoming more fully rounded and beginning to present new story wrinkles that grew out of their growing personalities things were getting more interesting, a lot more! *Amazing Spider-Man* #10 (March 1964) was as tightly plotted and scripted as any diehard fan could imagine. The question was: how long could the creative team keep it up? **Fun Fact:** This issue's lackluster cover image was obviously cobbled together in the office with the Big Man and his Enforcers clearly drawn by Ditko but Spidey done by Jack Kirby. What gave? Well, as it so happened, Ditko did create a cover for the issue, one crammed with relevant story points including a starring shot of the Big Man and the Enforcers in combat with Spidey. Why wasn't it used? Probably because it didn't feature rapidly rising star Spider-Man prominently enough in the action. A good reason for editor Stan Lee but not good enough for art lovers!

Fantastic Four #24

*"The Infant Terrible!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)*

After raising reader expectations with the exciting Dr. Doom epic of the issue before, "the leader" stumbled with *Fantastic Four* #24 (March 1964). It

would mark the last such occurrence for the next sixty-five odd issues as the title entered its golden years with the groundbreaking two-part Thing/Hulk battle and team-up with the Avengers to take place over the next pair of issues. But here, the team of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby faltered with a cliched tale right out of the hoariest of its prehero Atlas monster days. Namely the old “enfant terrible” plot, wherein an alien comes to Earth and begins exercising its vast powers and endangering the planet, requiring the FF to struggle against things like being trapped in giant milk bottles and spinning tops. (Could it possibly have been a Kirby inspired plot? Elements did share a resemblance to some of the goofier stories the artist produced for DC’s science fiction anthologies in the years just prior to his arrival at Marvel) A wrench is thrown into the plot when a gangster by the name of Big Joe (Now there’s a clever sobriquet!) befriends the alien and gets it to help in his crimes by feeding it candy and ice cream. Luckily, Mr. Fantastic guesses the nature of the alien and, sending a signal into space, alerts its parents to their child’s presence on Earth. Ho hum. The only positive thing that might be said for the story (besides still being well-scripted by Lee and entertainingly drawn by Kirby) was that, in a way, it foreshadowed the coming of Galactus. But Lee and Kirby’s failure in imagination here was all the more striking when compared to what was happening everywhere else across Marvel’s line of books, where all sorts of exciting colorful new supervillains were being introduced. Why, even the westerns were getting into the game! **Fun Fact:** This issue features Kirby’s earliest use of collage in his work at Marvel. On page 18, panels 1 and 2, inside the viewscreen being studied by Mr. Fantastic, Kirby has used photos of a starfield with what appears to be the outline of one of the manta ray-looking Martian craft from the movie *War of the Worlds* (1953). Although the reproduction here is primitive, later, more ambitious use of collage by Kirby would be more successful, and at times, spectacular.

Strange Tales #118

“The Man Who Became the Torch!”; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

“The Possessed!”; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

As evidence of a slowly building universe with back history, the Wizard makes yet another return in *Strange Tales* #118 (March 1964). He’d been around now long enough to make this his third (or was it his fourth?) go round with the Torch but



NOTWITHSTANDING HIS LATER WORK AT MARVEL, ARTIST JACK KIRBY DELIVERED MANY A GOOFY PLOT TO EARLY ISSUES OF DC'S HOUSE OF SECRETS GIVING SCIENCE FICTION A BAD NAME!

curiously, unchanged in all that time. Scripter Stan Lee here tells a rather conventional tale, with the Wizard escaping from jail and going after the Torch, serviceably illustrated by Dick Ayers. But while Lee had managed to develop characterizations for other villains such as the Sub-Mariner and to some extent, Dr. Doom, overall, he’d given his other villains little if no attention. Thus, the only really significant addition to the Wizard’s personality here is a technological one, involving his first use of an anti-grav disk to escape jail. This bit of new tech would become the basis for a complete revamp of the Wizard in an upcoming issue of the *Fantastic Four* that would include a significant upgrade in his personality and motivations. But for now, nothing’s changed. The Wizard outsmarts himself as usual so that by the end of the story, the malfunction of his new invention seems to spell certain

death as it carries him into the upper atmosphere. Meanwhile, at the back of the book, Lee and artist Steve Ditko continue to chronicle the early cases of Dr. Strange. In “The Possessed,” the magician discovers a European village whose residents have become possessed by beings from another dimension. Confronting their leader in a contest of wills, Strange wins and forces the aliens to give up their plans to take over mankind. Here, Ditko’s years of experience illustrating every kind of weird story comes to the fore with a couple good examples of his art on page 7 where, in panel 1, we see Strange fleeing through a darkened forest, and in panel 4, there’s a shot of the alien leader holding his hand up to shade his eyes,

the shadows of his fingers falling across his face suggesting the radiance of Strange’s power even without any force lines to indicate the presence of a bright light. Very cool! **Fun Fact:** Although this issue’s cover was drawn as usual by Jack Kirby, it was inked by a newcomer to the Bullpen called Chic Stone. Stone was soon destined to make his presence felt across the Marvel line, when he took over as Kirby’s regular inker. His interpretation of Kirby’s pencils would end up becoming the look of the years of consolidation and be forever associated with Marvel’s most fun period.

Tales of Suspense #51

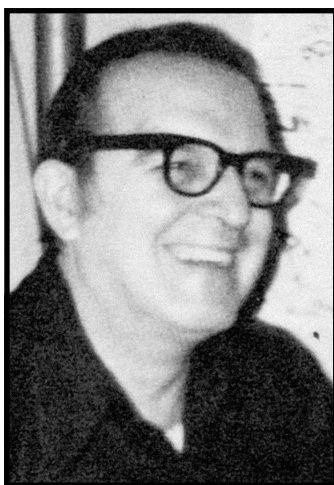
“Face to Face With the Sinister Scarecrow!”;
Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

The parade of colorful new supervillains continued in *Tales of Suspense* #51 (March 1964) with the introduction of the Scarecrow! Admittedly, scripter Stan Lee’s imagination may have faltered a bit with the Scarecrow whose “powers” consist merely of tumbling and a few trained crows. But that didn’t stop Lee from turning his debut here into an exciting 13-page story. However, judging from the amount of copy pasted all over the eye grabbing Jack Kirby cover, Lee may have suspected his new villain lacked something in the charisma department: “Anyone else would tremble in fear in the face of Iron Man’s angry challenge! But not the Scarecrow! What strange power does he possess?” demanded one blurb. “Once again, the mighty Marvel group introduces a new type of supervillain to make you gasp!” read another. Lee’s hyperbole was all wrapped up in the succinct catch phrase: “Another triumph for the new Marvel Age of Comics!” With that kind of buildup, the story and the Scarecrow had better have been good. Surprise! It was! Yeah, there really wasn’t any slam bang fight between IM and the Scarecrow, but the villain did present Iron Man with his own peculiar challenges, including trickery and espionage. Meanwhile, artist Don Heck continued to prove he could do superheroes as well as his contemporaries Kirby and Steve Ditko excelling this ish mainly with the strip’s supporting cast as jealous Pepper Potts decoys Tony Stark’s latest squeeze, one Veronica Vogue, by telling her

that Stark forgot all about their date. Although he suspects Pepper’s play, Stark is all right with it, as Vogue was becoming a bore anyway! Next, he and Happy Hogan get some face time on the way to Tony’s home where they catch the Scarecrow in the act of breaking and entering. All in all, a satisfying tale that convinced readers that no Marvel superhero feature could be safely overlooked as even such unpromising material as Iron Man vs. the Scarecrow could yield solid stories with their own quota of excitement and fun. And even for those handful of hard to please readers disappointed with the Scarecrow, they still had another Larry Lieber/Matt Fox fantasy gem by the title of “The Green Thing” to enjoy following this issue’s main item!

Journey Into Mystery #102

“Slave of Zarrko, the Tomorrow Man!”;
Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils);
Chic Stone (inks)



**THE ADVENT OF
 CHIC STONE INKING
 PENCILER JACK KIRBY
 ON JOURNEY INTO
 MYSTERY #102
 MARKED THE START
 OF A BEAUTIFUL
 PARTNERSHIP THAT
 WOULD DEFINE
 MARVEL’S YEARS OF
 CONSOLIDATION!**

It was official! Chic Stone was on board at the House of Ideas! That’s right, the man whose inks over Jack Kirby’s pencils would define the look of Marvel through the ongoing years of consolidation found his first permanent berth in *Journey Into Mystery* #102 (March 1964). Stone would go on to become Kirby’s primary inker not only here, but on the *X-Men*, *Avengers*, *Fantastic Four*, and the upcoming Captain America strip in *Tales of Suspense*. In addition, Stone would ink Kirby on all of his cover assignments, including the westerns. In fact, the only place where Stone would not be present was on the “Tales of Asgard” stories featured in the back of every issue of *JIM*. There, inker Vince Colletta was due to soon take over and between the two embellishers, Kirby’s art would be transformed (or perhaps interpreted is the better word), to

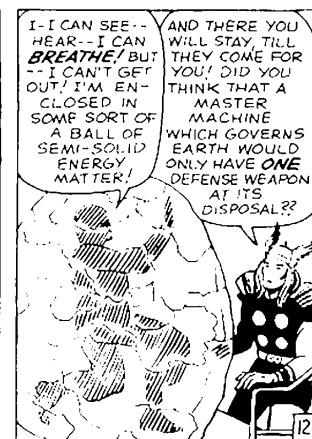
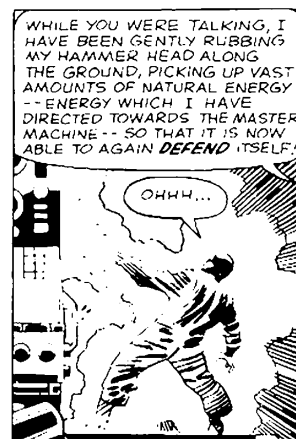
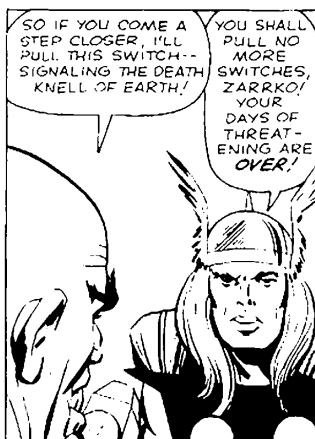
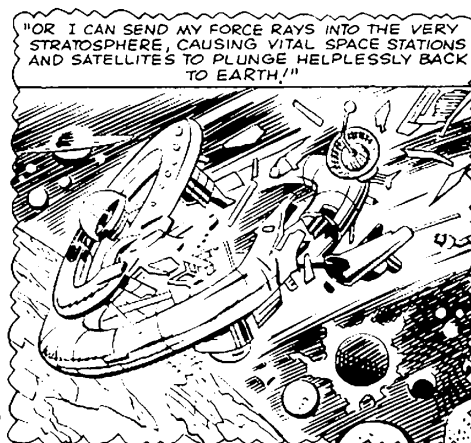
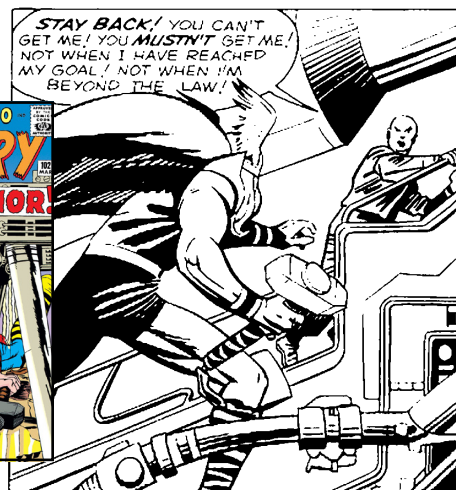
perfection in relation to the strips being inked. In particular, Stone’s heavy lines were a good fit for this period in Kirby’s evolution as an artist, perfectly capturing the spirit of fun that Marvel’s books were radiating in all directions. Later, as the grandiose years became more serious, Stone’s style would be less appropriate and other inkers such as Joe Sinnott on the *FF*, Colletta on *Thor*, and Syd Shores on *Captain America* would better capture the spirit of that later age. But for now, Stone’s debut as regular inker

on Thor is on full display with this issue's opening splash page of a full-figured Thor swinging his hammer. For the first time in the Marvel Age, the massiveness of Kirby's figures is more than hinted at, with muscles straining on Thor's thighs and arms. And although there wasn't much opportunity this ish for page after page of raw action as there would be in subsequent issues, Stone's solid inks gave Kirby's pencils a tactile, 3D-ish quality that would serve both artists well as the years of consolidation progressed. This issue's story being the second part of the return of Zarrko, the Tomorrow Man, scripter Stan Lee fills in readers regarding Thor's predicament namely, his vow to help Zarrko conquer his future time period in exchange for sparing his own twentieth century from being ravaged by the villain's giant robot. But when Zarrko does gain mastery, Thor's promise has been fulfilled, allowing him to turn on the bad guy and cut short his career as ruler. That's followed by a Larry Lieber/Matt Fox fantasy short that's in turn followed by a new installment of "Tales of Asgard" featuring Thor "at the age of eighteen" (however time is measured for immortals!) This story features the first appearance of the Lady Sif (here wrongly accredited as the sister of Balder and depicted with blond tresses) as Thor survives a first meeting with Hela, goddess of death! Inked here by Paul Reinman, a comparison with Stone's smoother inks on the lead story is all that's needed to show how much an asset Stone would be to Kirby!

Tales to Astonish #54

"No Place to Hide!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

On the face of it, it looked to be a step backward for the Giant-Man strip in *Tales to Astonish* #54 (April 1964). After all, instead of the by now expected colorful new supervillain, all readers got was "El Toro," so called due to the funny head cloth he wore with its stubby pair of horns. Not much of a menace for the mighty Giant-Man, right? Well, the saving grace here



JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #102, PAGE 12: INKER CHIC STONE WOULD BRING A NEEDED CONSISTENCY TO JACK KIRBY'S 'S ART ACROSS THE MARVEL LINE. HIS CONFIDENT BRUSH STROKES AT ONCE MAKE KIRBY'S ACTION SCENES CRACKLE AS IN PANELS 1-4 AND 6, WHILE GIVING A MORE NUANCED LOOK TO THE PENCILER'S FACIAL EXPRESSIONS.

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AMERICA HAD A HISTORY OF POLICING CENTRAL AMERICAN HOT SPOTS. AS THE GOVERNMENT ASKED GIANT-MAN TO INTERVENE IN SAN RICO TO INVESTIGATE THE EL TORO REGIME, SO TOO DID THE US SEND TROOPS TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC IN 1965 TO QUELL A CIVIL WAR.

is that scripter Stan Lee does it with a twist: Giant-Man is asked by the government to travel to Santo Rico (one of those pesky Central American countries that was forever see sawing between democracy and communism) to dig up evidence proving that commie strongman El Toro rigged the election that made him el presidente. Traveling to Santo Rico in the identities of Hank Pym and Janet van Dyne, Jan is given their size changing capsules on the likely theory that a woman wouldn't be searched as thoroughly as a man. Big mistake! The two are spotted immediately as spies and picked up with time only for Jan to slip Hank a single growth capsule. With no other choice, Hank becomes Giant-Man and, stuck at that size, is forced to go on the run from the police, finding it near impossible to keep out of sight due to his size. It was a clever twist by Lee to play an obvious weakness against the hero. And the lack of an interesting new villain was made more tolerable by the fact that this story was penciled and inked by Don Heck, who proved he had more on the ball for drawing action scenes than the staid Dick Ayers. The scenes of Giant-Man on the run are the most exciting in the story, as the climactic confrontation with the ineffectual El Toro is taken care of in a mere two panels! Needless to say, Giant-Man finds the evidence of electoral fraud and saves San Rico from communism: "Thanks to you, Santo Rico is again a democratic nation," enthuses a government official. Unfortunately, the balance of this ish is filled out with a Larry Lieber drawn fantasy yarn that's not helped by the fact that inker Matt Fox

is nowhere to be found. Worse still, is the "Wasp tells a tale" feature that fills out the last pages. These Lee-penned tales may have been interesting on a literary level, but the art on them is so unpleasing to look at that it spoils whatever benefit the scripts may have provided. **Fun Fact:** A house ad this ish trumpets the imminent arrival at your local newsstand of Marvel's newest superhero title: *Daredevil, the Man Without Fear!* (Albeit with no cover reproduction; only a blurb touting how great it was going to be) It would be the last new feature introduced by Marvel before the company's distributor loosened the rules allowing Marvel to expand the number of its titles later in the decade.

Amazing Spider-Man #11

"Turning Point!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

A jam-packed issue this time for *Amazing Spider-Man* #11 (April 1964), as Peter Parker learns the secret of Betty Brant that was only hinted at last ish. Turns out her brother, Bennett, is not only a mob attorney but is in hock to gang leader Blackie Gaxton. In order to pay his debt to Blackie and escape his employ, Bennett gets Betty to help him in a scheme to hire Dr. Octopus to free Blackie from jail. Spidey gets involved when he attempts to trail Octopus after learning he's being released from jail himself. (It's interesting to note how differently Spidey is treated compared to the Human Torch when he goes to the jail where Ock is being held and warns the warden not to free the villain. When the Torch tried the same thing at the Eel's release in *Strange Tales* #117, he was simply told that nothing could be done about it. But Spidey is threatened with arrest!) Shocked to discover that Octopus is being driven from jail by Betty, Spidey follows them to Philadelphia where Betty confesses all. Meanwhile, Octopus breaks Blackie from jail, and everyone converges on the ship where accounts are to be settled. Naturally, with Spidey involved, a fight breaks out and, in the excitement, a bullet meant for Betty is intercepted by Bennett who is killed. Of course, no Spidey tale ends on a happy note (Well, most of the time). Before the fight, Peter had decided he loved Betty and would tell her of his secret identity, but after Bennett is killed, Betty decides that though she initially blamed Spidey for the death of her brother, she still can't bear the thought of him. This plot twist was reminiscent of an earlier Lee penned story for the Two-Gun Kid that featured the same dilemma for the hero. The difference being that here, the emotions of the characters are much better defined, with enough time and space to explore

the nuances. On artist Steve Ditko's part, he was really settling into the Spidey groove, launching this issue's tale with a symbolic opening splash page of Betty beating her fists on Spidey's chest all against a looming shadow in the shape of Doc Ock! Ditko's work over the other twenty pages is just as good if more down-to-earth with pacing between action, characterization, and sub-plotting all in perfect balance. The fight scenes that cover the final ten pages of the story are perfect in their panel-to-panel continuity with Lee's scripting at once smooth and jaunty but never getting in the way of the action. **Fun Fact:** Did you know that Spidey's feet on the cover were redrawn by Jack Kirby? They were! Likely because Ditko had violated one of Lee's fundamental rules by showing the soles of Spidey's feet!

Strange Tales #119

"The Torch Goes Wild!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)
"Beyond the Purple Veil!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

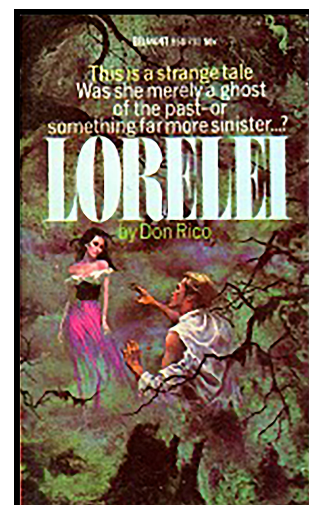
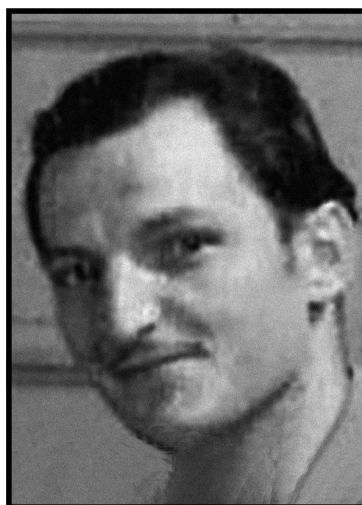
It was one step backward for the Human Torch strip in *Strange Tales* #119 (April 1964) as scripter Stan Lee presents readers with yet another "weird" villain in the form of a rabble rouser called, well, the Rabble Rouser! The villain is actually a Soviet spy sent to the US to stir up trouble during the visit of an important American ally. The Torch figures into the story when the Rabble Rouser gets the municipal government to ban the hero from flaming on within city limits. The Torch disobeys the law to tackle the Rabble Rouser and defeats him. Not helping this snoozer is the art by Dick Ayers that's merely adequate. The main attraction in this issue definitely lies at the back of the book, with the Dr. Strange feature "Beyond the Purple Veil" where our hero makes one of his first bona fide crossings into another dimension to confront evil ruler Aggamon. The highlight of the Stan Lee-scripted story is Strange's one on one confrontation with Aggamon in a game of mystical chicken. To present it, artist Steve Ditko breaks the contest of wills down into three horizontal panels each depicting the combatants as they slowly collapse with the drainage of their life energies. Also setting this ish apart is the plethora of full-page house ads touting *Fantastic Four* #25 (Hulk vs. the Thing); *Spider-Man* #11 (Spidey vs. Doc Ock); and *Avengers* #4 (intro of Captain America) Set off alone each on three separate pages only increased their impact and was guaranteed to make any dyed-in-the-wool Marvel fan drool in anticipation as the company entered perhaps its more exciting period

of creativity and worldbuilding. And hardly less impactful was the final ad forecasting the imminent arrival of *X-Men* #4 (intro of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants) and *Sgt Fury* #6 (the Howlers vs. Gen. Erwin Rommel)!

Tales of Suspense #52

"The Crimson Dynamo Strikes Again!"; Stan Lee (plot); Don Rico (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Maybe the concept of Iron Man and his secret identity as millionaire playboy Tony Stark was more inspirational than was the Human Torch or Giant-Man, or it might have been because the art of Don Heck was far more dynamic than Dick Ayers', but for some reason, Stan Lee's stories here were much more exciting and interesting than those he was writing for those two other strips. Take *Tales of Suspense* #52 (April 1964) for instance with the return of the Crimson Dynamo and its introduction of the Black Widow. First off, as Lee began to build on a backstory for the Iron Man strip, the plot was more involved than stories about El Toro or the Rabble Rouser. Lee did that by recalling past stories in the form of bringing back the Crimson Dynamo in a plot by his former Soviet Masters to sabotage the munitions plant of Stark Industries once again. Madame Natasha, code named the Black Widow, arrives in the United States, and distracts Stark while her partner, Boris, breaks into the plant and kidnaps Anton Vanko, the original Crimson Dynamo. Stark switches to Iron Man after he hears that his plant is being wrecked and after some



DON RICO, AN OLD TIMELY HAND, RETURNED TO MARVEL BRIEFLY TO SCRIPT A HANDFUL OF STORIES. HE DID THEM UNDER A PSEUDONYM HOWEVER, SO AS NOT TO JEOPARDIZE HIS CAREER AS A LOW RENT PAPERBACK NOVELIST.

stop and go action, realizes that the Dynamo isn't Vanko but Boris. The story ends in tragedy when Vanko sacrifices himself to stop Boris. (Among the first characters in the Marvel Universe to actually die, along with Junior Juniper and Bennett Brant, but not the last) And while Stark mourns Vanko's loss, the Widow is last seen on the run from her vengeful Soviet masters: "I must keep moving," she thinks to herself. "I know too well the penalty for failure!" The Widow herself appears here as strictly a femme fatale, one who works her feminine wiles on Stark while her partner Boris commits sabotage. But of the two, the Widow would be the one to return again and again in the coming months to become a costumed villainess, team with Hawkeye, eventually join SHIELD and the Avengers, and go on to a long career in the larger Marvel Universe. And her initial introduction here could hardly be better served than being drawn by Don Heck, who continued to work wonders on the Iron Man strip beginning with a great symbolic opening splash page, moving into an almost Milton Caniff-like style for domestic scenes with Stark, Pepper Potts, Happy Hogan, the Widow, and Boris before concluding with all-out action scenes between Iron Man and the Crimson Dynamo. It'd be disappointing when the time came that Heck would not have the time to ink his own work and lose much of the virtuosity he displays here but that was the kind of sacrifice fans had to make if they wanted more Heck than the mere 13 pages a month he was doing here for Iron Man! For this ish and the next, Lee abandoned

the scripting chores, temporarily turning them over to Don Rico (who signed himself here as "N. Korok"). Rico wasn't a stranger to Lee. He began his career as a scripter and artist (and sometimes served as a traffic manager of sorts) at Timely during the 1940s into the 50s. Removing himself to California, he became a prolific paperback novelist. It was because of that new career that he chose to use a pseudonym when he returned to comics with *Suspense* #s 52-53: he didn't want his publisher to know that he was working for the lower rates that the comics industry offered for his writing.

Journey Into Mystery #103

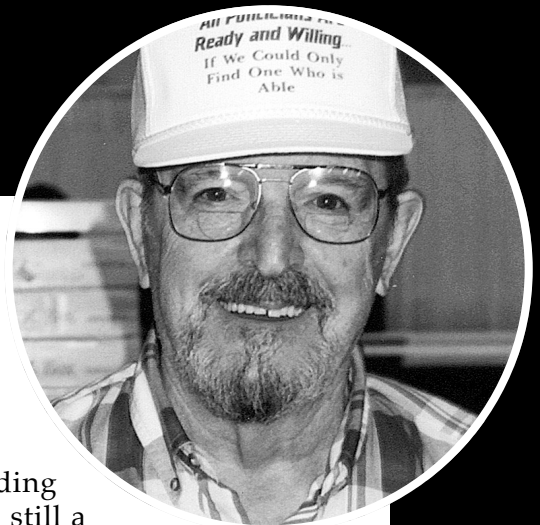
"The Enchantress and the Executioner!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

It was a triple shot of goodness with not one but two new supervillains and new inker Chic Stone on board in *Journey Into Mystery* #103 (April 1964)! And all that on top of the usual Stan Lee scripting and Jack Kirby artwork! Oh, fans at the time must have felt like they were living right! Sure, the Enchantress and the Executioner were Asgardian menaces who suggested that somehow, they'd be somewhat less interesting than an earthbound menace, but since Thor would end up fighting them on Earth over their many subsequent appearances, they felt more like straight supervillains than creatures of fantasy. And though Loki is again behind their introduction, once free of him, the pair present an interesting challenge to the thunder god. In an attempt to break Thor's infatuation with Jane Foster, the Enchantress appears in Dr. Blake's office as a beautiful patient (and whoever said Kirby couldn't draw women must have been blind...or was it Stone's inking?) and contrives to kiss him just as Jane enters the picture. But the Enchantress fails to sway the good doctor and so resorts to naked force by siccing the Executioner on him. Thor battles the Executioner but is ultimately stymied when the latter banishes Jane to another dimension. However, when the Executioner demands Thor's hammer, the Enchantress sees that he's betrayed her. In anger, she casts a spell on him that in turn releases Jane from her exile. Hard to believe all that could happen in only 13 pages, but Lee and Kirby manage it even as they deliver another installment in the "Tales of Asgard" feature this time called "Thor's Mission to Mirmir" (Where Thor is on hand for the creation of the Norse version of Adam and Eve!). Surprisingly, Stone inks this story as well and proves to be equally as pleasing on the eye with Kirby's big VistaScope quarter page panels as he was on the more down-to-earth lead feature.

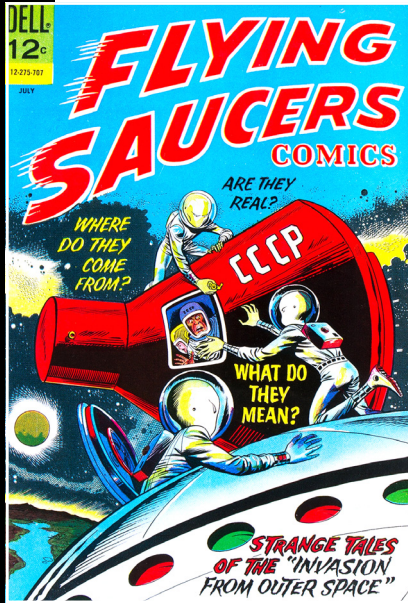


OFTEN PAIRED WITH PARTNER IN ESPIONAGE, BORIS BADENOV, NATASHA FATALE WAS INTRODUCED ON THE ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE TV SHOW THAT AIRED BETWEEN 1959-1964. COULD THIS NATASHA, THE CLICHED DEPICTION OF A RUSSIAN FEMALE SPY, HAVE BEEN THE INSPIRATION FOR NATASHA ROMANOV, MARVEL'S BLACK WIDOW? YOU DECIDE!

Chic Stone



During the landmark years of consolidation, it was Chic Stone's inking over Jack Kirby's pencils that gave Marvel Comics its uniform, instantly recognizable look and became synonymous with action and fun, colorful villains.



But before he made history at Marvel and with Kirby, Stone had a long, varied career in the publishing industry. After attending the School of Industrial Art, and still a teenager, he broke into the comics industry at the Eisner and Iger shop during the golden age of comics. He drew for Fawcett Publications on the original Captain Marvel then for Lev Gleason and ultimately for pre-Marvel Timely Comics doing the Blonde Phantom among others.

In the 1950s, Stone left comics to become an art director for such non-genre magazines as *True Experience* and *American Salesman*. Next, it was the advertising world and storyboards for TV commercials before falling back into art direction.

Eventually, Stone returned to comics with the American Comics Group and others before ending up back where he began, at Timely / Atlas now calling itself Marvel Comics.

At the time, Dick Ayers had been Kirby's regular inker but as editor Stan Lee's line of comics grew, both Kirby and Ayers were likely stretched thin. Stone was hired to take over from Ayers as Kirby's principle inker and in the process, transformed the look not only of Kirby but of Marvel itself.

Attached first to the *Fantastic Four*, Stone soon picked up all of Kirby's other assignments including the *Avengers*, *X-Men*, *Thor* (in *Journey Into Mystery*), and *Captain America*. If that weren't enough for him to imprint his style onto the burgeoning Marvel universe, he also inked all of Kirby's cover work, which at the time, encompassed virtually every Marvel title including the westerns. Stone's strong, heavy brush strokes gave Kirby's art a new kind of boldness that allowed figures to pop off the page but without burying Kirby's essential style. What resulted were often masterpieces of comics art on covers and fast moving, easy on the eyes interiors that defined Marvel's years of consolidation as perhaps the company's best single era. Not only that, but the range of stories he inked also included the introduction of new characters and events that would prove to be key building blocks of the nascent Marvel universe.

But alas! Stone's tenure as Kirby's principle inker wouldn't last. After about a year, he left Marvel for presumably greener pastures both with other comics companies and the advertising world. But fans of his early silver age work were delighted when, however briefly, he returned to the fold just in time to ink Kirby on the Inhumans strip for *Amazing Adventures* (just before Kirby absconded for DC) There, Stone's familiar thick line style was still apparent and for a brief shining moment, it was as if nothing had changed since the years of consolidation.

Tales to Astonish #55

"On the Trail of the Human Top!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

The satisfaction that readers had of seeing Giant-Man back in harness against a supervillain in *Tales to Astonish* #55 (May 1964) was somewhat dampened when they looked inside to find not Don Heck on the art as he'd been the issue before, but Dick Ayers. That disappointment was only sharpened after spotting the cover on the spinner rack sporting a Jack Kirby drawn Giant-Man in a dramatic action pose over the rooftops of New York squaring off with his old enemy the Human Top. Oh, the humanity! Imagine the following tale penciled by either Kirby or Heck: the Human Top escapes from jail, trails Giant-Man and the Wasp back to their HQ, takes them by surprise and, grabbing Giant-Man's utility belt, takes a size changing pill and becomes as big as Giant-Man! Actually, Ayers does a better than usual job here and manages some nice action sequences including an exciting shot of Giant-Man leaping into action on page 5, panel 6 as well as his final battle with the Top. But dang it! Why couldn't Ayers learn to draw Giant-Man's black "suspenders" right? (Come to think of it, what exactly was the purpose of that design element anyway?) The bottom line: scripter Stan Lee delivers a solid, 18-page action thriller that, if done on a regular basis, might have ultimately saved the Giant-Man strip from eventual cancellation. But no such luck. For some reason, it was not to be. **Fun Fact:** The opening shot of Giant-Man's slideshow given to members of his fan club on this issue's opening splash page featured a Kirby drawn panel from *Astonish* #49-50!

Amazing Spider-Man #12

"Unmasked by Dr. Octopus!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Scripter Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko had it all together by *Amazing Spider-Man* #12 (May 1964). The basic supporting cast was in place including Aunt May, Betty Brant, J. Jonah Jameson, Liz Allen, and Flash Thompson, interesting new supervillains were constantly being introduced (with Doctor Octopus fast becoming Spidey's #1 nemesis), and the rhythm of the book that carefully balanced Peter Parker's personal life with his adventures as Spider-Man was firmly established. As such, the stories seemed to write themselves. (Although Ditko, even by this time, had a big part in coming up with them) Consider this issue's tale. Not exactly a continuation of the previous issue's story about Blackie Gaxton, it nevertheless features a still on



LITTLE KNOWN FACTS DEPT: ALTHOUGH PETER PARKER WAS UNMASKED AS SPIDER-MAN A FEW TIMES IN HIS CAREER, AND THAT EVEN FLASH THOMPSON HAD BEEN KNOWN TO MASQUERADE AS THE WEBSPINNER, DID YOU KNOW THAT CIRCA 1968-1969, MARVEL SCRIPTER AND UNOFFICIAL EDITORIAL ASSISTANT ROY THOMAS ALSO DONNED THE MASK? IT'S TRUE! HERE HE IS IN COSTUME PREPPING FOR AN APPEARANCE IN NOT BRAND ECHH! BY THE WAY, THAT'S STAN LEE, MARIE SEVERIN, AND JOHN ROMITA LOOKING ON IN MIRTHFUL APPRECIATION.

the loose Doctor Octopus and his plans for getting even with Spider-Man for foiling his plans in #11. The story includes a number of interesting points, not the least of which is Spidey's initial defeat by Ock due to a cold having temporarily robbed him of his powers. It would be a device Lee would use a number of times in future years as a quick way to make things more difficult for our hero. Another twist is when Peter Parker is unmasked by Ock, and no one believes he's really Spider-Man but only donned the costume in a romantic attempt to free Betty from the villain's clutches (That device would also be used again). The incident serves to further cement Peter's relationship with Betty enough so that when Liz, impressed with his seeming impersonation, asks him for a date, Peter turns her down flat. In Spidey's climactic battle with Ock in an artist's studio, readers got an idea of the kind of monumental, heroic art Ditko might have preferred over the kind of "modern" art that's disparaged in issue #22 by a faceless observer who could have been Ditko himself! **Fun Fact:** Don't blink or you'll miss the sign on page 14, panels 4-5 that spells the word "Leedit Inc." Leedit is actually a contraction for "Lee Dit-ko!" Whose idea it was, whether Lee, Ditko, or even letterer Artie Simek is lost to time.

Tales of Suspense #53

"The Black Widow Strikes Again!"; Stan Lee (plot); Don Rico (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

"The Black Widow strikes again!" At least that's the somewhat unimaginative title editor Stan Lee called the latest Iron Man thriller in *Tales of Suspense* #53 (May 1964). He must have been impressed with the character of the Widow to bring her back so soon after her

first appearance in issue #52 (but then again, he did the same thing with Dr. Octopus over in this month's issue of *Amazing Spider-Man*...so maybe it was a way to mark time while trying to think up a whole new menace for his heroes to tackle) Certainly, it was too soon to gauge reader reaction to the stylish Madame Natasha as delineated by artist Don Heck now at the near height of his powers. Be that as it may, the Widow was back, and Iron Man had her, or rather Tony Stark did, as she uses her charms to weaken Stark's natural instinct to keep such a creature at arm's length. After all, being a Soviet spy and saboteur, she must have still been wanted by the FBI. Anyway, as could

be expected, she proves to be no less troublesome this time. (Just check out this issue's somewhat symbolic cover design drawn by Jack Kirby, with its tanks and whole factory buildings falling on Iron Man's head!) After getting Stark to lower his guard and give her a tour of his plant (!) Natasha steals his latest invention: an anti-gravity device. With it, she hopes to get back into the good graces of her Soviet masters after failing them in the previous issue. Before she does though, she goes on a spree, attacking Stark Industries and then Fort Knox! Even without her own super powers, the Widow manages to present Iron Man with a challenge, putting him through his paces before he finally figures out a way to neutralize the anti-grav device. But not before the femme fatale once again slips away. But Lee wasn't done with her yet. Not by a long shot! As for the rest of the



IRON MAN *The* **BLACK WIDOW STRIKES AGAIN!**

SEE IRON MAN FIGHT FOR HIS VERY LIFE AGAINST HIS OWN MOST FANTASTIC WEAPON!!

YOU ARE ABOUT TO ENTER THE EXCITING WORLD OF ANTHONY STARK...MILLIONAIRE PLAYBOY, WEAPONS MANUFACTURER, AND... MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL... **Man of IRON!**

IN THIS STARTLING SUSPENSE THRILLER, THE GORGEOUS, BUT DEADLY, **BLACK WIDOW** BECOMES **THE GIRL WHO CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS!!**

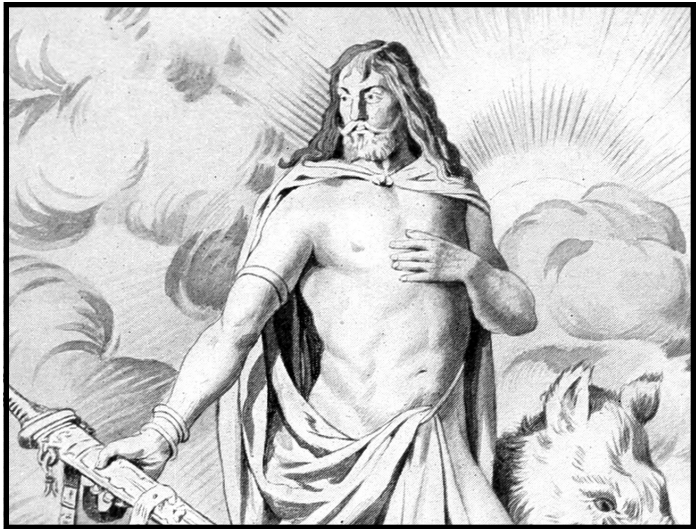
Story Plot by: **STAN LEE**
 Script by: **N. KOROK**
 Art by: **DON HECK**
 Lettering by: **S. ROSEN**



TALES OF SUSPENSE #53, PAGE 1: A PRE-SUPER POWERED BLACK WIDOW GIVES IRON MAN A RUN FOR HIS MONEY AS EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE HYPES UP HER APPEARANCE HERE IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS! AND DIG DON HECK'S IN YOUR FACE ARTWORK WITH IRON MAN FRONT AND CENTER IN APPROVED MARVEL STYLE!

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issue, most readers probably barely gave Marvel's remaining fantasy shorts that still filled out the remaining pages in *Suspense*, *Astonish*, and *Strange Tales* much thought, and for good reason. By now, they were being completely eclipsed by the far more interesting superhero features. And another reason can be seen in this issue's "The Omen." Drawn by Larry Lieber, readers could see just how much inker Matt Fox was needed to give these efforts at least some semblance of life. Here, Lieber appears without Fox and the results (with inks by George Roussos) are far below par. On the same level is the next story "The Way It Began" which tells the origin of the Watcher, or rather the Watchers. Here, Lee tells the earliest version in which the Watchers share the knowledge of atomic power with a lesser race who then turn it to the purposes of war and destroy themselves. The lesson the Watchers took from this incident was never again to interfere with the affairs of others but instead, to merely observe. Exactly why Lee chose this venue to tell the origin of the Watchers rather than say, weaving it into an issue of the *Fantastic Four* is unknown. Tucked away in the back of *Tales of Suspense* would seem to be a good place for it to be overlooked by fans, despite the blurb on the cover notifying them of its appearance.



IT'S PLAIN TO SEE HERE, THAT THE NORSE VERSION OF BALDER WAS IN DIRE NEED OF A KIRBY REHABILITATION! AS THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION MOVED INTO THE GRANDIOSE YEARS, JACK KIRBY'S NORSE FASHIONS WOULD BECOME MORE AND MORE ELABORATE TO THE POINT WHERE EVEN HE FOUND IT EASIER TO MAKE UP NEW WARDROBES THAN TO TRY AND REMEMBER HOW HE DREW THEM IN PREVIOUS ISSUES!

Journey Into Mystery #104

"Giants Walk the Earth!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

In what amounts to an extended "Tales of Asgard," Thor takes a break from such earthly menaces as the Tomorrow Man and even "supervillains" like the Enchantress and Executioner to tackle such otherworldly menaces as Surtur and Skagg, the fire demon and storm giant respectively. *Journey Into Mystery* #104 (May 1964) also features the first extended appearance of Balder the Brave in the book's lead story. Here, he arrives on Earth to warn Thor that big daddy Odin has transferred part of his power to Loki while he travels to Earth to confront the thunder god about his choice of girlfriends. (It wouldn't be the last time that Odin makes this mistake) As a result, reports Balder, Loki has loosed Surtur and Skagg in hopes they'll destroy Odin so he can stay in charge of Asgard. Teaming up with Odin, Balder and Thor both go into action and together, they defeat the two monsters. Odin then goes back to Asgard, strips Loki of his power, and sends him to do menial work for the trolls until further notice. It was a fast-moving tale (it had to be with only 13 pages to work with!)

with scripter Stan Lee's dialogue not yet in its faux Elizabethan mode, but still fully in tune with the action, action that was provided with penciler Jack Kirby's usual flair, starting off with another strong opening splash page featuring a hammer swinging Thor. Again, Kirby is ably assisted by inker Chic Stone, whose skill at capturing the Kirby of this era is ably foreshadowed in the first few pages as Lee presents a bit of an overlap with the previous issue with the Enchantress and Executioner lamenting their failure to defeat Thor. Although Stone had been on hand last ish to ink Kirby on the "Tales of Asgard" feature as well, he was replaced this time by Don Heck for the first in a series of "biographies in depth of Asgard's heroes." First in line is "Heimdall, Guardian of the Mystic Rainbow Bridge." Here readers learn that Heimdall's sight and hearing are beyond human ken (he can "hear the tiniest plant growing in the heart of the hidden hills" and can "look across time as well as space." For helping save Asgard from an invasion, Odin rewards Heimdall with the responsibility of guarding the Rainbow Bridge "forever." Whew! Doesn't sound like much of a reward, but hey, these are purportedly Norse legends, they don't have to make much sense. Anyway, Heimdall would become a regular presence in the main Thor feature for decades to come.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #7

"The Court Martial of Sgt. Fury!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

Going out with a bang, for penciler Jack Kirby's last regular issue of Sgt. Fury (he'd be back for one more, issue #13) scripter Stan Lee provides a tour de force that has action, drama, and humor in equal measure. To do it all, he chose the vehicle of "The Court Martial of Sgt. Fury!" The story begins on the battlefield as the Howlers are completing a mission. But just as they think they're heading home, there's a change of plans and they're told to rendezvous with one Lt. Spence Parker, a childhood acquaintance of Fury's who still carries a grudge. Just as Parker is about to order an attack relating to the new mission, Fury stops him. Time is short to do so, so he slugs Parker just before an aerial bomb hits and he's knocked unconscious. Fury comes to inside a base hospital and is informed by Capt. Sawyer that he's being court martialed for striking an officer. What follows is a military court proceeding that was a familiar plot device in films such as the *Caine Mutiny* (1954) or the popular *Combat!* television show, in which Lee and Kirby take the opportunity to fill in Fury's past life from the time he was a teenager (in scenes straight out of *Angels With Dirty Faces* [1938]), young adult pool hall hustler, and workplace brawler. Still, none of that is enough to exonerate Fury. Meanwhile, outside the courtroom, the Howlers

are worrying about the outcome but to help take their minds off their concerns, they hear that rival non-com Bull McGiveney has been bad mouthing the sergeant. What happens next is to be expected, at least by regular readers of the comic! What's funny is the way Kirby portrays McGiveney's Maulers, as more brutish counterparts to the Howlers. Interestingly, even as Kirby left the strip, he was still creating. *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #7 (May 1964) became the first appearance of Bull and his second attack squad. The Maulers would become a regular feature of the book, providing both rivalry and humor to future stories while depicting in an exaggerated way, real life competition between squads and among the services in general. But back on base, as the Howlers cooled their heels in the hoosegow (Lord knows how the MPs got them there!), there's an air raid, allowing for more Kirby action and an explosion that jogs Fury's memory so that he can finally speak up in his own defense. The issue ends where readers by now expect it to: with Fury putting the Howlers through their paces. "Move, you Howlers," growls Fury. "Happy Sam didn't get ya outta the guard house so ya could take a rest cure! Now move!" Kirby's departure from the title would be a blow but Lee managed to keep the strip on course with continued characterization (Fury's ongoing relationship with Pamela Hawley, the introduction of a replacement for Junior Juniper) and more impossible missions. What Lee couldn't do was effectively replace Kirby's sense of action and pacing so it was unfortunate that he couldn't find anyone else to take over the art but Dick Ayers. The only good thing about Ayers coming aboard was that it safely confined him to stories that took place for the most part outside the superhero universe (including the westerns) that uninterested readers could safely ignore.

X-Men #5

"Trapped: One X-Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

The steady parade of new colorful supervillains marched on with *X-Men* #5 (May 1964) except this time, they came in a batch! Introduced last issue was the new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants led by Magneto, "most powerful of the evil mutants." Among the Brotherhood's initial members were the image inducing Mastermind and the slavish, bounding Toad. But the two that immediately caught the attention of fans were the super-fast Quicksilver and the probability altering Scarlet Witch. The fact that they were brother and sister automatically set them apart from the other members of the Brotherhood and indeed, the



FILMS DEPICTING MILITARY COURTS MARTIAL WERE COMMONPLACE IN THEATERS. PLOT FORMATS USUALLY INVOLVED A COMBINATION OF TESTIMONY AND FLASHBACK SEQUENCES THAT FILL IN THE BACK STORY, BUILDING TO A REVELATORY CLIMAX. POPULAR FILMS IN THE GENRE INCLUDE THE CAINE MUTINY (1954), PATHS OF GLORY (1957), THE COURT MARTIAL OF BILLY MITCHELL (1955), AND EVEN SGT RUTLEDGE (1960)

rest of Marvel's burgeoning supervillain family. Quicksilver's overly protective nature regarding his sister defined his personality and gave reason for much of his aggressiveness, while the Scarlet Witch's doubts regarding their association with the nakedly evil Magneto displayed more depth to her character than most other members of supervillain teams. In fact, it was the pair's conflicting loyalties that swiftly caught the attention of fans, who almost immediately began to clamor for their recruitment by the X-Men. Later revealed as Pietro and Wanda (Maximoff), the siblings felt a duty towards Magneto due to his once having rescued Wanda from superstitious villagers. But how long did they need to serve him before their debt was paid? That was a question that dogged readers who sympathized with their moral dilemma. Not that scripter Stan Lee ignores the stars of the book. The X-Men get some characterization bits as well, not only in their exchanges of dialogue but in their solicitousness toward a seemingly injured Prof. X. There's a page that shows how each member changes from their uniforms to street clothes before the arrival of Marvel Girl's parents. Later, Iceman is watching a track meet on TV. When the star athlete displays incredible prowess and is threatened by the crowd, the X-Men conclude he must be a mutant and determine to rescue him. But it's a ploy by Magneto to lure them into the open. The athlete was actually the sycophantic Toad. When the X-Men arrive, the Angel is captured and brought to Magneto's orbiting asteroid headquarters. But all's well that ends well and when it does, Prof. X reveals that not only was his illness feigned, but that their battle with Magneto was a test and that the X-Men passed it. "You've proven you can think and act for yourselves," declares the Professor. "Your training period is over!" This blockbuster 24-page story, drawn by Jack Kirby, was a tour de force for the penciler with every kind of scene needing to be illustrated: action, domesticity, argumentation, crowds, you name it. Despite some rough inking by Paul Reinman, Kirby's style comes through with emphasis on action set pieces such as the X-Men's battles with the Brotherhood at a subway station and on an orbital space lab. In short, this issue was one of the most completely sublime enjoyments that the new Marvel Age of Comics had to offer!

Tales to Astonish #56

"The Coming of the Magician!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

The story was called "The Coming of the Magician" as if new villain the Magician (what else?) a typical Mandrake type of high hatted, wand waving character, was something big and eventful and destined to become a major villainous player on the Marvel stage. Uh, no. Sorry Stan! Although scripter Stan Lee's plot was well fashioned, featured some interesting challenges for Giant-Man, and managed

to fill out a novel length eighteen pages, the Magician just didn't hold up to the likes of the Human Top or even the Porcupine. After all, how much of a threat could a villain be who sics a trained rabbit on the hero and wraps a towel around his head? Worse still, Giant-Man ends up needing to be saved by the Wasp when she pulls the plug on the Magician's escape blimp. Hoo boy! But at least there was the compensation of the ongoing relationship between Hank and Jan wherein this time, Hank comes to the brink of asking Jan to marry him before she short circuits him with a last-minute ploy to make him jealous. However, by the end, their true feelings come out after the Wasp mistakenly believes she's accidentally killed her partner. Will he finally get around to popping the question? Readers had to stick around to find out. Weak as the menace was in *Tales to Astonish* #56 (June 1964),

there's a little compensation by way of Dick Ayers' art that seemed to come alive a bit this time. His pages of interpersonal stuff between Hank and Jan. are acceptable and an attempt to lay out a couple pages in big Kirby style, quarter page panels is admirable. In fact, it was even better when he used one panel on each of those pages to focus on a close-up portrait of some of the characters including the Magician on page 6 and a quite nice three quarter profile of the Wasp on page 17. Even his action shots of Giant-Man (when he wasn't using narrow vertical panel layouts) were pretty good. So overall, this issue's presentation alone was enough to paper over the unimpressive Magician.

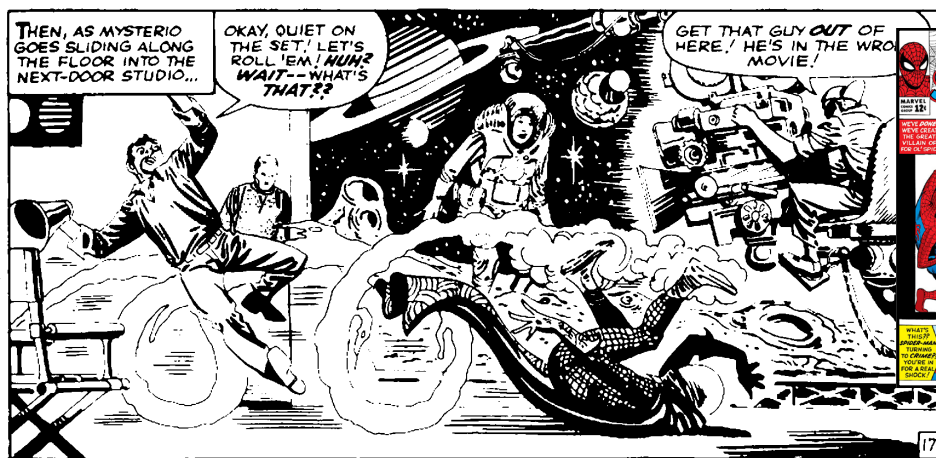
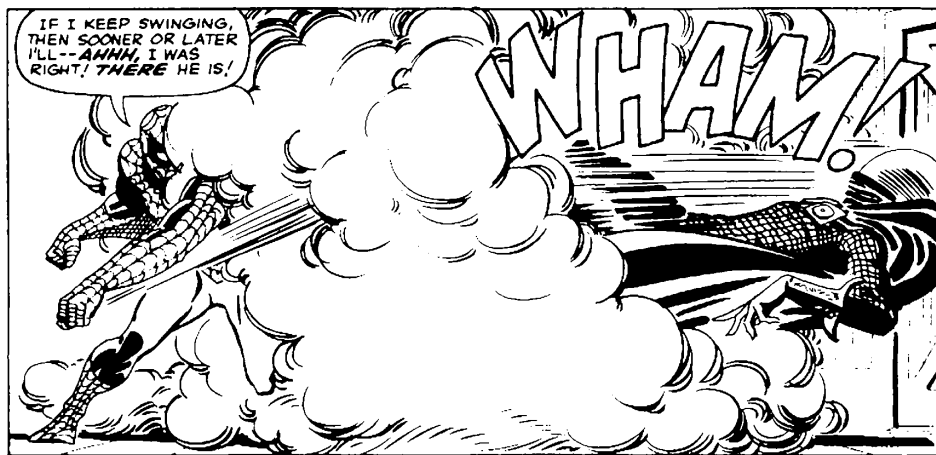
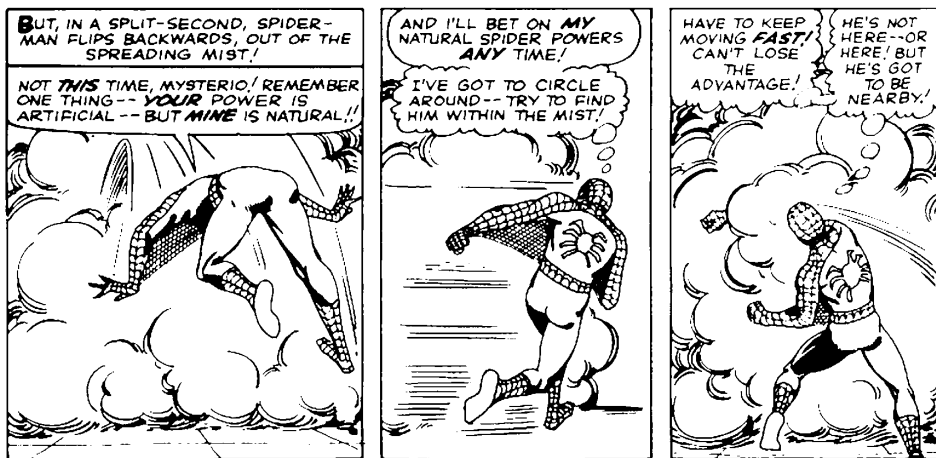


**THE TOP HATTED MANDRAKE
COULD HAVE BEEN THE TWIN
BROTHER OF MARVEL'S
VILLAIN, THE MAGICIAN, AN
UNWORTHY GIANT-MAN FOE.**

Amazing Spider-Man #13

"The Menace of...Mysterio!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Stan Lee and Steve Ditko do it again with *Amazing Spider-Man* #13 (June 1964)! How quickly they were able to move the Spider-Man strip



from its simple, early beginnings in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 and the first issue of the character's own title to complex storytelling that operated on different levels of interest at the same time. It had really started to come together a few issues back, with the introduction of Electro and then the two-part Dr. Octopus story, and now things really get into the weeds as the two creators explore the psychological side of Spidey's character. That's in addition to all of the by now expected subplots and through lines including Peter's life with Aunt May, the resentment of J. Jonah Jameson, Peter's relationship with Betty Brant, and the growing awareness of Peter's schoolmates, not to mention his secret life as Spider-Man. Now, all of that was called into question when Peter begins to wonder about his own sanity. Were all of the problems that constantly plagued him beginning to tell? The story opens with Spider-Man robbing a bank (you gotta love Ditko's penchant for drawing money bags as perfectly round sacks with a dollar sign on

them!) But Peter doesn't remember any of it. Is he going mad? Is he suffering from multiple personalities? As Spider-Man, he seeks out a psychiatrist to help him sort through his fears. "If I can make a patient out

of him, I'll make medical history," thinks the doctor. "Imagine a mysterious superhero who's a mental case!" But when the psychiatrist invites him to lie down and "tell me anything that comes into your head," Spidey balks. What if he accidentally reveals his secret identity? Making a hurried exit, he's challenged later by new

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AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #13, PAGE 17: ARTIST STEVE DITKO DELIVERS IN THIS EXCITING PAGE. AFTER TAKING PANELS 1-3 AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE TO SET UP THE ACTION, HE USES A FULL LENGTH HORIZONTAL PANEL 3 FOR THE PAYOFF: SPIDEY'S SUNDAY PUNCH AND MYSTERIO'S BEING THROWN FOR A LOOP. LITERALLY! A FINAL FULL LENGTH PANEL 4 SHOWS THE AFTERMATH AS THE VILLAIN TUMBLES HELPLESSLY THROUGH A MOVIE SET. IN A DOZEN SHORT ISSUES, DITKO HAD MASTERED THE ART OF ILLUSTRATING POWER AND MOVEMENT ON AN ESSENTIALLY STATIC COMICS PAGE!

supervillain Mysterio (who poses as a hero). Defeated the first time they meet; Spidey comes through in the end after discovering that Mysterio's powers aren't magic but simple Hollywood special FX (with some psychology thrown in) and it was he who robbed the bank in order to make Spider-Man doubt himself and thus become an easier foe to vanquish. Scriptor Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko have Peter and all the supporting characters down pat with their various storylines already immensely satisfying to follow for the book's growing legion of fans. It was hard to believe even at this early stage that *Spider-Man* hadn't overtaken the *Fantastic Four* as Marvel's most popular title! (Meanwhile, over on the letters' page in this month's issue of the FF, Lee reveals that Spider-Man is receiving as much fan mail as the Fantastic Four!)

Fantastic Four #27

"The Search for Sub-Mariner!";
 Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils);
 George Roussos (inks)

Squeezed between two classic crossovers (the Hulk and Avengers in #26 and X-Men in #28), it would be understandable if *Fantastic Four* #27 (June 1964) slipped between the cracks of the readers' collective consciousness. In actual fact, there's tons going on here that makes this issue one of the most memorable of the years of consolidation. In fact, it might be one of the best FFs ever! Not only does it feature yet another cross over (Dr. Strange, in his first appearance anywhere away from his own strip in *Strange Tales*) as well as the ultimate clash between the Sub-Mariner and Mr. Fantastic, but also a final settlement of the Subby/Reed/Sue romantic triangle. It all begins when Sub-Mariner's desire for Sue Storm becomes more than he can control. He kidnaps her and takes her to his undersea headquarters. Just prior to that, Reed had made up his mind to ask Sue for her hand in marriage and went out to shop for an engagement ring. But when he comes home and discovers that Namor has absconded with Sue, he loses his temper and determines to have it out with the sea king once and for all. Shaking off Johnny and Ben, Reed takes off on

his own. That's when the Torch's co-star from *Strange Tales* comes into the picture. Contacted by the Torch (via a flaming message in the sky) Dr. Strange locates Namor's HQ, enabling them to go to the rescue. But when they get there, they find that it's Namor that's in need of rescue, not Mr. Fantastic! In one of the best battle sequences penciler Jack Kirby had drawn for the strip up to this point, the artist lets his imagination go in coming up with different ways Mr. Fantastic uses his elastic powers to counter Namor's strength: he first fashions a "bola" out his arm and lassos the Sub-Mariner, then turns his entire body into a carpet of "sharp lances." He turns his fist into a sledgehammer

like shape before entangling the Sub-Mariner in strands of his own body. Evading his enemy's every blow with his pliable body, Mr. Fantastic then turns himself into a giant bow and fires Subby off like an arrow! "What breed of man are you who will not surrender to a stronger enemy?" demands the embattled Sub-Mariner. Their battle only concludes after Sue is freed from her prison and uses her invisible shield to keep them apart. When Sue tells Namor that she protected Reed out of love rather than loyalty, he explodes: "What are you saying!?? You can't love him!! I've claimed you for myself! You must be mine!" "Sorry if you misunderstood the sympathy I felt for you," replies Sue. "Yes, even the affection I felt... Sorry if you thought it was love! But I realize now, Reed is the only man for me... nothing can ever change that!" But if readers thought that settled things between Reed and Sue, they had another think coming. Lee and Kirby weren't going to end such a long running subplot just like that. Left wondering if Sue's declaration of love was only used to stop the fighting, Reed suspects she may not

really love him after all. Thus, even with Namor out of the picture, the uncertainty would go on for at least a little while longer. Perhaps sensing the importance of this story in re-setting the relationship among the characters, Lee, in his capacity as editor, steps in for the final word, thanking readers for making the FF magazine "the most successful magazine of the Marvel Age of Comics."



WHILE MARVEL'S MR FANTASTIC WAS TREATED WITH INCREASING SERIOUSNESS BY LEE AND KIRBY, INCLUDING THE MANNER IN WHICH HE EMPLOYED HIS ELASTIC POWERS, COMPETITORS' VERSIONS OF CHARACTERS WITH THE SAME ABILITIES WERE DEPICTED IN SILLY OR AT LEAST LESS INTERESTING WAYS. A LEGACY OF THE PLASTIC MAN CHARACTER OF EARLIER YEARS?

Rawhide Kid #40

"The Rawhide Kid Meets the Two-Gun Kid!";
Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Yes, Marvel was still publishing westerns and yes, Stan Lee was still on the scripting chores. Even as Spider-Man was battling Mysterio, Mr. Fantastic going hand to hand with Sub-Mariner, Giant-Man tackling the Magician, the X-Men searching for the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and Iron Man facing the challenge of the Black Widow, Marvel's western heroes were still fighting to bring law and order to the old west. But up to now, the three remaining big guns, i.e. Rawhide Kid, Two-Gun Kid, and Kid Colt had

not met. That all changed with *Rawhide Kid* #40 (June 1964) as Lee brought crossover madness from the superhero books over to the westerns. Like his earlier introduction of steampunk supervillains to Marvel's westerns, so now Lee consolidated the westerns into a single universe by having two of the three kids meet for the first time here: the Rawhide Kid and the Two-Gun Kid, arguably the two most colorful of the three kids. Beneath a rather rushed but still fun cover by Jack Kirby ("Another giant step forward in this, the Marvel Age of Comics!"), lawyer Matt Hawk finds himself defending the Two-Gun Kid against charges that he's trained a grizzly bear to rob Pony Express riders. (In an encounter with the bear just before being arrested, the bear is shown defending himself with a rifle...hm!) It's when the Kid escapes the law that he has his first meeting with Rawhide. The two tussle inconclusively (of course!) until Two-Gun convinces the Kid to surrender himself to the law, telling him that a friend will defend him in court. But his trial is interrupted by the bear, who is then revealed to be local bad guy Ace Fester. With Two-Gun holding back the crowds, Rawhide faces down Ace, forcing him to admit his guilt. It was a well written, satisfying encounter giving both characters plenty to do with scripter Stan Lee now really coming into his own as a crowd pleasing writer of comics only held back some by Dick Ayers' art whose odd angularisms and lack of detail (where were the blacks?) prevented the kind of visual excitement that Kirby would have brought to the tale. And speaking of Kirby, it was only too bad the superheroes were keeping him too busy to at least fill in on key stories like this. But then, except for Spider-Man and Dr. Strange, it was only to be lamented that Kirby couldn't draw everything Marvel was producing in these years!



Strange Tales #121

"Prisoner of the Plant Man!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)
"Witchcraft in the Wax Museum!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

As usual now for *Strange Tales*, the Dr. Strange strip at the back of the book was the star attraction with its smooth and inventive Stan Lee scripting and Steve Ditko's groundbreaking design sense. This issue's story, however, is nothing too remarkable. In fact, it's familiar elements are merely rearranged from past stories as Baron Mordo once again tries to capture Strange's physical self. The two battle on the astral plane until Strange reoccupies his mortal body and turns the tables on Mordo. As usual though, it's Ditko's visuals that are a delight to behold, from the shadowed, immobile occupants of the wax museum to mystical battle at the height of which Strange is

THE TWO KIDS MEET! OR AT LEAST TWO OUT OF THREE OF MARVEL'S GUNSLINGING KIDS! ALTHOUGH MUCH BALLYHOOD ON THE COVER BY EDITOR STAN LEE, THE REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TEAM UP WAS ITS IMPLICIT CONFIRMATION THAT ALL OF MARVEL'S WESTERNS EXISTED IN THE SAME UNIVERSE. AND IF THAT WAS SO, MIGHT IT BE POSSIBLE THAT THEY EXISTED IN THE SAME TIME CONTINUUM AS SGT FURY? AND SINCE THE FF'S REED RICHARDS APPEARANCE THERE HAD ALREADY CONFIRMED THE FACT THAT SGT FURY WAS PART OF THE SUPERHERO UNIVERSE...

boxed in by Mordo's bolts of bedevilment (page 8). By contrast, the Human Torch story offered in *Strange Tales* #121 (June 1964) is rather humdrum, even silly at one point when the Plantman doses the sleeping Johnny with a pail of water and then locks him in his closet! Although the Plantman has had the inspiration to finally don a costume to formally join the ranks of Marvel's other colorful supervillains, his imagination hasn't increased to match as he leaves Johnny in the closet while going to rob...a hotel safe? Meanwhile, the Torch dries up and flies after Plantman only to get soaked again. But the stratagem doesn't do Plantman any good as he allows the Torch to get close enough to simply slug him with a right cross. Game over. Again, Lee's script is solid, despite the low-level threat presented by the Plantman but it's Dick Ayers' art with its poor positioning of figures and lack of blacks that hold it back. (Curiously, Ditko seems to have been drafted to pencil the final panels of the story that feature Johnny and Dorrie leaving on a date; enough to hint at what higher quality art could have achieved for a strip that was beginning to run aground) That said, it's not like any Marvelite would trade this Torch story for anything the Distinguished Competition was offering!



AFTER A STORIED CAREER AT EC, ARTIST JOE ORLANDO KICKED AROUND A BIT BEFORE ARRIVING AT MARVEL JUST IN TIME TO TAKE OVER THE NEW DAREDEVIL FEATURE. HIS WORK THERE WAS SATISFACTORY BUT SOMEWHAT STATIC. BUT NOT TO WORRY! HE SOON MOVED OVER TO WARREN PUBLICATIONS WHERE HE SERVED AS A STORY EDITOR AND THEN TO DC AS LONG TIME EDITOR OF THE COMPANY'S LINE OF MYSTERY BOOKS AND EVENTUALLY A VICE-PRESIDENT.

Daredevil #2

"The Evil Menace of Electro!"; Stan Lee (script); Joe Orlando (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Daredevil #2 (June 1964) stumbled somewhat out of the gate with a long winded, heavily overwritten story by Stan Lee with ponderous, slow moving pencils by EC comics veteran Joe Orlando. Orlando was recruited by Lee following Bill Everett's more atmospheric and dynamic effort on the debut issue. But personal issues plagued Everett's work on #1 creating delays and the need for backup from other Bullpenners. His unreliability forced Lee to replace him on the series. Since EC folded, Orlando had kicked around doing adaptations for *Classics Illustrated*, some work for *Mad* magazine, and other illustration before getting the DD assignment. It would prove to be not a happy mix, with Orlando remaining for a mere three issues before eventually finding a permanent berth at DC, where he ended up editing its line of mystery titles. In the meantime, he struggled to adapt to the Marvel style of doing comics as established by fellow artist Jack Kirby which involved plenty of action and movement. Here, too, Orlando's work is held back somewhat by the inks of Vince Colletta. While good, somehow Colletta failed to mesh with Orlando as he would with Kirby on Thor. His work over the figure of Daredevil is nice, accentuating his musculature while he was still in his cool yellow costume. But otherwise, he seemed to add to the static nature of Orlando's work. By contrast,

Colletta's inks over Kirby on this issue's cover (and those that followed) were perfect, bringing out all the carnival excitement that should have been DD's signature on the inside as well. Although in its own way, Orlando's slowdown of the action in his issues of Daredevil had charms of its own. Perhaps spending more time on the scripting than he would have preferred, the slower pace forced Lee to concentrate on characterization and especially in describing how DD was able to do the incredible things he does despite being blind. Though some fans thought these descriptions tedious, they were actually clever and added color and more importantly, understanding to DD's actions. (In particular the near unbelievable scene here in which our hero pilots a runaway rocket from space to a safe landing in Central Park!) Those descriptions were not lacking here in a story designed perhaps to attract fans of the *Spider-Man* strip, which most resembled the athletically inclined *Daredevil* feature. It stars Spidey villain Electro as DD first breaks up his hot car operation and then foils his attempt to steal secrets from the Baxter Building. By coincidence, in his identity as attorney Matt Murdock, DD is hired by the FF to negotiate a new lease for them on their headquarters in the Baxter Building, something Matt doesn't have time to complete due to his battle with Electro. As a result, he's fired! Overall, it was a slow start for Marvel's newest full-length feature, but the concept of Daredevil was strong enough to overcome that until more dynamic artists could step in and increase the volume.

Tales to Astonish #57

"On the Trail of the Amazing Spider-Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

In the days when Spider-Man was still new on the superhero scene and was still considered by many in the public as a menace or even outlaw (thanks to continuous critical editorials by *Daily Bugle* publisher J. Jonah Jameson), it was relatively easy to have him tangle with another more trusted hero in the name of law and order. That was scripter Stan Lee's plot germ here when he has long time Giant-Man foe Egghead issue a false report via the ant grapevine that Spider-Man was out to attack Giant-Man (no explanation given). Knowing of Spidey's questionable reputation, Giant-Man has the Wasp do some scouting. Disobeying orders, she decides to tackle Spidey herself and ends up being caught by him instead. When he finds out, Giant-Man charges into battle and the two heroes tangle in what should've been an interesting encounter but that turns out to be only half the fun because Dick Ayers was penciling the story with the heavy hand of Paul Reinman on the inks. And if even Jack Kirby had difficulty depicting Spider-Man on the cover of *Tales to Astonish* #57 (July 1964), could Ayers be expected to do any better? Admittedly, Ayers does try. His quiet scenes of characters standing around and talking are decent, but he falls short when it's time for action. In an attempt to open up the story, Ayers again utilizes some quarter page sized panels as he did the issue before but fails to use them to full effect. His action scenes too are lackluster, not showing off Giant-Man's size relative to other objects sufficiently. Chalk this encounter up to a lost opportunity. Hardly worth mentioning is this issue's backup tale "A Voice in the Dark." The "Tales of the Wasp" feature had been running in *Astonish* for some issues by this time but now, editor/scripter Lee decided to give the character a regular solo adventure. A slight yarn with pretty much forgettable art by the team of Larry Lieber and Chic Stone, it did have a funny punchline involving Giant-Man scolding the Wasp for taking credit in

catching a jewel thief that properly belonged to the Invisible Girl. **Fun Fact:** Hank Pym provides the Wasp with a wrist mounted "compressed air gun" powerful enough to knock a man off his feet. Over the years, other writers would exaggerate the strength of the blaster until by the end of the twilight years, it was strong enough to punch a hole in the side of a spaceship! All without an equal and opposite reaction, thus violating the law of physics. Although Hank tells her that it will shrink due to being made of unstable molecules, that still doesn't

explain how swallowing a pill will make the blaster shrink too. (Not being of tight, stretchable material such as her uniform) Oh, well.

Two-Gun Kid #70

"The Amazing Mr. Hurricane!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Fresh off his team-up with the Rawhide Kid, the Two-Gun Kid returns to his own stomping grounds only to confront Hurricane, "the fastest, most fantastic gunman of all!" Continuing his campaign to bring Marvel's westerns up to speed vis a vis its superhero lineup, editor/scripter Stan Lee once again introduces a steampunk element in *Two-Gun Kid* #70 (July 1964) by providing the Kid with a super powered foe, one whose power makes him super-fast. And this being a western, super speed translates into the fastest draw imaginable. Even faster than the Kid's! It all begins with a cover masterpiece by Jack Kirby who provides a three-panel origin sequence for Hurricane across the top before presenting the fast

draw gunman facing off against the Kid, where he's caught flat footed by the blurred speed of the villain's arms. The dramatic imagery is accentuated by Stan Goldberg's spot on coloring where he places the Two-Gun Kid logo in purple (with red shading) against a bright yellow background. Goldberg maintains the purple motif by giving Hurricane a purple outfit as well. (An outfit fitted out by Kirby with a pair of stylized lightning bolts on the front). Top all of that off with a blurb guaranteed to catch the attention of the discerning reader (whether of westerns or superheroes!): "One sip of the Indian potion and



ALTHOUGH THE IDEA OF HAVING SUPERHEROES MEET WASN'T A NEW IDEA (DC HAD EVEN BASED A WHOLE TITLE AROUND THE CONCEPT WITH ITS BATMAN/SUPERMAN TEAM IN WORLD'S FINEST), IT WASN'T UNTIL MARVEL CAME ALONG THAT THEY BEGAN TO TUSSELE ON A REGULAR BASIS.



YUMA TERRITORIAL PRISON. BUILT IN 1875. LIKELY HOUSED ANY NUMBER OF TOO SLOW ON THE DRAW TWO-GUN AND RAWHIDE KID VILLAINS INCLUDING THE HAPLESS HURRICANE!

the most dangerous outlaw of the west turns into... Hurricane, the fastest draw of all time!" And how! Oh, it was to be devoutly wished that Kirby had guest drawn the story as well as the cover, but it was not to be. Instead, when prospective buyers turned the page, they were met by the strip's regular artist, Dick Ayers. Though nowhere near Kirby's class, Ayers does manage to be sufficiently inspired by the story to improve his usual lackluster style including a decent depiction of Hurricane's origin (with one page broken down into an interesting nine panel grid...radical for Ayers) Harry Kane is on the run from the Kid when he comes across an Indian shaman in the process of concocting some magical brew. Shooting the Indian (don't worry, he just "winged 'em!"), Kane picks up the brew just as it's struck by lightning. But hunger forces him to drink the brew down anyway. Result: super speed. Later, after experimenting with his newfound powers, Kane dons a costume and mask and calls himself Hurricane. In their first encounter, he beats the Kid to the draw and leaves him for dead. But the Kid recovers, meets Hurricane again and begins to chase him. But though Hurricane is fast, he can get tired and when he exhausts himself, the Kid strikes. Hurricane ends up with damaged hands and ankle that will prevent him from ever using his powers again. Well...we'll see. After all, the character was too good to allow to languish as a parolee! (Thanks to representation by lawyer Matt Hawk!) In fact, Hurricane would have made a good prospect for his own title. Be that as it may, it was a wonderful story, well written by Lee who was obviously devoting as much time with his work on the westerns as he was with his superhero scripts. No wonder Marvel's westerns would continue to have a long shelf life

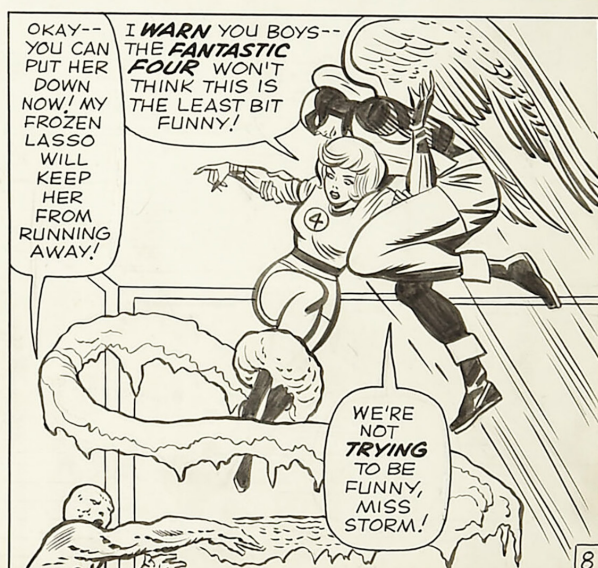
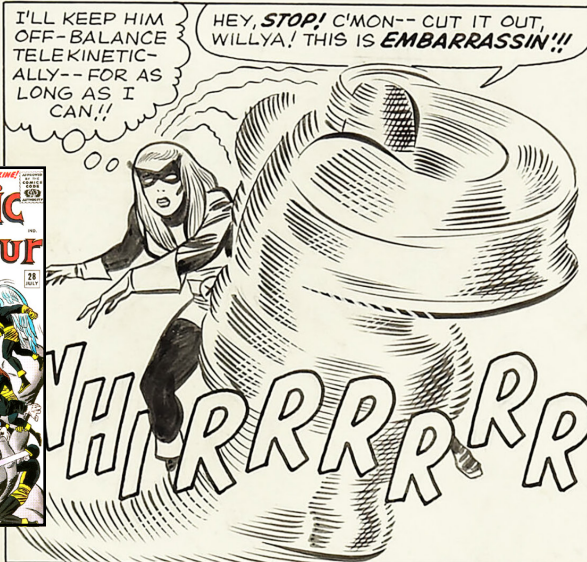
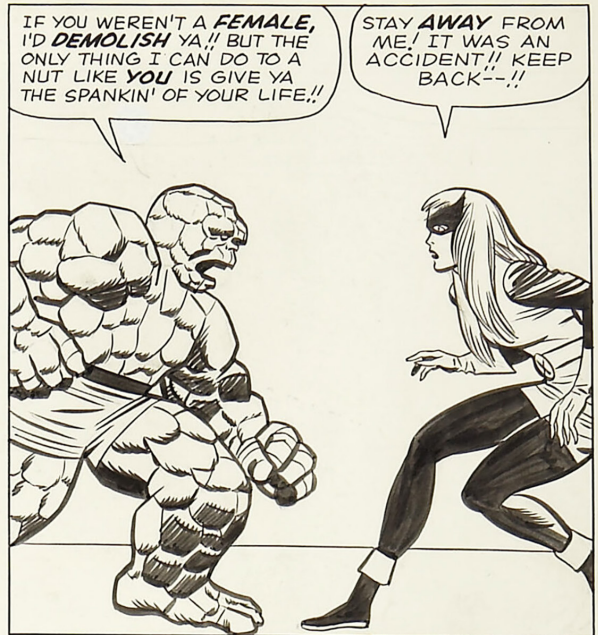
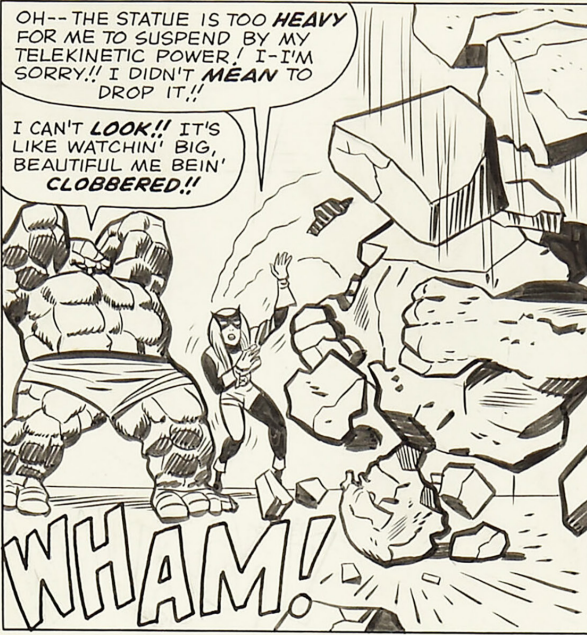
far beyond the time when anyone taking note of the rising popularity of its superheroes would've expected it!

Fantastic Four #28

"We Have to Fight the X-Men!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Oh, man! Stan and Jack were on a roll! First it was the Thing/Hulk battle in issue #25, then the Avengers and the Hulk in #26, followed by the Mr. Fantastic/Sub-Mariner fight guest starring Dr. Strange in #27, and now here comes *Fantastic Four #28* (July 1964) as the FF meet the X-Men! Top off all that magic with the arrival of Chic Stone on the inks and you've got one of the most thoroughly entertaining comics of the entire Marvel Age of Comics! And that's saying something, because this month alone the same creative team did *Journey Into Mystery* with Thor vs. the team of Cobra and Mr. Hyde, as well as both *Avengers #6* and *X-Men #6*! Then there was Stan Lee and Steve Ditko's introduction of the Green Goblin in *Spidey #14* and *Suspense #55* that included the second chapter of the origin of the Mandarin; *Astonish #57* with Giant-Man vs. Spider-Man; and *Two-Gun Kid #70* facing off against Hurricane. Marvel fans had to have been giddy with profound pleasure at having such great comics from a company that was now at the peak of its game all coming at them week after week! Don't believe it? Then check this issue's first meeting of the FF and the X-Men as the Puppet Master and the Mad Thinker team-up to get both teams to fight and destroy each other. It begins with a typical day in the Baxter Building, as the Thing brings in a massive stone sculpture of himself fashioned by girlfriend Alicia Masters while Reed and Sue read about the X-Men in the newspaper: "X-Men! Big deal!" scoffs the Thing. "They're just a bunch of cornballs, if you ask me! Who'd they ever lick??" "Magneto, the Space Phantom, the Blob, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch," reads Sue. "Also, the Toad, Mastermind..." continues Reed. "Okay! Okay! I get the idea!" (Clearly, however, the Thing needs to catch up on the news because the X-Men never did battle the Space Phantom...the Avengers did!) The scene cuts to the issue's villains, which penciler Jack

(OPPOSITE PAGE) FANTASTIC FOUR #28, PAGE 8: PENCILER JACK KIRBY EXPERTLY CHOREOGRAPHS THIS INITIAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN TWO OF MARVEL'S SUPER TEAMS, THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND THE X-MEN. WHILE STAN LEE'S SCRIPTING SEAMLESSLY BALANCES DRAMA AND HUMOR INTO A PERFECT BLEND OF STORY AND ART.



Ejection! Stamp 184

Kirby introduces in a huge, three-quarter page panel with the Thinker at one of his computers and the Puppet Master being allowed in by the Awesome Android. Using his radioactive clay, the Puppet Master takes control of Prof. X, who then orders the uncomprehending X-Men to invade the Baxter Building and kidnap Alicia. That happens and after the X-Men escape, they lead the FF to a lonely mesa where the villains have prepared a number of booby traps for them. The day is saved however, by the Beast, whose strength of will allows him to resist Prof. X's power and crush his clay image, thus releasing the X-Men of his control. Meanwhile, the FF free themselves and all go into action against the Android and in driving off the villains. Throughout, Kirby proves once again that he's the action king with ingeniously choreographed fight scenes involving at least 12 different super-powered characters (check out the three-quarter page size panel on page 18 for an example), while scripter Lee keeps everything from becoming confusing and providing individuated dialogue for each character. A more thoroughly satisfying superhero adventure could hardly be imagined. What could be understood however, is why Marvel was blowing all of its competitors out of the water in these years. No way the staid, largely infantile product of say, DC comics, could compare at all favorably with what Marvel was doing. No way! **Fun Fact:** This month's Marvels were the first ever purchased by this writer. More specifically, he began his lifelong enthusiasm for Marvel comics with this month's issues of *FF* #28, *Spider-Man* #14, and *Journey Into Mystery* #105. And who could blame him for being totally enthralled? This was likely the greatest single month in the company's history designed to grab hold of a young mind and never letting go!

Avengers #6

*"The Mighty Avengers Meet the Masters of Evil!";
Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)*

The mighty team of scripter Stan Lee, penciler Jack Kirby, and inker Chic Stone do it again (as they did for this month's issues of *Fantastic Four*, *Journey Into Mystery*, and *X-Men*) with *Avengers* #6 (July 1964). The argument for July 1964 being Marvel's greatest single month of releases is only strengthened by this issue's battle royale between the Avengers and their first encounter with a team of supervillains. And how! Arch-foes of every member of the Assemblers including Radioactive Man (Thor), Melter (Iron Man), and the Black Knight (Giant-Man) join Zemo, Captain America's old foe...wait a minute! Zemo is



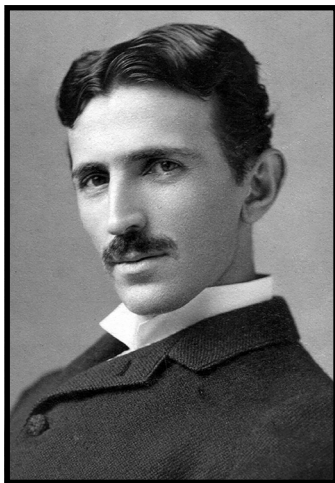
EVEN MARVEL'S SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM NAMES WERE MORE EVOCATIVE THAN THOSE OF THE DISTINGUISHED COMPETITION: THE MASTERS OF EVIL! THE EMISSARIES OF EVIL! THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS! THE LETHAL LEGION! YEAH! VS THE LEGION OF DOOM? THE SECRET SOCIETY OF SUPER-VILLAINS? THE INJUSTICE GANG? SNOOZE...

a brand-new villain, how could he be an old arch-villain for Captain America? The answer comes in a flashback this ish, in which it's revealed that Cap opposed Zemo when he used to be a top scientist for the Nazis during World War II. It was then, near the end of the war, that a vat of the villain's new paste compound was spilled over him during a final battle with Cap. The compound permanently cemented Zemo's hood onto his head. Driven into hiding somewhere in South America (where all Nazi rats who could, fled following the end of the war), he nursed his hatred for decades until the star-spangled Avenger suddenly reappeared on the scene following his revival in *Avengers* #4. Bringing together his fellow bad guys, all burning for vengeance against their respective heroes, Zemo attacks by spraying New York City with his Adhesive X, cementing unsuspecting citizens to the ground. In a nice bit of continuity, scripter Stan Lee has the Avengers seek out the help of Human Torch villain Paste-Pot-Pete (still in jail following his defeat in *Strange Tales* #110) for help in dissolving the adhesive. It works, but in the process, the heroes find themselves in direct battle with the villains. What follows is another expertly choreographed donnybrook amongst nine heroes and villains (not to mention Rick Jones and his Teen Brigaders) by penciler Jack Kirby. It was another 23-page epic tale, an exquisite entry in what might well have been Marvel's greatest month of releases! **Fun Fact:** Although not mentioned this issue or in #4, Zemo would later be revealed as the person responsible for Bucky's death.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #8

"The Death Ray of Dr. Zemo!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

In a masterful and clever use of continuity that demonstrated his now fully conscious effort at tying Marvel's growing line of new adventure comics together into a single universe, editor/scripter Stan Lee guest starred Zemo in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #8 (July 1964). Since both the *Sgt. Fury* book and the *Avengers* were both still on a bi-monthly release schedule when this story was written and drawn (*Sgt. Fury* went monthly only with this issue), it's unclear which title Zemo may have actually been conceived for first. Did he appear full blown in *Avengers* #6 and get retroactively included in this issue of *Sgt. Fury* as a way of promoting the character's appearance in the *Avengers*, or was he first conceived as a mad scientist for *Fury* and then someone, either Lee or artist Jack Kirby, had the idea of carrying him over to the *Avengers* as an arch foe for the newly introduced Captain America? Whichever it was, it was a brilliant ploy both to cross-promote *Sgt. Fury* and the *Avengers* and as a major factor in the growing inter-relationship of all of Marvel's new superhero features. Aside from that, the only question was whether using a mad scientist with a "death ray" in a strip that, even though it featured impossible missions, was still considered somewhat more grounded in reality than the superhero titles. Such would be the concern of readers who had the opportunity to express themselves in the book's new letters' page which began in this issue. Be that as it may, "The Death Ray of Dr. Zemo" proved to be another entertaining entry in the Howler's impossible missions repertoire as they're ordered to storm Zemo's castle and capture the evil scientist. When they get there, they



NOT FAR FROM REALITY? MAYBE THE DEATH RAY OF BARON ZEMO WASN'T THAT FARFETCHED. ELECTRICAL ENGINEER NICOLA TESLA CLAIMED IN THE 1930S TO HAVE INVENTED A RAY HE SAID TAPPED INTO "TELEFORCE" AND THAT COULD BE USED TO BRING DOWN AIRCRAFT HUNDREDS OF MILES DISTANT. ALTHOUGH THE WEAPON WAS NEVER PRODUCED, TESLA CONTINUED TO TEASE ITS EXISTENCE FOR YEARS.

find the castle booby trapped. They fight their way through until confronting Zemo, the villain turns his new death ray on them. When he's disarmed, Zemo makes a clean getaway and the Howlers make it out of the castle just as the ray gun itself blows up. It was a good story that should have been great but for the fact that the book's regular penciler, Jack Kirby, had left the strip with the previous issue. He was replaced by Dick Ayers who'd remain on the title for most of its remaining run of original stories (it would become a mostly reprint mag by the early seventies). As he'd been for other titles when replacing Kirby, Ayers was a distinct letdown (especially when readers were teased by a Kirby drawn cover) whose stiff, awkward figurework and sometimes odd presentation of the action within panels prevented thorough enjoyment of Lee's stories (which continued to capture the spirit of the *Fury* strip that Kirby had had a large part in creating). It was only further to be lamented that this issue included the introduction of a new Howler, the replacement for Junior Juniper who'd been killed in action in an earlier issue. The new addition was an improvement over Junior, in that PFC Percy Pinkerton could add diversity to the group's mix of personalities. His initial appearance here as a rawther Britisher, complete with bumbershoot and red beret that belie his fighting qualities, a conflict in expectations that Lee is quick to satirize. The writer has a good time supplying the dialogue for the disbelieving Howlers until Percy proves himself by wiping the floor with a couple of tormentors without even raising a sweat. **Fun Fact:** Because Zemo appears here without the mask he sports in *Avengers* #6, the events this issue obviously take place well before the scenes showing how a fight with Captain America ended with his being covered with Adhesive X that permanently affixes a hood to his head. But why was he wearing the hood in the first place? That would be a story for another time!

X-Men #6

"Sub-Mariner Joins the Evil Mutants!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

In the final entry for the greatest month in Marvel's history, everything was going right: Stan Lee on script, Jack Kirby on pencils, and Chic Stone on inks. Together, they couldn't help but create single issue masterpieces and they certainly did as the magic of July 1964 was extended over the next year or so of books. It's been said that the *X-Men* title was the slowest seller of all of Marvel's books not only at this time, but through the balance of its run, but boy! It's hard to imagine looking at *X-Men* #6 (July 1964) with Kirby's art now the best it ever was to that time (little

did anyone know that it would improve even more, reaching its zenith of development in the grandiose years) and Lee's scripting at the near peak of its refinement (before it became virtually blank verse in places during those self-same grandiose years). Even Stone's heavy inking style seemed to smooth Kirby's rough edges and make his figures pop off the page. Take this issue's cover for instance: the figure of the Sub-Mariner, set against the lighter inks of background objects, looks set to fairly leap off the page! And that's only for starters in a tale where Subby's obvious mutant characteristics are recognized by both Magneto and Prof. X but ends up recruited by the former for his Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. But Namor's heart is once again his weak spot, as he comes to the defense of a sympathetic Scarlet Witch. It's Magneto's ungallant manner that sparks Namor's suspicions; and when he decides not to ally himself with the villain, Magneto turns on him. But there's a lot more going on here in this long 22-page story. including more nuance to the characters of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, a great opening splash page showing the X-Men at the dinner table (each of their individual personalities are clearly defined by the combined skills of Lee and Kirby), and we learn for the first time that both Prof. X and Magneto have the ability to project their minds outside their bodies enabling them to travel anywhere in the world, including the bottom of the sea. Throughout, Kirby's art is top notch and his pacing of action, set up, and character beats is flawless. It was hard to believe that only

a few years before he was doing such visually exciting but ultimately bland fare as *The Challengers of the Unknown* and *Green Arrow* for DC. What a difference! If there were holdouts among the Marvel faithful who thought the X book wasn't up to the standards of the company's other



X-MEN #6, PAGE 10: NOW IN THE MIDST OF THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION, THE COMBINED TALENTS OF SCRIPTER STAN LEE, PENCILER JACK KIRBY, AND INKER CHIC STONE, KEPT PRODUCING MASTERPIECE AFTER MASTERPIECE, INCLUDING THIS ISSUE OF THE X-MEN. HOLDOUT MARVEL FANS WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE "SLOW SELLING" NATURE OF THE TITLE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THEY WERE MISSING! THIS ISSUE ALONE HAD EVERYTHING FANS CRAVED: ACTION AND DRAMA, SUPERHEROES AND SUPER-VILLAINS GALORE, GUEST STARS, CHARACTERIZATION AND NEW PERSONALITY WRINKLES. WHAT WASN'T THERE TO LIKE?

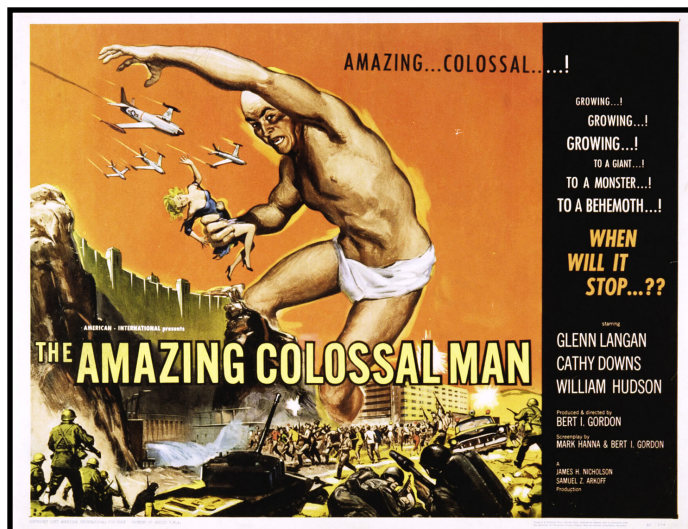
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offerings, they were definitely off their nut! This ish was one of the best, most exquisite comics of the years of consolidation, no doubt about it! **Fun Fact:** Even though she still sported her earlier masked look up there in the cover's corner box, Marvel Girl changed her mask this issue to a Mardi Gras look that allowed her crimson tresses to flow more freely. A definite improvement!

Tales to Astonish #58

"The Coming of...Colossus!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

A new month and a new round of Marvel offerings. Could Lee, Kirby, Ditko, Heck et al. keep up the high quality and level of excitement as the previous month? Answer: Yes for some titles, not so much for others. But that's only relatively speaking. Overall, the mounting excitement of fans for Marvel's line up continued to be fully justified. And that excitement seemed to have been delivered when readers caught sight of Jack Kirby's cover for *Tales to Astonish* #58 (August 1964)! Giant-Man, obviously taller than readers ever saw him before (judging from the size of the trees at his feet) still being dwarfed by a gigantic foe calling himself Colossus! (The only thing wrong with the great dramatic image was Giant-Man's left foot, which seems to just fade away instead of being completely drawn.) It was only to be desired that Kirby draw the insides too, but it was not to be. Once again, fans were disappointed to find Dick Ayers on the pencils managing to defuse much of the inherent drama in a story where Giant-Man, even at his greatest height, can still be challenged by Colossus. And it was a pretty good, off the beaten track story too, as scripter Stan Lee presents us with an alien Gargantua who presents Giant-Man a challenge: he can't grow to match the alien's 30-foot height without becoming proportionately weaker. But he manages and in doing so frightens the alien into thinking that if all Earth beings had magic powers such as Giant-Man (who seemed to disappear due to his new cybernetically powered size control), then he wasn't going to hang around. Unfortunately, it was one of Lee's oldest plot devices from the now virtually long-gone days of the pre-hero monsters and made for a pretty disappointing finish. Preferable would've been a slugfest between the two with Giant-Man winning in a thrilling finale. A perfect scenario for an action artist like Kirby, who would've found all sorts of ways to make such conflict interesting to look at. But it was not to be. As it was, the most arresting development this ish was the Wasp declaring her love for Giant-Man, something that Hank was quick to dismiss once the danger was over. "The big lunk," thinks the



IMAGINE A FIGHT BETWEEN GIANT-MAN AND 1957'S AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN AND YOU'LL HAVE AN INKLING OF THE ACTION IN ASTONISH #58...THAT IS, IF ARTIST JACK KIRBY HAD DRAWN IT. ONE THING THAT MARVEL OFTEN HAD EVEN OVER THE MOVIES, WAS AN AIR OF REALISM. IN REALITY, A MAN THE SIZE OF THE COLOSSAL MAN WOULD HAVE COLLAPSED UNDER HIS OWN WEIGHT...THE SAME LAW OF PHYSICS THAT RESTRICTED GIANT-MAN TO LESSER SIZE.

Wasp. "I was trying to tell him I did mean it!" The issue is rounded out by another solo Wasp tale called "The Magician and the Maiden" that features the return of Giant-Man villain, the Magician. The Larry Lieber penciled and inked story actually looks decent as the action takes place in a department store and the bad guy is defeated when his cape gets caught in an escalator!

Amazing Spider-Man #15

"Kraven the Hunter!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Marvel proceeded apace with its introduction of new, colorful supervillains completing a perfect trifecta of them for the Spider-Man book beginning with Mysterio in issue #13, the Green Goblin in #14, and here, in *Amazing Spider-Man* #15 (August 1964), with Kraven the Hunter! One of the incredible things about the Spider-Man strip (aside from its amazingly good art and stories that began almost immediately from the second issue) was its regular parade of villains, each one of whom was destined for classic status (well, okay, maybe not the Tinkerer) and Kraven would prove no different. His introduction here is slightly different than other villains: he arrives openly, by boat. Kraven, it seems, is not technically a villain, nor is he wanted for anything. He's just a celebrated big game hunter who has arrived in America at the behest of the

Chameleon, one of the first villains Spidey ever fought. The Chameleon has summoned him to hunt and defeat the wall-crawler, knowing the challenge would surely pique Kraven's interest. He was right; and after a quick set up to study his prey's fighting style, Kraven is ready. After luring Spidey into a park, he manages to snap magnets on one arm and a leg, magnets that are drawn to each other. A very clever complication by either scripter Stan Lee or artist Steve Ditko to what could've been a pretty straightforward fight scene, the magnets add excitement and a layer of suspense to the goings on as Spidey struggles to keep them apart.

At the same time, he manages to evade a series of traps until he tricks Kraven into one of his webs while the police nab the Chameleon: "Kraven is the one you want," complains the Chameleon. "He's been trying to hunt human beings!" As the two villains are being deported, Peter Parker's luck runs true...all bad! Victorious against the bad guys, he still finds himself in the doghouse with Betty Brant after she observes Liz Allen doting on him. Meanwhile, Aunt May has arranged a blind date for her nephew with the niece of next-door neighbor Anna Watson. Much more would be made of the mysterious Mary Jane Watson in future issues...and how! The issue ends as expected for our hero, with Betty giving him the cold shoulder and Liz unavailable for a date. Overall, it was another perfectly balanced and paced tale that moved its cast of characters forward just enough to suggest change; utterly satisfying to the growing legions of fans who found themselves identifying in one way or another with the hapless Peter Parker!

Fantastic Four #29

"It Started on Yancy Street!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Nothing about *Fantastic Four* #29 (August 1964) hinted at anything great happening beyond its rather inauspicious cover by penciler Jack Kirby. The members of the FF are seen in the lower portion walking along the street seemingly about to confront

the never seen hooligans that inhabit Yancy Street. The Yancy Street gang have made it a habit to tease the Thing to distraction and to a lesser degree, the rest of the team. Equally as unrevealing is the story's title "It Started on Yancy Street" that indicated nothing extraordinary despite the image of the Watcher in the background. What was going on here? Where were any of the new supervillains readers were becoming used to seeing with the release of any new Marvel comic? Well, those readers confident that the team of scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby wouldn't let them down were rewarded by page 6 when the FF

learn that their old enemy, the Red Ghost, tricked them into coming down to Yancy Street, where he and his super apes capture them and deposit them on the Moon, fully expecting them to die there. Instead, the FF make their way to the Watcher's home, where they use one of the alien's machines to draw the Red Ghost back to the Moon. There's a fight, but when the Red Ghost uses one of the Watcher's machines, an inter-dimensional portal opens, and he's knocked into oblivion by the Invisible Girl. It was a fun, fast-moving story with the soul satisfying inks of Chic Stone over Kirby's pencils (it even featured an early Kirby collage on page 11) with the return of one of the group's few actual supervillains. (Ironically, there was a debate on the letters page discussing the use of Communists as villains with fans falling on

either side of the discussion; the plain fact was that Communists were a great source of villainy that also provided bad guys with some real motivation for their attacks on the heroes.) The FF would begin adding to their roster of supervillains next ish with the first appearance of Diablo as hinted at by Lee in this issue's special announcements section: "Possibly one of the most exciting villains of the season!" That would be going some with the range of supervillains having been already introduced across Marvel's lineup in the preceding few months, but hey! By now, reader confidence in the Marvel Age of Comics was unbounded and Diablo as presented by Lee and Kirby promised to be another triumph!



THE NOTION OF HAVING HUMAN BEINGS HUNTED BY OTHER HUMANS WAS NOT A NEW IDEA BY THE TIME STAN LEE AND STEVE DITKO INTRODUCED KRAVEN THE HUNTER IN AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #15. BESIDES VARIOUS FRONTIER STORIES IN WHICH INDIANS HUNTED WHITE MEN, RICHARD CONNELL'S ORIGINAL SHORT STORY "THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME" HAD INSPIRED A 1932 FILM OF THE SAME NAME. STARRING STARLET FAY WRAY, THE MOVIE QUICKLY CAPTURED THE POPULAR IMAGINATION AND ENTERED THE CULTURAL MAINSTREAM.

Strange Tales #123

"The Birth of the Beetle!"; Stan Lee (script); Carl Burgos (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"The Challenge of Loki!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

The Human Torch finally received a colorfully costumed supervillain of his own in *Strange Tales* #123 (August 1964) with the advent of the Beetle! No, Marvel's Beetle had no relation to the rock group Beatles that had invaded America earlier in the year, but who knows? With the word "Beatles" in the air and on the minds of nearly everyone in 1964, it was quite possible that scripter Stan Lee was inspired to create Marvel's own Beetle in the form of the Beetle, a green and purple armored foe with extensile digits and heavy wings that somewhat implausibly allowed the villain to fly for short distances. Although regular penciler Dick Ayers wasn't on hand this time to do the art chores, long time company artist Carl Burgos was. Unfortunately, Burgos' unexciting style was just as bland as Ayers, so there was little improvement in the feature's art. Burgos' main claim to fame was his invention of the original Human Torch during the Timely era of Marvel comics back in the 1940s, but whatever cache he had back then was no longer observable by the mid-1960s. Though he succeeds somewhat in the first few pages of the story, telling of how inventor Abner Jenkins designs his Beetle outfit, when the action starts, Burgos falls flat. (While the Beetle's battle with the Torch here was unsatisfying, he'd be used to much better effect in later stories against other heroes) In a preview of a big change in the Torch strip, the Thing figures largely in the story, robbing the Torch of some of the spotlight. But as usual for *Strange Tales*, it's the second feature that's the real star attraction here, namely the Dr. Strange story where this time, the master of black magic is seemingly outmatched against Loki! It was a fun match up



MAYBE HIS HEART JUST WASN'T IN IT: SO GUESSED COLORIST STAN GOLDBERG OF CARL BURGOS' BRIEF RETURN TO MARVEL DURING THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION. IRONICALLY, BURGOS WAS ASSIGNED TO HIS OWN CREATION, THE HUMAN TORCH STRIP IN STRANGE TALES BUT FAILED TO GIVE THE SERIES A NEEDED ARTISTIC BOOST.

scripted by Lee (who also wrote the Thor strip over in *Journey Into Mystery* and so was familiar with the god of mischief's speech pattern and background), that also guest starred Thor, even though he and Strange never meet. The only strike against the story was the inking of George Bell over Ditko, which proved too rough and craggy (a close up of Thor's face on page 9 makes him look not only too old but malnourished!) Usually Ditko inked his own work for a more polished look, and he couldn't get back to it soon enough for art savvy fans! **Fun Fact:** Stan and Carl Burgos appear as themselves at the end of the Torch strip when they spot Johnny and Ben among the crowds attending the New York World's Fair!

Tales of Suspense #56

"The Uncanny Unicorn!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Though there'd been a scattering of complaints about the use of Communist based villains, there was no obvious slowdown in their number on the part of editor/scripter Stan Lee as he and artist Don Heck introduce yet another fun supervillain in *Tales of Suspense* #56 (August 1964): the Unicorn! The 18-page novel length epic opens with a suitable for framing splash page of Iron Man ripping apart Tony Stark's private lab. "I'm sick of being Iron Man," rages Tony Stark from inside the armor. "Sick of having to wear an electronic chest plate 24 hours a day! Sick of living on borrowed time...never knowing which moment will be my last!" IM's rage continues on page 2 until he finally calms down on page 3 where Heck uses a half page sized vertical panel to illustrate a despondent Iron Man, head in hands, sitting among the wreckage: "Nobody can help me! Nobody can repair my damaged heart. Nobody can guarantee how much longer it will keep beating! Nobody can ever know the torment felt by Iron Man!" It was an arresting scene drawn by Heck with accompanying Stan Lee scripted soliloquy that perfectly captured the secret tragedy that made the Iron Man character tick. It was the element missing from strips like Giant-Man or the Human Torch that kept them from joining others like Iron Man at the forefront of the Marvel revolution. And as Stark seeks to forget his worries by dating a society femme, it's then that the Unicorn chooses to strike. And when he does, Stark's neglect of his duty becomes the cause of Happy Hogan's hospitalization after he tries to stop the Unicorn himself followed quickly by the kidnapping of Pepper Potts. Sick with remorse, Iron Man tracks down the Unicorn as Pepper and the reader learn of the villain's origins behind the Iron Curtain and how his multiple powers derive from a power horn designed by the late Crimson

Dynamo before he defected. Although IM succeeds in rescuing Pepper, he's stymied when the Unicorn reveals there's a bomb in Stark's factory and unless Iron Man promises to come as his prisoner back to the USSR, he'll allow the bomb to explode. IM agrees, but his promise didn't include going to Russia, only in being taken prisoner. In their subsequent battle, the Unicorn escapes to fight another day and it was just as well, the way Heck drew this story, readers could only be salivating at his next appearance! (Not to mention the way cool Jack Kirby cover; Whoever said Kirby couldn't draw women needed to have his mouth washed out with soap!) But IM's victory is a somewhat hollow one. As Stark observes Pepper's concern for Happy while on a hospital visit, he realizes that his life as Iron Man, trapped as he was in his metal chest plate, gave him no right to make any romantic claims on Pepper. As for the Watcher story that backs up the main feature, it's merely forgettable.

Daredevil #3

"The Owl, Ominous Overlord of Crime!"; Stan Lee (script); Joe Orlando (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

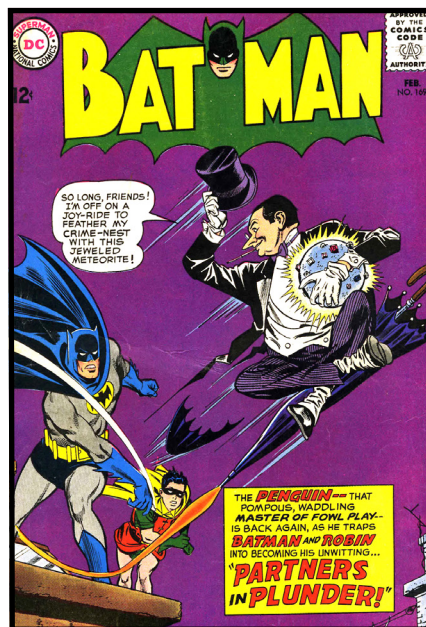
The Owl may not have been of the colorful supervillain variety, but he made up for it by simply being somewhat bizarre what with his ability to "glide on the air currents" despite being on the overly pudgy side! Furthermore, he was unique in that he preferred to haunt the canyons of Wall Street in search of prey rather than robbing banks or committing sabotage for the Communists. Soon enough though, he lowers his sights to engage in common brawling when New York's latest superhero makes the scene! Again, writer Stan Lee spends a good deal of time on the script for *Daredevil* #3 (August 1964), perhaps to compensate for penciler Joe Orlando's somewhat static art. That said, Orlando shows much improvement between this ish and the last, with more pages given over to DD in action. Ironically, in many instances, Orlando's work reveals the influence of mentor Wally Wood, who'd take over the strip with #5. As good as Wood's version of DD would be though, Orlando's effort here suggests that

given another issue or two, he could've come up to Marvel speed fairly quickly. As it was, inked by Vince Colletta, his work suited Lee's ground level tale of crooked business, high finance, and legal shenanigans that the early Daredevil stories seemed to gravitate to. In this case, Matt Murdock decides to defend the Owl in a tax evasion case and thereby becomes embroiled in a plot to let him take the fall. But the Owl reckons without DD. In their first encounter, however, our hero seemed less than impressive as he's forced to surrender when Karen Page is captured. Taken to the Owl's hideout located on an island in the harbor, DD and Karen are held prisoner in giant bird cages from which our hero manages to free them (With the aid of DD's trick billy club/cane and ongoing description of the use of his heightened senses by Lee). This entire sequence is nicely done by Orlando with plenty of opportunity to depict DD flying, twisting, and swinging as he goes from one cage to the other. In the end, the Feds swoop in but end up capturing only small fry while the big fish gets away. It was another solid entry for the new series (including another arresting Jack Kirby/Vince Colletta cover) that was quickly forming its own personality apart from Marvel's other offerings.

Journey Into Mystery #107

"When the Grey Gargoyle Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

And the cool new supervillains kept on coming! This time it's the Grey Gargoyle, a clumsy French chemist who accidentally spills a solution on himself and soon realizes he has the power to turn anything he touches into living stone! (The effect was later established to last for just an hour but here, editor/scripter Stan Lee couldn't seem to make up his mind if the effect was shorter or longer!) Now, even if his power could make him ruler of the Earth, Paul Duval realizes the accomplishment wouldn't mean a thing if he died too soon. Solution: seek out an immortal such as Thor and steal his hammer. (It was perhaps one of the most original motivations ever thought up for a villain as a reason to go after the good guy) Under the delusion



DC COMICS HAD THEIR OWN VILLAINOUS BIRD OF PREY BUT THE GIMMICKY PENGUIN USUALLY STAYED ON THE SILLY SIDE OF THE AISLE WHILE MARVEL'S OWL, DESPITE HIS SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE POWER OF FLIGHT (WAS HE A MUTANT?) REMAINED GROUNDED WITH BELIEVABLE UNDERWORLD HENCHMEN AND A WALL STREET HUNTING GROUND.

that the secret of Thor's immortality lies in his magic hammer, the Gargoyle confronts Thor and after brief battle, manages to separate the thunder god from his weapon. But the Gargoyle is unable to lift it allowing Thor time to grab it back. The action places Thor too close to the Gargoyle, who changes him to stone. Luckily, when the Thor "statue" is upset and falls over, the hammer strikes the ground first and transforms him back to Don Blake. Unwilling to chance changing back to Thor and finding himself stone again, Blake uses a 3-D projector and, mounting it on a motor cycle, projects an image of Thor in the sky and eventually lures the Gargoyle to the docks where he ends up in the drink, the weight of his stone body carrying him to the bottom. Whew! It was a rollicking good story filled with fast paced action by penciler Jack Kirby (inked by Chic Stone) who, as usual, had little time to spend on character building bits. Something that could readily be seen as the difference in emphasis between him and Lee. In books that Lee wrote apart from Kirby, there was usually much more in the way of characterization as witness this month's Iron Man story in *Tales of Suspense*, *Daredevil*, and *Spider-Man*. But that was okay. Maybe the Thor strip didn't need that. His ongoing relationship with Jane Foster and his simmering conflict with big daddy Odin were enough. And speaking of Odin, *Journey Into Mystery* #107 (August 1964) also featured the regular "Tales of Asgard" backup, this time it tells the tale of how Loki tried to kill Balder by taking advantage of his only weakness. (His invincibility would be conveniently ignored in future appearances, thus keeping some element of suspense when he went into action)

Avengers #7

"Their Darkest Hour!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

The creative team of sripter Stan Lee, penciler Jack Kirby, and inker Chic Stone were firing on all burners by the time of *Avengers* #7 (August 1964)! In an epic length 22-page story, the action goes in two directions before coming together in the final scenes. But unlike such plot gimmicks used at rival DC, where the heroes split off to tackle the same related threat separately only to come together in the end for a final victory, here, the two tracks are completely different and only thinly related. The Enchantress and the Executioner find themselves banished to Earth where they look up Zemo as a foe of the Avengers. They have something in common: Zemo wants revenge on Captain America and the two Asgardians want the same thing with Thor (except unbeknownst to the Executioner, the Enchantress doesn't want to kill Thor, but to make him her consort). She does so by



AVENGERS #7: SOMEWHAT LIKE MAGNETO OVER IN THE X-MEN TITLE, ZEMO WOULD BECOME A RECURRENT NEMESIS FOR THE AVENGERS OVER THEIR FIRST DOZEN ISSUES OR SO. AND LIKE MAGNETO, WOULD EVENTUALLY MEET A SEEMINGLY PERMANENT END. BUT NOT BEFORE HE BECAME THE CATALYST FOR MANY AN EXCITING AVENGERS YARN!

hypnotizing the thunder god and then commanding him to kill his teammates. Meanwhile, Cap is lured to South America where he battles Zemo's private army. When Zemo makes his escape via air ship to New York, Cap manages to cling to the outside of the vessel. While that's going on, Thor calls in Giant-Man and in a brief but very cool sequence by Kirby, he destroys high pockets' helicopter. Giant-Man makes it out in time by changing to super giant size in mid-air and using nearby skyscrapers to break his fall! Wild! Then Iron Man makes the scene (breaking parole after he was banished from team activities because he failed to heed a request for aid back in *Suspense* #56...a small but significant detail by Lee that further helped boost continuity across

his line of superhero comics) and manages to break the hypnotic spell holding Thor in thrall. Suddenly the two near unrelated threads of the story come together when Zemo's ship arrives, but too late! With only one more page to finish the fight, Kirby winds things up fast by having the bad guys escape to fight another day. While the Avengers only managed to preserve the status quo ante, it was another wild, thrilling, deeply satisfying jaunt in both story and art for the Marvel Age of Comics. One that surely left readers panting for more of perhaps the perfect Avengers creative team!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #9

"Mission: Capture Adolph Hitler!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

As if trying to make up for the loss of momentum with the departure of original artist Jack Kirby, scribe Stan Lee comes up with the Howlers' most impossible mission yet: capture Adolph Hitler! In an action-packed tale, the Howlers actually succeed (after encountering Baron Strucker and battling their way through a battalion of SS and Gestapo troops) but when they present their prisoner to Happy Sam Sawyer, Hitler turns out to be one the doubles that the Fuhrer was rumored to employ. It didn't matter though, as Lee's script, filled with the usual blend of action and humor, keeps the story barreling along. So much so that the still disappointing fact that Dick Ayers had replaced Kirby on the art can almost be overlooked (Except for the cover, one of the few times that Kirby didn't draw it). Helping the art on *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #9* (August 1964) are the inks of George Roussos. Not a preferred inker most of the time due to his thick, at times clumsy style, here it works better than one might expect, bringing Ayers' fuzzy, awkward work into better focus particularly on the opening pages, where Fury is on a date with Pamela Hawley before reporting to Sawyer for his next mission. One interesting note is that Lee departs from the standard dismissal of the Nazis as one note bad guys with his inclusion of an unnamed German underground agent who aids the Howlers in their mission only to give his life for its success. **Fun Fact:** This issue's letters' page features a missive from fan Dave Cockrum who expresses surprise and delight at the story in *Sgt. Fury #6* wherein Lee and Kirby address the sensitive subject of racism. "You guys will always be my first choice" insists Cockrum about his comic preferences. Ironically, after Cockrum became a professional comics artist later in the twilight years, he began his career at DC, not Marvel!



MARVEL TALES #1: WITH NEW READERS CONSTANTLY JUMPING ON THE MARVEL BANDWAGON AND SO HAVING MISSED CHARACTERS' EARLY APPEARANCES, EDITOR STAN LEE RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS WITH A NEW TITLE RELEASED IN THE SUMMER OF 1964. THIS WRITER, AT LEAST, FOUND THE .25 COVER PRICE WORTH IT TO BE CAUGHT UP TO SPEED!

Marvel Tales #1

Stan Lee (editor/scripter); Jack Kirby/Don Heck/ Steve Ditko (pencilers)

Now, near the start of the years of consolidation, only a few years since the debut of *Fantastic Four #1*, Marvel's growing success showed no signs of slowing down. In fact, it continued to grow, and quickly, with new readers being added to its fan base every month. Things were at the point by *Marvel Tales #1* (August 1964) that there were far more newer readers than those who'd been on board since those first, formative months. Consequently, there were many who'd never read the origins and/or earliest issues of the company's major stars and who began to ask about them, including if Marvel sold back issues. Unfortunately for newcomers, Marvel didn't hold on

to back issues, with editor Stan Lee often directing curious readers to ads elsewhere in the company's titles placed by dealers in old comics. But it didn't take much for Lee (or publisher Martin Goodman) to see that there was money to be made in reprinting past issues of their comics (particularly when the company didn't pay writers and artists residuals for reprinting their work...a practice common in the industry). Thus, *Marvel Tales* was born with a formula that would prove so successful, it would spawn a number of similar titles all reprinting past Marvel product even its long forgotten Golden Age material from the 1940s in *Fantasy Masterpieces* with new covers by artist Jack Kirby. For his initial foray into the reprint market, Lee

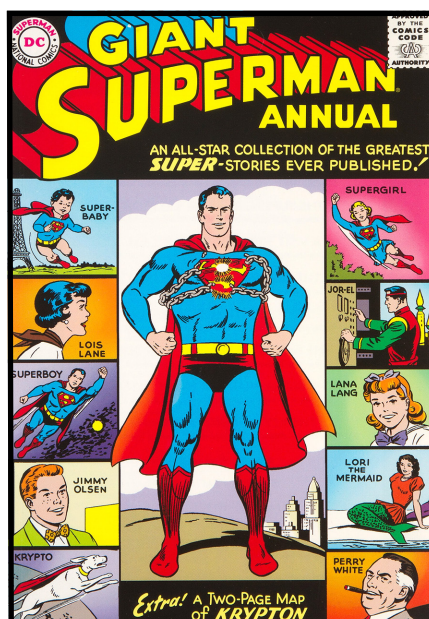
decided to go all the way back to the beginnings of the Marvel Age and re-present the origins of Marvel's most iconic characters including Spider-Man, Hulk, Thor, Giant-Man, and Iron Man in an oversized, 72 page format in the style of the annuals the company had begun to produce in 1962 with *Strange Tales Annual* #1. The only problem for fans who were completists, some of the stories were edited for space considerations. Thus, the Sgt. Fury "origin" only featured the first few pages of the character's first issue. Likewise, Giant-Man only included a two-page sequence from *Astonish* #49 (although it did feature the full length origin of Ant-Man) The Hulk included only the first five pages of his origin from *Hulk* #1 while Spidey's origin was taken from his first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy* #15. However, the Iron Man section did include, in addition to his full origin from *Suspense* #39, the four page sequence featured in *Suspense* #48 wherein he refashioned his old armor into his newer red and gold outfit. So, there were positives and negatives here for newer readers

(who might not have discovered the truncated nature of some of the entries until years afterward) but there was one small incentive for old timers to also buy the 25 cent *Annual*, namely a two-page spread with photos of members of Marvel's Bullpen, folks that readers had come to know from credit boxes and information doled out by Lee on letters' pages. Here, albeit in grainy black and white photos, were revealed for the first time the images of Lee himself, Jack Kirby, Don Heck, Dick Ayers, Chic Stone, Larry

Lieber, even publisher Martin Goodman, letterers Sam Rosen and Artie Simek, gal Friday Flo Steinberg, and "campus rep" Debby Ackerman! The only person of consequence missing was Steve Ditko, who would eventually be recognized as permanently camera shy. The success of *Marvel Tales* would be quickly followed by *Marvel Collectors' Item Classics* and *Marvel Superheroes* both published in the same format but headlined by reprints of the *FF* and the *Avengers*.

Tales to Astonish #59

"Enter the Hulk!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)



USING DOUBLE SIZED SPECIAL ISSUES TO FILL IN CURRENT READERS WITH PAST STORIES WAS NOTHING NEW. DC COMICS HAD USED THE FORMAT FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS. WHAT WAS DIFFERENT WAS MARVEL'S SUDDEN NEED TO REPRINT PAST TALES THAT WERE ONLY TWO OR THREE YEARS OLD.

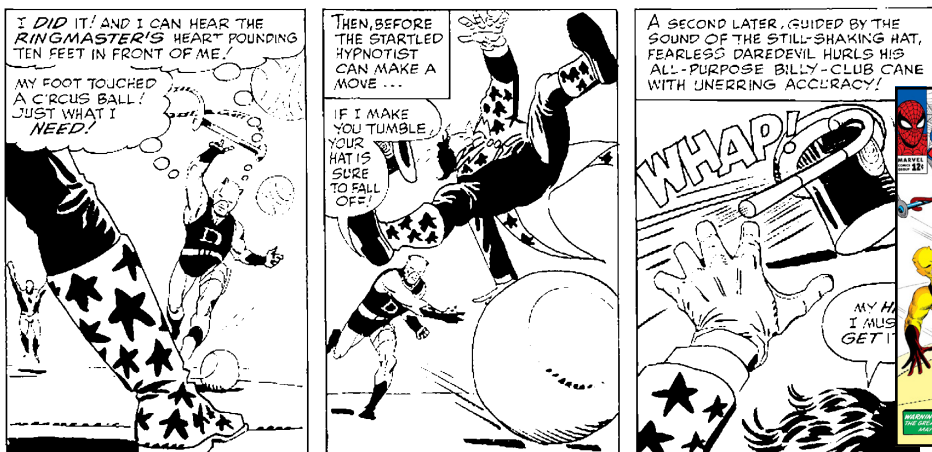
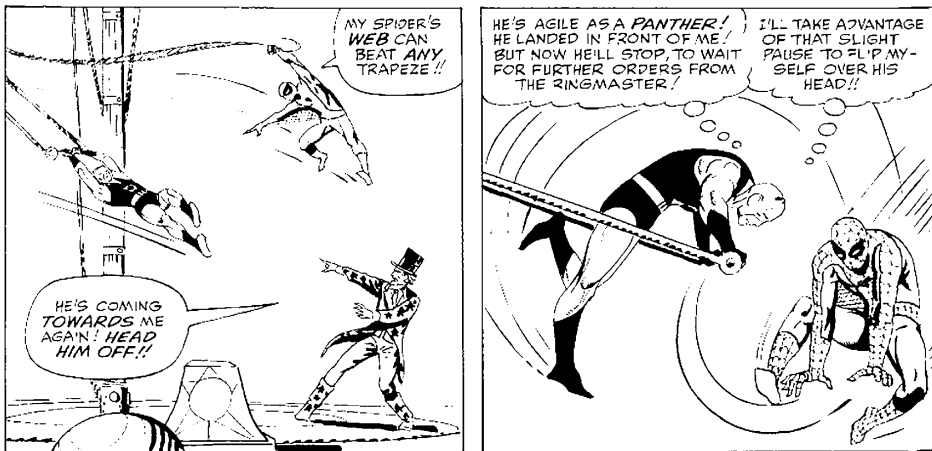
It was another disappointment with its incredibly dramatic cover by Jack Kirby showing an impressive looking Giant-Man reeling back in the face of the Hulk's attack. The illo was further dramatized by Stan Goldberg's shaded coloring of the major figures against an all-white background. But *Tales to Astonish* #59 (Sept. 1964) was a disappointment because Kirby didn't draw the insides. At one time, such a momentous confrontation would have merited a special fill in by the action king, but not this time. Inside, the story was once again penciled by Dick Ayers albeit in a somewhat better presentation due to the brushwork of Paul Reinman. Somehow, Reinman's heavy inks made Ayers' pencils in many places actually decent. Unfortunately, in many others, his awkward, even comical posturing of human figures is unfortunate, robbing scenes of any inherent drama. The story by scripter Stan Lee though is a good one with a reasonable set up for the Giant-Man/Hulk confrontation. Adding suspense to the tale, is the presence of the conniving Human Top, who schemes to kill Giant-Man.

He does it by telling General "Thunderbolt" Ross that the Hulk is in a nearby deserted town and it was the Army's chance to destroy him with a nuclear missile. The missile is duly launched with the Wasp aboard trying to defuse it. Failing at that, she warns Giant-Man cybernetically, and Giant-Man convinces the Hulk to deflect the missile. Whew! It was a solid story but to no avail! Because this was actually an intro to big changes to *Astonish* due to occur in the very next

issue. Namely, the beginning of Marvel's "split book" era. Due to rising demand by readers to give homeless characters like the Hulk their own features and limitations by the company's magazine distributor regarding its ability to launch new titles, editor Lee was forced into the expedient of having characters share the same titles. Hence, Iron Man would share billing with Captain America in *Tales of Suspense*, the Human Torch with

Dr. Strange over in *Strange Tales* (formalizing an arrangement that had been going on for some time), and here in *Astonish*, with Giant-Man dividing the book between himself and the Hulk starting in the next issue. (The move also put the kibosh on the last vestiges of fantasy tales that had marked the pre-hero era.) The news was announced in a very splashy way with a full page ad immediately following this issue's main story with a big, Kirby drawn Hulk figure dominating a blurb laden page: "Hulk lovers of the world!" screamed the headline. "A special announcement of almost earth-shattering importance!!!!" (Yeah, Lee used four exclamation points after that line!) And as if all that

wasn't enough, readers this issue were treated to a five page "Secrets of Giant-Man" feature that covered details of his size changing abilities, strength and agility levels (did you know that Giant-Man could halve a telephone pole with a single karate chop?), and a schematic of Giant-Man's split level penthouse suite atop a lower Manhattan skyscraper. Yup, it sure looked like Marvel was on the march!



Amazing Spider-Man #16

"Duel With Daredevil!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

For a rollickin' good time, all fans needed to do was check out *Amazing Spider-Man* #16 (Sept. 1964)! For a change of pace, scripter Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko decided to dispense with most of Peter Parker's angst issues and go for a nearly cover-to-cover actioner as Spidey first tangles with new hero on the block Daredevil and

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #16, PAGE 13: TOO BAD ARTIST STEVE DITKO COULDN'T HAVE HANDLED BOTH THE SPIDEY AND DD BOOKS! BECAUSE AS HE DEMONSTRATES HERE ON THIS VIRTUAL DAREDEVIL SOLO PAGE, THE ACROBATICALLY SIMILAR CHARACTERS AND THEIR STREET LEVEL ENVIRONMENTS, WERE BOTH DEFINITELY IN STEVE'S WHEELHOUSE! BY THIS TIME, DITKO HAD FULLY TRANSITIONED FROM THE LIGHT FANTASY TALES OF YORE TO SUPERHEROES AND HAD ALL THE LATTER'S VISUAL TROPES DOWN.

then with the Ringmaster and his Circus of Crime. After a brief intro in which Spidey inadvertently rescues Matt Murdock from being molested by some bad guys, readers are introduced to the Circus of Crime, their first appearance since getting mixed up with the Hulk in his own late, lamented mag. Besides the Ringmaster himself, the circus includes such soon to become classic members as the Great Gambinos and Cannonball. (Sorry fans, Princess Python and the Crafty Clown would have to wait for their debuts in *Spidey #22*) Here, Matt Murdock finds himself at the circus with law partner Foggy Nelson and secretary Karen Page while Spidey shows up because the Ringmaster had cynically advertised that he'd appear for charity so as to ensure a capacity crowd. The Ringmaster goes into his routine of hypnotizing the audience (including Spider-Man) in order to have his minions pick their pockets, but his powers have no effect on the blind Murdock. Changing into his costume, DD goes into brief action against Spidey as Ditko begins immediately to take advantage of big top accouterments such as trapezes and such to illustrate their encounter. But Spidey and DD's first meeting amounts more to a chase than a fight until DD manages to reach the Ringmaster and use his hat to un-hypnotize Spider-Man. After Spidey comes to his senses, the two proceed to lay waste the Circus. (Actually, the Circus of Crime with members' varied, low level, non-super-powered skill sets, was never better than when they faced off against Spider-Man; their appearances elsewhere were always less than satisfying.) As the fight progresses, it's soon apparent to DD that Spidey can handle Circus members all by himself. He decides to sit out the rest of the fight and just enjoy the show! Meanwhile, Ditko goes into high gear and lets his imagination go wild as he puts Spidey through his paces, with one spectacular set up after another (Like jumping on a giant barbell while it's being held by two clowns socking them unconscious as he goes!). Pages 15-19 are just totally freewheeling, Ditko-ized thrills like no one who ever went to the circus ever saw (But wished they had)! Meanwhile, Lee was at his best dialoguing the action combining humor and drama in an effortless verbal ballet. Oh! This was the Spider-Man strip at its very peak of perfection, a streak that would last straight through to the end of Ditko's tenure on the book. But after all that action, there was little room for Peter Parker's usual gaggle of personal problems, so Lee and Ditko's one concession in that regard is yet another attempt by Aunt May to set Peter up with the mysterious Mary Jane Watson (Ugh!). Peter avoids that dire fate by leaving the house for some fast web swinging. Whew!

Fantastic Four #30

"The Dreaded Diablo!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Unjustly maligned as one of the worst villains Marvel ever created (even editor and co-creator Stan Lee disowned him at one point), Diablo actually isn't anything of the sort. Based on medieval chemists who mixed and matched elements to see if their combinations would turn into anything different other than their separate elements (such as turning lead into gold), Diablo was an interesting take on that concept with the added catch that none of his alchemical potions would last more than a few days. Fittingly, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby place Diablo in Transylvania (natch!) where he was entombed by angry and fearful locals generations before. But his spirit is still active, and when the Fantastic Four arrive in the area on vacation, Diablo is able to make a connection with the Thing's mind and, leading him to his tomb, Ben is compelled to free the villain. Freed, Diablo begins a campaign to convince the world that his potions will grant it all kinds of benefits, beginning with the Thing, whom he changes into a cross between his rocky self and his human form. That sets up a conflict between the Thing and the rest of the FF as they battle Diablo. It was a solid story that provided Kirby and inker Chic Stone with plenty of opportunity for exciting visuals beginning right off with the opening splash page wherein the FF are lost in the woods and continuing on to the team's fight against Diablo's private army. On page 20, Kirby employs four big quarter page panels to show how the Thing crushes a suit of armor into a ball of metal that he uses on the next page to herd Diablo toward his tomb. In somewhat of a rushed finish, Kirby shows



BEFORE PETER PARKER HAD HIS ISSUES WITH BLIND DATE MARY JANE WATSON, WALLY CLEAVER HAD THE SAME PROBLEM A FEW YEARS BEFORE IN THE CLASSIC 1959 "BLIND DATE COMMITTEE" EPISODE OF THE POPULAR TV SHOW LEAVE IT TO BEAVER.

Diablo's castle falling into ruin from the Thing's blows in a single, tiny panel...a scene that in later years, he'd surely have taken a full page to depict! The story in *Fantastic Four* #30 (Sept. 1964) ends on a light note as the FF find themselves once more lost in the forest as they were at the start!

Strange Tales #124

"Paste-Pot Pete"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

"The Lady From Nowhere!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Bell (inks)

It continued to be difficult to appreciate scribe Stan Lee's stories for the Human Torch feature in *Strange Tales*, what with Dick Ayers' sub-standard art (not helped in *Strange Tales* #124 [Sept. 1964]) by the rough inks of Paul Reinman) In a perfect example of how Ayers could flub it, we have here the return of old Torch enemy Paste-Pot Pete, he of the unfortunate name. Old time readers would remember how he looked in his first appearance: like some mad artist hauling around an open bucket of paste from which a tube emerged connecting it to a paste gun. Such an ensemble wouldn't fly in the new Marvel Age of Comics. Consequently, for his return, in his capacity as editor, Lee likely instructed Ayers to come up with a better look for Pete. It can be inferred that it was indeed Ayers who was to blame for the unimpressive look by the fact that he drew this issue's cover as well as the insides. (And not Kirby who would go on to design a much better look for Pete in an upcoming issue of the *Fantastic Four*...perhaps again at the suggestion of Lee; nevertheless, there is some evidence that Kirby may indeed have been responsible for Pete's new duds. Re: *Strange Tales* #93, "The Man Who Shrunk the World") But here, Ayers comes up with a bulging vest affair that only made Pete's arms and legs look more spindly than they would normally appear. And despite not having the imagination to also change his name to go with his new look, Pete nevertheless gives both the Torch and the Thing a run for their money before his inevitable defeat. And speaking of the Thing, he was beginning to be a regular guest in the Torch's strip, a situation that became official with this ish. From here on in, the Thing was to be the Torch's co-star in *Strange Tales*. Likely an attempt by Lee to drum up interest in the feature at a time when it was becoming obvious that the Thing's popularity with readers was outstripping that of the Torch. It would still fail, and within a year the strip would be replaced by a whole new feature. In a healthier condition was the Dr. Strange half of the book that this time featured a story titled "The Lady From Nowhere." Strange battles a villain called Zota over the fate of a



JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #108: STAN GOLDBERG'S FREQUENT DECISION TO GO TO YELLOW AS HIS DEFAULT BACKGROUND COLOR ON SELECT MARVEL COVERS GUARANTEED EYEBALLS AT THE OLE SPINNER RACK!

mystery woman caught in a kind of trance. Our hero overcomes Zota and frees the woman whose identity presents the story with its bit of a twist. Somewhat slight for a Strange yarn, but that would be made up for in future installments...and how!

Journey Into Mystery #108

"At the Mercy of Loki, Prince of Evil!";

Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Aw rats! Did Marvel really have to waste the primo Kirby/Stone art team on yet another Loki story? Oh well, at least between them, scribe Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby made it impossible to produce a bad story no matter what the subject. Add to that a little sweetener in the form of guest appearances not only by Thor's fellow Avengers, Giant-Man and Iron Man, but also Dr. Strange and you've got another winner from the House of Ideas! And it didn't hurt

either for *Journey Into Mystery* #108 (Sept. 1964) to have an action-packed cover drawn by Kirby and colored in another eye catching manner by Stan Goldberg. (Goldberg's decision to use a bright yellow background behind Thor's primary colors and Loki's greens was inspiring! Hey, the same background worked for the supremely beautiful cover of #105, so why not try it again?) As for the story inside, it gets complicated and again, readers had to hand it to Lee and Kirby for being able to cram so much detail into a mere 18 pages! It begins with Thor coming to the aid of Dr. Strange, who's been injured in a battle with Baron Mordo. (By the way, Strange himself had only concluded his own battle with Loki in last month's *Strange Tales*) Surgery is required, but during the operation, Odin demands Thor's help in Asgard. Dr. Blake refuses to leave his patient. Then, as Odin and the rest of the gods go into battle, Loki sneaks to Earth and manages to separate Blake from his cane. Revealing himself, Loki then kidnaps Jane Foster, imprisoning her in limbo. To find his cane, Blake enlists the aid of Dr. Strange and, in possession of it once again, becomes Thor and rushes off to confront Loki. But not before dispatching Strange to limbo to protect Jane. Now readers had a chance to enjoy seeing Kirby draw the Avengers again (something he'd end up not doing very often; in fact, it was likely that very infrequency that made him slip up now and then where costuming was concerned because here again, he gets Giant-Man's gloves wrong while forgetting to include the pods on Iron Man's waist) Anyway, Thor finally comes face to face with Loki and over four pages, Kirby lets loose for some really good action between the two foes, something that would actually be pretty rare through his tenure on the Thor feature. In sum, even though this was another case of Thor battling an Asgardian menace rather than an earthbound one (the difference being that in fighting magic-based battles, normal rules of engagement could be suspended, making for a general lack of suspense), it still turned out to be a fast action gem! But for those fans who craved more mythology and less superheroics, there was always this issue's "Tales of Asgard" entry, where Thor finds himself "Trapped by the Trolls!" The most noteworthy thing about this story, besides the great Lee/Kirby presentation, was the arrival of Vince Colletta on the inks. Right away, he transforms the feel of the strip from pumped-up superheroics to ancient myths retold. His inks on the opening splash page are stunning in their revelatory nature and page 2 is to die for! It all presaged the oncoming years wherein Colletta would become the main feature's inker as well, as helping to propel the Thor strip into the forefront of Marvel's grandiose movement.

X-Men #7

"The Return of the Blob!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

With *X-Men* #7 (Sept. 1964), Chic Stone was now on duty inking Jack Kirby's pencils everywhere the action king appeared, including covers, giving Marvel a uniform look across its entire line of superhero books. And though Kirby would be winding down his direct involvement in some of his regular assignments, that "look" would continue to dominate. And nowhere was that look more obvious than in Marvel's three team books: the *Fantastic Four*, the *Avengers*, and the *X-Men*! And in this ish, Kirby was called upon to render super-human services as he filled the story not only with the X-Men, but the "Evil You Know Who's" (the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, natch!), the Blob, a circus full of "hey rubes," and a club full of beatniks! Scriptor Stan Lee and Kirby's story is jam packed with delights and surprises including the continued development of the X-Men themselves. It begins with an opening splash page of the team's graduation from students to full-fledged superheroes to Prof. X's appointment of Cyclops as group leader. "Without you, we would have remained misfits in a world that could never understand us," remarks Marvel Girl to Prof. X. "With no purpose, no goals." But the X-Men have



SCRIPTOR STAN LEE HILARIOUSLY CAPTURES THE LATE 1950S, EARLY 60S BEAT SCENE DURING INTERLUDES IN THE X TITLE WHEN STRAIGHT LACED BEAST AND ICE MAN BECOME ITEMS AT A FAVORITE GREENWICH VILLAGE CLUB. THE BEAT MOVEMENT WAS A PRECURSOR TO THE LATER HIPPIE SCENE WITH ITS ANTI-ESTABLISHMENTARIAN APPROACH TO MAINSTREAM VALUES INCLUDING THOSE DEALING WITH DRUGS AND SEX. KEY ELEMENTS OF SELF-EXPRESSION COVERED POETRY, ART, AND DANCE. ALL OF WHICH LEE POKED AT WITH GENTLE FUN.

not only become professional superheroes, they've also finished their regular schooling by completing their "normal prep school curriculum." And well ahead of such peers as Peter Parker and the Human Torch, both of whom wouldn't graduate for another year! In contrast, Lee and Kirby then take readers into Magneto's camp, where the group dynamics there are quite the opposite of the X-Men: there, suspicions, jealousies, and troubled consciences rule in place of happiness, satisfaction, and loyalty. Magneto announces his latest plan that involves the recruitment of the Blob for the Brotherhood and departs for the circus. There, he reveals a new power: Besides controlling magnetism and being able to project his astral form outside his body, the most dangerous mutant in the world can also apparently read or influence the minds of others. These last powers would be played down over the subsequent years, but they're established here. Meanwhile, back with the X-Men, Cyclops as the new team leader, is introduced to Cerebro (shown on page 5, panel 6 with one of the craziest designs Kirby had yet come up with), a machine used to detect the existence of other mutants. Cyclops' new responsibilities weigh heavily on him, further accentuating an already established sense of loneliness and isolation. That in turn works to prevent intimacy with his teammates and in particular, Marvel Girl, for whom he'd develop a rivalry with the more outgoing Angel. Adding to Cyke's woes is the news that Prof. X has to leave on a mysterious errand that he can share with no one. What that errand will be, won't be revealed for another couple issues. But while all that's going on, the other team members go into town for some celebrating at a local coffee house where the Beast and Iceman are introduced to the beat scene. There, the Beast becomes the scene's new idol: "Wait till Bernard sees them," says a beat of the Beast's outsized feet. "He'll write a new poem immediately!" "This could start a whole new cult," says another, "We'll call ourselves barefoot beats!" In addition, the scene introduces some female companions, Zelda and Vera, who were destined to become series regulars in the months to come. But the party breaks up all too soon, as the X-Men are called to battle the Blob and the Brotherhood, resulting in another stalemate, except that the Blob himself calls it quits. "I'm through with mutants. Through with fighting other people's fights," he says. Boy, there was a lot going on here but for some reason, fans weren't glomming onto this book the way they were with the *Avengers* which went monthly long before the *X-Men*. It was a head scratcher for sure, because the X-book was easily as good as the *Avengers*, and maybe better!



EVERYONE IS FAMILIAR WITH THE LAND BATTLE FOR THE ISLAND OF OKINAWA WHICH LASTED FROM APRIL 1 TO JUNE 22, 1945 AND THAT INVOLVED SOME OF THE MOST SAVAGE FIGHTING OF WWII; BUT LESS KNOWN WAS THE CONCURRENT BATTLE AT SEA WHERE THE DANGER CAME LARGELY FROM JAPANESE SUICIDE PLANES KNOWN AS KAMIKAZES WHICH STRUCK MANY SHIPS INCLUDING SEVERAL FLEET CARRIERS.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #10

"On to Okinawa!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

It was "On to Okinawa" for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #10* (Sept. 1964) and on to continuity confusion! Assuming the Commandos up until now (and likely for the duration of the series) had been operating from a base in England at a time before the invasion of Europe (in #6 they went after Rommel, where the battle for North Africa was still going on), then the Howlers' mission this issue to Okinawa is way off base! The invasion of Okinawa took place only a month before victory was declared in Europe in May 1945. So was this issue's story a flash forward? If so, readers were robbed of any suspense regarding the survivability of any of the Howlers during the war. Furthermore, the man the Howlers are to rescue from Japanese captivity on Okinawa is said to have been with Fury during the Battle of the Bulge! Hoo boy! Scripter Stan Lee must have really been asleep at the switch for this one! (He'd commit a similar historical error over in the *Two-Gun Kid* book, but that's a story for another entry.) It would've been better if he'd simply let the island remain nameless but then he'd lose the element he was likely after: name recognition of a famous battle. Be that as it may, the rest of the book follows the usual course of Fury's impossible missions, and everyone makes it back to

England safely (where they could begin celebrating VE Day?). There's an ironic finish to the issue however, when Fury tells girlfriend Pamela Hawley about the mission and she replies (as anyone would at this point) "Honestly, Nicholas! Can't you ever be serious?" **Fun Fact:** The one good thing about this ish is the first appearance of "the Skipper," the unnamed submarine commander who'd end up ferrying the Howlers on many of their missions and become a fan favorite. Readers would begin to demand his real name and back story. It would take a few years, but eventually Lee would get around to it by giving the Skipper his own book calling it *Capt. Savage and His Leatherneck Raiders!*

Avengers #8

"Kang, the Conqueror!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Sadly, *Avengers* #8 (Sept. 1964) would be the last issue drawn by Jack Kirby. Oh, sure, he'd be around for a couple more years doing the covers but as for the interiors, this would be his last hurrah. But he'd done what he had to do: successfully launch Marvel's answer to DC's *Justice League of America*, giving it enough momentum not only to quickly become a monthly offering, but to continue without him for decades to come. And what an issue he chose to leave with! Up to now, the Avengers had had to contend with a number of supervillains, but mostly villains they'd encountered in their individual titles (even Captain America was supposed to have met Zemo during World War II). But now, at last, the team was to get its very own, all original, arch-enemy in the shape of Kang, the Conqueror from the future. Oh, sure, there'd later be a question whether Kang was the future incarnation of the time traveling Rama-Tut from *Fantastic Four* #19 (and by extension maybe even of Dr. Doom), but that possibility hadn't been firmly established at this point. In any case, like the Avengers, no Marvelite had yet met Kang, a villain who'd return again and again to meet the team in battle, the only obstacle to his conquest of the twentieth century. (It would only be in the late twilight years that writer Roger Stern would tackle the myriad time paradoxes created by Kang's many trips to the twentieth century, but that's a story for another time.) Here, Kirby and scribe Stan Lee (aided this time not by Chic Stone but former inker Dick Ayers who does a bang up job replacing Stone's heavy ink lines with a lighter touch of his own) have Kang suddenly appear outside Washington and after defeating the Army, relaxes on an invisible floating cushion. Until the Avengers show up. "You who call

yourself Kang," says Iron Man in his most officious manner. "State your business here, by order of the Avengers!" After explaining his intention to conquer, the Avengers attack and are confronted with Kang's weapons of the future including the ability to shunt Thor's hammer into sub-space and back! The story is filled with great Kirby shots, including the arrival of the Avengers at their mansion on page 2 (with a big three quarter sized panel); big double panels showing future warfare on page 8; Giant-Man going into action by grabbing Kang and bending him almost double in his huge hands; and Kang's cool sparkle force field (shown in dramatic fashion on this issue's cover). The whole thing had an epic, *Day the Earth Stood Still* vibe to it that only Kirby could capture, all topped off by the unlikely team of the Wasp and Rick Jones and his Teen Brigade coming to the rescue of the rest of the team! It was a sprawling, awe inspiring tale of wonder, action, and adventure that only the team of Lee and Kirby could produce in these years, making it all the more disappointing that there'd be no more like it for the *Avengers* title. Of course, Lee would soldier on as the scribe for the book and Don Heck would take over on the art. Their stories would be just as good but necessarily different, because there was nobody really who could touch the King when it came to tales such as this. However, his giving up the art chores on the *Avengers* was part of a general retreat by Kirby as he first let go *Sgt. Fury*, then the *Avengers*, and finally the *X-Men* as the years of consolidation wore on. He'd pick up other features like the new Captain America strip in *Suspense*, but never again would he seem to be everywhere at once.



SCENES IN THE MOVIE THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951) SHOWING THE US ARMY SCRAMBLING TO SECURE AN ALIEN SPACE SHIP THAT HAD LANDED ON THE WASHINGTON MALL. MUST HAVE BEEN ON ARTIST JACK KIRBY'S MIND WHEN HE DREW THE OPENING PANELS OF AVENGERS #8!

Fantastic Four #31

"The Mad Menace of the Macabre Mole Man!";
Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

By now, the team of editor/scripter Stan Lee, penciler Jack Kirby, and inker Chic Stone had it all together! Every story they did together, whether here in *Fantastic Four* #31 (Oct. 1964), or the *Avengers*, *X-Men*, on Thor, or later on Captain America, turned to instant gold. Storytelling and art were so well synchronized as to appear seamless. And with the growth in confidence came taking some risks, including a subplot that begins this issue, laying the groundwork for events in the next. Sure, Marvel had experimented

with continued stories before, usually restricted to two parts and always in those books where the superhero character was merely the lead feature. Elsewhere, Lee and Kirby began to explore interconnected but not necessarily continued stories, such as the tight Brotherhood of Evil Mutants cycle in *X-Men* and the Hulk/Zemo through lines in *Avengers*. But longer, even ongoing storylines that were directly connected and went on beyond a couple issues were on the horizon, and a taste of that can be found here as the Invisible Girl is upset at something she reads in the newspaper about an escaped convict. Though she refuses to speak about it to Reed, readers will discover in the next ish that it has something to do with her and Johnny's missing father. For now though, it's action time again as the Mole Man returns for a third bite at the apple (and the last time versus the FF in their own regular book at least until issue #89; it seemed that this early villain was considered unsuited for the demands of the intervening grandiose years) This time, the villain is experimenting with a new device that can steal whole city blocks and sink them into his underground lair. (Just how does it work? Never mind! It gives Kirby an excuse to come up with some fun visuals, including a half page sized panel leading off page 4!) Mole Man uses the device to kidnap the Invisible Girl after determining which city block she's in, and when they try to rescue her, the rest of the team are forced to retreat. That's when they run into the Avengers, who've also come to investigate and end up battling them briefly before explaining the situation. (It was always an occasion when the Kirby/Stone team had a chance to draw the Avengers; it was a hoot here to see the Thing collaring Giant-Man just as he leaps into the hole created by the missing block!) Given some breathing space, Mr. Fantastic comes up with a device ("It's an experimental Army hover-cycle which I modified with increased jet power," explains Reed) that can fly them down to the Mole Man's cavern by another route burned by the Human Torch. They rescue Sue, but not before she's injured. Rushing her to the hospital they're told that there's an expert who could perform the surgery, but no one knows where he is. In fact, he was in prison until escaping, as Sue read in the paper on page 3. The shocker comes at the end when he shows up at the hospital and is revealed to be Sue and Johnny's father! A next issue blurb promises all the answers in the next issue. It would be a long wait until then!



EDITOR STAN LEE'S FEARLESS USE OF COVER BLURBS CONVEYS THE BREATHLESS EXCITEMENT THAT SURELY AWAITED READERS INSIDE FANTASTIC FOUR #31! FROM THE ALLITERATIVE STORY TITLE TO THE HINT OF MORE SURPRISES AWAITING WITHIN TO HYPING UP THE STORY'S VILLAIN, NO CARNIVAL BARKER COULD HAVE DONE A BETTER JOB PROMOTING THE MARVEL BRAND.



REED RICHARDS AND SUSAN STORM WEREN'T THE ONLY CELEBS CATCHING THE ATTENTION OF THE PAPARAZZI AROUND THE TIME OF STRANGE TALES #125! SO WERE RICHARD BURTON AND ELIZABETH TAYLOR WHO TIED THE KNOT (FOR THE FIRST TIME) ON MARCH 15, 1964 IN MONTREAL, CANADA.

Strange Tales #125

"The Sub-Mariner Must Be Stopped!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

"Mordo Must Not Catch Me!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

In what amounted to an extended joke complete with punch lines, the Human Torch story for *Strange Tales* #125 (Oct. 1964), with its Dick Ayers/George Roussos artwork was somewhat less than compelling. In a nutshell, after the Thing again shoehorns himself into the action, he and the Torch chase off a pair of reporters due to jealousy over Reed and Sue, who get more attention from the paparazzi than they do. Hearing reports of the Sub-Mariner being nearby, the two decide to tackle him by themselves in order to drum up some publicity of their own. A fight ensues, but it's inconclusive except for the fact that they soon learn from Mr. Fantastic that Subby was coming to New York to discuss peace and their fight ruined that chance. Bummer! Even worse, the pair find out that the two reporters they chased off at the beginning of the story were there to interview Reed and Sue for a surprise article about the Thing and the Torch. Hoo boy! (And was it coincidence that those two reporters looked an awful lot like Stan Lee [without his hairpiece] and Jack Kirby?) By comparison, the Dr. Strange half of the book was a relief in terms of interest, despite Steve Ditko's pencils being held back somewhat by George Roussos' heavy inks. Unfortunately, the story itself presents nothing too original as Strange battles yet again with Baron Mordo, who has again captured the Ancient One, forcing Strange to fight

off his nemesis at the same time as he seeks to rescue his mentor. In a way, this story is a dry run for a later, similar but groundbreaking serial in which Strange is chased everywhere by Mordo and his minions. In that story, the Ancient One is blessedly sidetracked in favor of new arch-villain Dormammu.

Tales of Suspense #58

"In Mortal Combat With Captain America!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils) Dick Ayers (inks)

Like *Astonish* #59, *Tales of Suspense* #58 (Oct. 1964) was a prep issue that served to introduce the title's new co-star by having him tangle first with the current feature's protagonist before being launched into his own series with the following issue. *Astonish* did it by having Giant-Man tangle with the Hulk. Here, editor/scripter Stan Lee finds a way to have Captain America and Iron Man trade blows before the former went solo with #59. More specifically, Iron Man catches Kraven the Hunter and the Chameleon as they try to sneak back into the country after being deported at the end of *Spidey* #15. Although IM catches Kraven, the Chameleon gets away, vowing to defeat Iron Man himself. His plan calls for imitating Captain America and informing Iron Man that the Chameleon has replaced him. Iron Man charges off after the real Cap and ends up in a cement factory where the star-spangled Avenger can use various machinery to give Iron Man a hard time. But in the middle of the action, Giant-Man appears and exposes the Chameleon. This was definitely a fun, fast-moving story (albeit a bit confusing) that served its purpose well. What made it even more interesting was that Jack Kirby seemed to have had a hand in the art (besides the cover which, with its face-off between Cap and Iron Man, became an instant classic!). In a number of panels, Kirby's uncredited hand is obvious, or was it due to Dick Ayers' inking over Heck's pencils? Were his years of inking Kirby paying off, allowing Ayers to mimic the master on occasion? And even with all that going on, Lee didn't forget the supporting cast, featuring Pepper and Happy in the action, with poor Pepper suffering the brunt of the gags and having to endure being noticed by the Wasp for her bedraggled appearance. (She'd been through a literal wringer being buried in sand and then drenched in water) The "Tales of the Watcher" backup is forgettable and couldn't be replaced with the new Cap feature soon enough. **Fun Fact:** Was this story also intended as a dry run for Heck who'd be taking over the art chores on the *Avengers* next month? It seemed so with three and a half Avengers all being present and accounted for!

Daredevil #4

"Killgrave, the Unbelievable Purple Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Joe Orlando (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

The new supervillain in *Daredevil* #4 (Oct. 1964) was so good editor/scripter Stan Lee had to give him two names: Killgrave and the Purple Man! Killgrave shows up out of nowhere with his entire body colored purple, robbing a bank by just asking for the money, a set-up that was surely enough to intrigue any reader! Arrested and placed in jail, Killgrave waits calmly until an attorney has been assigned to his case: Matt Murdock. Apparently, the Purple Man was just amusing himself the whole time he went through the legal process, because he suddenly asks the guard to let him out and for Murdock's secretary, Karen, to accompany him. Both obey without question but for some reason, Matt isn't affected. Needing to act as if he was so as not to reveal his secret ID, Matt remains where he is. Meantime, Killgrave makes his escape. By the time Matt goes after Killgrave as Daredevil, the Purple Man is comfortably ensconced at a plush hotel with a small army of weight lifters as body guards. It seems the Purple Man received his powers in the usual way, by being doused with a strange chemical while doing some spying for the Communists. Learning that he now had powers to control the will of others, he decided it was much better to go his own way than continue working for the Reds. Any kid with an imagination reading this story could figure out how handy having Killgrave's coercive powers could be, especially older kids. But DD less so, as he doesn't seem to show any need for haste in rescuing Karen from the clutches of her captor. But show up he finally does and defeats the Purple Man by wrapping him in a sheet thus cutting off his powers. (Which apparently worked on sight) Whew! For the fourth issue in a row, the title is graced by a simple but wonderful Jack Kirby cover as inked by Vince Colletta, who also graces the pencils of Joe Orlando on the insides. There, Orlando continued to loosen up as he really got the feel of the DD strip. Page 8 sports a number of large sized panels with some nice shots of DD in action and page 14, panel 5 is a third page sized illo of DD's shadow stretched across the urban landscape. And on page 21, panel 3 is a half page in size and crammed with bystanders crowding a triumphant Daredevil as he hands a gift-wrapped Purple Man to the police. But it was not to last. Just as the strip's art was beginning to look good, Orlando would be gone. Would his replacement need to go back to start and learn the ropes all over again? Readers could only wait and hope!

Avengers #9

"The Coming of the...Wonder Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

In somewhat of a speed bump to the ongoing saga of the Avengers, Jack Kirby had given up the art reins on the book and handed them to Don Heck, who'd become the title's regular penciler for the next couple of years. Though any switch from Kirby's style would be jarring no matter who took over from him, it was made less traumatic here as Heck had already established his bona fides as the artist for the Iron Man strip over in *Suspense*. On top of that, readers had already been given some idea of how he'd handle the Avengers after seeing his work on this month's issue of *Suspense* where he had the opportunity of drawing

Iron Man, Captain America, and Giant-Man (as well as the Wasp) all in the same story. Thirdly, he'd have the assistance of Dick Ayers, who'd put in many years as Kirby's main inker and so, would be expected to give Heck's unique pencils a Kirbyesque sheen in places. That began right off with the opening splash page of *Avengers* #9 (Oct. 1964) wherein the figure of Captain America bears more than a passing resemblance to the Kirby style. That style was of course, on display with this issue's cover where Kirby gets to introduce Wonder Man (and design his look as well?), a new character



THE SOBRIQUET WONDER MAN WASN'T EXACTLY ANYTHING NEW BY THE TIME MARVEL'S VERSION WAS INTRODUCED IN AVENGERS #9.

that editor/scripter Stan Lee's hyperbolic blurb seemed to suggest would be a permanent addition to Marvel's growing pantheon of superheroes. Unfortunately, it wasn't to be, as Wonder Man wouldn't survive the issue (Lee stated at the time that possible legal issues may have prevented Wonder Man's return because DC already had a character by the same name). Created by Zemo, Wonder Man is really Simon Williams, a man with a mad on for Tony Stark whom he blames for having him arrested for embezzlement. There's one caveat to the incredible strength he's given though: he's been infected with a deadly poison for which he requires Zemo to provide the antidote. Wonder Man infiltrates the Avengers,

tells them of his poison problem, and though they work to find him a cure, he betrays them to the Masters of Evil. But when crunch time comes, Wonder Man can't pull the trigger. Recalling how the Avengers tried to cure him, a total stranger, he finds his soul and helps to defeat the Masters at the cost of his own life. It was a well plotted, fast moving story that Heck's artwork proved equal to (although one can't help thinking how much better it would've been if he'd inked his own pencils) with a script by Lee that endeared Simon Williams to fans, who immediately called for his revival. Alas, that would have to wait until the twilight years to come true. In between, he'd be revived, sorta, when his brain patterns were used to give life to the Vision in *Avengers* #58. **Fun Fact:** On this issue's special announcements section. Lee informs readers that from this point on, all of Marvel's superhero titles would sport their very own letters pages! Hoo ha!



MORE WONDROUS USE OF THE WORD WONDER FOR WUNNERFUL SUPERHEROES GOING BACK TO 1939! UNFORTUNATELY FOR FOX PUBLICATIONS. NATIONAL PERIODICALS. THE PRECURSOR OF DC COMICS. SUED FOR COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT ON ITS SUPERMAN BRAND AND FORCED WONDER MAN'S DEMISE. LATER, DC THREATENED TO SUE MARVEL FOR THE SAME REASON. COMPELLING EDITOR STAN LEE TO LIMIT HIS OWN WONDER MAN TO A SINGLE APPEARANCE.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #11

"The Crackdown of Capt. Flint!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee provides a solid if predictable war yarn in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #11 (Oct. 1964) as the unit is taken over temporarily by one Capt. Flint, a strict, by the book, martinet who, of course, learns by the end of the story that the book often is lost when it runs into the harsh reality of the battlefield. In fact, the most interesting item in the issue isn't what happens in the field, but when Flint is informed of Capt. Sam Sawyer's "origin." Here, readers find out from a Gen. MacArthur lookalike that

Sawyer helped pave the way ashore for the invasion of North Africa where he formed the Howlers. After being wounded in action, he was ordered to concentrate on training other commandos for special missions. Those commandos are spotlighted for the first time on page 5 where the second, third, and fourth attack squads report for duty and where Lee has a fun time putting the sounds of genuine DIs into his characters' voices: "Fourth attack squad awww present 'n 'counted fawrrrrrrr!" And though, again Dick Ayers' art still lacks the oomph that Kirby used to give the strip, he's so helped in certain places by the inks of George Roussos that some panels actually come close enough to suggest Kirby such as the triptych of panels on page 5 showing the three squad leaders or page 9, panel 4 with the younger Capt. Sawyer in action. Unbelievably, one letter writer this issue claimed that Ayers inked by Ayers was better on Fury than the Kirby/Roussos art team! Well, no need to go overboard! All in all however, so long as Lee at least was at the writing helm, the Sgt. Fury book could still be enjoyable and eminently readable.

Tales to Astonish #61

"Now Walks the Android!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Roussos (inks)
"Captured at Last!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

Marvel's golden year of 1964-65 continued marked both by expansion of the number of superhero features it produced as well as its consolidation of the various innovations introduced over the preceding years since *Fantastic Four* #1. The Jack Kirby/Chic Stone art team was in full swing as could be seen on the cover of *Tales to Astonish* #61 (Nov. 1964). Some readers at the time immediately began to lobby against the split cover format that editor Stan Lee preferred for *Astonish* as well as *Strange Tales* and *Tales of Suspense*. Instead, they preferred a cover that featured only a single one of the book's two stars but alternating them from issue to issue. Eventually, Lee would accede to this idea, but for the next year or so, would stick to the "split screen" style that over the years have attained a certain cache of nostalgia due largely to Kirby's ability to come up with double images that didn't look crowded but instead worked as an integrated whole that was completed by Lee's expert use of blurbs to bolster reader excitement. But for this issue, that was hardly necessary! A Steve Ditko double whammy, both the Giant-Man lead feature and the Hulk co-starring vehicle were penciled by him and inked by his current partner for the Dr. Strange strip over in *Strange Tales*, George Roussos. A vast improvement over regular artist Dick Ayers, Ditko brings back



MARVEL'S NEW SPLIT BOOK FORMAT WAS FAIRLY LAUNCHED BY TALES TO ASTONISH #61 WITH THIS EYE CATCHING KIRBY/STONE COVER. RIVAL DC HAD ALWAYS INCLUDED AT LEAST ONE OTHER FEATURE IN MOST IF NOT ALL OF ITS TITLES, BUT THERE, BACK UPS WERE JUST THAT, BACK UPS THAT STARRED LESSER CHARACTERS AND SITUATIONS THAN THE LEAD. AT MARVEL, HOWEVER, BOTH FEATURES WOULD QUICKLY GROW TO BE EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT SHARING NEARLY THE SAME NUMBER OF PAGES.

some interest in the Giant-Man feature as arch-villain Egghead returns with a giant plastic android in tow. The Android provides Giant-Man with a fitting antagonist with Ditko having 14 pages to present the kind of action that he was beginning to master over in the *Amazing Spider-Man*. Meanwhile, over in the Hulk strip, he did the same as the feature there presented the second chapter in its serial format with ole greenskin squaring off against a manned robot designed by Bruce Banner to survive an atomic blast! This issue's cliffhanger had the Hulk "Captured at Last" by the Army brass and secured in heavy metal chains while under the guns of a platoon of tanks. Hoo

boy! In addition, Bruce Banner had something else to worry about: namely the introduction here of Major Glenn Talbot. The major would become an ongoing thorn in Banner's side as the years went on, both because of his suspicion that Banner was a possible traitor and connected to the Hulk in some way but also as a competitor for Betty Ross' affections. This was the kind of supporting character/complicated personal life that made Marvel's superheroes so successful and the reason why some strips failed to catch on with readers while others did. **Fun Fact:** This issue of *Astonish* finally earned its own letters page as Lee announced elsewhere that all of the company's books would now have them, including the westerns!

Fantastic Four #32

"Death of a Hero!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

The story of Sue and Johnny's father is expanded upon and concluded in *Fantastic Four* #32 (Nov. 1964). As readers recalled, Franklin Storm reentered their lives at the end of the previous ish just in time to perform lifesaving surgery on an injured Sue. But the reunion was a short one. After the surgery, Storm was sent back to the prison where he was serving a sentence for manslaughter. Visiting him in prison, Sue reveals to Johnny the full story of their father's imprisonment: he was the victim of an auto accident that killed their mother. Blaming himself, Storm grew despondent and became involved with the mob. He ended up killing a gangster over gambling debts and was sent to prison. But little do Sue and Johnny know that the man they are now visiting in jail has been replaced by a mysterious being calling himself the Invincible Man. (By now, scripter Stan Lee must have been running out of adjectives with which to name new characters; why, only in the last issue of *Avengers* he featured Wonder Man!) But little do they know that the convict they're visiting isn't their father but a replacement who soon shows that he possesses all of the powers of the FF. After some battling with the full team (who are hesitant to really whale into him because they think he's Sue and Johnny's father), Mr. Fantastic figures out the Invincible Man's true identity: the Super Skrull, whom the team defeated back in issue #18. Defeated and his secret revealed, the Super-Skrull is taken back by his home planet in exchange for the elder Storm. But Storm has been rigged with a bomb set to explode and kill the FF. In a final act of self-sacrifice, Storm smothers the bomb with his body and is killed (Thus, this issue's title: "Death of a Hero"). "The editors feel this is not the time nor place for advertising our next issue," reads Lee's last lines of the story. "So let us merely

say farewell for now, as we leave our silent friends alone...with their grief!" It might be said that such lines were contrived. After all, it was only a comic book, right? But somehow, Lee was able to pick out just the right words, develop just the right tempo for the story's final page (aided visually by penciler Jack Kirby, of course) to have it transcend its lowly medium and touch on something that was true and real. Readers who'd come to invest a great deal of loyalty and affection in a set of characters that increasingly seemed to add up to more than their four-color origins were actually moved by scenes

such as this, proving that something special was going on with Marvel Comics. Something that was lacking in its competitors and all other companies that had preceded it. Never before did fans invest so much emotion in their comic book heroes. It was an investment that would pay dividends for themselves and Marvel over the next twenty-five years and it was a testament to the literary and artistic power of such creators as Stan Lee and Jack Kirby that they could inspire such feelings.

Kid Colt Outlaw #119

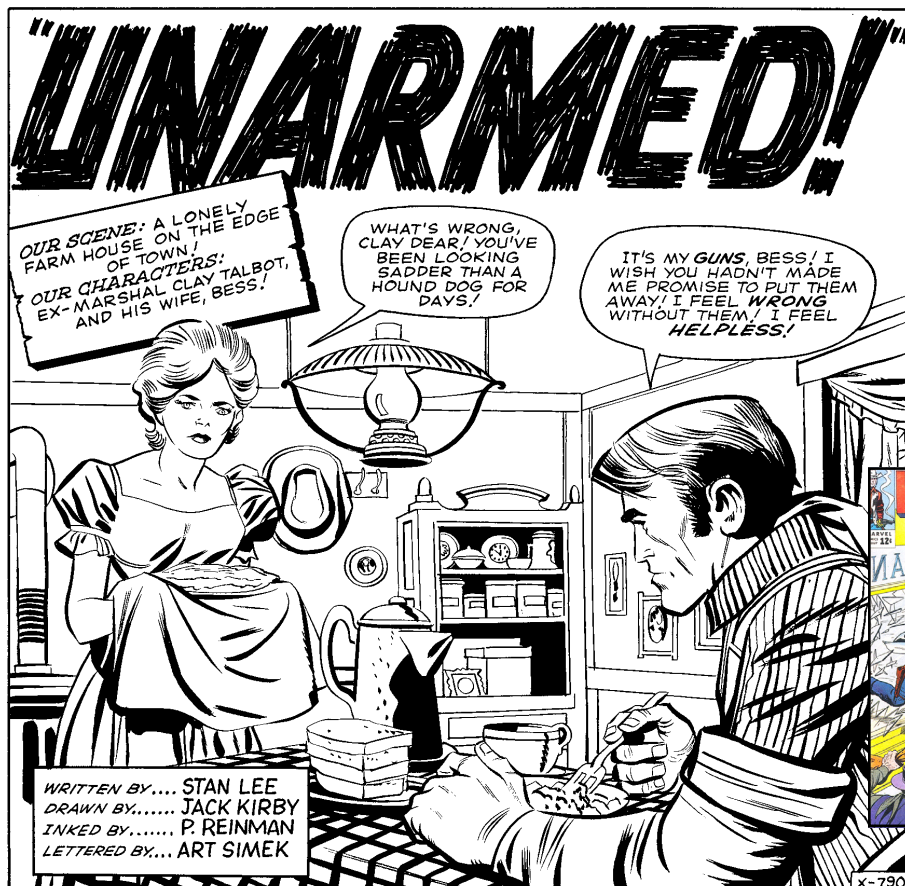
"The Saga of Bassett the Badman";

Stan Lee (script);

Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

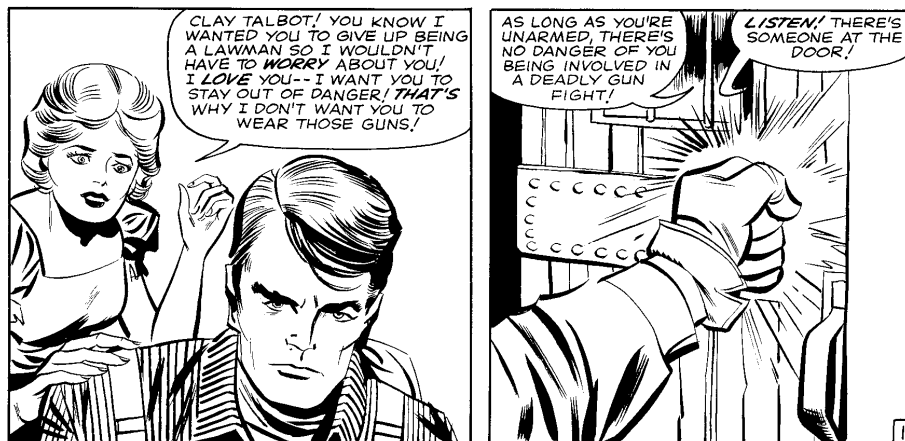
"Unarmed!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack

Kirby (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)



Though the lead story in *Kid Colt Outlaw* #119 (Nov. 1964) is supposed to be the main feature, the real news here is the five-page backup story titled "Unarmed." That's because "Unarmed" is drawn by Jack Kirby, by this time,

the undisputed driver of the look of Marvel Comics, which involved in your face action with characters that often seemed to leap off the page. He does that again here in a morality tale scripted by Stan Lee that was little different from the hundreds of other such stories he'd written over the years. But that didn't mean its message was any less effective. Here, peaceful Clay Talbot has promised to "put away his irons" at wife Bess's request. Suddenly, their home is invaded by the evil Harper Brothers who proceed to bully the pair. At first caught helpless without his guns, Clay turns the tables on his tormentors when he manages to take a gun from one of the Harpers. Quickly, he subdues



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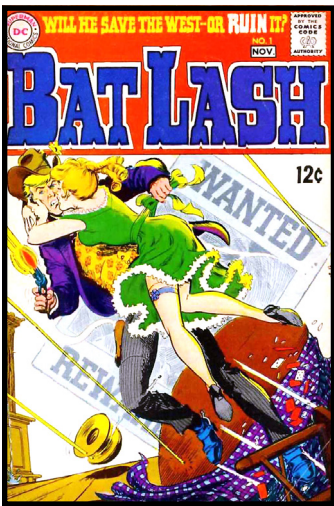
KID COLT OUTLAW #119, PAGE 1: SPEAKING OF BACK UPS, "UNARMED" IS SUPPOSEDLY THE LESSER TALE HERE WITH THE LONG, KID COLT LEAD FEATURE THE ATTENTION GRABBER. HOWEVER, WITH BOTH STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY ON THE JOB, IT BECOMES A SIMPLE, BUT POWERFUL MORALITY TALE, FOR WHICH WESTERNS BOTH ON TV AND IN COMICS, WERE UNIQUELY SUITED FOR.

them with superior gunplay with the lesson for Bess that so long as the west remained without law and order, a man needed to be armed to protect himself and his family. The only reason the Harpers chose the Talbots to attack was because they knew Clay had hung up his guns. And though Kirby does his usual masterful job in illustrating the story (inked by Paul Reinman), it's obviously a rush job due to its very basic figure work, lack of backgrounds, and detailed settings. Furthermore, page 3 (of a five-page story) is blocked out in four, big quarter page panels, a sure sign that Kirby was trying to save time. That said, this was still a satisfying outing for fans of the King, but a sad one as well, as it was destined to be Kirby's final appearance in Marvel's western lineup (Except for covers; and work on those would soon peter out as well). Maybe to save time, Kirby didn't draw this issue's cover image as he usually did. Instead, it was left to Dick Ayers who does a decent job but somehow his work just lacks that special something that only a Kirby image could offer. Inside, things only get worse with a lead story penciled and inked by Atlas stalwart Jack Keller as Lee pens "The Saga of Bassett the Badman" about a young gun turned from the outlaw trail just in time, leaving the Kid pondering on his own fate: "Too bad my life can't have a happy endin' like other folks," he philosophizes. "But, I reckon the ol' wrangler up there in the sky has a heap of other chores for me to do before I can unhitch my guns for the last time."

Strange Tales #126

"Pawns of the Deadly Duo!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)
"The Domain of the Dread Dormammu!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Like this month's *Kid Colt Outlaw*, it's the book's second feature that's the real attention grabber in *Strange Tales #126* (Nov. 1964). There, Dr. Strange has his first encounter with Dormammu, the lord of the Dark Dimension, who is destined to become his arch-enemy. Scripted by Stan Lee, the story has Dr. Strange entering the Dark Dimension at the behest of the Ancient One to warn Dormammu about any plan to invade the Earth's dimension. But getting to Dormammu isn't that easy as artist Steve Ditko (now returned to full penciling and inking chores following several issues inked by the clumsy George Roussos) unloads his considerable imagination in the service of giving Strange as difficult a time as possible including confronting the G'uranthic Guardian, a golden midget with unlimited growth potential, inter-dimensional traps, armies of belligerents immune to magic, and a horde of lesser mages sent to challenge him. Finally, impressed by his skill and determination, a strange silver-haired girl shows up to warn him about facing the dread Dormammu. But Strange isn't deterred and the story ends on a cliffhanging note as Strange challenges Dormammu. The story represents a true creative breakout for Ditko. Sure, most of the elements here had appeared off and on in previous stories, but never were they all combined, weaved into a single story of wild, uncontrolled elements. From here, Ditko's interpretation of the Strange strip would leave off confrontations with standalone supervillainous types (for the most part) and abandon Dr. Strange's own dimension almost entirely as he takes his defense of Earth to other realms of reality (and unreality!) To do it, Ditko would just let loose with a depiction of other dimensions as being completely bereft of all normal rules of science and three-dimensional perceptions of reality. How any man could retain his sanity in the kinds of realms and circumstances that would become normal for Dr. Strange would be one of the great questions readers might have considered as the series went on. It was under these conditions that the reputation of the Dr. Strange strip would spread beyond the regular comic book fan into the notice of a growing counter cultural movement that would take him to heart. Ditko's fantastic visions of other states of being were natural to young people who began to "turn on, tune in, and drop out" and who assumed that



ALTHOUGH MARVEL'S OLDER WESTERN TITLES WERE DOOMED TO FADE AND DESCEND INTO REPRINTS BEFORE DISAPPEARING ENTIRELY, THE COMPANY DID MAKE ONE MORE TRY AT KEEPING THE GENRE ALIVE WITH SUCH SHORT LIVED TWILIGHT YEARS TITLES AS GUNHAWKS AND RED WOLF. MEANWHILE, DC WOULD HAVE SOMEWHAT BETTER RESULTS WITH WEIRD WESTERN STARRING SCALPHUNTER AND JONAH HEX.



STEVE DITKO DIDN'T NEED LSD OR ANY OTHER HALLUCINATORY DRUGS TO INSPIRE HIM. ONLY MENTOR AND TEACHER JERRY ROBINSON AS CAN BE SEEN IN THIS ROBINSON ILLO FROM MY DATE #1 IN WHICH HE USES A MONTAGE OF LEERING FACES AND EVEN DETACHED TEETH. IMAGES THAT DITKO WOULD ALSO USE AT VARIOUS TIMES IN HIS CAREER.

anyone who could so reflect the hallucinations they experienced while under the influence of such drugs as LSD must be a head himself. They were doomed to disappointment however, as Lee and Ditko were as straight arrows as could be imagined. Men of the World War II generation, they were firmly grounded in reality and the business of making a living, even if that living allowed their imaginations to soar! By comparison with all that, the Human Torch lead feature was pretty humdrum stuff, especially drawn the way it was by Dick Ayers and Paul Reinman. There, he and the Thing go up against the Puppet Master and the Mad Thinker until a last-minute save by Mr. Fantastic stymies the villainous duo. **Fun Fact:** This ish features the title's very first letters page! After 26 straight issues featuring the Human Torch, it was about time!

Journey Into Mystery #110

"Every Hand Against Him!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

By the time of *Journey Into Mystery* #110 (Nov. 1964), scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby had become comfortable with both aspects of Thor's life, both in Asgard and on Earth. Thus, with this story that has a foot firmly planted in both worlds, everything falls easily into place. Again, Loki is at the bottom of it all, having come to Earth to ally himself with the Cobra and Mr. Hyde. After freeing them from jail, he uses his magic to double their powers and then sic them on Thor's one weak spot: Jane Foster. While the two villains kidnap Jane, Loki returns to Asgard to set

Odin against Thor. Angered, Thor fights his way into Asgard, explains the situation to his angry father, and talks him into sending him back to Earth to rescue Jane. On Earth, he enters a lonely house that Hyde and Cobra have filled with death traps and when one is sprung, the explosion injures Jane, forcing Thor to contain her in a warp that holds time still, preventing her death. Meanwhile, his two superpowered arch-enemies approach for a final confrontation... This was Marvel, or rather the team of Lee and Kirby, at the height of their respective powers, keeping characterization and action in perfect balance in a story that never stops moving. One can even detect a bit of the grandiose Kirby on page 4 which he divides into four quarter page panels, with panel 1 featuring a nice close-up of Loki and Hyde and panel 2 an awesome display of Loki manifesting his magical powers. An image hinting at the true unearthliness of his being, a sight that can be seen in the reactions of the incredulous villains. And in the back of the book as usual, we have the "Tales of Asgard" feature titled "The Defeat of Odin!" Again, we have those half page and quarter page panels perfect for depicting larger than life mythological events. In this case, where Odin allows himself to be defeated so as to keep hope alive in men even when the cause seems unwinnable. Here, inker Vince Colletta really begins to give a foretaste of how the lead feature would evolve as the grandiose years debuted now only months away. The only real drawback this ish is the cover, one of the weakest so far seen from Kirby. A combination of dull layout and washed-out coloring seemed to contribute to its sense of lacklusterness. Maybe an eye-catching yellow background by colorist Stan Goldberg would have perked things up instead of the empty white? **Fun Fact:** As Marvel's best year progressed, the house ads in this issue only confirm the fecundity of the company's product including *Spider-Man* #19, *X-Men* #8, *Avengers* #10, *Suspense* #60, *Astonish* #62, and *Sgt. Fury* #12. (Almost all with Kirby covers) Truly, it was the greatest time of all to be a Marvel fan!

Journey Into Mystery #111

"The Power of the Thunder God!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Marvel's greatest year continued to roll on with *Journey Into Mystery* #111 (Dec. 1964) as the team of scripter Stan Lee, penciler Jack Kirby, and inker Chic Stone conclude their two-part story featuring Thor vs. the up powered Cobra and Mr. Hyde. As readers recalled, the previous ish ended in a cliffhanger with Jane Foster hovering near death and only kept from dying by Thor suspending time around the isolated

murder mansion belonging to Cobra and Hyde. Meanwhile, in Asgard, Balder gets his first real spotlight in the book's lead feature when he travels to one Hardol with a prescription from Odin for a potion that will save Jane's life. But to get to Hardol, Balder must fight his way through a series of deadly challenges. He succeeds, of course, and whisks the potion to Earth fastened to the hilt of his sword. On Earth, Thor has just defeated Cobra and Hyde in patented Kirby fashion. Victorious but heavy-hearted, he returns to Jane's side, realizing that he must lower the warp so as to avoid causing damage to the normal time stream. But just as he does, Balder's sword arrives, bearing the curative potion. Whew! (This last scene is beautifully depicted with a symbolic cover design by Kirby enhanced by Stone's heavy, dark inks and vibrant colors as applied by Stan Goldberg.) Then, for dessert, readers could turn the page for the latest installment of "Tales of Asgard" this time featuring "The Secret of Sigurd!" Here, Balder is once again featured as a strong supporting player along with Thor and Loki as they battle Sigurd. It's the combination of Thor's magic hammer and Balder's quick wits that win the day. Inked by Vince Colletta, Kirby's art here is light years away from the look the artist was given by Stone in the lead feature...almost as if a different penciler were doing the art. Both styles suited Kirby well, but ultimately, it would be Colletta's approach over Kirby in the coming grandiose years that would prove definitive.

X-Men #8

"The Uncanny Threat of Unus...the Untouchable!";
 Stan Lee (script);
 Jack Kirby (pencils);
 Chic Stone (inks)

It was another heavily plotted story for X-Men #8 (Nov. 1964), as scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby (inked here by Chic Stone) once again come up with a strange new supervillain along the lines of the Vanisher and Blob from earlier issues. This time, it's a character called Unus the Untouchable, a big-time wrestler whose

mutant power is an ability to keep anyone else from laying a glove on him. (Introduced in this issue's striking cover image by Kirby as the X-Men fly away from Unus in every direction of the compass against an empty, white background; a big improvement over this month's dull *Journey Into Mystery* cover.) But before the team mixes it up with him, Hank and Bobby decide to relax at the beat club they visited last ish only to become the target of an angry, anti-mutant mob. So angered is Hank at barely getting away in one piece (he and Bobby arrive back at headquarters with their clothes ripped to shreds), that he up and quits the X-Men. Later, he takes up the wrestling game (using "Beast" as his handle and being escorted to the ring in a cage!) and that's where he meets Unus, just in time to find that he's being actively recruited by the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants (in the form of contact man Mastermind). In the meantime, the rest of the X-Men have their first encounter with Unus and are defeated (But not before a lot of rather unique Kirby action as team members are repulsed in every way by his strange power). Returning to HQ, they find Hank has returned and is building a machine that will increase Unus' power. Assuming the Beast

has betrayed them, the others try to stop him, but he escapes and tuns his gizmo on Unus. Now the rest of the team see the method of his madness: with his powers increased, Unus can't even eat. He'll starve! Promising to renounce his bid for evil and return to wrestling, the Beast restores him to normal. At the same time all that's going on, Lee and Kirby continued to explore the team's group dynamics as readers receive the first solid hint that Jean might be in love with Scott; Cyclops, continuing in the role of team leader in the absence of Prof. X, helps Iceman perfect his powers to the point where

he finally sheds his snowman look for the clear, icy form he'd keep for the rest of his career; and Prof. X continues his secret mission where he identifies his mysterious quarry for the first time: Lucifer! More on him next ish!



UNFORTUNATELY, IMAGES OF BLACK AMERICANS BEING ATTACKED BY MOBS WAS NOT AN UNCOMMON SIGHT IN THE MID 1960S. INSTANCES IN THE NEWS THAT WERE NO DOUBT ON THE MINDS OF STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY WHEN THEY INCLUDED SIMILAR OCCURRENCES IN THEIR X-MEN STORIES.

Avengers #10

"The Avengers Break Up!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Another eye-grabbing cover by Jack Kirby spotlighting Captain America against a featureless white background is the best thing about *Avengers* #10 (Nov. 1964) in which scripter Stan Lee falters with a tale filled with DC style silliness and tired tropes. To wit: new villain Immortus, allying himself with the Masters of Evil, tries to break up the Avengers by creating suspicion among them. He does it by getting Rick Jones to reply to an ad offering to make an ordinary person super-powerful! Rick falls for the thing (that any normal person would dismiss out of hand) and when Cap investigates, is told by Immortus that the ad was placed by his fellow Avengers. And Cap falls for it! Anyway, the next thing you know, the Avengers confront Immortus, who plucks historical figures out of time to pair off against individual heroes such as Giant-Man and Goliath and Iron Man and Merlin. Ho hum. (Earlier in the story, he even conjures Paul Bunyan to impress the Masters!) Anyway, the Avengers overcome their opponents and, panicking, Immortus takes a powder while the Enchantress casts a spell sending everyone to a time before Immortus showed up, thus making the whole story pointless! Well, at least readers had some decent Don Heck artwork to enjoy. The only real interesting element here is Immortus' claimed desire to conquer the twentieth century. If that sounded familiar to Avengers fans, it was likely because Kang claimed the same thing only a couple issues earlier. It would be used much later in the twilight years to link Immortus with Kang, in fact, making them the same person but from different time periods, much like the Pharaoh had already been linked to Kang. The only interesting thing about this ish, really, is the continued appearance of Zemo and the Masters of Evil who by this time, have become the Avengers' answer to the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants over in the X-Men book. That is, a



THE FATE THAT DINO MANELLI FACED IF CAPTURED: GERMAN SOLDIERS CAUGHT IN AMERICAN UNIFORMS AT THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE AWAIT THEIR FATE.

continuing thread that links together all the earliest issues of the title and that would shortly culminate in their destruction. The Brotherhood would meet their end in *X-Men* #11, while the Masters would finally be defeated in *Avengers* #16, each heralding in a way, the end of the years of consolidation.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #12

"When a Howler Turns Traitor!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

It's a near run thing for Howler Dino Manelli when a plan only he and Sgt. Fury are cognizant of backfires, almost ending his life at the hands of his own army! To wit: while on their latest

mission in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #12 (Nov. 1964), Fury tells Dino to surrender himself and pretend a desire to defect. Once among the Germans, he's to find out where buzz bombs are being launched so that Allied planes can target the base for destruction. Although Dino is successful in locating the launch site (on a moving railway car), he's forced to hijack a plane back to England while still in a German uniform. That circumstance places him in front of a firing squad

with the rest of the Howlers convinced of his guilt, because Fury himself had since been captured. Hoo boy! Luckily however, Fury escapes and makes it back in time to clear Dino of desertion charges. Whew! It was another tightly plotted tale by scripter Stan Lee more or less fumblingly penciled by Dick Ayers and inked by George Roussos. The story was used by Lee to address real life attempts by Axis powers to persuade Allied soldiers of German and Italian descent to desert. Attempts, as in the case of Dino Manelli, that largely failed: "I guess Axis Sally figures there are lots of Joes like me in uniform," Dino says to the other Howlers. "Guys with names like Dino Manelli or Garibaldi, or Schultz, or Erhardt. She doesn't realize that we can love our European heritage and still be ready to die fighting tyranny!"

Tales to Astonish #62

"Giant-Man vs. the Wonderful Wasp!"; Stan Lee (script); Carl Burgos (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"Enter...the Chameleon!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

"Giant-Man vs. the Wonderful Wasp!" No contest, right? Wrong! No, it's not because this is the later, much feminized, and up-powered Wasp from the later twilight years. It's because the Giant-Man featured in the left side of this issue's split cover (executed once again by the great Jack Kirby) isn't the real Giant-Man! How can that be, you ask? Very simple! Scriptor Stan Lee has contrived to have Giant-Man's costume stolen by a simple burglar named Second Story Sammy and in what turns out to be an extended version of the old "Tales of the Wasp" backup feature, the Wasp tackles Sammy on her own. Meanwhile, Hank Pym battles a giant plant that he's accidentally released into the city while at the same time having a flying ant capture the ant-sized Sammy. The real noteworthy thing about this installment of Giant-Man is the art by Carl Burgos. Most famously, Burgos had created the Human Torch for Marvel (then called Timely Comics) back in the 1940s and returned in the early 1950s to work on the character again. In the mid '60s, he began a lawsuit with Marvel over ownership of the Torch, but that didn't stop him from accepting some assignments from editor Lee around the same time. His work here on the Giant-Man feature is one of the results. And though he starts off with a bang on the story's opening splash page, he fails to deliver the goods through the rest of the story providing uninteresting layouts, bad figure work, off proportions (crucial for a feature with a character who can grow and shrink), and even ugly faces. Clearly, whatever time Burgos had enjoyed as an artist in the past had long since passed its sell date. In fact, it might be said that along with Dick Ayers (who also inked this story), Burgos contributed mightily to the demise of the Giant-Man feature. With art that compared so badly to what Kirby, Don Heck, and Steve Ditko were doing elsewhere, it was no wonder the strip could never pick up traction. In comparison, the Hulk second feature with pencils by Ditko and inks by George Roussos, stood out in its quality. Falling back on his patented nine panel grid format for many of the pages, Ditko allowed for more storytelling by scriptor Lee before opening it up with larger-sized panels for the concluding action sequences. Meanwhile, the serial format continued to serve the strip well with the installment for *Tales to Astonish* #62 (Dec. 1964) hinting at the coming of Hulk arch-foe the Leader, who would figure largely in the wonderful group of tales that the strip would enjoy straight through to issue #71.

Rawhide Kid #43

"Where the Outlaws Ride!"; Stan Lee (script); Larry Lieber (pencils/inks)

Stan Lee was still on the job scripting Marvel's trio of western titles, including *Rawhide Kid* #43 (Dec. 1964). This time, the Kid goes up against "the deadly threat of Patch Morgan and his outlaw band" as the blurb on the exciting Jack Kirby drawn cover screams out at the potential buyer. The story has everything a western fan could want, plenty of action and the obligatory close shave in the romance department, as the Kid avoids entanglement due to his chivalrous attitude about not being worthy of the girl. But what holds it all back, way back, is the art by Larry Lieber. Having performed good service scripting early issues of many of Marvel's popular superhero features and seemingly graduated from the now defunct science fiction/weird backup features, Lieber was relegated



KIRBY AND STONE DO IT AGAIN WITH THIS EXCITING COVER FOR RAWHIDE KID #43! EVEN FANS OF MARVEL'S SUPERHERO FARE HAD TO PERK UP AND TAKE NOTICE.

to the fading westerns where he filled in for the likes of Dick Ayers who was busy with *Sgt. Fury* as well as the *Two-Gun Kid*. But though manfully trying to echo the old Kirby dash (check out page 17 with its six-panel fight sequence), he fails miserably here. To be sure, Lieber would improve as the months went on, mostly after he took over the scripting from Lee. Perhaps at that point, when he had control over the entire product (penciling, inking, scripting), he felt motivated to invest more of himself into the results. Lieber's failings on the lead feature were only made more apparent in contrast to this issue's backup: A new Lee story penciled by the King himself! Readers might have considered the story of "Brass Buttons" an encore of sorts to the Kirby drawn story in last month's *Kid Colt* #119. Here again, Kirby seems to have been in a rush with rough etched characters, bare bones backgrounds, and big panels. Lee's story itself is fun and told succinctly in a mere four pages, as bully Blackie Greer discovers how the Brass Buttons Kid acquired his name. Yeah, it was a typical gunfight story but the buildup and final twist (not to mention the body language for both Greer and the Kid supplied by Kirby) add up to more than the sum of its parts. Bottom line: it was another mini triumph for the team of Lee and Kirby and perhaps Kirby's real, honest to gosh swan song with regards to Marvel's western comics. (Except maybe for the cool pin-up of the Kid tucked between this issue's two features!

Strange Tales #127

"The Mystery Villain!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)
"Duel With the Dread Dormammu!";
Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

It had been a while since the *Strange Tales* book had lived up to its name. At one time, the Human Torch had busied himself with menaces that were hardly different from the weird characters that populated the title before the advent of Marvel's superhero boom. Then came a string of supervillain types and his permanent team-up with the Thing, and strangeness seemed to take a back seat to straight ahead action. Not that the Torch/Thing story in *Strange Tales* #127 (Dec. 1964) lacked action, more like an aura of strangeness or unreality seemed to permeate the Stan Lee scripted tale more than usual. It starts off typically enough (for a Torch/Thing story anyway) wherein our heroes disagree that Mr. Fantastic is the only choice for leader of the Fantastic Four. Soon after, the two are invited to take part in a charity auto race involving souped up cars. During the race, they're challenged by a mystery villain (with a big question mark on his mask of all things!) Unusually, they're eventually defeated: "So



NO ONE BATS A THOUSAND: A RARE INSTANCE WHEN JACK KIRBY AND CHIC STONE MISSED THE MARK WITH THIS LACKLUSTER COVER FOR STRANGE TALES #127. IT WAS LEFT UP TO EDITOR STAN LEE TO PICK UP THE SLACK WITH SOME ENTICING BLURBS.

far, that bozo has beaten us at every turn," thinks Johnny. Finally comes time for the unmasking and the villain turns out to be Mr. Fantastic who set up the whole situation in order to prove his qualifications for leadership of the FF. "In the business we're in, there's no room for lack of confidence in a leader!" concludes Mr. Fantastic. "Your lives may one day depend upon instant obedience!" But, as was happening more often now, the standout feature of *Strange* #127 was its second offering: Dr. Strange. Continued from last ish, the good Doctor faces off with Dormammu, master of the Dark Dimension. Given some time to contemplate the hazards of challenging Dormammu, Strange is told by the unnamed girl whom he met last issue of how Dormammu is needed in order to hold back the Mindless Ones, creatures who'd kill everyone if his magic wasn't keeping them in check. With the burden of knowing his defeat of

Dormammu would mean death to the residents of the Dark Dimension, Dr. Strange returns to face his enemy. The two enter upon an arcane duel only artist Steve Ditko could conjure up with spells of vanishment, interdimensionality, and outright black magic being flung in every direction. But forced to use more and more of his strength to combat Strange, Dormammu loses control of the barrier keeping out the Mindless Ones. He's forced to abandon the battle to attend to that and in the process, Strange adds his strength to Dormammu's. By placing the villain in his debt, Strange manages to protect the dimension of Earth while keeping an angry Dormammu in place to continue holding back the Mindless Ones. The two-part story established Dormammu as Strange's arch-enemy, guaranteeing that the two magi would meet again, and again, and again...!

Tales of Suspense #60

"Suspected of Murder!"; Stan Lee (script);

Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Army of Assassins Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script);

Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Very quickly and obviously, *Tales of Suspense* emerged as the star of Marvel's three double feature titles. Whereas *Strange Tales* had only the Stan Lee/Steve Ditko drawn Dr. Strange and *Tales to Astonish* had the Lee/Ditko Hulk to recommend them (the Carl Burgos drawn Giant-Man and Dick Ayers penciled Torch/Thing lead features were drags due to the inability of the visuals to match the storytelling), *Suspense* enjoyed the artistry of two of Marvel's big guns on its pair of offerings: Don Heck on Iron Man and Jack Kirby on Captain America. As the lead feature, Iron Man was allotted 13 pages to tell its story while Cap received a mere ten. But that was enough when Kirby was on the job! In a tale where it seemed editor Lee let the artist have his head, the rather slight plot involves Baron Zemo dispatching an army of specially trained commandos to take out Cap. After taking two of the ten pages to show their training, Kirby has them flown to America where Cap is giving a demonstration of his fighting prowess. At first, he suspects nothing but eventually the rough tactics of his adversaries tip him off that all was not right. That's when Kirby lets go in page after page of balletic action that shifts from panel to panel in a logical progression. He even allows a page's worth of space to Rick Jones, who manages to show off what he's learned of combat tactics from Cap since being taken under his wing. Of course, the assassins never had a chance, and the story ends with Cap warning Zemo to back off. The Kirby art as inked by Chic Stone was immaculate, demonstrating why the art team of Kirby and Stone

were the very definition of the Marvel Age of Comics here, in the very midst of Marvel's greatest year. Not to give short shrift to the Iron Man feature at the front of the book! There, Heck is in top form from his great symbolic opening splash page to its finish. In fact the only thing holding back this strip from utter perfection was the inking of Dick Ayers. Although Ayers was tops over Kirby, the more delicate artistry of Heck demanded a more sensitive embellisher the best being of course, Heck himself. But editor Lee wanted as much art out of Heck and Kirby as possible, and so, neither were given the opportunity to work over their own pencils. Be that as it may, this issue's IM story was a double whammy that featured the exciting team-up of Communist agent Black Widow with reluctant bad guy Hawkeye, whose second outing here quickly established him as a fan favorite on the order of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch over in the *X-Men* book. But the secret of Iron Man's success as a feature was not all Don Heck artwork, nor was it the action and colorful supervillains. It was also his supporting cast and personal problems. To wit: Tony Stark's disappearance due to the fact that he couldn't remove his armor because there wouldn't be enough power left to keep his injured heart beating. Thus, Pepper and Happy suspect IM of doing away with Stark. Next, the authorities are

called in and Iron Man becomes a wanted man. The pairing of Iron Man and Captain America by Lee/Heck/Kirby was pure dynamite, a combination that would hold steady for almost the entire run of the title, something that couldn't be said for *Strange* or *Astonish* in which only one or the other of their two features were usually the sole attraction.

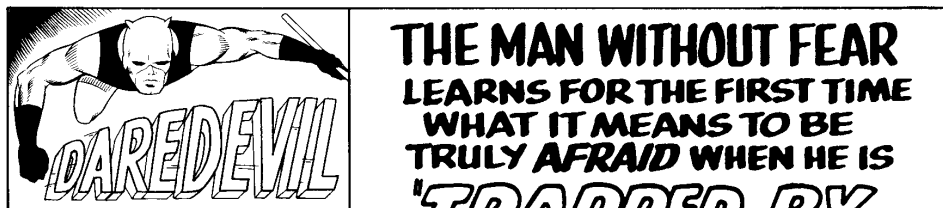


MARVEL'S HAWKEYE WASN'T THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN! ALTHOUGH COMICS COMPANY'S OFTEN HAD HEROES WITH THE SAME POWERS ON THEIR ROSTERS, WHAT SET SUCH COPYCATS APART, AT LEAST WITH MARVEL, WAS THE PERSONALITIES THEY WERE GIVEN. IN THE CASE OF MARVEL AND DC'S RIVAL BOWMEN, GREEN ARROW WAS A CARBON COPY OF BATMAN WITH NOT MUCH OF A PERSONALITY TO SPEAK OF. HAWKEYE, ON THE OTHER HAND, BECAME INTERESTING VERY QUICKLY AS A GOOD GUY WHO FALLS IN LOVE WITH BAD GIRL BLACK WIDOW AND BETRAYS HIS COUNTRY!

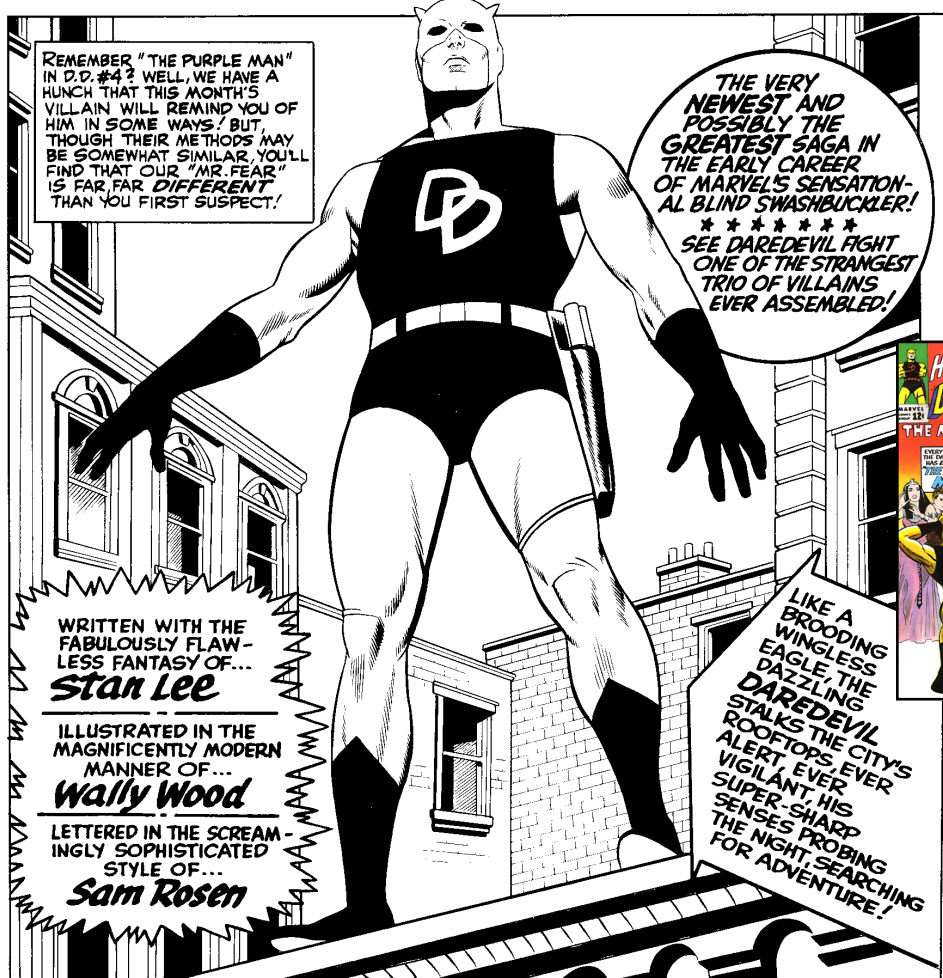
Daredevil #5

"The Mysterious Masked Matador!"; Stan Lee (script); Wally Wood (pencils/inks)

With breathless excitement, editor/scripiter Stan Lee made known the change in artists from Bill Everett and Joe Orlando, to the era of Wally



THE FELLOWSHIP OF FEAR!



REMEMBER "THE PURPLE MAN" IN D.D. #4? WELL, WE HAVE A HUNCH THAT THIS MONTH'S VILLAIN WILL REMIND YOU OF HIM IN SOME WAYS! BUT, THOUGH THEIR METHODS MAY BE SOMEWHAT SIMILAR, YOU'LL FIND THAT OUR "MR. FEAR" IS FAR, FAR DIFFERENT THAN YOU FIRST SUSPECT!

THE VERY NEWEST AND POSSIBLY THE GREATEST SAGA IN THE EARLY CAREER OF MARVEL'S SENSATIONAL BLIND SWASHBUCKLER!

SEE DAREDEVIL FIGHT ONE OF THE STRANGEST TRIO OF VILLAINS EVER ASSEMBLED!



WRITTEN WITH THE FABULOUSLY FLAW-LESS FANTASY OF...
Stan Lee

ILLUSTRATED IN THE MAGNIFICENTLY MODERN MANNER OF...
Wally Wood

LETTERED IN THE SCREAM-INGLY SOPHISTICATED STYLE OF...
Sam Rosen

LIKE A BROODING WINGLESS EAGLE, THE DAZZLING DAREDEVIL STALKS THE CITY'S ROOFTOPS, EVER ALERT, EVER VIGILANT, HIS SUPER-SHARP SENSES PROBING THE NIGHT, SEARCHING FOR ADVENTURE!

DAREDEVIL #5, PAGE 1: IT DIDN'T TAKE LONG FOR ARTIST WALLY WOOD TO BEGIN TINKERING WITH DAREDEVIL'S COSTUME AS CAN BE SEEN BY THE ABSENCE OF THE V-NECK DESIGN AND OTHER DETAILS. IT WOULDN'T BE LONG BEFORE THE WHOLE THING WAS TOSSED OUT IN FAVOR OF A COMPLETELY NEW LOOK. WOOD ALSO GRANTED THE STRIP A NEEDED CONSISTENCY IN LOOK THAT WOULD EVENTUALLY BOOST THE BOOK TO MONTHLY STATUS.

Wood: "Under the brilliant artistic craftsmanship of famous illustrator Wally Wood, Daredevil reaches new heights of glory!" So Lee trumpeted on the cover of *Daredevil* #5 (Dec. 1964) and well might he have! Getting Wood to draw the Daredevil strip was a major coup for the fledgling but rapidly solidifying Marvel superhero lineup. Wood had begun his career in the early 1950s before landing a permanent gig with EC Comics where his art became instantly recognizable as some of the most accomplished and beautiful in the industry. Most especially, he made his mark on the company's science fiction titles, where his utter fidelity to detail was the wonder of fandom. When EC folded, Wood found other work, most notably dividing his time in comics between inking for Jack Kirby on his *Sky Masters* newspaper strip and *Mad Magazine*. By then, his reputation had soared, and Lee

counted himself lucky to add such a prestigious talent to a strong Bullpen that already included Kirby, Don Heck, and Steve Ditko. Wood hit the ground running here with a full-length tale in which Daredevil

goes up against the Matador. Admittedly, the Matador (a frustrated bullfighter given to crime) was a pretty low level villain, but he was colorful (making him a good addition to Marvel's growing stable of bad guys) and with the right kind of plot, could manage to give DD a hard time. He does just that at a costume party where circumstances confuse our hero's heightened senses allowing the Matador to win their initial matchup. While Wood is good with characterization and crowd scenes,

his action scenes are understated, even static looking. But he makes up for that in layout and atmosphere such as page 15, panel 6, where he has DD sitting in a shadowed office waiting to greet the Matador. Wood's style and imagination coupled with Lee's sure scripting certainly lifted the overall quality of the DD strip, placing it among the top ranks of Marvel's offerings, but not all of his contributions would be fortunate ones. Granted, his designs for the Matador, Stilt-Man, and Mr. Fear were wonderful, but changes he implemented in the strip right off with this issue including changes to DD's costume (elimination of the V neck in his tunic and loss of the buttons fronting his boots were ill advised, but changing the single "D" on his chest to double, overlapping D's was good) were mostly unfortunate. Even worse would be the complete revamp of DD's costume from its eye catching yellow and red original to a less inventive all red jumpsuit. Boring! Still, the real tragedy for fans would be Wood's all too brief stay with Daredevil. Only four issues with full pencils and inks, and a few more with just inks. Then he was gone following a dispute with Lee over rates and division of labor. But at the time, fans didn't know that, allowing them to blissfully wallow in what had suddenly become one of the best-looking comics on the stands!



NO DOUBT SCREEN IDOL TYRONE POWER IN THE FILM BLOOD AND SAND (1941) WAS AN IMMEDIATE INSPIRATION FOR DAREDEVIL VILLAIN, THE MYSTERIOUS, MASKED MATADOR!

Avengers #11

"The Mighty Avengers Meet Spider-Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Evidence for the rising popularity of Spider-Man among readers is the fact of his growing number of guest starring roles in various Marvel books, including *Tales to Astonish* and his frequent meetings with the Human Torch. His latest turn is here, in *Avengers* #11 (Dec. 1964), as he jumps in to foil a plot by Kang the Conqueror to defeat the Avengers. Taking advantage of Iron Man's absence (due to the Golden Avenger's faking of the death of Tony Stark over in *Tales of Suspense*), Kang creates a robot of Spider-Man and has it try to join the Avengers (Kang must have read *Spider-Man* #1 and seen his attempt to join the FF there!). Needless to say, the attempt fails, and the false Spidey ends up luring our heroes to an Incan temple (or is it Aztec?) and defeats them one at a time. But not to worry! The real Spidey makes the scene just in time to save the day. How he does it, is anyone's guess, but by that time, the Stan Lee scripted story has drawn in the readers such that no one really cared. The only real drawback to this fun yarn, believe it or nuts, are the inks by Chic Stone over Don Heck's pencils. While working wonders over Kirby, here Stone falls short, holding back Heck's more delicate pencils and surprisingly making readers pine for the return of Dick Ayers! Nevertheless, Heck's work does manage to shine through in many places, including page 5, where he uses big, quarter page panels to depict Kang at work in his super futuristic lab and sending the fake Spider-Man traveling through the time barrier. (For an idea of how Heck's art would have looked without someone else inking it, check out the poster of Kang elsewhere in this issue, an image both penciled and inked by Dashin' Donny) Alas! Heck also proves the rule that at this time, only Steve Ditko had the proper touch to draw Spider-Man. Many of his shots here look decidedly awkward, especially in the design element of the webs on Spidey's costume, something no one but Ditko could get right. This inability to get Spidey right extended to cover artist Jack Kirby as well, although this time, the artist seems to have managed to get Spidey looking properly arachnid-like. But was it all Kirby? For sure, Ditko had a hand in producing this cover (whose symbolic design with its concentric rings of webbing is really catchy) as evidenced by its figure of Giant-Man. But surely, he must also have drawn the webbing pattern on Spidey's costume, despite the fact that the Spidey figure itself looks to have been drawn by Kirby. **Fun Fact:** Though he appears on the cover, Iron Man doesn't take part in this issue's story!

Patsy and Hedy #97

*"The Girl Between Them"; Stan Lee (script);
Al Hartley (pencils/inks)*

As if he wasn't being kept busy enough scripting Marvel's entire superhero line as well as its westerns, editor Stan Lee was also still at work writing the company's remaining romance comics (Including *Modeling with Millie* and *Millie the Model*). Although by this time, these titles might be considered less romance (though there was that, obviously) than a combination of romance and Archie style teen humor. As can be seen in *Patsy and Hedy* #97 (Dec. 1964), Hedy, jealous that Patsy seems to be too close to their handsome boss Ted Trent, tries to insert newcomer Sandra Starr in between them. But her plot backfires when the boss has Sandra take over Hedy's fashion column. But all's well that ends well and by the end of the story, the status quo ante between the two women is reestablished. These stories by Lee are surprisingly engaging and as would be seen in subsequent issues, some of the lessons being learned on the superhero books will spill over to the romance titles with more continuity and characterization, climaxing in *Patsy and Hedy's* appearance at the upcoming wedding of Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Girl in *FF Annual* #3, thus, like the *Sgt. Fury* title before them, firmly establishing Marvel's romance characters as inhabiting the same universe as its superheroes! And the influence was reciprocal, as Lee injected some of his romance plotting into the superhero titles. Lee himself had a knack for such fare, having tried off and on to break out of comics into comic strips and humor books. Another fun feature of the *Patsy and Hedy* book was the use of submissions by readers of clothing designs. Practically every page, artist Al Hartley is required to put in at least one full size panel showing off the characters in outfits designed by readers such as the one on page 18, panel 1: "Nan's nifty 3-piece suit prepared by: Ann Wells Hurst, Tex." Whether or not all these outfits were actually designed by readers or cribbed by Hartley from fashion magazines is unknowable but were likely a mix of the two. And like all Marvel comics at this time,

Patsy and Hedy were due to receive their very own letters' page as announced at the conclusion of this issue: "...please be sure to either type your letters, or write clearly with ink or a dark lead pencil...because the fabulous females here at the Marvel office want to be sure to read everything you have to say!" Was the word "fabulous" code for Stan Lee's gal Friday Flo Steinberg? Possibly!

Tales to Astonish #63

*"The Gangster and the Giant!"; Stan Lee (script);
Carl Burgos (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)
"A Titan Rides the Train!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils); George Bell (inks)*

If *Tales to Astonish* #63 (Jan. 1965) wasn't "the biggest double feature value for twelve cents" that the blurb on the cover claimed, it came awfully close! (Hint: the biggest double feature value of the month was actually *Tales of Suspense* #61!) At the very least, the images on the cover as drawn by Jack Kirby and inked by Chic Stone made a strong case for this issue of *Astonish*: Giant-Man crashing through a store front clutching the Wrecker in a fist that literally reaches out to the reader and below that, the Hulk facing off against a plastic whatsit atop a speeding train! Inside however, it was the same as the previous issue: namely an artistically disappointing Giant-Man story with sub-standard art by Golden Age veteran Carl Burgos and the high-octane Lee/Ditko presentation on the Hulk feature. Sadly, it was a split personality situation that would hold until the demise of the Giant-Man strip later in the year, making for a difficult decision for penny-pinching readers to decide whether to buy the book or not. Then again, editor/scripter Stan Lee tried hard to make the Giant-Man feature exciting, it was just that the growing Marvel lineup had stretched his artistic talent too thin. Though the Chic Stone inks over Burgos helped to make the art look somewhat Marvelesque (if a reader squinted), it wasn't enough to make the ground level story of our hero breaking up a protection racket run by the hooded Wrecker of the title an overly exciting one. Excitement would have to wait for the book's second



THE SUPER POPULAR AND ENDURING ARCHIE COMICS LINE INSPIRED MANY IMITATORS INCLUDING SOME AT MARVEL WHOSE OWN EARLY YEARS VERSIONS MIGHT BE DESCRIBED MORE AS DRAMEDY THAN STRAIGHT HUMOR.

feature. There, Lee and artist Steve Ditko introduce the Leader, a villain destined to become the Hulk's arch-enemy. His origin, while similar to the Hulk's, grants him super brain power rather than muscular strength. Dismissing his former identity as "meaningless," the Leader forms a vast spy network with the aim of taking over the country. But his spies have proved inadequate to the task, and so he's created what he calls a humanoid; an indestructible creature with great strength. Learning that Bruce Banner's latest nuclear invention will be transported via train, the Leader dispatches his humanoid to steal it. Of course, Banner is aboard the train (along with the suspicious Maj. Talbot) and with Banner around, can the Hulk be far behind? Though watered down somewhat by George Roussos' inking, Ditko's art is forceful and fun to look at with good action between the Hulk and the humanoid. So far, the serial format was working nicely for the Hulk feature, with each installment ending with readers anxious for the follow-up!

he have enhanced strength, but a costume patterned after a scorpion complete with tail. Unfortunately for Jameson however, the experiment has one flaw: it drives Gargan mad, turning him evil. Eventually, he comes to blame Jameson for turning him into a monster and thereafter seeks to kill him, thus setting up the ironic situation of Jameson relying on Spider-Man to defeat the Scorpion in order to save his life, a turnabout that's not lost on the hypocritical publisher. But between bouts with the Scorpion, Spidey has other looming problems (as usual), one being in the form of Ned Leeds, a reporter who threatens his relationship with Betty Brant. Another being his being beat to a near pulp by the much more powerful Scorpion and having to make excuses to Aunt May and the kids at school about what happened to him. Finally, he has to re-sew his shredded costume. Argh! Needless to say, by this time, Ditko's style had reached near perfection, with his choreographed fight scenes the most impressive while Lee's dialogue sums up the action

Amazing Spider-Man #20

"The Coming of the Scorpion or Spidey Battles Scorpy!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

With the three-part "Spidey goes yellow and comes roaring back" storyline over with, scripter Stan Lee and penciler/inker Steve Ditko reenergize the Spidey strip with a densely plotted tale that not only introduces yet another supervillain destined to enter the ranks of classic Spider-Man bad guys, but spotlights J. Jonah Jameson as well. In *Amazing Spider-Man #20* (Jan. 1965), readers learn that the mysterious man who's been following Peter Parker around for the last ish or twain is actually one private investigator Mac Gargan, hired by Jameson to find out how Peter takes such great pix of Spidey in action. Luckily, he fails. Instead, he accompanies Jameson to the lab of Dr. Farley Stillwell, who says he can grant any man super powers. Jameson decides that Gargan would be the perfect subject for the enhancement and in return for his investment, he expects Gargan to defeat Spider-Man. Gargan agrees and when the doc is finished with him, not only does

and ramps up the emotionalism in an increasingly realistic fashion. Jameson in particular had become one of the most well-rounded among the supporting cast with Aunt May, Betty Brant, and Ned Leeds not far behind. It was no wonder that the *Spider-Man* strip was rapidly becoming the leader of the comics industry!



THE ORIGINS OF MANY OF COMICS' CHARACTER TYPES, VILLAINS, AND SITUATIONS CAN BE TRACED DIRECTLY BACK TO THEIR PULP MAGAZINE PROGENITORS, EVEN TO SUCH DISTANT RELATIVES AS SPIDER-MAN VILLAIN THE SCORPION AND THE VILLAINOUS SCORPION WHO HEADLINED HIS OWN PULP TITLE WAY BACK IN 1939!

Fantastic Four #34

"A House Divided!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Here was Marvel in the midst of its greatest single year as editor/scripter Stan Lee was getting everything together; lead artist Jack Kirby, teamed with inker Chic Stone, was producing the best work of his career; artist Steve Ditko was turning the *Spider-Man* strip into a showcase; colorful new villains were being introduced left and right; and plots and stories were almost all interesting and overall fun as can be, when there was a seeming stumble in *Fantastic Four #34* (Jan. 1965). Well, not a stumble really, but somewhat of a speed bump as the team confronts not a colorful new villain, but simply a fabulously rich guy by the name of Gregory Gideon.

Yet, for all his wealth, Gideon wants more. In fact, he wants it all! He makes a bet with his competitors that he can defeat the FF within a week. If he does, they forfeit all their assets to him. If he doesn't, he'll give up all of his own wealth. His plan is to sow distrust among the team members so that, like the Bible reference captured in the story's title, "A House Divided," the FF cannot stand but must fall apart. Of course, Gideon fails, but only because he hadn't counted on his son's admiration for the FF. In trying to warn the team of his father's plan, he falls into a time trap prepared for the FF. To get him back, Gideon pleads with the FF to help and in return, promises to forget his ambitions. It was a good story to be sure, but somehow, by this point in Marvel's progression, was vaguely disappointing, a seeming waste of the Kirby/Stone team. However, that doesn't stop Kirby from going for broke art wise (as he always did) such as the big panel on page 4 that takes up two thirds of the page showing Gideon's cavernous office complete with massive desk and security guards bringing in sacks full of petty cash! An added bonus was a pin up page by Kirby of the FF wandering around Yancy Street. Another fun outing with the FF, but not everything readers had come to expect from "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine." But happily, that would change quickly with the very next issue!

Strange Tales #128

"Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch!";

Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers

(pencils);

Frank Giacoia (inks)

"The Demon's Disciple!"; Stan Lee (script);

Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

In what was perhaps a preview of what was in editor/scripter Stan Lee's mind regarding the characters of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, he produces them as guest stars in this issue's lead feature starring the Thing and the Human Torch. The brother/sister pair were still members of Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, but as readers of the *X-Men* book knew, their hearts weren't really in it. Feeling indebted to Magneto for once saving their lives, they served him, but their obvious reluctance

in doing so prompted readers to petition Lee to have them desert the Brotherhood for the X-Men. Not unmindful of the clamor, Lee never dismissed the notion out of hand. Indeed, he'd later rehabilitate the two mutants and, in a surprise move, had them join the Avengers instead of the X-Men. But for now, the story here reinforces their dissatisfaction as they travel to the Baxter Building to seek the advice of the FF on how to transition from bad guys to good guys. Unfortunately, only the Thing and Torch are home and they've just heard a news report identifying the pair as evildoers. A fight ensues until both sides come to an uneasy truce, and Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch are allowed to walk away to rejoin Magneto. Lee's story had everything to make it a classic confrontation, but its potential was ruined by the unimaginative Dick Ayers artwork (inked serviceably by Frank Giacoia under the pseudonym of Frank Ray) that again, suffers by comparison to the likes of Jack Kirby. In fact, this was just the kind of special story that Kirby used to be called in to illustrate, but alas, he was apparently way too busy by this time on other features to continue with that. More's the pity. (At least readers had a hint of what might have been from the cover which was drawn, as usual, by the King.) Contrastingly, however, the Dr. Strange secondary feature in *Strange Tales* #128 (Jan. 1965) not only had Steve Ditko on the pencils, but he was back to inking his own work as well. This time, he and scripter Lee have the good doctor facing off with the self-anointed



ARTIST STEVE DITKO'S DEMON IS NOT TO BE CONFUSED WITH JACK KIRBY'S DEMON. TO BE UNLEASHED BY DC COMICS LATER IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS AFTER THE ARTIST HAD LEFT MARVEL FOR ITS CHIEF COMPETITOR.

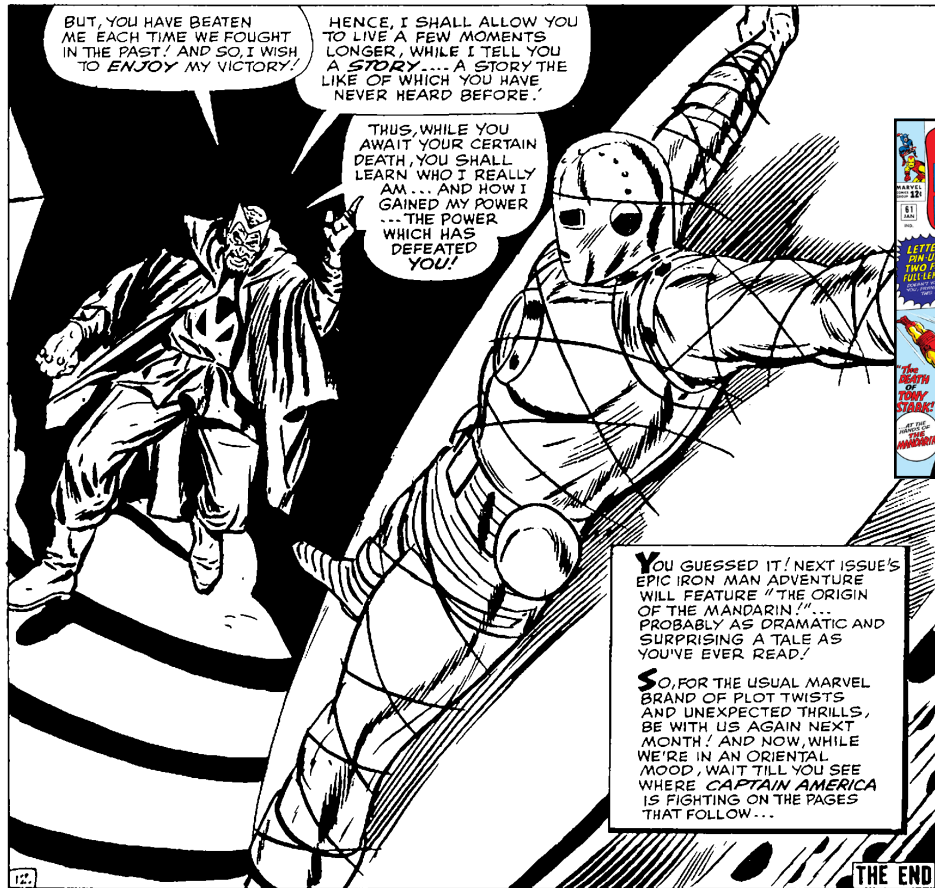
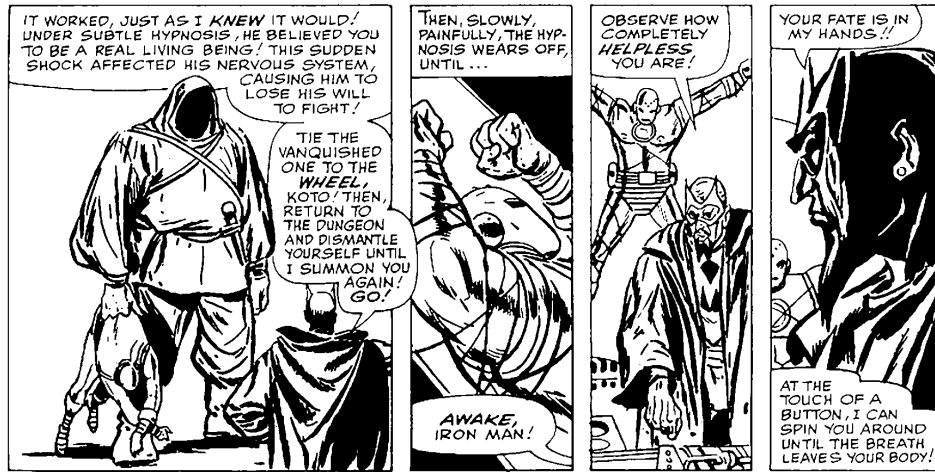
Demon, a competing mage who's been practicing in secret against the day he could challenge Strange. Of course Strange defeats him, but not before the Demon presents him with some interesting challenges, including use of the Crimson Bands of Cyttorak! Here, pure Ditko is pure gold as he not only continues showing the use of magic in his own unique style (his depiction of Strange versus the Demon in mystic combat is one for the books!) but manages a really cool portrait of the Demon on page 5, panel 3. All that and a new Ditko drawn pin up of Strange too. It all went a long way to making up for the visually disappointing Thing/Torch story.

Tales of Suspense #61

"The Death of Tony Stark!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Strength of the Sumo!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

It might have been claimed that this month's issue of *Tales to*



Astonish was the "greatest double feature value" for the money, but really, as good as *Astonish* #63 might have been, *Tales of Suspense* #61 (Jan. 1965) actually deserved the honor. With a lead 12-page Iron Man story with art by Don Heck at the near height of his powers and a second feature starring Captain America with art by the take no prisoners team of Jack Kirby and Chic Stone, what else could fans conclude? This time, editor Stan Lee (who also scripted both stories) was absolutely right when he penned the blurb on this issue's cover: "Letters page! Pin-up page! Two fabulous full-length features! Doesn't your conscience bother you, paying only 12¢ for all this enchantment?" The answer:

readers likely did feel a twinge of guilt paying so little for a book like this! C'mon! The Iron Man portion alone, featuring as it does the return of the Mandarin in the first of a two-part epic tale, was sensational enough! In it, Iron Man is still under suspicion for the disappearance of Tony Stark. Apparently sick in bed, Stark manages to come up with an excuse, but Happy Hogan and Pepper Potts are not buying it. Before they can do anything about it though, a ray strikes Stark's home and destroys it along with Stark... or so everyone thinks. Filled with drama, characterization, and soap operatic elements (not to mention the expected superheroics), this story is a perfect example of why the Iron Man strip was one of



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TALES OF SUSPENSE #61, PAGE 12: FANS SPENT MANY A SLEEPLESS NIGHT FEELING GUILTY FOR PAYING ONLY .12 FOR THIS ISSUE THAT INCLUDED THIS INCREDIBLE FINAL PAGE OF THE IRON MAN FEATURE! PENCILED AND INKED BY DON HECK, READERS HAD TO WAIT A NEAR ENDLESS 30 DAYS TO FIND OUT NOT ONLY THE MANDARIN'S ORIGIN, BUT HOW IM ESCAPES FROM HIS DEADLY CLUTCHES! HOO BOY!



ALTHOUGH IT WAS STILL SAFE FOR CAPTAIN AMERICA TO ADVENTURE IN VIETNAM DURING 1965, ANTI-WAR RUMBLINGS WOULD SOON MAKE SUCH STORIES PROBLEMATIC WITH SOME FANS AND STUDENTS EDITOR STAN LEE WAS MEETING ON THE LECTURE CIRCUIT.

Marvel's most popular. But in *Suspense*, fans had an embarrassment of riches. Just as good, or maybe even better, was the book's second feature as Captain America makes his first visit to Vietnam. Such visits, that should have been a lot more frequent given Cap's history as a WWII combatant, were actually rare in the 1960s. The problem was, Cap's introduction into the Marvel Universe coincided with Lee's earliest appearances at local college campuses, where he may have encountered the first rumblings of youthful discontent with the war in Vietnam to which the United States had just decided to increase its commitment. Be that as it may, after a couple of all battle stories in *Suspense* #50 and 60, scripter Lee and artist Jack Kirby decide on a change of pace by telling a more involved story with Cap penetrating into Viet Cong held territory to rescue a downed American helicopter pilot, the brother of a man who once helped him back in WWII. The slam bang action starts on page 1 and quickly moves along as Cap first battles a group of Cong wrestlers before meeting up with the commie general who turns out to be a massive sumo wrestler! What results is more incredible Kirby style hand to hand combat with Cap finally freeing the captive pilot. A pilot incidentally, who is African American, a fact that is never mentioned in the story. Readers were simply expected to take it for granted in an era when such supporting roles were still extremely rare in comics.

Avengers #12

"This Hostage Earth!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Except for the dramatic, in your face, Jack Kirby cover illustration (suitable for framing!), there was nothing much to write home about in *Avengers* #12 (Jan. 1965). Even scripter Stan Lee seemed to sense the low level of excitement when he has the rest of the Avengers castigate Giant-Man for seemingly wasting their time after he sounds the emergency alarm based on some overly excited ants. With the others gone, Giant-Man decides to investigate the problem himself, and is soon battling the Mole Man, who's in the midst of yet another plot to conquer the surface world. This time, he's allied with fellow Fantastic Four foe, the Red Ghost (sans super apes). After some early action, Giant-Man is captured and the Avengers, finally convinced that something's up, head to Subterranea and help confound Mole Man's plans. It was a fun yarn, but the Avengers deserved bigger and badder menaces to fight. And while penciler Don Heck's artwork was strong at the start of the story (utilizing bigger panels and concentrating as it does on Giant-Man solo action), it fumbles somewhat in the second half when the artist's layouts begin to use smaller and smaller panels. Ayers' inking isn't too hurtful, but he fails to fill in backgrounds in many places and doesn't bother to correct some of Heck's less attractive affectations, such as his habit of drawing the wings on Thor's helmet as if they were actual feathers and not a more rigid ornamentation. But don't let this issue fool you into forgetting that this was still Marvel's best year ever. For proof, just take a gander at the two ad pages that conclude this ish showing off four comics on each page with the one featuring the latest FF (first Dragon Man), Spidey (with the Torch vs. the Beetle), Thor (vs. the Hulk), and X-Men (vs. the Avengers) books a group of comics of unequalled excellence in comics history!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #14

"The Blitzkrieg Squad of Baron Strucker!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

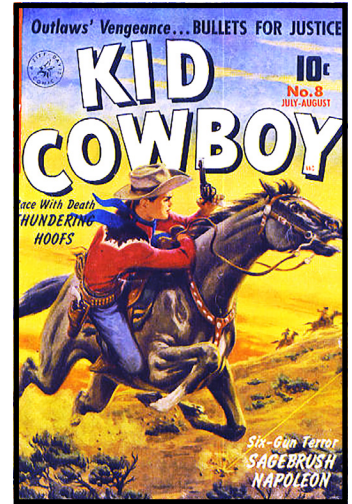
Sooner or later, it had to happen! The Nazis, fed up with the Howling Commandos' successes, and defeated practically every time they tried to stop them, finally figured out that the only way to deal with them was to fight fire with fire. Thus, the reasoning behind the creation of the Blitzkrieg Squad! And who but Baron Strucker, Sgt. Fury's natural Nazi counterpart, to lead them? Such was the logic of Adolph Hitler (and Stan Lee!) as the Howlers go up against a team

formed specifically to be their equal if not superior. Each member of the Squad is chosen as a counter to a member of the Howlers. For instance, there's the bruiser with a funny Alpine hat (for Dum Dum Dugan); the guy with the movie star looks (for Dino Manelli); the "master mechanic" (for Izzy Cohen); the "Prussian Junker" aristocrat (for Percy Pinkerton); and a "master of horsemanship" (for Reb Ralston). Strucker sets a trap for the Howlers that is sure to draw Allied attention. It does and the Howlers are sent out to handle the situation. (It would have been interesting if one of the other special attack squads was sent, confounding the Nazis' expectations!) Taken by surprise, they're captured. But not to worry! They escape and make fools of the Squad. (While Strucker gets a tongue lashing from Uncle Adolph!) It was a brilliant idea with a ready-made set of arch villains for the Howlers that fans would want to see again and again but much of the story's energy, let alone potential for action, is squandered by penciler Dick Ayers' boring art. What interest it does generate is due largely to the inks of George Roussos whose chunky style somehow gives Ayers' art some vague attraction in a few panels here and there. For an idea of what this ish might have looked like under better hands, just look at the cover for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #14 (Jan. 1965) that was drawn by the master, Jack Kirby with inks by Chic Stone. There, the Howlers are surrounded as the Blitz Squad jumps out at them from every direction. How many extra sales of a book like this did Kirby generate that otherwise would never have materialized based solely on the interior visuals? Probably lots!

Tales to Astonish #64

"When Attuma Strikes!"; Leon Lazarus (script); Carl Burgos (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)
"The Horde of Humanoids!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

As the situation had been since the book entered its double feature format, it was the backup Hulk strip that continued to be the shining light in *Tales to Astonish* #64 (Feb. 1965). There, burdened by the inks of George Roussos, penciler Steve Ditko is still on the job, as is scripter Stan Lee, as they pick up the story where it left off the issue before, i.e. with Bruce Banner under arrest and new arch-villain the Leader more than a little interested in the Hulk. There's a big twist however, when Rick Jones shows up (fresh from working with the Avengers) and manages to get Banner pardoned by none other than Pres. Lyndon Johnson! Now free, Banner immediately accompanies the still suspicious Maj. Talbot to Astra Island where the Army is about



WHO WAS LEON LAZARUS? WELL MIGHT FANS IN 1965 ASK! LAZARUS HAD BEEN A STAFF WRITER FOR MARVEL IN ITS PRE-HERO DAYS UNTIL LAID OFF WHEN PUBLISHER MARTIN GOODMAN SCALED BACK HIS COMICS OPERATION. LAZARUS FELL BACK ON FICTION WRITING FOR GOODMAN'S LINE OF MEN'S MAGAZINES UNTIL RE-EMERGING BRIEFLY AS A COMICS WRITER IN THE MID-1960S.

to test Banner's latest device, a nuclear absorbatron. (Don't ask!) Then comes a cool sequence where the Leader unleashes an army of plastic humanoids by dropping them into the ocean. Walking along the sea bottom, they eventually invade Astra Island where Banner turns into the Hulk, and double-barreled action ensues. The issue ends in another cliffhanger, with the Hulk being overwhelmed by the seemingly invulnerable plastic creatures. Throughout, the team of Lee and Ditko totally deliver, amazing the reader in how much story they can pack into only ten pages. By contrast, inker Paul Reinman only doubles down on penciler Carl Burgos' clumsy, even ugly style for an uninspired Giant-Man tale where he meets Sub-Mariner foe Attuma. To be fair, Burgos isn't helped by a story scripted by one Leon Lazarus filling in for the absent Stan Lee. Lazarus had had a long association with Magazine Management, Marvel's parent company owned by Martin Goodman. Beginning his career in the later Golden Age, Lazarus was laid off in the early '50s, when Goodman decided to downsize and found other employment writing fiction for the company's line of men's magazines. But, according to Lazarus, his single assignment here as a writer during the Marvel Age of Comics came about due to Goodman's fear that with Lee writing everything himself, the editor placed the publisher over a barrel if he ever decided to hold him up for a raise. And so, Goodman insisted Lee take on other writers, starting with Lazarus. Though Lazarus' effort could've been

decent, it was ruined by the Burgos/Roussos art team that showed little inspiration or imagination in presenting the action, let alone such details as facial features. For the umpteenth time in such situations, fans had only to look at this issue's cover to get a hint on how such a story could have looked under more talented hands. There, artist Jack Kirby did it again with one of his best illos of Giant-Man ever. Apparently inked by Vince Colletta, this shot of Giant-Man holding Attuma aloft

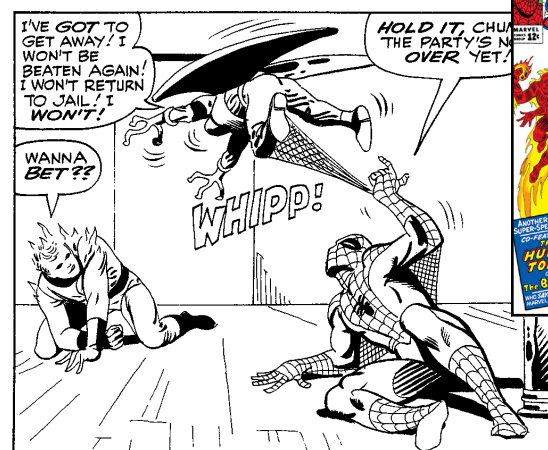
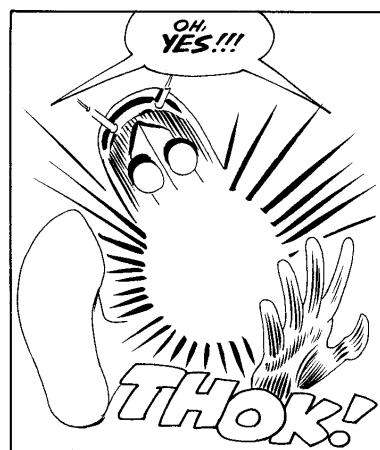
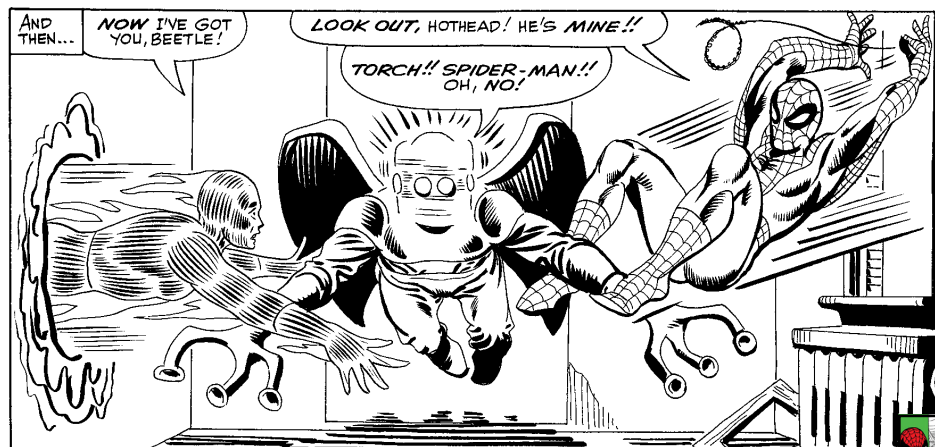
in his oversized hand along with the grim look on the hero's face is incredible! Oh, if only the King had continued as the regular artist on the Giant-Man feature! Surely, he could have squeezed in an extra 12 pages into his schedule? All he had to do was get along with only two or three hours of sleep every night. But alas, even Kirby it seemed, was only human.

Amazing Spider-Man #21

"Where Flies the Beetle...!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Hoo ha! When it came to a quintessential example of the greatness of the Marvel Age of Comics (not to mention why it was destined to overwhelm its stodgy competition) there was no better place to look than here, *Amazing Spider-Man* #21 (Feb. 1965)!

A Stan Lee scripted / Steve Ditko drawn blowout extravaganza that underlined Marvel's whole approach to its superhero line, namely, telling straight ahead stories with a touch of humor. And this issue of Spidey filled both those bills...in spades! The sheer delight offered by this ish is signaled by Ditko right on the cover with a shot of Spidey caught between fellow teenaged rival the Human Torch and the slightly ridiculous supervillain the Beetle. Even the layup for the coming story promises healthy doses of humor as Peter Parker literally bumps into Torch girlfriend Dorrie Evans, who invites him into her home for tea and crumpets (or whatever). The irony being that she's more impressed with Peter's normalcy than the Torch's flamboyance. Little does she



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AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #21, PAGE 19: ARTIST STEVE DITKO WINDS UP WHAT HAD TO HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE MOST ACTION PACKED SPIDEY OUTINGS YET...AND THE FUNNIEST! READER INTEREST WAS EVENLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THE PETER PARKER/DORRIE EVANS/JOHNNY STORM TRIANGLE AND THE SPIDEY/HUMAN TORCH/BEETLE SLUGFEST. EITHER WAY, THEY GOT THEIR MONEY'S WORTH...AND MORE!

know...! The result is a confrontation on the street between the angry Johnny Storm and Peter wherein Peter tells off the uniformed Johnny. Nearby, Flash and the gang are almost impressed. "Maybe he's not really a pantywaist," says one kid of Peter. Meanwhile, Johnny is left wondering, "I just don't get it! What can Dorrie see in a big zero like him?" Meanwhile, free from jail, the Beetle makes his way to Dorrie's house with the idea of catching the Torch in an ambush. Instead, Spidey shows up, spoiling the Beetle's plans. They begin to fight, eventually ending up in Dorrie's living room! Here, Ditko really lets go in page after page of brilliantly choreographed action and when the Torch makes the scene, wow! Just take page 15 for example: two big, quarter page panels at the top are classic Ditko but the huge half page illo beneath beats them all hollow as Spidey reels away from a maddened Torch! This was Ditko in full afterburn, finally coming into his own as an artist and blowing away any doubters left in the room! (And if there were any left, all they had to do was gaze upon a special pin-up of Spidey provided at the back of the book! Zowie!) And when the action moves into an abandoned building with the three combatants moving from room to room, well, it's merely a whole lot of fun! "Torch! Spider-Man!? Oh, no!" laments the Beetle as he's caught in a squeeze play. "Oh, yes!" cry the two heroes as they all collide. But the hilarity and joy of this issue fades quickly as the rescued Dorrie expresses fear of Spider-Man while flying into the arms of the Torch. The action leaves our hero by himself in the final panel standing atop a smokestack overlooking the cold, unfeeling city lamenting a fate that has seemingly cast him in the role of loner for all time.

Fantastic Four #35

"Calamity on the Campus!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

In perhaps a nod to the growing popularity of Marvel Comics on college campuses, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby moved the action for *Fantastic Four* #35 (Feb. 1965) to the bucolic surroundings of State University. There, the alma mater of both Reed Richards and Ben Grimm, the FF become the confluence of a number of personalities as they converge in the same place and time, combining Marvel Comics penchant for both action and humor. In fact, the Marvel Universe by this point had evolved such that events and characters from different books could be easily combined into different patterns without endangering the believability of the whole. In fact, such rendezvous added to its verisimilitude



MUCH OF MARVEL'S FAN ENERGY WAS CENTERED ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES AROUND THE COUNTRY WHERE EDITOR STAN LEE HAD TAKEN TO LECTURING ON THE GROWING POPULARITY OF MARVEL COMICS...AS WELL AS HIMSELF! THUS, THIS OFFICE VISIT WITH STAN LEE IN 1967 BY A STUDENT DELEGATION FROM PRINCETON'S CHAPTER OF THE MERRY MARVEL MARCHING SOCIETY WOULDN'T HAVE SEEMED UNUSUAL.

rather than detracting from it. Case in point: even as the FF encounter old enemy Diablo on campus, rivals Johnny Storm and Peter Parker cross paths as they consider the school for possible attendance after they graduate high school (while referring to their recent encounter in this month's *Amazing Spider-Man*) even as the rest of the FF bump into Prof X and Scott Summers elsewhere on the campus. Humor is provided on the gridiron as Reed and Ben, "the best four-letter man State ever had," take on the college's entire football squad. Finally, the issue is climaxed in romance as Reed and Sue stroll down "Memory Lane" to visit the "Sweetheart Tree" and declare their love for each other. "According to tradition," Reed tells Sue, "Any couple who hold hands and kiss while standing before (the Sweetheart Tree), will marry within a year!" And so it would happen as the two at long last become engaged. ("Yeesh!! What a revoltin' development!!" concludes a wondering Thing) Which is not to say Stan and Jack skimp on the action! In between all these moments is a riotous battle with Diablo and Dragon Man, a model creature constructed by State's very own mad scientist, that the villain turns to life and sics onto the FF. What follows is page after page of action, with twists and turns ending with the apparent deaths of both Diablo and Dragon Man in a bottomless pool. After the more restrained Gideon affair of the last issue, this issue's story was like a breath of fresh air. This was more like it! And more was on the way, with the momentum for fantastic situations and action begun here carrying over through the rest of Marvel's greatest year and far beyond!

Strange Tales #129

"The Terrible Trio!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"Beware...Tiboro! The Tyrant of the Sixth Dimension!";
Don Rico (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Like the Giant-Man strip over in *Tales to Astonish*, the Thing/Human Torch feature would continue to stumble along under weak artistic hands until their almost predetermined finish a few months down the road. In *Strange Tales* #129 (Feb. 1965), the two are menaced by the unexciting "terrible trio," the same three up powered henchmen of Dr. Doom seen in *Fantastic Four* #23. Here, they manage to capture both the Torch and the Thing, securing them to railroad tracks in front of an

oncoming train. Shades of the Perils of Pauline! Not exactly the stuff of a successful feature, and it wasn't helped by the pencils of Dick Ayers despite being somewhat bolstered by the inks of Frank Giacoia. (And previewed with a much more attractive cover illo by Jack Kirby) The only saving grace here was Lee's scripting but without a strong hand on the art, it was a wasted effort. Not like Don Rico, who stepped in to script the following Dr. Strange yarn penciled and inked by the great Steve Ditko (Who was likely the main plotter as well, just as he'd become over on the Spider-Man book). Rico, an early writer/editor

for Timely Comics in the Golden Age, returned to Marvel briefly likely for the same reasons that Leon Lazarus had been called in to script a *Tales to Astonish*: because publisher Martin Goodman was fearful that with Lee writing everything, he'd be stuck if Lee ever decided to quit or ask for a raise. Here, Rico does all right. Perhaps with Lee's editorial hand in, he was able to mimic the latter's style so that there was nothing too jarring here in a tale wherein the good doctor meets a new menace calling himself Tiboro, "tyrant of the sixth dimension."

Tales of Suspense #62

"The Origin of the Mandarin!"; Stan Lee (script);
Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"Break Out in Cell Block 10!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Marvel's greatest double feature value for only 12¢ continued to maintain its reputation with *Tales of Suspense* #62 (Feb. 1965) ...and how! The wonderment begins where last issue left off, namely with Iron Man captured by the Mandarin and now, besides imminent death, he has to listen as the Mandarin tells him about his origin. Something that True Believers were beginning to wonder about after a number of appearances by the villain and no explanation about where he came from, or where he got those ten rings, each with a

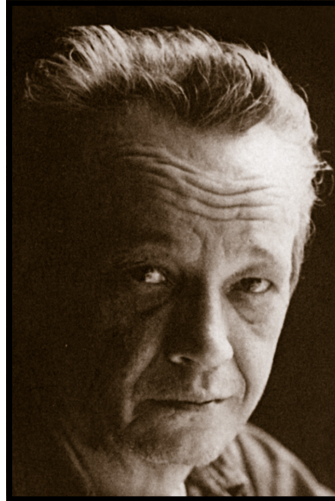
separate fantastic power. Well, as readers learned here, he got them where you'd expect, in a crashed alien space ship! But scripter Stan Lee doesn't leave things there. As was increasingly to be expected in the Marvel Age of Comics, major villains were likely to have detailed, character-establishing origins too, just as the heroes did. Dr. Doom got one, the Red Skull would too down the road a piece, and so would the Mandarin here, as readers discovered he was an orphaned child, raised by an aunt who hated the world. Before her untimely death, she spent the fortune the Mandarin had inherited to educate him in every subject. Then the Reds



EFFORTS AT PRISON REFORM WERE HIGHLIGHTED BY RIOTS SUCH AS THAT AT WALPOLE STATE PRISON IN NOVEMBER OF 1965, WHICH BEGAN WHEN A POWER FAILURE THREW THE BUILDINGS INTO DARKNESS. THE RIOT WAS QUELLED WITH TEAR GAS BUT ANOTHER HAPPENED THE NEXT YEAR IN WHICH FOUR GUARDS WERE STABBED. PRISON VIOLENCE PEAKED WITH THE ATTICA RIOT OF 1971 WHERE 43 MEN PERISHED.

came and confiscated all of the Mandarin's property. That didn't help his disposition any! That's when he came across the alien ship, found the rings, moved in to an empty castle, and began studying the alien's technology. With that knowledge, he became a feared and independent authority within Red China but his inability to defeat Iron Man had created a mania in him such that he was blinded to everything else, including the fact that maybe, just maybe, he'd met his match. Maybe more so, as Iron Man proceeds to demonstrate. First escaping from the Mandarin's trap and then turning the tables on him. It was a satisfyingly well-

done story scripted by Stan Lee and drawn by Don Heck (for whom even Dick Ayers' inking didn't hurt any) But as great as this tale was, it was matched by the Captain America second feature! There, Lee teams with penciler Jack Kirby and inker Chic Stone to provide yet another tale in which Cap battles a small army of non-powered criminals. This time, he's trapped in State Penitentiary, where the cons have captured the warden, and their leader believes that Cap's shield is the key to their escape. (The story starts with Cap being attacked right in the warden's office, and the reader is expected to believe Cap is so naive that he doesn't realize instantly that something's not kosher: "I wonder why they asked me to demonstrate how I would defend myself if the prisoners escaped and attacked me?" Cap wonders while dodging gunfire. "Oh, well, they must have their reasons!") Of course, this was all just an excuse for more of Kirby's straight-ahead action and quickly fill ten pages as Cap battles hordes of bad guys in an impossible display of athleticism. And even with his current workload, Kirby doesn't spare the horses. Just take a gander at page 10, panel 1 where he draws twenty-eight separate figures! Yesiree, *Tales of Suspense* was most definitely among Marvel's top tier of must buy books for any fan in the know!



ARTIST WALLY WOOD MADE HIS MARK AT EC COMICS IN THE 1950s MOST NOTABLY WITH ITS SCIENCE FICTION TITLES. BUT WOOD WAS EQUALLY AT HOME WITH ANY GENRE INCLUDING HUMOR WHICH WAS ON DISPLAY IN EARLY ISSUES OF MAD MAGAZINE.

Daredevil #6

"Trapped by...the Fellowship of Fear!"; Stan Lee (script); Wally Wood (pencils/inks)

Marvel did it again! Or was it just editor/scripster Stan Lee? Maybe it was artist Wally Wood, but in his case, was he even familiar enough with Marvel's short history to have come up with this particular team of villains? For instance, the Eel? One of the most obscure villains Lee had come up with to confound and bedevil the Human Torch. But that's beside the point, the cool thing about *Daredevil* #6 (Feb. 1965) is yet another great team name for supervillains: the Fellowship of Fear! Ya gotta love it! It ranks right up there with the Emissaries of Evil, the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and even the Sinister Six! And check out

its leader, none other than Mr. Fear. Okay, not exactly an original sounding name, but it's still fun just the same. And though his power to literally invoke fear in his adversaries by means of his fear gun might also sound unoriginal (somewhere in the history of comics and pulp mags, villains must have tried the same thing more than once), Lee manages to make him feel original with Wood's costuming somewhat low key but memorable. The story itself begins with action as Daredevil foils a robbery by the Fellowship (which also includes the Ox, having quit the Enforcers, one presumes) but is compelled to run away after Mr.

Fear targets him with his fear gun. After readers are informed of Mr. Fear's origin (he's really Zoltan Drago, kids, the owner of a wax museum who was trying to find a means of bringing his figures to life but wound up discovering fear gas instead; in other words, ole Zoltan was a nut) the Fellowship devises a plan to trap DD in a wax museum, just the setting for the somewhat creepy atmosphere evoked by Wood's art (and his skull like design for Mr. Fear's mask). Here again, he excels in producing a Daredevil story that was miles ahead of

predecessors Joe Orlando or even Bill Everett. (Even though he was, deliberately or no, still getting the design of DD's costume wrong) Between he and Lee, the two were swiftly lifting the Daredevil feature into the top ranks of Marvel's titles. With its solid art, smooth storytelling, colorful villains, and supporting characters, there was a lot to like, and readers knew it.

Journey Into Mystery #113

"A World Gone Mad!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

The fun times continue in *Journey Into Mystery* #113 (Feb. 1965) as the dream team of Stan Lee on script, Jack Kirby on pencils, and Chic Stone on inks produce another classic Thor adventure. This time, the Grey Gargoyle returns from where he plunged into the river at the conclusion of his last contest with our hero. Salvaged by a local museum, he revives and immediately picks up where he left off, namely with

the intention of stealing Thor's hammer under the belief that its possession will grant him immortality. Meanwhile, defying Odin, Don Blake reveals his secret identity as Thor to Jane; but just as he's about to tap his cane to prove it, he's robbed of his powers by big daddy Odin, leaving him holding the bag. Just then (of course!) the Gargoyle breaks in demanding Blake tell him where he can find Thor. What results is a bit of a twist as the powerless Don Blake and Jane are pursued by the Gargoyle through the city. But unknown to Blake, an unnamed Asgardian is on Earth who restores his power for thirty seconds. That's enough for Blake to change to Thor and defeat the Gargoyle. The mysterious Asgardian was really Honir the Hunter sent by Odin in a moment of weakness. "Only the strong dare to be gentle, my lord," says Honir of Odin's expressed doubts about his own motivations. "And only the wise can be as forgiving as Odin!" Another great little story with just a hint that Kirby may have been a little rushed this time, with figures in some panels looking more basic than was usual for him. Likewise this issue's "Tales of Asgard" featuring "The Boyhood of Loki." There, Vince Colletta's inks over Kirby continued to astonish. Colletta's light touch seemed to accentuate the airiness of Kirby's original pencils, capturing them perhaps better than more literal embellishers ever did before. The story itself, of how Loki sabotages a contest of champions and the resulting trouble smoothed over by his brother is interesting, illustrating the basis for his resentment of Thor while whetting the appetite of fans for more stories from this early period of the villain's history.

Avengers #13

"The Castle of Count Nefaria!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

After a number of issues that seemed to drag somewhat following artist Jack Kirby's departure with issue #8, *Avengers* #13 (Feb. 1965) was a real wake up call. It began with a spectacular example of one of Kirby's specialties: the symbolic cover design. Here, showing the Avengers held at bay by rays emanating from an incredibly articulated control panel operated by Count Nefaria as if he were some fanatical organist. No kid worth his 12 cents could possibly resist picking up a comic with this masterpiece for a come on! And what's more, that buyer would be more than rewarded with an epic length tale by scripter Stan Lee of an elaborate plot by Nefaria to capture the Avengers in retaliation for their interference in the operations of the Maggia, Marvel's very own euphemism for real life organized crime, of which he's the leader. Under the guise of inviting the Avengers to visit his castle, he frames them so that they're charged as enemies of



NO KID COULD HAVE RESISTED THIS DRAMATIC AVENGERS COVER IMAGE BY JACK KIRBY AS INKED BY CHIC STONE! WELL, ALMOST NO KID. THERE CERTAINLY MUST HAVE STILL BEEN SOME DC HOLDOUTS IN THE HINTERLANDS BUT IT WASN'T IN LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS WHERE THE AUTHOR EAGERLY PLUNKED DOWN HIS HARD EARNED .12 FOR IT!

the state (A preview scene for which was beautifully depicted by penciler Don Heck on this issue's splash page). Realizing they've been tricked, the Avengers return to assault the castle which turns out to be filled with booby traps. Anyway, the Avengers win through but at a cost: the Wasp is shot by one of the Maggia's hoods with her life hanging in the balance! There's so much good stuff here, it's hard to point at any single element that really rings the bell, but one thing that stands out is the role of the Teen Brigade as they become suspicious of Nefaria and then strike out on their own. One of the last times the group would ever feature prominently in the series, it would prove a nice send off for the much-missed teens who were soon to be left behind as Marvel outgrew such obvious kid fare concepts.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #15

*"Too Small to Fight, Too Young to Die!";
Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Steve Ditko (inks)*

Surprise! Surprise! Look who's inking Dick Ayers in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #15 (Feb. 1965)! None other than Steve Ditko, taking some time between Spider-Man and Dr. Strange to help out this ish. Ditko replaced regular inker George Roussos in a pinch, according to editor/scripter Stan Lee's comments on the letters' page, when the latter left on vacation. And though there was really nothing Ditko could do about Ayers pedestrian layouts, he helped enormously on the characters' faces. Right off the bat, regular readers likely noticed how the Howlers' faces on the symbolic opening splash page were more finely rendered than usual, something that held in the following pages with many close-ups interesting to look at for the first time in many issues. The Ditko touch also enhanced other scattered images with panel 3, page 5 in particular, with its presentation of Hans Rooten's first meeting with the Howlers. The way Ditko kept Hans in the dark with just a suggestion of shading caused by overhead leafage really set this dramatic image apart. And Ditko's ability to prettify the teenaged girls on pages 7 and 8 went a long way to make that scene work. So with the artwork up a notch or two compared to previous issues, it would've been a shame if the story didn't measure up. But Lee came through again with a tale about the Howlers' mission to the Netherlands to stop a Nazi buildup preparatory to the invasion of England. That's all! To do it, they'll have to blow the country's famous dikes, flooding the Germans out. The only catch is, the Howlers must contact Agent X, the only man who can tell them precisely where to set their charges so that the flooding won't threaten the civilian population. Once on the ground, the squad meets a youngster named Hans Rooten, the son of a local turncoat who helps them with their mission. At the last minute, Agent X is contacted, and the mission completed. Unsaid but made obvious in the storytelling is the fact that Agent X is really the traitorous Rooten Sr., a secret that's kept from Hans even as he's taken back to England by the Howlers to serve as the unit's new mascot. Altogether, this ish was likely the most successful so far since the departure of artist Jack Kirby from the strip, signaling to doubtful readers that it was risky to refrain from purchasing any Marvel comic!



ARTIST BOB POWELL ENJOYED A LONG CAREER IN THE COMICS FIELD BUT BY THE TIME OF MARVEL'S YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION, HIS STYLE WAS MORE ILLUSTRATIVE THAN DYNAMIC AND FAILED TO CATCH THE SPIRIT OF THE ERA.

Tales to Astonish #65

*"The New Giant-Man!"; Stan Lee (script);
Bob Powell (pencils); Don Heck (inks)
"On the Rampage Against the Reds!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)*

The inking merry go round that began the previous month when Steve Ditko inked Dick Ayers on *Sgt. Fury* #15 continued here on both strips featured in *Tales to Astonish* #65 (Mar 1965). Speaking of Ayers, what gives? He appears here on the Hulk second feature inking over the pencils of Steve Ditko! Why didn't the two artists just switch off and ink their own pencils on *Sgt. Fury* and the Hulk? Only editor/scripter Stan Lee knew for sure, and he wasn't telling! Suffice it to say that Ayers does more than a satisfactory job here, giving Ditko's pencils a little more finesse than the more heavy-handed George Roussos had a habit of doing. And speaking of Ditko, he really goes to town this time. As soon as the bridging material between the final scenes of the ongoing story about Astra Isle and the Leader's humanoids and Bruce Banner's capture by the Soviets ("...the mightiest mortal on earth defies the armed might of the ruthless red masters of tyranny!" Ya gotta love it!), he really lets go as the Hulk takes out his rage on the Russians for a change and stops costing American taxpayers millions in damages to their own military! Meanwhile, in the front of the book, there were yet more artistic changes as fans were relieved to find penciler Carl Burgos gone. The only problem was he was replaced by an equally unexciting artist in the person of Golden Age holdover Bob Powell. Marginally better than Burgos

had been, Powell had lost steam over the years but managed to provide a promising opening splash page to what would prove to be an important Giant-Man story. Perhaps not as revolutionary a change as when the character graduated from Ant-Man to Giant-Man, the change here to “the new Giant-Man” presented mostly fashion alterations, giving Giant-Man a flashier new costume (Okay, he also received enhanced powers that allowed him to alter the size of other objects around him). The problem was, only Jack Kirby could ever get the costume exactly right (See this issue’s cover, for example, or the few *Avengers* covers Kirby did before the original team broke up). Inking by Don Heck aided Powell’s presentation immeasurably as our hero battles not a flashy supervillain, but a giant spider. Ho hum. A misstep by scripter Lee, it wasn’t exactly the kind of menace that sent readers’ blood racing. Unfortunately, Powell would remain the artist in residence for the remainder of Giant-Man’s run on the title, completing a long list of sub-standard (for Marvel) artists that did nothing to promote excitement for the strip among long suffering Ant-Man/Giant-Man fans.

Two-Gun Kid #74

“Dakota Thompson Strikes!”; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)

Yes, Marvel was still publishing a full line of western titles, including *Two-Gun Kid* #74 (Mar 1965)! Not only that, but Stan Lee was still working on the scripts, providing new mini-epics of western lore every month. The only problem was, the westerns were in definite eclipse as the superhero titles grew in importance. Thus, all of Marvel’s best artists were needed there more urgently than on the westerns, where the best they could muster was the likes of Dick Ayers, who penciled this issue’s saga of Dakota Thompson “the roughest, toughest gunman of all” according to Lee’s breathless cover blurb. This time, however, Ayers doesn’t ink himself but is aided by Vince Colletta, he that was doing wonders over Jack Kirby’s “Tales of Asgard” backup in *Journey Into Mystery*. He comes through again here, easing Ayers’ awkward pencils, softening faces, and fleshing out background features so that the artist’s work here is the best it had looked in a long time. (With the exception of last month’s *Sgt. Fury*, when he was inked by Steve Ditko!) Increasingly, as he would do in the twilight years when Marvel was forced to hire a slew of untried artists, Colletta was the go-to man to prettify amateurish work, giving it a veneer of acceptability. In any case, for this ish, Lee provides a 17-page tale of bad man Dakota Thompson, out to revenge himself

on attorney Matt Hawk for failing to keep his son out of jail. Later, after failing to free his son from the law, Dakota sets up an ambush for the Two-Gun Kid and action ensues. But quickly enough, tragedy strikes. There’s a sudden death, heroic sacrifice, repentance, and forgiveness. “I reckon there’s some good in everybody,” broods the Kid as he rides off into the sunset. “Even in an owlhoot like Dakota Thompson. If only people would find that out, before it’s too late!” For sure, Lee had the touch; the ability to transcend the lowly comic book and reach for something more. A something that he’d reach for ever more successfully as the Marvel Age of Comics wore on! **Fun fact:** Aside



STAN GOLDBERG'S FAVORITE YELLOW BACKGROUND COLOR EFFECTIVELY HIGHLIGHTS THIS ACTION PACKED IMAGE FOR TWO-GUN KID #74. PENCILER JACK KIRBY'S CHOICE TO PLACE THE HORSE AND RIDER IN THE FOREGROUND (WITH BACK TURNED TO THE READER YET!) CREATES A DEPTH IN FIELD EFFECT THAT CHIC STONE'S CONFIDENT INKS ONLY ENHANCE. ADD IN EDITOR STAN LEE'S BREATHLESS BLURBS, AND YOU HAVE A TOP MARVEL COVER DESIGN MASTERPIECE SUITABLE FOR THE LOUVRE!

from the Two-Gun Kid story on the inside, the best thing about this ish was the striking cover by none other than artist Jack Kirby! Of course, Kirby had been doing all the western covers right along, some better than others. But for this issue, he really nailed it with a wonderfully dramatic image of the Kid caught between Dakota and son amid the rocky badlands of the old west. The large foreground image of Dakota's son on horseback sets the tone for a deep focus image that's all the more striking due to Chic Stone's inking and Stan Goldberg's coloring. Once again, Goldberg chooses yellow for the background, a color that really brings out the foreground action. Truly, one of Kirby's most striking images for Marvel's westerns and one that surely must have been responsible for an uptick in sales!



Amazing Spider-Man #22

"Preeeeesenting...the Clown and His Masters of Menace!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Marvel does it again! These months were a Golden Age of supervillain teams as editor/scripster Stan Lee adds another one to the growing list: the Masters of Menace! The Masters were actually the old Circus of Crime as seen in past issues of Hulk and Spidey, the difference being that its members voted out the Ringmaster as their leader and replaced him with the Crafty Clown. Interestingly, *Amazing Spider-Man* #22 (Mar 1965) was also the first time the core members of the Circus were nailed down, including the Crafty Clown and Princess Python (who make their first appearances here), the Great Gambonno, Cannonball, and of course, the Ringmaster. This group would remain unchanged for years to come. Anyway, the Clown wastes no time showing his leadership skills by immediately making plans to rob an art exhibit being sponsored by J. Jonah Jameson. Meanwhile, Spider-Man catches up to the ousted Ringmaster and places a Spidey tracer on the villain. Later, while attending the exhibit as Peter Parker, the Masters strike and through the Ringmaster, Spidey is able to find their hideout and the usual fun-filled Spidey action follows as only Lee and penciler/inker Steve Ditko could deliver it! By this time, both men had the *Spider-Man* strip down cold. Lee's dialogue was unfailingly witty, and his text captured the happy-go-lucky nature of the strip perfectly. Also, Ditko's art had been streamlined. The fussy details he used in the pre-hero, Atlas years were gone to be sure, but the artist had turned his concentration on layout and facial expression that served the strip much better. By this time also, Ditko was taking a much bigger role in the storytelling, and so was able to balance stories

FOR SOME REASON, OVER THE YEARS SINCE THE 1960s, CLOWNS HAVE EVOLVED FROM OBJECTS OF MIRTH TO THINGS OF NIGHTMARE. LOOMING LARGE TO YOUNGSTERS OF THE FIFTIES WAS CLARABELL FROM THE HOWDY DOODY SHOW AND IN THE SIXTIES, BOZO, HOST OF MANY AN AFTER SCHOOL TV SHOW FEATURING LAUGHS, PRIZES, AND CARTOONS. STEVE DITKO'S VERSION OF THE CRAFTY CLOWN PREFIGURED ALL THE SCARY CLOWNS OF LATER DECADES INCLUDING SUCH LATER COMERS AS STEPHEN KING'S IT.

more surely between the action and Peter Parker and his supporting cast. He even had time to squeeze in some art criticism on page 5, panel 6. Was that Ditko himself standing behind the pillar contemplating a piece of modern art depicting a giant foot with a toe sticking out of the stocking (another has a finger wearing a bandaid): "Boy, I wish I could draw feet like that!" A comment on early instances when fellow artist Jack Kirby had been called in to correct Ditko's drawings of feet? Or did Lee himself take the liberty to poke a little fun at his partner? Maybe. But why the Masters would bother to steal art that was so obviously tacky is a mystery, and another part of the story's charm. But what would Andy Warhol have to say? Our hero though, has other things to worry about, namely women. In fact, one in particular, Princess Python. "Sufferin' spider webs! What do I do now? I can't fight a female! I can't use force against her..." (It was a different time then). He tries to talk the Princess into giving up, but she sweet talks him instead then moves to unmask him. Finally, for his gentlemanly pains, she sics her giant python on him. Females!

Fantastic Four #36

"The Frightful Four!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

First there was the Circus of Crime, then the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, then the Emissaries of Evil, then the Fellowship of Fear, and now it was the turn of the Frightful Four! It was a far cry from Marvel's early days when the company struggled to come up with good villains for their heroes to tangle with. Oh, sure, there was Dr. Doom early on, but mostly it seemed that the bad guys were leftovers from the pre-hero Atlas monster/weird story era. Then, suddenly, the years of consolidation began, and the floodgates opened and in almost every feature, editor Stan Lee and his artists cranked out one new colorful, exciting supervillain after another. To the point where they now had enough to begin coalescing into agglomerations of villains, alliances bent on overwhelming the good guys by their sheer weight of numbers. Usually, such teams included a few established villains with one new, original bad guy to lead such as Zemo or Mr. Fear. But in the case of Marvel's latest and possibly greatest supervillain team, the Frightful Four, three of the members, including its leader, were old Human Torch villains and the fourth member was the wholly new character. Created to be the evil counterpart to the heroic FF, the evil FF consisted of the Wizard as leader, the Trapster (the renamed and refashioned Paste-Pot-Pete), the Sandman, and Medusa. The latter was found on a Mediterranean Isle by the Wizard bereft of her memory. With her flowing red

tresses that she could manipulate like a million tendrils, she had the potential to be a striking figure. She quickly became one under the pencil of Jack Kirby, as was demonstrated on page 8, panel 1 where the Wizard introduces her as Madame Medusa to the rest of the evil FF. Unknown at the time, even to editor/scripiter Stan Lee and



HER LONG SCARLET TRESSES MAY NOT HAVE BEEN SNAKES. NOR MIGHT SHE HAVE TURNED MEN TO STONE SIMPLY BY LOOKING UPON HER (NOT BY A LONG SHOT!). BUT THE FRIGHTFUL FOUR'S MEDUSA WOULD QUICKLY INTRIGUE READERS AS SHE SEEMS TO HAVE DONE WITH STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY WHO WASTED NO TIME IN SEPARATING HER FROM HER EVIL TEAMMATES AND ASSOCIATING HER INSTEAD WITH THE MORE FAN FRIENDLY INHUMANS.

Kirby, Medusa would be revealed as belonging to a mysterious race of super-powered beings known as the Inhumans. Thus, her bloodthirsty persona here as a member of the Frightful Four would later be deemed as somewhat out of character. Something that Lee and Kirby would gloss over after they changed her from villainess to heroine. The other big event in *Fantastic Four* #36 (Mar 1965) was the ongoing development of the relationship between Reed Richards and Susan Storm. Remember how last ish they became engaged? Well, the couple waste no time making the situation public as the story opens, with their being mobbed by the paparazzi before retreating to a private affair held only for the superhero community. The party was duly encapsulated in a single, half page illo by Kirby (as only he could do it) and inker Chic Stone. There, the FF mingle with the Avengers and the X-Men (not having formerly made the acquaintance of Daredevil and Spider-Man still somewhat persona non-grata... although that doesn't stop Spidey from sneaking a piece of cake from outside the window) Fans, however, were denied the pleasurable opportunity to listen in on small talk among fellow teens the X-Men, Rick Jones, and the Human Torch, as well as professional conversation among Mr. Fantastic, Iron Man, and Prof. X, not to mention girl talk between the Invisible Girl and the Wasp likely covering Sue's trousseau. But it's not all sweetness and light, as the evil FF scheme to ambush our heroes after the final guest has gone. What follows is an immensely satisfying two-part battle between villains and heroes, with Kirby orchestrating the action and Lee providing tone perfect dialogue among all the characters. And luckily for fans, the Frightful Four manage to get away to fight another day! All in all, it was what made the FF "the leader" of the Marvel group and why the company's readers were so fanatical in their devotion. It had it all in this, the greatest 12-month stretch in Marvel's history!

Kid Colt Outlaw #121

"Iron Mask Strikes Again!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Keller (pencils/inks)

It had to happen! (As Marvel blurbs were wont to say) The two Kids meet! But hold the horses! Didn't the "two Kids" already meet? A casual reader not fanatically devoted to Marvel's western line up might be excused for being confused, what with three heroes with the word "Kid" as part of their handles. But really, two Kids did already meet, namely the Rawhide Kid and the Two-Gun Kid over in *Rawhide Kid* #40. But that was a few months back and in this, the height

of the years of consolidation, the name of the game was crossovers, and with only three western stars left in Marvel's stable, their meetings tended to blend together. Be that as it may, Rawhide and Kid Colt meet for the first time in *Kid Colt Outlaw* #121 (Mar 1965), touched off with a cover drawn by Jack Kirby but looking less than impressive due to its rushed nature. Kirby was a better conceptualizer of drama than this image conveys with its tiny, awkwardly posed figure of Rawhide over to one side and that of the book's star, Kid Colt, squashed down in the lower left hand corner...and with his back to the readers for Pete's sake! Still, anything by Kirby was way better than most anyone else, especially the book's regular artist, Jack Keller. Keller was still on the job, as was scripter Stan Lee in this tale that also included semi-regular Sam Hawk (the Man Hunter) and Kid Colt arch-foe Iron Mask. In the story, the two Kids find themselves sharing adjoining cells in the local jail, but after an escape, naturally there's a misunderstanding and they mix it up. Soon enough things get straightened out and they team-up to tackle Iron Mask and his outlaw band. It was another solid, but unexceptional tale of the owlhoot trail by Lee rather lacklusterly penciled and inked by Keller. In a sign of things to come, Larry Lieber scripts, pencils, and inks a backup tale called "Hogan's Hiding Place." The art is again lackluster, but oh! What it would've looked like if Matt Fox were still on staff! Anyway, Lieber would soon be offering his complete services to the lead feature as well, as Lee finally retreated from the westerns after many long years of toiling along the outlaw trail. **Fun Fact:** As reported in this issue's letters' page (yes, all the westerns had letters' pages just as the superhero books did), one letter writer hailing from Spencer, Iowa reported that not only did Marvel's superhero titles sell out in his neighborhood, but its westerns did too, suggesting that far from being on their last legs, the westerns were still very much sellers for Marvel.

Strange Tales #130

"Meet the Beatles!"; Stan Lee (script); Bob Powell (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)
"The Defeat of Dr. Strange!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Strange Tales #130 (Mar 1965) is notorious for its inclusion of the biggest pop culture phenomenon of the decade. Yeah, even bigger than the rise of Marvel Comics! The Beatles rock group, consisting of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr, burst on the American scene like a thunderbolt out of a clear blue sky on February 9th, 1964, when the Fab Four appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The Beatles had emerged from obscurity back in their native England in 1961, combining the Merseybeat sound with their own unique musical talent and soon began churning out hit after hit, including "She Loves You" and "Please Please Me," that kickstarted their American popularity. After that, they could do no wrong, rocketing to the top of the pop charts and staying there until the group finally broke up in 1970.



BY 1965, THE BEATLES WERE UBIQUITOUS IN THE POP CULTURE LANDSCAPE SO IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT THEY BE FEATURED AS TOPICAL REFERENCES IN COMIC BOOKS ALONGSIDE EARLIER APPEARANCES BY PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND NIKITA KRUSHCHEV. UNFORTUNATELY, THEIR APPEARANCE IN STRANGE TALES #130 WAS BOTH BRIEF AND UNSATISFYING; BUT TO BE FAIR, ACTION WAS WHAT READERS READ THE TORCH/THING STORIES FOR, NOT TO SEE THEIR SISTERS' IDOLS

But during the period of this issue of *Strange Tales*, the Beatles were at the zenith of Beatlemania and between a pair of well-received films. (*Hard Day's Night* and *Help* for the persnickity!) In short, the Beatles were everywhere in the culture, and it was only a matter of time before their existence was acknowledged within the Marvel Universe. That happened first over in the FF's regular book, when the Yancy Street Gang sent the Thing a Beatle wig as a gag (Though he and the Torch are seen sporting Beatle wigs on this issue's cover, only the Thing wears his for a single panel inside). Here, the boys decide to

take their dates to attend a Beatles concert and do briefly "meet the Beatles" on the stairs backstage before being interrupted by a robbery of the box office. By the time they capture the crooks, the

concert is over, and they've missed seeing the Beatles perform. It was a fun story ruined by the sub-standard Bob Powell art (inked by Chic Stone), who couldn't draw the Beatles to save his life. Thus, it's a relief to move on to the Dr. Strange half of the book, where artist Steve Ditko was at the top of his game providing the first installment of what was destined to become one of the most memorable storylines in the Strange oeuvre. Here, Dormammu teams up with Baron Mordo to attack the Ancient One. Strange, of course, foils the attempt, but in the process is forced to go into hiding, even as Mordo calls upon all of Earth's evil magicians to help in locating the missing mage.

X-Men #10

"The Coming of...Ka-Zar!";

Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Fans of the X-Men must have been living right! Begun almost simultaneously near the conclusion of the early years with artist Jack Kirby on the pencils, both the *Avengers* and *Sgt. Fury* lost his services with issues 8 and 7 respectively. But the king continued with the *X-Men* title, and would stay on full pencils until issue #11 and then on layouts well beyond that point. Due to the title's continued bi-monthly schedule, the busy Kirby likely had the time to devote to the book. And readers were the lucky beneficiaries as the King would be on hand for the introduction of Unus the Untouchable, the X-Men vs. the Avengers and their battle with Lucifer, the end of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and the introduction of the Stranger, the first appearances of the Juggernaut and the Sentinels, and here, in *X-Men* #10 (Mar 1965), the introduction of Ka-Zar, Marvel's answer to Tarzan! Like the Human Torch, Captain America, and Sub-Mariner, Ka-Zar was another revival of sorts. Reaching back to Timely's pulp era, before publisher Martin Goodman entered the comics field, Ka-Zar was created in 1936 by writer David Rand to headline his own magazine, much in the manner of Doc Savage or Captain Future. When Goodman started up his comics line, Ka-Zar was

one of his pulp characters that he brought over. That iteration didn't last long and for the next ten years or so, the character remained in limbo until editor/scripster Stan Lee decided to introduce him to the Marvel Universe. That happens here, as the X-Men hear a report on TV about a mysterious savage who appeared out of nowhere in Antarctica to rescue a member of a scientific expedition. Suspecting the near naked man to be a mutant, the X-Men depart for Antarctica and find a cavern leading to a lost world of jungles, dinosaurs, and primitive cultures somehow preserved amid the frozen wastes (Later, other routes would be discovered leading into the Savage Land). There, Kirby goes wild in his depictions of prehistoric beasts and their contrast with the colorful X-Men. In particular, Kirby exploits



BY RELOCATING MARTIN GOODMAN'S PULP TARZAN KNOCKOFF FROM THE 1930S TO A HIDDEN LAND FILLED WITH DINOSAURS, EDITOR STAN LEE BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO AN OTHERWISE GENERIC JUNGLE HERO.

the Angel's ability to fly to draw the hero in numerous action sequences and dramatic postures. The Angel's power of winged flight may have been a basic one, but nobody could turn such a character into pure visual excitement the way the King could! Kirby also took advantage of big, quarter page panels to convey the larger-than-life action and creatures offered by the story, as both Marvel Girl and the Angel are captured and then rescued by Cyclops and the Beast along with Ka-Zar. It was an exciting story made to order for Kirby that kept the X-Men at the top of Marvel's heap of quality mags. Which only added to the mystery of why it failed to grab the attention of a majority of readers. While Thor and the Fantastic Four were riding high, the X-Men continued to lag, having to wait some months before finally gaining monthly status. As for Ka-Zar, the third time proved the charm, as the character's durability allowed him to remain

on hand for decades to come. At first guest starring in various books until gaining his own feature in *Astonishing Tales* at the start of the twilight years. Never a terribly interesting character in his own right (his next appearance over in *Daredevil* was a decided dud), under certain conditions, such as those in *Astonishing Tales*, Ka-Zar could shine. He'd become one of the mainstays of the Marvel Universe, as did many of the creations of Lee and Kirby introduced in these years.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #16

"A Fortress In the Desert Stands!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Sure to grab the attention of any casual browser of the comics racks, the cover of *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #16 (Mar 1965) represented one of artist Jack Kirby's greatest symbolic images. While not as obviously symbolic as such covers as *X-Men* #4 or *Fantastic Four* #39 with their looming images of Magneto and Doctor Doom dominating a shrunken set of heroes, the cover here is no less powerful for all that. Here, the defeated Howlers slink away from a massive desert fortress with its defenders cheering



ANOTHER STAN GOLDBERG MASTERPIECE OF COMICS COLORING! YEAH, THIS SYMBOLIC COVER DEPICTING A DEFEATED GROUP OF HOWLERS BY JACK KIRBY AND CHIC STONE WOULD BE WORTH THE ADMISSION ALONE. BUT WHEN SGT FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS #16 WAS SEEN BY BUYERS ON MAGAZINE RACKS WITH ITS DISTINCTIVE HOT YELLOWS, ORANGES, AND BROWNS, THE COMBINATION MADE FOR AN UNFORGETTABLE IMAGE!

on the ramparts. Now, in real life, there'd be no real reason for such wild exuberance on the part of the defenders having fought off only a small band of seven attackers, but this is the hyper reality of the *Sgt. Fury* strip, and so such a reaction is perfectly within the growing legend of the indomitable Howlers. Adding even more drama to the image was Stan Goldberg's coloring, where once again he chooses a bright yellow to highlight the action (A color he used often in these years, usually as a background color to great effect on such covers as *Journey Into Mystery* #105 and *Two-Gun Kid* #74). Combined with an almost but not quite orange on the foreground figures of the dejected Howlers and the brown of the sand at their feet, the overall effect of a single-color cover serves to heighten Kirby's phenomenal image. Use of single-color covers was a trick Marvel would use now and again at editor Stan Lee's direction to accentuate drama, something the Distinguished Competition never did. And it worked, not only here, but on such now classic covers as *X-Men* #17 and *Spider-Man* #50. All that said, it was a distinct letdown to go from this outer image to the insides of the book only to find the dull by comparison Dick Ayers still on pencils (although this time aided somewhat by the grounding inks of Frank Giacoia). Scriptor Lee's tale involves the Howlers sent to North Africa on the report that the Nazis are developing a new secret weapon there (V-2 rockets). It was a good story so far as impossible missions went, but Ayers' artwork, as always, held it back from what it might have been if Kirby had followed through and done the interiors as well. Sigh. Unfortunately, Kirby couldn't do it all and it was a Hobson's choice of the FF, Thor, X-Men, and Captain America or *Sgt. Fury*, and by this time, it was clear that Marvel was better served with Kirby on its superhero offerings rather than the more or less out of the mainstream *Sgt. Fury* strip.

Tales to Astonish #66

"The Menace of Madame Macabre!"; Stan Lee (script); Bob Powell (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"The Power of Dr. Banner!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

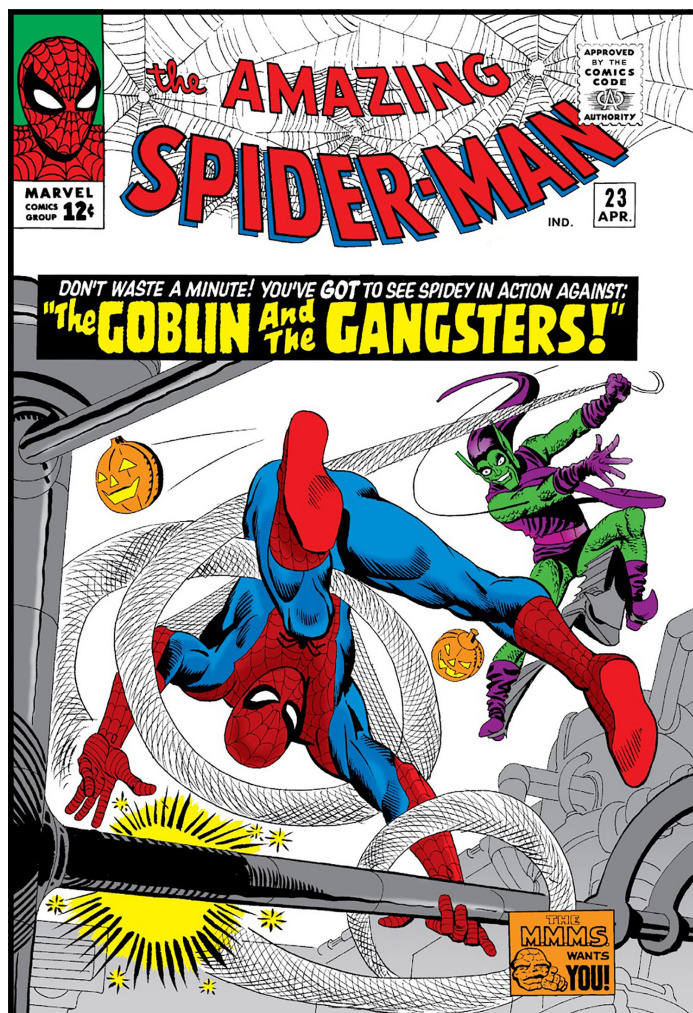
The Giant-Man feature in *Tales to Astonish* #66 (April 1965) continued its downward spiral, not helped much by the pencils of Bob Powell. For some reason, scriptor Stan Lee seemed incapable of finding good supervillains for Giant-Man to fight. (Where oh where was the Black Knight or even the Porcupine when you needed them?) Instead, readers got the likes of Madame Macabre this ish. The lady in question

wants the secret of Giant-Man's size changing power and sets a trap for him, which he duly falls into. Much of the rest of the story involves the Wasp's jealousy of Giant-Man's interest in Madame Macabre and her efforts to rescue him. Ho hum. Add to all that, Powell's merely serviceable art that could never be mistaken for anything very exciting (he just couldn't get the hang of drawing Giant-Man's new uniform in anywhere close to the way Kirby could do it on a number of covers). It was no wonder that even as this issue went to press, Lee was likely in the planning stages for its cancellation and replacement with a new feature scheduled for ish #70. As was usual for *Astonish* in these months, the Hulk co-feature with its Steve Ditko art was the real attraction. Still produced as a serial with chapters often left as cliffhangers from issue to issue, it was no different this time, as we find the Hulk trapped behind the Iron Curtain and about to lay waste the Red Army! Meanwhile, the Leader is still present behind the scenes in contact with the Chameleon while also in cahoots with the Reds. Slowly but surely, the Leader's great intelligence is moving him closer and closer to Bruce Banner's secret. The only thing holding this chapter back though was the guest inking of Vince Colletta. Suitable for many things (including his inks over Kirby on Thor and later on Gene Colan's *Daredevil* and John Buscema's *Avengers*), Colletta falls short over Ditko, somehow misinterpreting the artist's style that needed a heavier ink line than Colletta was prepared to provide. (Despite a nicely done opening splash page) That, however, wasn't enough to detract from this fast-moving installment scripted in Lee's exciting style.

Amazing Spider-Man #23

"The Goblin and the Gangsters!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Amazing Spider-Man #23 (April 1965) was sheer, straight ahead, soul satisfying fun as scripter Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko allowed Spidey to do what he did best, namely mixing it up with hordes of underworld hoods! And in this case, Ditko went to town with a bang-up fight between Spidey and the Lucky Lobo mob. And just to underline how not very seriously Lee and Ditko were taking the fight, they have Spidey take a break amid the action to call Aunt May and assure her that he was all right. Then, with the mob about break into the room, he tells Aunt May that "someone else might want to use the phone!" Finished with the mob, Spidey catches up to the Green Goblin for a showdown. An earlier plot point where Spidey believes the Goblin was doing



THE TEAM OF ARTIST STEVE DITKO AND SCRIPTER STAN LEE MADE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #23 A PERFECT COMBINATION OF CONTRASTING HUMOR AND FREEWHEELING ACTION THAT BY THIS TIME HAD BECOME A HALLMARK OF THE STRIP AND A BIG REASON FOR ITS ONGOING POPULARITY.

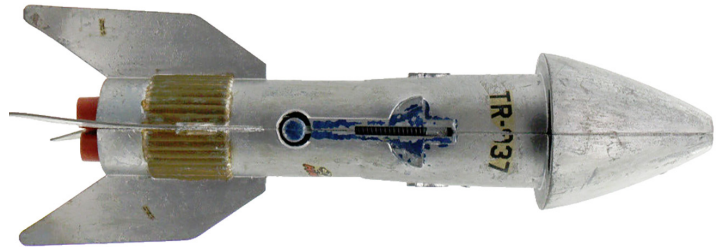
something altruistic by trying to stop Lobo (when he actually wanted to take over his mob as a stepping stone to taking over all of the city's organized crime) is a tad unbelievable, unless taken as an example of how Peter Parker was still somewhat of a callow youth, inexperienced with the ways of the world despite twenty-three issues of action as Spider-Man. Anyway, it's a small nitpick as Spidey tackles the Goblin for the third time in his career and again comes off even. Meanwhile, his suspicions are aroused that the Goblin is really Frederick Foswell, who makes a reappearance this issue after his arrest as the Big Man back in ish #10. It was a thoroughly satisfying issue but still, a mere place holder pending meatier stories to come in the months ahead. **Fun Facts:** The unnamed, unspeaking Norman Osborn makes his first appearance at J. Jonah Jameson's

businessman's club. Whether Lee and/or Ditko intended this character to be the Green Goblin this early in the series is unknown (although Ditko has since claimed he did), but Ditko did have him appear each time the club was visited, recognizable by his distinctive wavy haircut. In future issues, he'd even get a line or two to speak. But if this was intended to be the Goblin, his apparently sane behavior in his club appearances presented a slightly chilling contrast to his maniacal Goblin persona, one that Lee would exploit in the epochal events of issue #s 39 and 40. Also this issue, is an early appearance of an African American police officer. In future issues, blacks would be increasingly represented on the force as well as on the street (and as members of Jameson's businessman's club), culminating with the introduction of the Daily Bugle's city editor Robbie Robertson in *Spider-Man* #51.

Fantastic Four #37

"Behold! A Distant Star!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

It was back into space for the FF in *Fantastic Four* #37 (April 1965). As readers recalled, last issue Reed and Sue held their engagement party so here, the story opens with the male members of the team fitting themselves out with the tuxedos they'll wear at the wedding. (Once scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby finally had Reed and Sue make up their minds about each other, they lost no time in barreling forward with the nuptials!) But all is not happiness and light in the Baxter Building as Reed wonders why Sue is not happy with the advent of their wedding. Turns out she can't be completely satisfied with the unfinished business of her father's death back in issue #32 still unaddressed. There, the elder Storm sacrificed his life in order to prevent a booby trap set by the treacherous Skrulls from destroying the FF. Whoever was behind the attempt was never brought to justice. To settle the issue prior to the wedding, the team travels to the Skrull home world and, after a number of adventures, ends up causing the death of Skrull warlord Morrat, who was responsible for the attack on the FF and the death of Sue and Johnny's father. Back on Earth, the four arrive just in time for the wedding rehearsal. Whew! Needless to say, Kirby's art this issue is spot on as it was everywhere here, amid Marvel's greatest year ever. He was aided of course by Chic Stone on the inks but despite all the good that Stone did for Kirby's pencils, the one thing he failed on was the texture of the Thing's rocky skin. In some places, he almost gets it, defining the platelets



STILL AVAILABLE ON EBAY! THE ROCKET BANK THAT ARTIST JACK KIRBY COULD HAVE BASED HIS DESIGN FOR THE FF'S ROCKET USED IN FANTASTIC FOUR #37!

bi-monthly strips and all the covers, he still found time to do a little experimenting. In particular the impressive illo he provides for page 6 of this issue. No doubt hitting readers right between the eyes, Kirby presents a full-page collage of the FF's rocket ship flying through outer space filled with planets and asteroids. After a few earlier experiments on a more limited scale, Kirby here expands his horizons immensely, perhaps underlining the excitement he himself was feeling at the growing popularity of the Marvel line, a sensation he likely hadn't felt since his days in the early fifties when he and partner Joe Simon created a line of romance comics. This would not be the last time Kirby used collage, with future efforts getting only better and more daring. **Fun fact:** The design of the rocket used by the FF to travel to the Skrull homeworld was possibly based on a rocket shaped piggy bank design sold at the time wherein the bank would sit on its fins and a catapult device on its side would launch coins upwards into a slot hidden beneath the capsule portion of the rocket. Might Kirby have seen this bank design in stores or even that one of his children possessed one? It's possible!

Rawhide Kid #45

"Gunman's Quest!"; Larry Lieber (script/pencils/inks)

It was the end of an era. After a decade and more of scripting Marvel's westerns and in particular, all of the adventures of its three top stars, the Rawhide Kid, Two-Gun Kid, and Kid Colt, Stan Lee finally handed the reins over to someone else. But that someone else was no stranger to the genre. Larry Lieber, Lee's younger brother, had been warming up in the Bullpen for years. Under his brother's tutelage, he began as a scripter, writing many of Marvel's top superheroes' earliest adventures while at the same time penciling fantasy backup stories in those selfsame issues and in many of the western titles. But now, with Lee busy scripting all of the superhero

books, editing Marvel's entire line of comics, acting as de facto art director, and being in increasing demand as a speaker on college campuses, it was time to cut some slack somewhere and the westerns were the obvious choice. Obvious because all the growing energy surrounding Marvel comics was with the superheroes and not the fading westerns. There was no mention anywhere in *Rawhide Kid* #45 (April 1965) of the changeover in scripters other than the no nonsense credit reading "written and illustrated by Larry Lieber." Perhaps the most apparent signal of the change was the lead story itself wherein Lieber retells the origin of the Kid as if to mark the unspoken new beginning for the strip. And though Lieber sticks to the essential details of the origin that Lee and artist Jack Kirby had devised way back in issue #17, he also adds a good deal of new information. Unfortunately, Lieber's art is far from adequate to the task. There's evidence here and there that he was trying to emulate Kirby's style, but overall he fails to excite (Though he'd improve as the months went by, it was not by much). The fact that Lee would allow such inferior art in the westerns only lends credence to the belief that the westerns were on the back slope of their popularity (Or, perhaps, that western readers were indifferent to the art). How Lieber would be received by fans would only be known in future letters' pages. But for now, the only real quality left here was the cover, however rushed it might've been, by the real deal, Kirby himself.

Strange Tales #131

"The Bouncing Ball of Doom!";

Stan Lee (script); Bob Powell

(pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"The Hunter and the Hunted!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Seemingly on the same trajectory to oblivion as the Giant-Man strip over in *Tales to Astonish*, the Human Torch/Thing feature in *Strange Tales* #131 (April 1965) also continued with a string of uninspired tales drawn by artists that just could not live up to the standards set by Marvel's top pencilers including Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck. Here, the Human Torch/Thing story is once again penciled by Bob Powell (who, in a switch from Kirby, also executed

the cover, which wasn't so hot). As he did over in *Astonish* in the story that introduced the new Giant-Man, Powell manages a nice opening splash page of the Torch and Thing in the Torch's sports car, stopping on a rainy scene with police everywhere. Unfortunately, the care Powell took for this opening image wasn't carried through with the rest of the story. But maybe it wasn't entirely his fault, as the Stan Lee penned tale involving "The Mad Thinker's maddest plan," was somewhat of a dud. Sure, it had a clever hook with our heroes battling a simple metallic ball controlled by the Mad Thinker, but ultimately the whole production was wanting, just as the remainder of the Torch/Thing stories would be before the feature was replaced in issue #135. By comparison, all the energy this ish was over in the Dr. Strange feature where our hero finds himself on the run from Baron Mordo's minions. Continued from the issue before, Mordo, allied with Dormammu, is out to finally defeat Strange, who

manages to keep one step ahead of his pursuers, Strange is still free at the conclusion of this latest chapter in what would prove to be one of the best remembered storylines/serials in Marvel history. Here, Ditko is at the top of his form, having refined his style to the point where he could more easily crank out every month penciled and inked pages for both the full-length *Spider-Man* comic and the ten-page Dr. Strange feature. It was safe to say that like the *Spider-Man* book, Ditko had taken over most of the plotting on Strange, with Lee providing guidance as editor and scripting that seemed so effortless.



WAS IT JUST THE DE RIGUEUR FISHNET STOCKINGS OR DID MARVEL'S COSTUMED BLACK WIDOW RESEMBLE DC'S BLACK CANARY JUST A LITTLE TOO CLOSELY?

Tales of Suspense #64

"Hawkeye and the New Black Widow

Strike Again!"; Stan Lee (script);

Don Heck (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

"Among Us, Wreckers Dwell!";

Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils);

Frank Giacoia (inks)

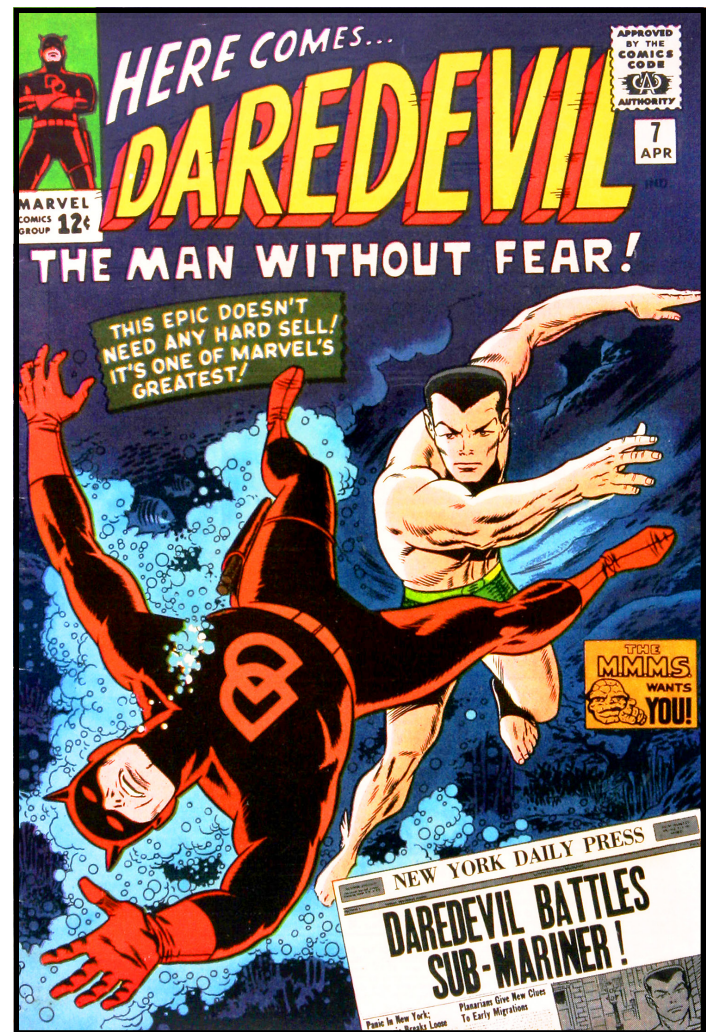
Among Marvel's double feature titles, *Tales of Suspense* continued to rule the roost, mostly because of its double-barreled artistic punch with Jack Kirby on Captain America and Don Heck on Iron Man. To be sure, Heck's pencils on the Iron Man strip in *Tales of Suspense* #64 (April 1965) were interpreted somewhat too literally by inker Chic

Stone, but that was a small quibble when readers took in the results. The opening splash page with Tony Stark experimenting on his IM helmet alone was more than impressive enough! And scripter Stan Lee's story isn't bad either, as he reintroduces the Black Widow, now in costume for the first time. Having returned from behind the Iron Curtain, where her Soviet masters provided her with the costume and such minor powers as being able to cling to walls and fire a line from her wrists allowing her to swing from place to place, the Widow has been given one more chance to prove herself. Reuniting with former partner Hawkeye, Lee provides the two with a rather mature relationship that is entirely believable within the context of Code approved comics. Once again, the lovesick Hawkeye is dragooned into helping the Widow with her anti-American espionage until, in conflict with Iron Man, she's injured, and the bowman quickly abandons a mission his heart wasn't in anyway in order to whisk the Widow to safety. Hawkeye would appear next in the last place readers ever expected: as a member in the Avengers' new lineup! Meanwhile, Lee was in top form as well on the Captain America feature, polishing and improving a script from the original *Captain America Comics* #1 from way back in 1940. For a brief few issues around this time, Lee decided to differentiate the Cap stories here from his present-day adventures with the Avengers by going back to the setting of the Second World War. In doing so, he declined to use the original scripts for tales that originally appeared in the forties and instead to retell the stories in the new, up to date, more sophisticated Marvel style. Kirby reprised his role as penciler, but now did the older plots even better with 25 years of experience under his belt. Thus, the art and story here is much more polished and exciting than it was when originally presented, with more details that helped better define the characters of Cap and especially Bucky. For this issue, the duo face off against fake spiritualists Sando and Omar, who are really Nazi spies involved in sabotage. Kirby doesn't stint on the action and manages to present a more realistic depiction of Bucky, who is made into more of a teenager than he was in the 1940s (See how Kirby draws him on page 10, panel 1. Very cool!). He and Lee also introduce a female spy who identifies herself only as Agent 13, a designation that would present some minor continuity problems down the road. All in all though, these tales of Cap set in the war years would all prove to be excellent and exciting, likely due to Lee and Kirby's own wartime experiences. Thus, it made it the more disappointing when they were all too quickly discontinued in favor of present-day adventures. Too bad!

Daredevil #7

"In Mortal Combat With...Sub-Mariner!"; Stan Lee (script); Wally Wood (pencils/inks)

"This epic doesn't need any hard sell," screams the blurb on the cover of *Daredevil* #7 (April 1965). "It's one of Marvel's greatest!" And maybe it was, with its power packed scripting by Stan Lee and art by EC stalwart Wally Wood, who continued to provide both pencils and inks making for one of Marvel's most impressive looking titles. (Take a gander at this issue's opening splash page of Namor sitting in regal splendor. Wood inks the scene in incredible detail while in the background, through an observation port, a submarine glides through the ocean but illustrated in a zip-a-tone style giving the image a vague, undersea value. Wow!) And though the art in the rest of the issue doesn't rise to this level of detail,



THIS WRITER STILL PREFERS THE OLD YELLOW COSTUME: ARTIST WALLY WOOD INTRODUCES DD'S NEW ALL RED COSTUME IN DAREDEVIL #7. JUST IN TIME FOR HIS EPIC BATTLE WITH THE SUB-MARINER!

Wood's style everywhere creates a unique "still life" look even to the most action-packed sequences. Furthermore, according to a note on the letters page, editor Lee gave Wood the green light to design a new costume for Daredevil. According to the note, Wood was dissatisfied with the yellow outfit (although his redesign elements made it less attractive than its original look) and wanted to change it. And so he did, giving DD a sleek, all-red costume with a double D emblem on his chest. The change was popular with fans, who dug the suggestion of reflective texture that made for a costume coloration that was just as much black as red. Another Wood innovation was the use of a newspaper's screaming headlines on the cover that also acted as a blurb for the story inside. And inside, there's an offbeat tale of Namor seeking out an attorney to help him sue the surface world for its use of the seas, which Subby regards as the property of Atlantis. By sheer coincidence, he chooses the law offices of Nelson and Murdock who disappoint him about the possibility of suing the entire surface world. Naturally, the temperamental Sub-Mariner goes on the rampage until DD can talk him back. But when Subby learns that Atlantis is under attack, he abandons the courtroom with DD trailing him in a heroic attempt to bring him back. Of course, DD is defeated but in defeat earns the respect of the Sub-Mariner, who then abjures causing any more damage to New York and returns to the sea. It was a pretty original take on a story, one that would be reprised in the twilight years by writer Roger McKenzie and artist Frank Miller, but in that instance, DD faced the Hulk rather than the Sub-Mariner. With productions of this quality, it was a wonder why the DD book was still on a bi-monthly schedule. But according to Lee writing on the letters' page, it just took too long to produce an issue of DD for it increase its frequency. It would take the departure of the meticulous Wood and the arrival of another long-term professional for that to happen. But it couldn't happen fast enough for insatiable fans!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #17

"While the Jungle Sleeps!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Under its very cool Jack Kirby drawn cover depicting a high angle shot of Fury and his fightin' fanatics as they make their way through a jungle filled with lurking natives and their Nazi leaders, lies an average, every day, impossible situation for our heroes. In *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #17* (April 1965), scripiter Stan Lee picks up the



DON'T MESS WITH A MESSERSCHMITT! Bf 109 THAT IS! THE BACKBONE OF THE GERMAN AIR FORCE (AND OFTEN IN AMERICAN WAR COMICS). THE MESSERSCHMITT WAS A VERSATILE FIGHTER/ BOMBER THAT REMAINED COMPETITIVE WITH ALLIED DESIGNS UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR. A VETERAN OF THE ARMY AIR CORPS. ARTIST DICK AYERS SEEMED TO COME ALIVE WHEN CALLED UPON TO DRAW SUCH WEAPONS OF WAR AS THE HIGH FLYING MESSERSCHMITT!

action where he left off the previous ish, wherein the Howlers find themselves stranded in the North African desert. Then, while making their way back to safety, they're strafed by a Me 109. But for the Howlers, that's nothin'. They shoot it down and use the radio to contact base. Upon which, they're ordered to rescue an American unit lost in the jungle that fringes the desert. Off they go for more fun n' games until finally making it back to England, where Fury gets a medal. Dick Ayers is again on the pencils but this time it seemed, not even the inks of Vince Colletta could do much to improve the results. Layouts are dull, a lot of the action is confined to talking heads, and characters are often on the chunky side. In the most interesting scene of the story, Ayers seems to come alive a bit when he gets to draw the Me 109 and its pilot. Lee manages to make things more exciting than the art would suggest while granting howler Gabe Jones a star turn in the plot. But as things would turn out, this ish was merely in a holding pattern pending the truly ground shaking events in the next issue!

Tales to Astonish #67

"The Mystery of the Hidden Man and His Rays of Doom!"; Stan Lee (script); Bob Powell (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)
"Where Strides the Behemoth!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

It was a lost opportunity. Namely the lead story in *Tales to Astonish* #67 (May 1965). There, in the Giant-Man lead story, our hero finds himself battling a villain identified only as the Hidden Man, who is using a strange technology to steal the knowledge of scientists while robbing them of any memory of the same knowledge. At one point, Giant-Man falls victim to the villain's green ray, forgetting how to use his shrinking powers. Still able to grow, he chases down the Hidden Man only to have readers discover that he was just another alien criminal. Shucks! Up till then, the Hidden Man had some potential to be a mysterious recurring foe for the supervillain deficient Giant-Man. Until its conclusion, the story by scripter Stan Lee had a strange, off beat feel to it that succeeded in capturing the reader's interest. (Lee seemed to sense this himself, judging by the footnote he placed at the bottom of the opening splash page: "This may not be the greatest story you've ever read, but we guarantee it's one of the kookiest!") Even penciler Bob Powell came through on occasion with images that played into the oddball nature of the story. Again, Powell delivers an arresting opening splash page as he'd done over the past couple issues (this time with Giant-Man leaping over a house in pursuit of a strange, souped-up station wagon), but except for isolated instances, fails to excite overall. Meanwhile, in the Hulk second feature, the jolly green giant continues his rampage across the Soviet Union; smashing a task force of tanks and ripping up roadways until, changing back to Bruce Banner, he's captured by central Asian bandits. Rescued by Maj. Talbot, the last readers see of the two, they're falling over a cliff to their apparent deaths! For sure, the Hulk strip continued to be the star attraction in *Astonish*; fast paced, clearly scripted, and Steve Ditko drawn. The only sour note was that according to a note on the letters' page, editor Lee announced that this would be the final installment penciled by Ditko. What would come next was left unanswered but as readers would discover, his replacement on the art chores would be none other than ole greenskin's co-creator, Jack Kirby! And speaking of Kirby, what was up with this issue's cover? Split into two images as usual, the half devoted to the Hulk sports what would become a classic image of the man monster and though the Giant-Man half was great as well, Kirby apparently slipped in his drawing of Giant-Man's face (or was it inker Chic Stone's fault?) where he ends up with an almost childlike aspect, kind of ruining the dramatic scene as he hangs from the top of a skyscraper while the Hidden Man zaps him with his green ray. Oh, well. No one bats a thousand!

Two-Gun Kid #75

*"Remember the Alamo"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils/inks)*

Kirby does it again! Like last month's amazing symbolic cover for *Sgt. Fury* #16, Kirby designed a similarly eye-catching cover image for *Two-Gun Kid* #75 (May 1965) presenting the heroic figure of the Kid dominating the foreground with the ruins of the Alamo at his back. Inks by Vince Colletta sharpen the Kid's image against the lighter background that Stan Goldberg chose to color in muted grey tones that darken as the eye moves upward gradually shading into a deep purple tinted sky. Wow! It was likely covers like this that singlehandedly kept Marvel's westerns a viable genre for as long as they did. Meanwhile, Stan Lee's story inside could've been one fraught with action and pathos but is undercut somewhat by the fact the events of the historical Alamo ought to have occurred long before the *Two-Gun Kid* came into existence. By his garb, it was understood that the Kid operated in the Golden Age of the American West, the one most frequently depicted in the movies and television, that is the post-Civil War years. The Texas Revolution took place in the 1830s and more specifically, the battle of the Alamo in 1836. Just as he mixed up the dates of events during World War II in his storytelling for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos*, Lee's lack of historical accuracy is on display here as the Kid races to warn the forces in the Alamo of danger only to arrive too late to save them (Maybe Lee knew he was playing fast and loose with history, but figured telling an exciting story was more



SO INGRAINED INTO THE AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS, THE DATE OF THE BATTLE OF THE ALAMO (1836) IS OFTEN FUDGED IN POPULAR CULTURE AND SIMPLY THOUGHT OF AS PART OF AMERICA'S WESTWARD EXPANSION THAT ACCELERATED FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR.

important). There, he finds the aftermath of battle and another incongruity: a troop of post-Civil War era US Cavalry arriving too late to reinforce the former mission. They arrive late because one Wolf Fargo destroyed a vital bridge, preventing them getting to the Alamo in time. Naturally, the Kid tracks down Wolf but not before he's killed by Indians. Lee's final line in the story might be seen as an excuse for the fantastic events in the story: "And that's our tale, exactly the way we heard it. Part fiction, perhaps, part truth, perhaps!" For sure, Lee heard it wrong! But that's the way it goes with legends. Truth often suffers but not usually as bad as this! That said, although Dick Ayers was still doing the art, his usually dull pencils and layouts were considerably livened up by Vince Colletta's inks. If this art team had been a regular thing, Marvel's later westerns might have become more than a footnote in the company's history. As it was, fans weren't going to be that lucky.

Amazing Spider-Man #24

"Spider-Man Goes Mad!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Mysterio strikes again in *Amazing Spider-Man* #24 (May 1965)! This time, the master of special FX tries to convince Spider-Man that he's losing his marbles by making him think he's seeing things. It doesn't help either that events in Peter Parker's life continue to move in a single direction, namely downhill. First, the household needs money but due to an encounter with *Daily Bugle* reporter Frederick Foswell, Peter can't use the photos he took of Spidey in action. Then, back at the *Bugle*, Peter discovers that girlfriend Betty is receiving mail from the absent Ned Leeds. Next, the public is again being turned against him due to J. Jonah Jameson's editorials. Finally, believing that Peter is making time with Liz Allen, Flash Thompson is determined to fight it out with him. With the mounting pressures of his personal life, it's no wonder that Peter comes to believe a psychiatric assessment of Spider-Man finds that he's due for a mental breakdown! By this point in the strip, Ditko had a strong hand in the plotting, and he shows he's up to the task with the story's precise balance between action and the strip's large supporting cast. It all comes together after Spider-Man goes to the psychiatrist (really Mysterio!) for help and is saved when his therapy is interrupted by Jameson, with Flash in pursuit! But not only are Ditko's plotting skills on display, but he continued to streamline his artistic style with this issue's opening splash page an inventive use of overlapping imagery. Something readers were more likely to see in his Dr. Strange work than Spider-Man. By this point, scrip



ARTIST STEVE DITKO CHANNELS HIS INNER DR STRANGE WITH THIS VERTIGINOUS COVER LAYOUT FOR AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #24. NOTICE THE ARTIST'S DISTINCTIVE MANNER OF TWISTING, WRENCHING, AND OTHERWISE CONTORTING SPIDER-MAN'S BODY AND LIMBS AS HE WRITHES IN ANGUISH. IT WAS A MANNERISM THAT SUCCEEDING ARTISTS ON THE STRIP WOULD LARGELY FAIL TO EMULATE.

Stan Lee and Ditko seemingly could do no wrong. Every choice they made, every plot twist, all proved exactly right. And those decisions were rewarded by an increasingly excited fan base that would soon take the *Spider-Man* title to the top of Marvel's popularity heap.

Strange Tales #132

"The Sinister Space Trap!"; Stan Lee (plot); Larry Ivie (plot/script); Bob Powell (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)
"Face-to-Face At Last With Baron Mordo!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

As of *Strange Tales* #132 (May 1965), the Torch/Thing strip was still stuck in the doldrums, with

Bob Powell continuing at the artistic reins. Although Powell had proven that he could at least come up with nice looking opening splashes for his stories before falling back into tedium for the remainder of his pages, this time he couldn't even do that. But then, he didn't have much to work with in this second story by fan turned briefly pro Larry Ivie. Co-plotted with editor Stan Lee (who seems to hint at the heavy hand he took in the story with his credit being given as "edited with reckless abandon by Stan Lee") the tale is a humdrum affair about Johnny volunteering to test pilot a space capsule only to discover that it's been sabotaged. Falling back into the Earth's atmosphere, he flames on and returns in time to help the Thing capture the mad scientist. On this issue's letters' page, Lee notes: "...can you figure out exactly what our Torch and Thing story was all about? We have to admit it had us pretty confused! We read it over and over again and never could quite understand what the villain was really after!" It put a happy face on what was surely a disappointing experience for Ivie, who was being groomed as a possible editorial assistant for Lee, an eventuality that never panned out. In contrast to the problematic Torch/Thing story, the Dr. Strange second feature did everything right. Plotted by penciler/inker Steve Ditko (who'd soon be credited for it here and for his similar work over in *Spider-Man*), it was the latest chapter in the ongoing serial involving the team-up of Baron Mordo and Dormammu vs. Strange. Ditko's mastery of mood and atmosphere is on full display with the story's second page, as we catch up with Strange skulking through the rain "on the outskirts of Greenwich Village." With Mordo's minions obstructing him at every turn, Strange is finally cornered by Mordo himself, now empowered by Dormammu. A mystic battle ensues as only Ditko could draw it (and Lee could write it): with magical bolts of bedevilment and rays of wonderment blasting everywhere until finally, Strange is seemingly defeated. To be continued! Argh!



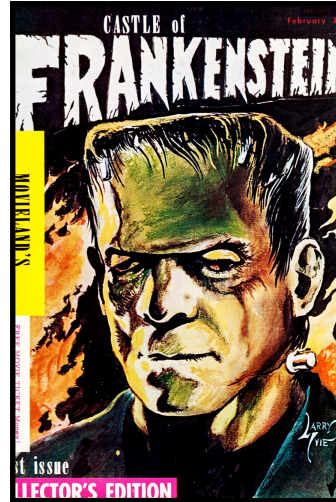
IF SOMEONE COULD BE DESCRIBED AS A PROFESSIONAL FAN, THEN LARRY IVIE WAS IT. INVOLVED IN ART, WRITING, AND PUBLISHING (EMPLOYING ALL THOSE SKILLS FOR CASTLE OF FRANKENSTEIN MAGAZINE), HE EVEN MANAGED TO BREAK INTO COMICS SCRIPTING AT MARVEL, WRITING A PAIR OF TORCH STORIES FOR STRANGE TALES.

Tales of Suspense #65

"When Titans Clash!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Mickey Demeo (inks)
"The Red Skull Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Chic Stone (inks)

Tales of Suspense #65 (May 1965) opened with a fun story by scripter Stan Lee and penciler Don Heck in

which a burglar breaks into Tony Stark's office and finds his briefcase containing the Iron Man armor! Tony only finds out about the theft after the thief goes on a crime spree using the armor. It forces Tony to don his old, clunky, original armored suit to go after the thief. The sticking point being (as the thief in IM's armor thinks on the Jack Kirby cover image) "I'm faster but he's stronger!" A nice contrast that made for plenty of soul satisfying Don Heck action. (Inks this time were provided by DC artist Mike Esposito, moonlighting here as Mickey Demeo, whose embellishment was well suited to Heck's



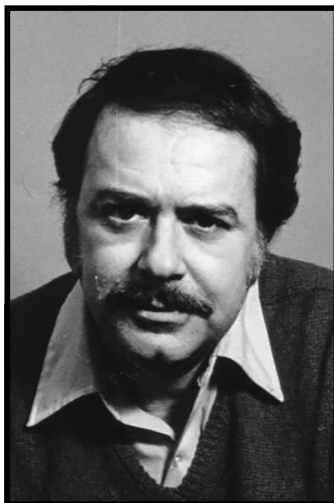
style; much more so than Ayers had been.) There were some more interesting developments in the soap opera department too, as Tony decides that a relationship between himself and Pepper is impossible and tries to fix it so that she gets the message and turns to Happy. The only flaw in this latest installment of the Iron Man saga is the question of what Tony was wearing under his shirt if his chest unit was included in the briefcase stolen by the thief? Oh, well, it was on to the book's second feature, where scripter Lee and penciler Jack Kirby continued to present Captain America's wartime adventures. This time, they retell a tale originally told back in the 1940s involving the introduction of the Red Skull. There, the Skull is revealed as George Maxon, an American industrialist gone over to the Nazis. But like their initial intro of Cap himself back in *Strange Tales* #114, in this updated version, Maxon proves not to be the real Skull but only an imposter. In fact, the real Red Skull would debut, in all his horrendous glory, next issue. Whether this decision to make the Red Skull an actual German was made at the time of

this story or not, isn't known. What is known is that it was the right decision. As a known American traitor, the Red Skull could never have achieved the same iconic status as a faceless German who'd allowed his own petty hatreds to be manipulated by Hitler, who used them to fashion him into the perfect Nazi. As the two did with Bucky, Lee and Kirby made the right moves here in their refashioning of the Red Skull, evolving him from a petty, shallow villain into one of major significance to rank alongside Dr. Doom as one of Marvel's most towering achievements in pure villainy. Yup. *Tales of Suspense* was proving to be one Marvel title that couldn't be ignored by the discerning fan!

Journey Into Mystery #116

"The Trial of the Gods!";
Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils);
Vince Colletta (inks)

It was as if the "Tales of Asgard" backup feature had become the lead feature in *Journey Into Mystery* #116 (May 1965). With Vince Colletta now permanently promoted to inker over Jack Kirby's pencils, the regular Thor lead feature in the title would increasingly assume the look and feel of the backups. More and more as the series went on, adventures would take place entirely within the fantasy milieu of Asgard rather than the everyday world that existed back on Earth. Also marking the divide was scripter Stan Lee's regular use of a pseudo-Elizabethan dialect of his own invention as spoken among the gods. Most significant of all was the next step in Kirby's evolution as an artist, as his images increasingly took on the look of something grander than was customarily offered in the humble comic book form he'd worked in for his entire career (Check out page 7, where Kirby features Odin at his bath in four, big, quarter size panels and page 8, where he uses up a full half page depicting Thor and Loki in confrontation with the gladiator-like Yagg). Yeah, we're talking here about the dawn of Marvel's grandiose years. Still in their transition period, it would take a few more issues to become fully apparent, but



INKER MIKE ESPOSITO WAS FREQUENTLY PAIRED WITH ROSS ANDRU AT DC BUT LATER FOUND HIMSELF AT MARVEL WORKING UNDER A PSEUDONYM. HE'D SHED THE NOM DE PLUM LATER IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS AFTER ANDRU BECAME THE REGULAR ARTIST ON SPIDER-MAN AND HE THE INKER.

this issue was definitely a major step in that direction. Not that the prosaic world of Earthside super heroics was completely abandoned, as the Executioner and the Enchantress hold Jane Foster hostage and one of Rick Jones' Teen Brigaders tries to call in local heroes to help. We see the Avengers just as they're preparing for a momentous change in the roster; Daredevil on his way to confront the Sub-Mariner; and the Frightful Four being chased from the Baxter Building after defeating the FF. But what they think is the Human Torch is actually a fireball from Asgard bearing Balder come to Earth in Thor's stead. Meanwhile, things don't look good for Thor, as Loki cheats his way through the Trial of the Gods and wins! But Kirby and



Colletta seemed to save most of their combined energies for the "Tales of Asgard" backup, energy that was clearly on display in the opening splash page with King Hymer front and center. Here, Kirby's incredible knack for detail is on display with Hymer's massive headdress, armor, boots and gloves that Colletta renders in all their elaborateness. That's followed by four more pages equally as stunning as Thor accepts a series of challenges from Hymer after the latter has been goaded on by Loki. No doubt, the Thor strips in *JIM* hadn't lost much of their excitement in the

transition to the grandiose years!

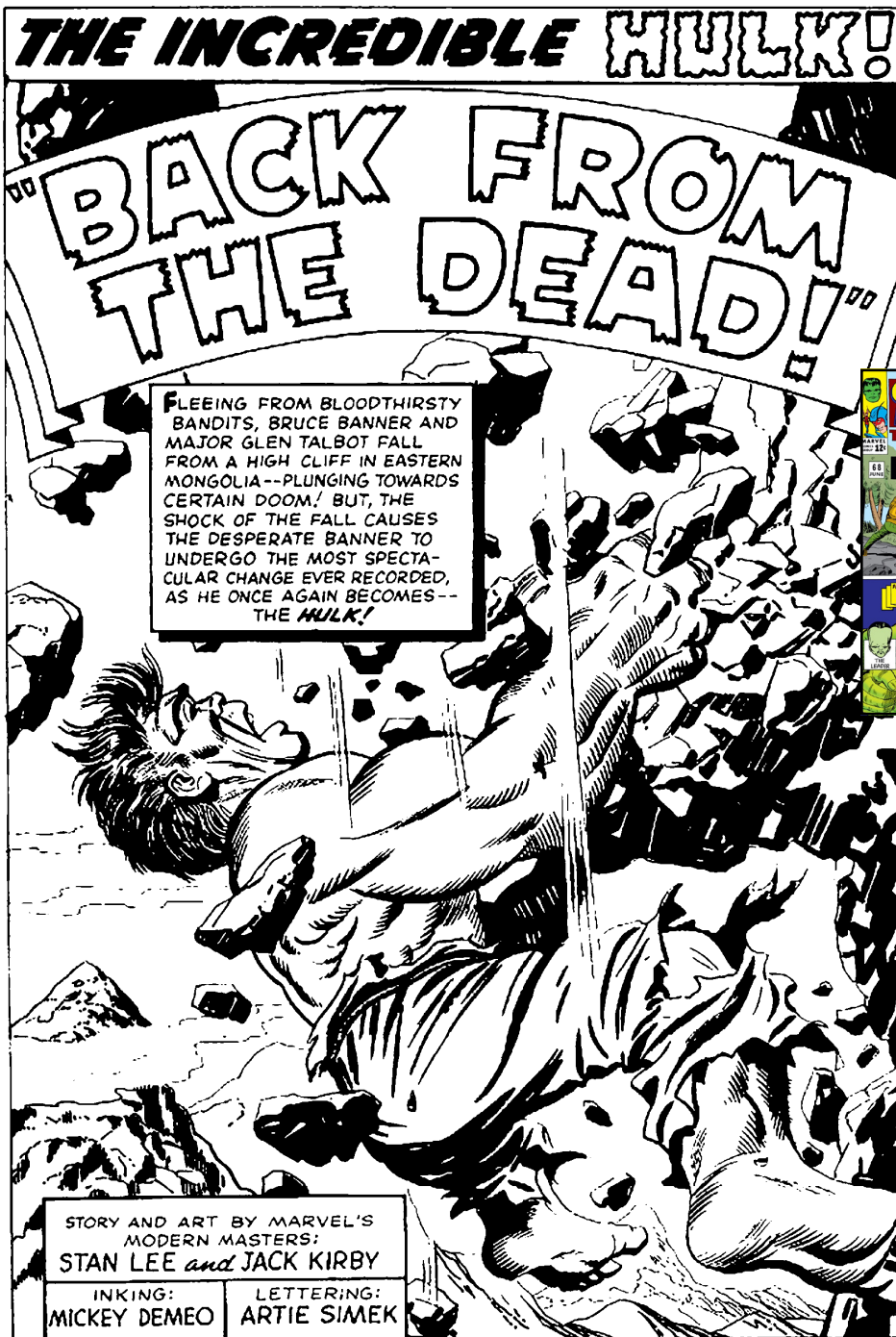
Tales to Astonish #68

"Peril From the Long Dead Past!"; Stan Lee (script);
Bob Powell (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"Back From the Dead!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Bob Powell was still penciling the Giant-Man strip in *Tales to Astonish* #68 (June 1965) and his work here was as unimpressive as it had been over the past several issues. It was given a bit of new life though by way of Vince Colletta, whose fine line, detailed style did wonders for Powell. Take the story's opening splash page with Giant-Man (way past his max height of twelve feet) towering over a forest and log cabin.

There, Colletta renders every muscle in his arms and legs with delicate feathering giving Giant-Man a solidity that hadn't been on display since... well, maybe ever! Unfortunately, Powell's penchant for small panels prevents more such artistic flamboyance (with the exception of page 3, panel 1 with the close up Giant-Man's unconscious form, an image that was also used to good effect as the Giant-Man half of this issue's split cover)". Another unfortunate element of this Stan Lee scripted tale of

the return of old time Giant-Man foe, the Human Top, was Powell's redesign of the Top's costume. Ugh! With its skullcap and underarm wings it was definitely several steps down from Kirby's original concept. Almost as bad was Powell's giving Hank Pym a crew cut! Anyway, after having Giant-Man at his mercy at the start of the story, the Top devises another plan of attack, only to be repulsed. But Giant-Man has had enough! The story ends in a cliffhanger with our hero charging into action and perhaps a final showdown with the Human Top. Far more exciting was this issue's second feature!



There, penciler Steve Ditko, who had helped shepherd the Hulk from failure (his original six issue title had been canceled two years earlier) to success as a serialized feature at the back of *Astonish*, was gone,

overwhelmed by penciling and inking both the *Spider-Man* and *Dr. Strange* strips (Not to mention work for Charlton Comics he was doing on the side). Replacing him was none other than the Hulk's co-creator, Jack Kirby! Kirby would remain on full pencils on a temporary basis until falling back to doing layouts for other artists, but in the meantime, the action king proved that no one could best him in depicting the Hulk's rage. That was proved right off the bat in the Lee-scripted story's opening splash, as the Hulk plummets hugely from a cliff. After rescuing Major Talbot, he wastes no time taking off in leaps that carry him from Asia, while the Leader plots again to take control of Astra Isle. Back home, the Hulk calms down and changes back to Bruce Banner, and is promptly jailed as a possible

TALES TO ASTONISH #68, PAGE 1: AS GOOD AS STEVE DITKO'S TENURE ON THE HULK FEATURE IN ASTONISH HAD BEEN, AND AS DISAPPOINTED AS MANY READERS WERE WHEN HE LEFT, IT WAS STILL SOUL SATISFYING TO FIND JACK KIRBY BACK ON FULL PENCILS WITH A POWER PACKED SPLASH PAGE LIKE THIS TO ANNOUNCE HIS RETURN!

traitor. But by special order of President Johnson (identified not by name but by his famous quote: "Let us reason together"), Banner is released to supervise the testing of his absorbatron bomb on Astra Isle. There, he comes under suspicion again, as the Hulk appears to fight off the Leader's plastic androids. Whew! There was a lot going on in only ten pages, but Lee, with Kirby's help, didn't miss a beat with the departure of Ditko. It would only be onwards and upwards for the Hulk from this point on, as he'd eventually confirm the early faith Lee and Kirby had in the character for potential as a Marvel super star!

from a spate of "blaxploitation" films as well as an active Native American movement that resulted in unconventional Black and Indian heroes. But due to the assignments being given to beginning scripters and neophyte artists, the new features attracted little attention and the entire western line would soon be canceled. It was an ignominious end to a genre that had boasted a long and respected pedigree. **Fun Fact:** Legendary EC artist Alex Toth made a rare appearance in a Marvel Age comic when he both scripted and penciled this issue's backup tale about a sheriff forced into a gunfight with his own brother!

Rawhide Kid #46

"The Deadly Doc Holliday!";
Larry Lieber (script/pencils/inks)

It was a whole new era for Marvel's western comics, as scripter Stan Lee gave up the writing reins and handed them over to others beginning with brother Larry Lieber, as he did here with *Rawhide Kid* #46 (June 1965). With prior experience scripting many of the company's superhero features, Lieber hit the ground running here turning in a decent tale of how the Kid met one of the real West's legends: Doc Holliday, he of O.K. Corral fame. Lee, of course, was still present as the editor (as was artist Jack Kirby, who produced this issue's exciting cover image), but with the handover of the scripting chores, the writing was on the wall. The changeover signaled the beginning of a long slide for Marvel's venerable western line up that by decade's end would become mostly reprints. There'd be a brief attempt at injecting new life in the genre as the 1970s dawned with the introduction of new western heroes that drew their inspiration not from the traditional Hollywood western as exemplified by directors John Ford and Henry Hathaway, but from Sergio Leone by way of Italy, where the so-called "spaghetti western" was born. There, most of the trappings of Hollywood were discarded in favor of dusters, grubby villains, and squinty eyed anti-heroes in the form of actor Clint Eastwood. There was also a tad of inspiration taken



ACTOR CLINT EASTWOOD BECAME THE ICONIC FACE OF THE WAVE OF SPAGHETTI WESTERNS THAT INVADED AMERICAN SECOND RUN THEATERS IN THE MID 1960S. THEIR POPULARITY WITH RISING YOUNG DIRECTORS CHANGED THE LOOK AND STYLE OF THE TRADITIONAL HOLLYWOOD WESTERN AND BY EXTENSION. WESTERN COMICS. A CHANGE THAT WOULD BECOME MORE APPARENT WITH NEW TITLES AND CHARACTERS TO DEBUT IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS.

Strange Tales #133

"The Terrible Toys!";
Stan Lee (script); Bob Powell (pencils);
Mike Esposito (inks)
"A Nameless Land, A Timeless Time!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Scripter Stan Lee was just mailing it in by this time, with penciler Bob Powell doing the same. Clearly, both knew the end was nigh for the Human Torch/Thing feature in *Strange Tales* #133 (June 1965). This time, the boys run into the Puppet Master (surely one of the dullest villains ever) and defeat him quickly. For some reason, the Puppet Master has put aside his M.O. of taking over people's minds using his radioactive clay and is now controlling them via a ray gun of sorts. Go figure. But as has been the case for many months now, the real attraction of the *Strange Tales* book is the Dr. Strange co-feature as our hero finds himself thrown into an unknown dimension thanks to Baron Mordo (whose power has been augmented by Dormammu). By now, artist Steve Ditko had fully entered into his mature style, beginning with a trippy opening splash page showing Doc falling through a barrier and then plunging through a series of alien dimensions to finally land in a domain ruled by the evil sorceress Shazanna. To stop her, Strange throws himself upon her power source, destroying it. But the backlash sends him even deeper into the labyrinth of dimensions. To be continued!

Daredevil #8

"The Stilt-Man Cometh!"; Stan Lee (script); Wally Wood (pencils/inks)

The creative team of scribe Stan Lee and artist Wally Wood continue their all too short run on Daredevil with *Daredevil #8* (June 1965) as DD adds to his rogues gallery with one of the most inventive, clever, and unique villains ever! The story itself reverses expectations, as mousy inventor Wilbur Day comes to the law offices of Nelson and Murdock to sue his boss, whom he claims has stolen the patent for a new kind of hydraulic lift Day has invented. During the course of Matt's trying to help his client, he confronts the mysterious Stilt-Man a number of times, encounters that allow Wood to draw DD in vertiginous action with a villain who can take mile-wide strides across the city and step over bridges before suddenly disappearing by simply telescoping his metal legs down to normal height. Surprise, surprise! Stilt-Man turns out to be Day, who meets defeat when DD turns his own weapon on him, shrinking him to microscopic size. Luckily for many more future encounters between the two, this won't be the end of the Stilt-Man, who manages a comeback in later issues. He was too good a villain (one especially adapted to DD's skill set) to be allowed to disappear forever. Throughout, Wood's action scenes are fun to follow, but none as striking as the story's opening splash page featuring DD swinging toward a runaway car about to run over one of Wood's patented beautiful female forms. This time positioned front and center in an eye grabbing yellow ensemble,

Wood gives the girl real form and substance by the simple expedient of having her legs stretched wide, pulling the seams of her skirt taut against her figure. Lee does his part by having DD describe how a blind man could rescue the girl while driving the car to the docks, where a hidden time bomb blows it up! Interspersed with all that, Wood has the



DAREDEVIL #8, PAGE 8: EARLY ISSUES OF DAREDEVIL CONTINUED TO INTRODUCE DANDY NEW VILLAINS INCLUDING THE MUCH MALIGNED STILTMAN. UNDER ARTIST WALLY WOOD, THE STILTMAN DOES COME OFF HERE AS RATHER FARGICAL AS A CHALLENGE FOR DD. IT WOULDN'T BE UNTIL GENE COLAN TOOK OVER ON THE PENCILS THAT STILTMAN WOULD COME INTO HIS OWN WITH MANY A POWERFUL IMAGE COURTESY OF COLAN AS HIS OWN STYLE MATURED THROUGH MARVEL'S GRANDIOSE YEARS.

Stilt-Man make his initial appearance by extending upward to rob a helicopter in mid-flight! All that, and a sub-plot to be fully developed next ish, wherein Matt's secretary Karen Page, urges the blind man to see a specialist who might be able to restore his sight. Understandably, Matt is reluctant to go, as restoration of his sight might also end his career as Daredevil. But he can't tell that to Karen and so misunderstandings ensue. Meanwhile, Marvel's new fan club, the Merry Marvel Marching Society (MMMS), was in full swing, with a full-page ad dedicated to news and the initial installment of members' names with an announcement of more fun stuff to follow. One of the goals was to list the names of every single club member in some Marvel comic, but with thousands of kids signing up, it was doubtful that Marvel ever got around to printing all of them.

Journey Into Mystery #117

"Into the Blaze of Battle!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

In what would prove to be an increasingly rare event in Marvel comics, Thor visits war-torn Vietnam and battles the Red hordes of the Viet Cong, at first to recover the Norn stones used by Loki to win last issue's Trial of the Gods but then being drawn into a human drama involving protection of local villagers against the cruel oppression of the Communists. *Journey Into Mystery* #117 (June 1965) was a call back to earlier days in which Thor fought Communist villainy as often as he did Asgardian foes. But the story here was a good one for all that, as it ends in the ironic fashion preferred by scripter Stan Lee in zillions of horror, giant monster, fantasy, and western tales he'd written over the years. This time, a native family that had helped Thor in a time of need is captured by the Cong whose commanding officer is their own wayward son. Angered when his younger brother accuses him of betrayal, the officer loses his temper: "You do not matter! Nobody matters! Only the Communist cause is important! People mean nothing! Human lives mean nothing!" He shoots the boy and his parents down in cold blood but is immediately filled with remorse. Thor vows vengeance, but the officer is already a broken man. "It was communism that made me what I am—that shaped me into a brutal, unthinking instrument of destruction! To communism, then, may it vanish from the face of the earth and the memory of mankind!" Following which, the officer destroys himself and the Cong base by igniting the weapons cache hidden there. It was perhaps Lee's most ringing denunciation of the Communist creed and likely the last chance he had



AS JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #117 WENT ON SALE IN THE SUMMER OF 1965, THE WAR IN VIETNAM INTENSIFIED WITH INCREASED INVOLVEMENT BY US FORCES. IN RESPONSE TO WIDESPREAD ATTACKS BY COMMUNIST UNITS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH, PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON AUTHORIZED A BOMBING CAMPAIGN AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM. THEN, IN AUGUST, THE US ARMY CONDUCTED LARGE SCALE GROUND COMBAT AT CHU LAI FOLLOWED IN NOVEMBER WITH ACTION IN THE IA DRANG VALLEY.

to do it as the times were a-changin', and Marvel's readership (at least those who wrote letters and whom Lee met while speaking on college campuses) demanded that he tone down the anti-Communist rhetoric. Whether or not it was the right decision, Marvel deprived itself of a rich source of potential bad guys and turned its back (for the most part) on a genuine threat to the whole world that was worthy of its heroes' attention. Meanwhile, penciler Jack Kirby was in his glory this issue, where he not only had the chance to illustrate combat action, but some down-to-earth villainy as Balder fought alone against the Enchantress and the Executioner who were still holding Jane Foster hostage. (And though new regular inker Vince Colletta was fine, this issue's story seemed like it would have been better served by Chic Stone; but alas! Stone had left Marvel for what he hoped would be greener pastures.) Colletta was on hand as well for this issue's "Tales of Asgard" backup, kicking things off with an impressive inking job over Kirby's opening splash page that featured a couple dozen characters clashing in combat followed by four magnificent pages that included a close up of an angry Odin and the first appearance of the Odinsword (here called the Oversword) In a first for the series, this issue's story is only the opening chapter of a new serial that would see its characters launched on a quest in the best of heroic fantasy style.

Avengers #17

"Four Against the Minotaur!"; Stan Lee (script);
Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

After taking one of the biggest risks any publisher could take (i.e. switching horses in mid-stream or, dropping all the major heroes from the original roster and replacing them with virtual unknowns with considerably less power), editor / scripter Stan Lee launches into the first adventure for his new Avengers line up. In fact, Lee seems to underline the doubts some fans might have had about the change in a blurb on the cover of *Avengers* #17 (June 1965): "Without the raw power of Iron Man, Thor, or Giant-Man, how can the valiant Avengers hope to stop the Minotaur?" How indeed? Well, the first step is to try and find the raw power necessary and to do that, the Avengers go in search of the Hulk. They never find him although readers got to enjoy a little Jack Kirby magic whenever Lee cut away from the immediate action to show readers what the Hulk was doing while "Cap's kooky quartet" bumped around in the underworld and trying to survive the attack of the Minotaur. That magic actually consisted of excerpts of Kirby drawn panels from an upcoming issue of *Tales to Astonish*. Nice touch! Kirby also provided this issue's exciting cover, a service he'd continue to provide to the title for some months to come. Not that the book suffered in the art department! Penciler Don Heck was still on hand to provide the thrills as Captain America, Quicksilver, Hawkeye, and the Scarlet Witch tackled their first mission and got the best of the Mole Man to boot! Heck's work was really impressive this time (even with Dick Ayers' inks), especially when he presented the action in large sized panels as he did on page 4, and again on pages 6 and 7, as the new Avengers tackle a practice robot. In the meantime, Lee latches onto an element that would keep upcoming issues interesting, no matter what menace the team faced, namely relationships among the characters:



THOUGH RICK JONES WOULD BE HEARD FROM AGAIN, LARGELY IN THE HULK STRIP, THERE WOULD BE LITTLE ROOM IN THE FUTURE FOR DISNEY'S HARDY BOYS TYPE HANGERS ON AS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE MATURED INTO ITS GRANDIOSE YEARS.

"It is only a matter of time before Quicksilver replaces Captain America as leader of this group" and "Does he really expect someone as young and powerful as Hawkeye to take orders from a relic of World War II like himself?" There was even a hint of some romantic tension in the air: "Captain America is no weakling," admires the Scarlet Witch. "I shall enjoy being an Avenger." As future stories unfolded, it'd be these conflicting emotions that would keep readers coming back issue after issue and provide the real bedrock interest in a team

that, on the face of it, wouldn't seem powerful enough to inspire really good action yarns. All in all, the new Avengers line up was off to a good start! **Fun Fact:** Though Rick Jones appears briefly here, he'd soon disappear from the Avengers more or less permanently to rejoin the Hulk over in *Tales to Astonish*. With Rick's departure, so too will the Teen Brigade disappear, rarely if ever to show up anywhere else in the Marvel Age. Too bad, as they did work okay in some of the Avengers' past stories and provided

a kind of vicarious pleasure for younger readers who perhaps wished they could participate in such adventures themselves. Unfortunately, as the Marvel Universe matured, it seemed it had less room for such Hardy Boy type characters.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #19

"An Eye For An Eye!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

"You'll never forget the roaring revenge of Nick Fury!" screamed the blurb on the cover of *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #19 (June 1965). Following the devastating events of the previous issue wherein Fury's girlfriend, Pam Hawley, was killed in an air raid, Fury seeks to bury his grief in more intense training exercises. Still, the Howler ramrod burns for revenge upon the man who ordered the air strike and over a number

of the story's opening pages, scripter Stan Lee takes more time than usual not only to explore Fury's feelings, but also to follow him as he arranges a secret mission of his own into "Nazi land" to avenge himself on one Luftwaffe General von Krummpt. Additionally, once in occupied Europe, Lee manages to slip in some continuity by having the Howlers contact Mayor Rooten (the so-called quisling but really Allied spy from ish #15). As readers expected, Fury catches up to von Krummpt and in the process of capturing him, the two spar with some wartime philosophy with Lee characterizing the Nazis as ruthless killers (as he'd also characterize the Communists in this month's *Journey Into Mystery*): "People must die in war!" claims von Krummpt. "The life of a civilian is nothing! All that matters is victory for the Third Reich!" "Mister, I don't want to live in the same world with you!" replies Fury in no uncertain terms. But of course, things can't end that simply. Von Krummpt escapes into a World War I biplane with Fury hanging on. There's an aerial struggle that ends when von Krummpt falls to his death. The final panel of the story marks a poignant fini to the Nick/Pam saga as a silhouetted Fury visits Pam's grave: "I had to do it baby...for you! I...I...just wanted you to know..." The two-part story of Pam's death was perhaps the high point of the post-Jack Kirby *Sgt. Furys* and luckily for readers, penciler Dick Ayers had a sympatico

inker on hand in the form of Frank Giacoia, whose thicker brush line helped bring more solidity to Ayers' work than Colletta's finer penpoint did in an earlier issue. Here, Giacoia didn't hold his own talent back, making Ayers' pencils more than simply palatable, especially in the quieter, opening pages. If the *Sgt. Fury* strip could only maintain this level of quality in story and art, it could stand more solidly with Marvel's other titles. Only time would tell.



SGT FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS #19, PAGE 20: ARTIST DICK AYERS' PENCHANT FOR THE MATERIEL OF WAR IS OBVIOUS ON THIS PAGE IN HIS DRAWING OF THE BIPLANE IN PANEL 2. BUT IT'S THE STORY'S FINAL PANEL THAT SET A POIGNANT PERIOD TO THE ARC THAT HAD MARKED THE STRIP'S FIRST SCORE OF ISSUES.

Tales to Astonish #69

"Oh, Wasp, Where Is Thy Sting?"; Al Hartley (script);
Bob Powell (pencils); John Giunta (inks)
"Trapped In the Lair of the Leader!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

The writing had been on the wall for months. With its plague of lackadaisical stories and unimpressive art, the Giant-Man feature in *Tales to Astonish* #69 (July 1965) would prove to be the end of the series. It was an ignominious conclusion for a venerable feature that had begun way back in issue #35, the very dawn of the Marvel Age, when scripter Stan Lee was teamed with penciler Jack Kirby to launch the Ant-Man series before having the art chores taken over by Don Heck. Kirby would return from time to time to help reboot the strip, first by introducing the Wasp and then by having Ant-Man become Giant-Man. Even Steve Ditko filled in at least once. (*Astonish* #61!) But largely by the time the Hulk was introduced as the title's second feature, the Giant-Man strip was plagued with uninspired art by the likes of Carl Burgos and Bob Powell, neither of whom ever really caught on to the Marvel style. Even Lee seemed to lose interest with stories that were more weird than exciting and that completely lacked colorful supervillains. Take this issue's story for instance. The Human Top was brought back, but his wonderfully Kirby-designed costume was replaced by a skullcap and green sack affair, with the Top himself displaying some heretofore unknown scientific skill in his preparation of an oversized freezing trap for Giant-Man. Moreover, in order to make this Al Hartley scripted tale work, the Wasp displays a power she never seemed to have before, namely an ability to communicate with wasps. By the time this ultimate disappointment of a story reached its conclusion, even loyal fans were no doubt relieved to read Giant-Man was going to retire from superheroics due to the physical danger of frequent size changing. Highpockets would disappear for a time but would eventually return, better than ever. By contrast, the Hulk second feature this ish was hands down terrific, made no less so by the power packed pencils of Jack Kirby! This time, the Hulk's been captured by the Leader and taken to his hideout where he eventually breaks loose and tears the joint apart in classic Kirby style. Another Kirby specialty was drawing US soldiers, and he has plenty of opportunity to do that here with exciting scenes of the Army invading the Leader's hideout. (Shades of all those 1950s sci-fi movies where the Army fans out and takes control of a situation) Previous artist Steve Ditko was good, but readers had to admit, Kirby was still the King! Add in the reappearance of Rick Jones

(fresh from his gig with the new Avengers) to help spice up the Bruce Banner side of the equation, plus the apparent death of Banner himself, and you've got a tale that adds up to quite a bit more than its measly ten pages! The question however remained: who or what would replace the Giant-Man lead feature? According to the next issue notice on the letters' page, Lee wasn't telling.

Strange Tales #134

"The Challenge of...the Watcher!"; Stan Lee (script);
Bob Powell (pencils); Wally Wood (inks)
"Earth Be My Battleground!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

As had happened over in the concurrent issue of *Tales to Astonish*, so too the lead feature in *Strange Tales* #134 (July 1965): it was canceled to be replaced in the



ARTIST JACK KIRBY CONTRIBUTED THIS FINE COVER TO STRANGE TALES #134 MARKING THE END OF THE LONG RUNNING TORCH SERIES. IN A SIGN POST INDICATING THE TRANSITION FROM THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION TO THE GRANDIOSE YEARS, A NEW FEATURE WOULD REPLACE THE TORCH AND THING IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

following issue with a new strip as yet unknown. (It was teased by editor Stan Lee in this issue's letters' page, but he didn't reveal what it was) The Human Torch strip, that had been born way back almost at the dawn of the Marvel Age, had begun strongly with Jack Kirby on the art before dipping into some very strange tales indeed. Then there was an uptick under penciler Dick Ayers as new supervillains began to be introduced.

Kirby returned from time to time for special stories like the reintroduction of Captain America (sort of) and the teaming of the Torch with Iceman, but mostly over the last several issues, after the Thing had become a regular in the strip, the feature took a definite downward turn. Not helping was the art of Bob Powell, who just couldn't seem to capture that ole Marvel magic (Even aided as he was this ish by the inks of Wally Wood). Thus, the Torch strip slowly ground to a near halt until landing with a thud

here, as the boys are sent back in time by the Watcher to battle Kang the Conqueror and a horde of knights in shining armor. Ho hum. As had become usual for *Strange Tales*, the real attraction was in the back of the book, where dwelled the Dr. Strange feature. Here, the good Doctor continues to find himself on the run from Baron Mordo (up powered by Dormammu). He receives help from an as-yet-unnamed Clea in the Dark Dimension when she releases the Mindless Ones, forcing Dormammu to take his eye off the ball. Defeating Mordo (in one of artist Steve Ditko's strangest scenarios!), Strange learns from probing the Ancient One's mind that the only thing that can save him from Dormammu is Eternity. Who, or what Eternity is, readers would have to wait months to find out as the ongoing serial unfolded. Ditko's art here is top notch, putting the more down-to-earth Powell to shame. He's aided as always by scripter Lee's on target dialogue and vocabularistic creations. After this, it wasn't any wonder why the Strange strip would be the one to survive rather than the Torch/Thing feature...even as Lee admitted later not having any real enthusiasm for it.



VETERAN ARTIST FRANK GIACOIA HAD BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH MARVEL GOING BACK TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE 1940s: BUT IT'D BE AS AN INKER, ESPECIALLY OVER JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS. THAT HE'D BE BEST KNOWN TO READERS IN THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS.

Tales of Suspense #67

"Where Walks the Villains!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)
"Lest Tyranny Triumph!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

In a plot device crafted to allow Iron Man to seemingly fight all his old enemies, scripter Stan Lee teams with penciler Don Heck to tell another actioner featuring the golden avenger. This time, Count Nefaria, seeking revenge on the Avengers after his defeat over in their own book, uses something he calls a "dream machine" that entrances its subjects and makes them dream anything he desires. And, as is common knowledge (it says here), if a person is killed in a dream, they die in real life. Thus, Nefaria hopes one of Iron Man's old enemies will kill him in his dreams. But the plot backfires when Iron Man's resistance proves too much for the villains and the dream machine overheats and explodes in the feedback. Heck's art is

good, but too literal inking by Mike Esposito keeps it grounded when it should soar. Anyway, it was fun to revisit classic IM villains such as the Melter, Gargantus, and Jack Frost again. That said, *Tales of Suspense* #67 (July 1965) continues to maintain the tradition of the *Suspense* title being Marvel's premiere split book with not only Iron Man in the lead, but with the Captain America backup. Both, of course, are scripted by Stan Lee, no mean element to the equation, but on Cap, Jack Kirby continued to provide the pencils (inked strongly here by Frank Giacoia who manages to fill in nicely for the departed Chic Stone). As readers would recall, Cap had been captured by the Red Skull and brainwashed to do his will. With his adventures still taking place during the war years, Cap is being trained for a mission to assassinate the Allied Commander-in-Chief (An unnamed Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower?). But the spotlight this time rests squarely on Bucky, who Lee and Kirby have greatly matured from his original appearances back in the Golden Age of comics. In those days, he was mostly comedy relief and seemed to be no older than an unrealistic nine or ten years old. But in the new Marvel Age of Comics, scripts were aimed at a



more discriminating audience (albeit off times with an editorial tongue planted firmly in cheek), and Bucky was not only made more believably older, but taken more seriously as a combatant. Here, for instance, he escapes from a firing squad, goes into rough and tumble action as only Kirby could draw it (leading fellow prisoners by his example: "The boy prepared us! He told us to wait for the right moment!"), and finally does what Cap himself would never do, throws a hand grenade into a barracks (and judging from the size of the explosion) killing everyone inside. Later, he takes out a Nazi commando and replaces him in his squad, thus accompanying the brainwashed Cap back to England. There, he machine guns down members of the squad sent to make sure Cap completed his mission before going off to prevent the killing. But is he too late? Continued next ish! **Fun Fact:** Kirby, of course, drew this issue's cover and had the chance to draw a number of Iron Man's old villains, but he slipped up slightly. Likely intending to draw Gargantus, he drew the giant alien Colossus, whom Giant-Man fought in Africa over in *Tales to Astonish*, instead, inadvertently giving him one last appearance in the Marvel Age!

Journey Into Mystery #118

"To Kill a Thunder God!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Running slightly ahead of the *Fantastic Four* in the sweepstakes for which title would cross over into the grandiose years first, *Journey Into Mystery* #118 (July 1965) introduces the Destroyer, a robotic creature created by Odin and left hidden on Earth to be awakened if Midgard was ever threatened by some overwhelming menace. It was obvious from the start that this scheme wasn't one of Odin's better ideas as an artifact hunter, guided by Loki (still determined to keep Thor from bringing his Norn stones back to Asgard, proving that his brother cheated in the Trial of the Gods), discovers the Destroyer's hiding place. Upon contact, the Destroyer absorbs the hunter's mind and comes to life. Instantly, Thor is presented with a no-win scenario: how can he defeat a device created by Odin to be indestructible? The artistic collaboration on the lead Thor strip between Kirby and inker Vince Colletta is still in its early stages, but already we see how well the combined talents of the two men worked to create a sense of antique monumentalism in the panels, showing the hunter approaching the hiding place of the Destroyer: a full half page panel on page 5 with the hunter dwarfed by some huge stone idol, and readers' first look at the Destroyer given super-detailed substantiality on page 6, panel 2. Unfortunately, hindsight has shown that Colletta would cut corners in his inking chores by



BLUDGEONING COMBATANTS CLASHING HUGELY SET MANY A MARVEL COMIC APART FROM THE COMPETITION DUE TO ARTIST JACK KIRBY'S GROWING SENSE OF GRANDIOSITY AS HE DEMONSTRATES HERE WITH JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #118.

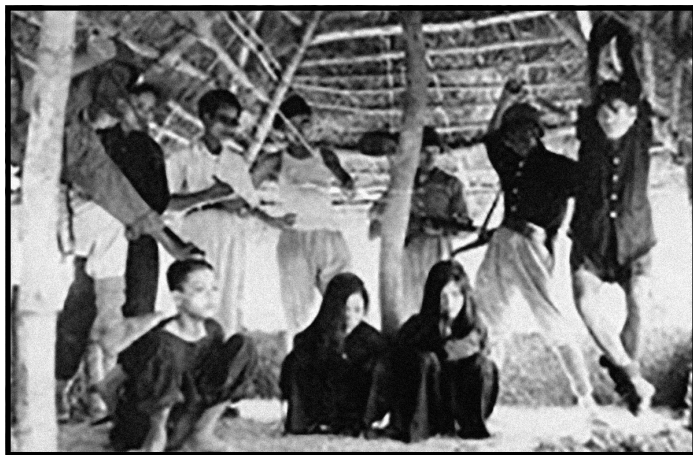
simply ignoring and erasing extraneous details that Kirby had drawn in. Thus, in many panels, absence of backgrounds and use of force lines to fill spaces that one suspects Kirby had filled out, are obvious. But at the time these stories were released, no one knew of Colletta's time saving measures and fans were simply thrilled at the results brought forth by the Kirby/Colletta team. The impressive achievement of the team's collaboration was also on display in the book's backup "Tales of Asgard" feature as the second installment of a new serial is presented with Thor being given the "mystic hand of truth" to help him with his mission. **Fun Fact:** This issue's cover by Kirby and inker Frank Giacoia presents a layout that would soon become a classic Kirby trope, namely featuring just two combatants going toe to toe and filling the entire picture frame. Here, Thor and the

Destroyer go at it with no background whatsoever to detract from the dramatic scene that's limned only with force lines. As usual, coloring by Stan Goldberg accentuates the drama, as he surrounds the whole thing in blue fading to deep purple at the outer edges, the better to spotlight Thor's more colorful garb and the Destroyer's grey.

Avengers #18

"When the Commissar Commands!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Off to a running start last issue, "Cap's kooky quartet" did no less in *Avengers #18* (July 1965) as they travel to the mythical southeast Asian country of Sin-Cong to relieve it of the oppressive rule by a man known only as the Commissar. One of the less frequent stories featuring Communist villains to be enjoyed by readers as the years of consolidation drew to an end and the grandiose years began, scripter Stan Lee stacks the deck against the Reds when he depicts Sin-Cong's rulers as utterly ruthless and cruel. When the people of Sin-Cong protest that they cannot pay any more taxes because the Communist government has already taken everything they have, the huge, super-strong Commissar is wheeled out to demonstrate the futility of resistance, or even simple protest. As the Commissar threatens the populace with a brute demonstration of his power, the people are asked, not without heavy irony: "See how I stand ready to fight for you against the scheming capitalist nations!" "But we do not fear the capitalists! They had been our friends—they helped feed us, helped clothe us, until you came to power," replies some courageous individual in the crowd. "So! You are still victims of their evil propaganda! But I shall cure you of that illness!" replies the Commissar before demanding that everyone get on their knees and kowtow to him. The scene is one calculated to inspire revulsion in readers and succeeds. Later, the Avengers receive a call from "Radio Free Sin-Cong" for help, but it's really just a trick to get them within reach of the evil Commissar. Arriving on the scene, the male members of the team are each defeated by the Commissar until he takes on the Scarlet Witch, whose hex power proves unpredictable and gains the victory with a twist ending. It was a solid story with nasty commie villains readers loved to hate, but as was becoming apparent with the new group of Avengers, the main attraction was how Lee worked on their individual personalities. Captain America, for instance, continues to muse about adjusting to the new world he's only recently become a part of, as well as hoping that a good performance in Sin-Cong will get him noticed by Nick Fury and hired as an agent of SHIELD. Meanwhile,



THE SITUATION IN SIN-CONG REFLECTED ACTUAL COMMUNIST ACTIVITY IN VIET-NAM AS THIS VIET-CONG PROPAGANDA PHOTO INDICATES. CAUGHT BETWEEN COMMUNISTS WHO TERRORIZED THEM INTO COOPERATION AND THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPTS TO KEEP THEIR VILLAGES FROM FALLING PREY TO THE CONG, THE ORDINARY CITIZEN OF SOUTH VIETNAM WAS UNFORTUNATELY CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE.

we discover Quicksilver's fondness for the circus and Hawkeye's penchant for designing new trick arrows. Initially, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch oppose going to Sin-Cong: "I thought our purpose was to battle crime! Why need we concern ourselves with international affairs?" asks Quicksilver. "Well, let me spell it out for you!" replies Hawkeye, who only recently had been working with the Communist Black Widow to betray his country, "We're supposed to avenge injustice, right? Well when liberty's threatened, justice goes down the drain! That's it in a nutshell!" Simple, but wholly understandable to even the youngest members of Lee's audience and maybe even the college students who were paying increasing attention to Marvel. Meanwhile, penciler Don Heck was up to the task of turning in another fine job here. Even inker Dick Ayers seems to have altered his style to better match that of Heck. Page 5, panel 7 for instance, where we first meet the Commissar, Ayers really does well in capturing Heck's detailed yet scratchy looking style. And the three-quarter page sized panel on page 14 when the Avengers come face to face with the Commissar is beautifully illustrated, with all of Heck's fine detail preserved. Truly, the Lee/Heck team was approaching the height of its powers with these issues and the best was yet to come! **Fun Fact:** On the exciting Jack Kirby drawn cover, check out the names of Kirby and inker Ayers written at the bottom of the vase located at Cap's left shoulder. Pretty sneaky for a pair of artists who didn't usually sign their work.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #20

"The Blitz Squad Strikes!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Jack Kirby slipped up somewhat on the cover of *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #20 (July 1965), with a layout that was just plain unattractive. Sure, Fury himself is front and center, but the arrangement of the other Howlers, each confronted by their Blitz Squad counterparts, lacks focus with dark colors and inks making the characters even more indistinct. This time, even Stan Goldberg's use of yellow for the background doesn't work. Inside, things aren't much better with penciler Dick Ayers choosing to keep the action confined in small panels and keeping the Blitzers in minor, unspotlighted roles with their figures off times partially off panel. He's aided again this issue by the inks of Frank Giacoia, but unfortunately, Ayers just doesn't give him much to work with. Stan Lee's script is an okay affair involving the Howlers needing to raid a castle in Scotland and rescue a unit captured by Baron Strucker and his Blitzkrieg Squad. But the most interesting scene in the book was the confrontation between Fury and Bull McGivney, or rather the lack of one. Here was a chance for Lee to build up the company's second squad of commandos, but he chose to keep the Maulers firmly in second class status. Sure, the Howlers are the stars of the book, but it was always interesting to learn that there were other commando units at camp, all likely as rough and tough as the Howlers, but who were they? What impossible missions were they doing while the Howlers conducted their own? It was a question that was rarely addressed. One that could have opened up the world of the Howlers, but that Lee failed to explore. Still, just to show that Lee hadn't lost his touch, this issue's final panel surely brought a smile to the faces of many old-time readers as Fury asks Dum Dum to do him a favor: "Wipe that dumb lookin' smile off your ugly pan when I'm talkin' at ya, soldier! This is the Army, not a gol-danged two-bit amusement park! Now how about lendin' your ol' sarge a sawbuck till payday, ya flap-eared, lantern-jawed goldbrickin' creep!"

Fantastic Four #41

"The Brutal Betrayal of Ben Grimm!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Continuing directly from events in the previous issue, *Fantastic Four* #41 (Aug 1965) opens with the Thing deciding to quit the team after Mr. Fantastic transformed him back to his rocky self as a last desperate measure to defeat Dr. Doom. With over

forty issues under their belts, the team of scribe Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby have become totally familiar not only with the stars of the book but also their enemies. In this case, their evil counterparts, the Frightful Four. Furthermore, the story arc that begins this issue is actually a continuation of events begun as far back as issue #38, when the team was defeated by the Frightful Four, thus kicking off what would become a Marvel innovation, an ongoing, ever unfolding story of the lives of the main characters. In this case, the lives of the Fantastic Four as one adventure merges into the next either by superheroic action or the characters' personal travails. The events of this issue proceed directly from that first defeat by the evil FF, when as a result, they lost their powers and upon returning home, were forced to fight Dr. Doom, who'd taken over the Baxter Building in their absence. Doom was defeated, but Ben Grimm



ALTHOUGH THE CONCEPT OF A TEAM MEMBER TURNING ON THE OTHERS WOULD BECOME A TIRED TROPE IN LATER YEARS, HERE IN FANTASTIC FOUR #41, IT WAS STILL A RELATIVELY UNTRIED IDEA AND MADE FOR AN ABSORBING MULTI-ISSUE STORYLINE.



ALTHOUGH INKER VINCE COLLETTA WOULD PROVIDE STANDOUT WORK OVER JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS ON THE THOR STRIP, HIS STYLE PROVED INCOMPATIBLE WITH A MORE SCIENCE FICTION ORIENTED FEATURE SUCH AS THE FANTASTIC FOUR. BUT COLLETTA HAD THE UNSTINTING SUPPORT OF EDITOR STAN LEE, WHO RESPECTED THE ARTIST'S ABILITY BOTH TO PENCIL AND INK AS WELL AS MEET DEADLINES.

Fantastic Four #42

*"To Save You, Why Must I Kill You?";
Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils);
Vince Colletta (inks)*

had to be changed back from his human self to the Thing in order to do it. Now the Thing has quit the team in his despondency and is in turn captured by the Frightful Four and subjected to the Wizard's ID machine, brainwashing him into thinking that he's a member of their team. Meanwhile, searching for the Thing, the other members of the FF are attacked by their evil counterparts with the Thing in the lead and are captured. In between all that, Lee and Kirby build on the personalities of the Frightful Four, which are a dark reflection of the loving camaraderie present among the good FF. The Wizard is cold and calculating, Sandman and Trapster are venal and selfish, and Medusa is aloof and masterful. All of them are incompatible except for their shared hatred for the FF. So it's no surprise at the end when they sic the Thing on Mr. Fantastic who's helplessly pasted to a board. Kirby's art throughout is good (inked, unlike their teaming on Thor, incompatibly by Vince Colletta; one could only imagine how much better it would've all looked if Chic Stone was still on the job), particularly his juggling of the large cast of characters culminating on page 17, where he divides the page into big quarter sized panels not used for action but more character moments between Sandman and Trapster. Even though much of the issue lacked action, it turned out to be one of the most interesting, captivating reads in the FF's long run of successes. And things would only get better from here!

Directly beneath one of the best story titles ever can be seen the reason why Vince Colletta wasn't the best choice to ink Jack Kirby's pencils on the *Fantastic Four*. Besides likely eliminating some background detail in the opening splash page showing the Frightful Four goading a brainwashed Thing into killing Mr. Fantastic, there was just something that didn't click between the two artists on a stylistic level the way it did over in *Journey Into Mystery* and the Thor feature there. There was something too literal about Colletta's approach to the FF. Where his fine line style added a *je ne sais quoi* to Kirby's pencils on Thor, here, for *Fantastic Four* #42 (Sept. 1965), it makes the figure work too light and airy, too ephemeral. That situation would hold for the rest of the book and the following issue, but in no way would it interfere with the storytelling, as scripter Stan Lee teamed with Kirby's artistry to continue the current tale of the Frightful Four's brainwashing of the Thing and their attempt to use him to defeat his fellow team members. And to start things off here, Lee and Kirby include one of the most spectacular and exciting uses of Mr. Fantastic's stretching powers ever put on a comic page, topping even his earlier fight with the Sub-Mariner in ish #27! Stuck to a platform by the Trapster's paste, Mr. Fantastic is apparently helpless. But when the Thing reaches for him, the surface area of his body not glued down begins to expand; first to block a blow by the Thing, then to swell and push everyone out of the room! "No wonder they call 'im Mr. Fantastic," gasps the Trapster as the entire evil FF and the Thing are forced out of the room. "If I didn't see this, I wouldn't believe it. And I'm still not sure I believe it!" What follows is a Thing vs. Mr. Fantastic fight (as hinted at on the cover) that ends when the Thing shoves Mr. Fantastic into a bottle and stops it with a metal seal! But that doesn't end the action as the story barrels along, never stopping to catch its figurative breath as the Frightful Four are seemingly defeated, and the issue ends in conflagration! Marvel may have passed the greatest single year of its history when the company could seemingly do no wrong, but this was for sure a long way from chopped liver!

Fantastic Four #43

"Lo! There Shall Be An Ending!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

If there was any doubt among fans as to the appropriateness of Vince Colletta inking the pencils of Jack Kirby, they needed to look no farther than the cover of *Fantastic Four* #43 (Oct. 1965) which was nothing less than, well, fantastic! Add to it the brilliant coloring of Stan Goldberg with its subtle shadings against a mostly lead grey background and you have a Marvel masterpiece of most compelling excellence! The final chapter in the multi-part Frightful Four storyline, the arc ran at the same time Colletta's inks on the lead Thor feature in *Journey Into Mystery* were ongoing, a period in Colletta's collaboration with Kirby that was still trying to find its footing. Following the story in concurrent Thors involving the Absorbing Man's invasion of Asgard, the strip would enter its most fecund period with the introduction of Hercules, the Colonizers and Ego, the High Evolutionary, and the Enchanters, through all of which Colletta's inking style would turn Kirby's penciling into a thing to behold. Just as he did here with this issue's cover. Unfortunately, just as in the concurrent Thors, that kind of attention didn't extend to the interior of the book, where Colletta failed to capture the subtle difference in Kirby's storytelling between the mostly fantasy of Thor and the hard-edged SF of the FF. Too dainty an inking line just wasn't enough to give the action a realistic, down-to-earth feel, as can be seen right off with the issue's opening splash page, where barely a shadow can be seen. Things pick up for the rest of the book though, but the obvious incompatibility between Colletta's style and the needs of the strip were still apparent. Apparent enough to editor/scripter Stan Lee, who removed Colletta from the book with the next issue (He kept the inker no less busy though not only on Thor, but on the new Sub-Mariner strip and later on the *Avengers* and *Daredevil* with excellent results). Meanwhile, here, the FF escape from the evil FF and make it back to the Baxter Building. Kirby provides a great four panel page 12 that really exploits the visual possibilities in the Sandman's power as he seeps into the HQ as loose sand and then hardens his fists into hydraulic-like lifts that smash the roof open for his partners. The final battle scenes are more than satisfying, except for the infamous panel on page 14 where Kirby draws the wrong hand at the end of Mr. Fantastic's outstretched arm! The story ended up being so good, Colletta's less than stellar inking over the early chapters is easily forgotten. Still, with his departure this ish, a whole new era was set to begin for the fantastic foursome!

Tales of Suspense #68

*"If a Man Be Mad!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)
"The Sentinel and the Spy!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)*

People are still playing mind games with Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* #68 (Aug 1965). This time it's Tony Stark's own cousin, the ne'er-do-well Morgan Stark, who's indebted to the Maggia. In order to get out from his gambling debts, Morgan agrees to a plan by Count Nefaria (fresh from his defeat by Iron Man in the previous issue, although IM never knew it) to use a "visio-projector" on Iron Man to make him think he's going nuts. Thus, after following Tony for a while, Morgan projects an image of an alien rocket, and when Tony reports the incident to the authorities and no evidence is subsequently discovered, he's suspected of losing his marbles. In no time flat. Sen. Byrd wants him investigated and stripped of his government contracts. Determined to clear himself, Tony returns to the site, only to find real alien invaders! Quite a coincidence! Thankful that Morgan testified to his sanity, Tony sends him back to Monte Carlo in style... just what Morgan doesn't want, having failed the Maggia: "I wish I were dead!" he thinks while being ushered into Nefaria's office. It was a good story by scripter Stan Lee marred only by the unbelievable coincidence of the real aliens showing up at exactly the right time in exactly the right place. More costumed supervillains please, Stan! As usual, the star attraction



ALTHOUGH THE CHARACTER OF SENATOR HARRINGTON BYRD FEATURED IN THE IRON MAN STRIP MIGHT RESEMBLE THE IMPATIENT AND IRASCIBLE REAL LIFE SENATOR JOSEPH MCCARTHY, HE WAS ACTUALLY AN AMALGAM OF SEVERAL CONGRESSIONAL PERSONALITIES WHO CHAIRED INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEES, PERHAPS INCLUDING SENATOR ESTES KEFAUVER, NEMESIS OF THE COMICS INDUSTRY IN THE 1950S!



WITH ONLY A HALF COVER TO WORK WITH, ARTIST JACK KIRBY NEVER FAILED TO PRODUCE SEPARATE IMAGES FOR BOTH FEATURES IN MARVEL'S TRIO OF SPLIT BOOKS SUCH AS THIS ISSUE OF TALES OF SUSPENSE #168 THAT TOLD READERS ALL THEY NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT THE STORIES INSIDE. IN FACT, THERE ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE ROOM LEFT OVER FOR STAN LEE'S EDITORIAL INPUT AS WELL!

of the *Suspense* double header in these months was the Jack Kirby drawn Captain America feature this time picking up where he left off last ish, with Cap about to assassinate Eisenhower! (Or at least his comic book stand in!) In the nick of time, Cap regains his senses and stops himself just as Bucky makes the scene and together, they wipe the floor with the Nazi commandos who accompanied Cap on his mission. In fact, panel 4 on page 2 is another incredible Kirby crowd scene where he draws in twenty-seven figures including the floored Nazis, a mass of MPs, and our heroes too. With Kirby, readers always got their money's worth! From there, the action shifts to the Red Skull back in Germany, who's not wasting time over spilt milk and

is planning his next caper. Specifically, stealing a top secret allied weapon code named Project Vanish! It was clear that once Lee and Kirby decided to move on from retellings of early Cap stories from the 1940s that plots really began to perk up. In the remaining eight pages of the ten-page story, Kirby really picks up the pace and delivers some really great action sequences as Cap faces off with a Nazi spy armed with a disintegrator beam. Coloring by Stan Goldberg was key to the action, intensifying scenes of explosions by coloring those panels entirely in red. Unfortunately, this would be Kirby's last full pencil job on the Cap strip (For the next half year or so). Sadly, he'd only have time to lay out the remaining installments of the WWII era stories. But for a finale, it'd be hard to imagine anything better than "The Sentinel and the Spy!"

Amazing Spider-Man Annual #2

"The Wondrous World of Dr. Strange!";
Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Although the *Amazing Spider-Man Annual #2* (Aug 1965), fulfilled the requirement that a Marvel Comics annual ought to be about something special beyond the run of the character's regular title such as surprise revelations, unlikely team-ups, marriages, and births, it nevertheless felt somewhat unsatisfying. Yes, Spider-Man's team-up with Dr. Strange (both uniquely associated with artist Steve Ditko) filled the bill as an unlikely crossover, but it was also more of a fish-out-of-water story than anything else. By this time in Spidey's career, sripter Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko had established the wall-crawler as a street level hero, representative of the common man, your "friendly neighborhood Spider-Man" as it were. Having Spider-Man fight aliens from outer space or other outlandish foes such as those from beneath the earth or under the sea, ran counter to his down-home persona. After all, beneath the mask, Spidey was still Peter Parker, nephew to his doting Aunt May, who lived in a quiet suburban home in Forest Hills and was unpopular in high school. Thus, his adventure here, teamed with the otherworldly Dr. Strange and sent on a fantastic errand into another dimension (as exemplified on page 12 with the mind-bending panel 3 showing Spidey adrift in a Ditko-verse of drowned worlds, floating continents, and doorways to elsewhere), doesn't fit the pattern. Oh, it's a fun read all right, as Spidey becomes involved in an arcane struggle between Strange and rival mage Xandu over possession of the Wand of Watoomb. But any other neophyte seeing the things that Spidey sees here would likely have gone out of their mind! For Spidey

however, it's just a walk in the park. That said, Ditko's art (both pencils and inks) really captures the weird otherness of the environment that Strange inhabits. Here, New York City is subtly transformed into a dark, uncomfortable place where the world of Peter Parker doesn't belong (And in fact, never appears). So chalk this one up to a subject worthy of an annual, but not of Spider-Man himself. The balance of the book is composed of reprints of early Spider-Man adventures (including his encounter with the Tinkerer, an outer space menace that Lee and Ditko quickly and wisely eliminated from Spidey's ongoing adventures) and a few pages of pin-ups spotlighting new foes our hero encountered over the past year. So chalk this one up to unique and interesting but falling short of what Lee and Ditko had by now established for Spider-Man.

Daredevil #9

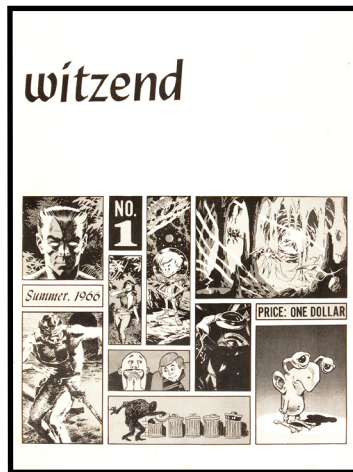
"That He May See!"; Stan Lee (script); Wally Wood (layouts/inks); Bob Powell (pencils)

The fissure between editor/scripter Stan Lee and penciler Wally Wood was already showing by *Daredevil* #9 (Aug 1965). It had been an exciting time when legendary artist Wally Wood joined the Marvel Bullpen a few months before, meaning that for Marvel's handful

of titles, readers would have the likes of Jack Kirby, Don Heck, Steve Ditko, and Wally Wood drawing most of them. It was a heady time, but one that wasn't to last. Unlike Kirby, Heck, and Ditko, who'd adapted to the "Marvel method," in which a plot would be discussed between themselves and Lee, the artists would proceed to draw the story, giving it pace and adding details as they saw fit, and then Lee writing the script based on the results, Wood was never able to adapt, mostly because he resented not receiving any additional compensation for his assistance on the plotting. Feeling that he was being asked to come up with story elements that the writer was being paid for and not himself, Wood demanded to be paid for his additional services as he saw them. Lee declined, likely seeing the shift in responsibilities as merely a new paradigm in the creative relationship between writer

and artist. The difference of opinion resulted in Wood eventually leaving Marvel, or at least the *Daredevil* feature, and confining himself only to inking, a job that required no creative input by the artist. Thus, for this issue, Wood contributed only layouts and inking with Bob Powell firming up the layouts in pencil. And with a credit line reading "plot and script by Stan Lee," it's likely that Wood left story development all in Lee's hands as well. Whatever the case, the results were more than satisfactory, as *Daredevil* travels to the country of Lichtenbad to visit a doctor who may be able to cure his blindness. While there, he becomes involved in a resistance movement against one Klaus Kruger, who rules Lichtenbad with an iron

fist. Literally. In the end, the doctor sacrifices his life for his country thus saving Matt Murdock (and luckily for readers) from having an operation that would've restored his sight but deprived him of his radar sense. The team of Wood and Powell worked out well, despite Powell's poor showing in strips like *Giant-Man* over in *Tales to Astonish*, where he provided the pencils without the benefit of Wood's layouts. Unfortunately, even this team wouldn't last as, over the next two issues, Wood would take an even smaller role, resulting in merely so-so visuals.



ARTIST WALLY WOOD LEFT MARVEL TO HELM T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS FOR TOWER COMICS BEFORE BECOMING A PUBLISHER HIMSELF WITH SUCH CREATOR OWNED TITLES AS WITZEND AND HEROES INC. IN BETWEEN, HE DIDN'T LACK FOR WORK FINDING EMPLOYMENT FROM NUMEROUS OTHER PUBLISHERS.

Journey Into Mystery #119

"The Day of the Destroyer!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Behind its cobbled together cover, *Journey Into Mystery* #119 (Aug 1965) continues the action from the previous issue, namely Thor's battle with the Odin-created Destroyer. It'd been Loki who managed to revive the Destroyer, but now he's developed cold feet. Fearful of Odin's wrath should Thor be killed, he seeks help from the Norn Queen to wake the All Father from his Odinsleep. Meanwhile, Thor has managed to save himself by grabbing the inert body of the hunter whose soul inhabits the Destroyer. Luckily, Odin is awakened and saves Thor by transferring the hunter's soul back into his body. Then Thor brings the

ancient burial chamber down, hopefully burying the Destroyer forever. No such luck. Although the concept of the Destroyer was good for an issue or two, there was nothing so special about him to arouse any real interest in the reader. He was just a super-strong robot more or less. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be the last readers saw of him. He'd return to ruin the following year's second *Thor* Annual. That said, penciler Jack Kirby with Vince Colletta inking, provided some power-packed imagery as Thor battles the Destroyer deep in the heart of an ancient stone temple, climaxed on page 12 with an awesome splash of the crumbling building. All that on top of the introduction of Karnilla, the Norn Queen, and the continuing subplot involving the Norn stones that Thor has yet to return to Asgard as proof of Loki's cheating during the Trial of the Gods. Almost as significant is this issue's "Tales of Asgard" feature, the latest chapter in the quest to find out how the Odinsword was cracked. Here, scripter Stan Lee and Kirby introduce a trio of characters who'd loom large in future issues including Hogun the Grim, Fandral the Dashing, and Volstagg the Voluminous. Of course, there's also Kroda the Duellist and Magrat the Schemer, but who remembers them? What's also noteworthy here is what would soon become a hallmark of Kirby's vision of Asgard, namely the odd mix of high tech and more mundane Viking paraphernalia. Readers had already become used to the Asgardians' mode of dress, a combination of Earthly looking armor, furs, and draping cloth, but now they're introduced to a giant Viking longboat, complete with sails and rigging, that will carry its crew across the vast reaches of outer space! For sure, the Thor feature afforded Kirby the opportunity to really let his imagination run wild!

Avengers #19

"The Coming of the Swordsman!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Behind the slapped-together cover of *Avengers* #19 (Aug 1965), with its combination of Jack Kirby designed Swordsman central figure and Don Heck background and head shots of the Avengers (not to mention Stan Goldberg's terrific coloring job helping to spotlight the otherwise on the face of it dull looking Swordsman), is another Stan Lee triumph as the editor/scripter continues to make the unlikely combination of Captain America, Hawkeye, Quicksilver, and Scarlet Witch a really interesting read. This time, he takes the most unpromising material in the form of the Swordsman, a colorful new supervillain who's only power is his mastery of the blade (a weapon that will be up powered by the Mandarin in the following



THE DASHING SWORDSMAN HAD A READY MADE TEMPLATE IN ACTOR ERROL FLYNN WHOSE FILMS INCLUDED 1939'S THE PRIVATE LIVES OF ELIZABETH AND ESSEX. FLYNN'S MUSTACHIOED LOOK HOWEVER, WAS ONLY IN KEEPING WITH OTHER HOLLYWOOD SWASHBUCKLERS SUCH AS DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS BEFORE HIM AND TYRONE POWER AFTER BOTH OF WHOM COULD ALSO READILY SERVE AS INSPIRATIONS FOR THE SWORDSMAN.

ish). Who'd have thought that such a simplistic villain could manage to be the centerpiece of a 20-page story and keep it interesting all the way through? But it happens, as the Swordsman uses a letter sent by Cap applying for a job with SHIELD to lure him into a trap and force the Avengers to accept him as their leader! Yeah, right! The issue ends on a cliffhanger as the Swordsman shoves Cap off the top of a building under construction, plunging him to his doom! Along the way, we also find out that the Swordsman and Hawkeye were once colleagues in the circus, with the Swordsman having encouraged Hawkeye in the use of a bow. Helping to make the Swordsman a convincing foe was penciler Don Heck, whose work here continued to excite with some action-packed opening and closing pages. He did it despite too-literal inking by Dick Ayers, who eliminated much of Heck's detail and shading. Still, under Lee and Heck, the new Avengers were swiftly hitting their stride with exciting, if low intensity stories (compared to more world-shattering stories with the original team) that continued to hold the readers' attention.

Avengers #20

"Vengeance Is Ours!"; Stan Lee (script);
Don Heck (pencils); Wally Wood (inks)

Editor/scripter Stan Lee was so excited he uncharacteristically blurbed it right there on the cover of *Avengers* #20 (Sept. 1965): "Special Note to Art Lovers! Wait'll you see wonderful Wally Wood's inking of Don's drawings in this great ish!" Lee rightly judged that Wood's participation on any Marvel project was worth the ballyhoo. Unfortunately, this time, it came a mite too late, as Wood had grown disillusioned with the company, due largely to the division of labor created by the "Marvel method" of creating comics. Believing that he (or any of Marvel's



ANOTHER SPECTACULAR COVER IMAGE BY JACK KIRBY AS INKED BY WALLY WOOD! THE IMAGE OF CAP PLUNGING DIRECTLY AT THE READER ALMOST SEEMS THREE DIMENSIONAL AGAINST THE COMPLEX GIRDER WORK OF A BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION. THE STARTLED FIGURES IN THE BOTTOM FOREGROUND VS THE DISTANT FIGURE OF THE SWORDSMAN ATOP THE HIGH STEEL. ONLY ADDS TO THE SUCCESSFUL DESIGN OF THE COVER OF AVENGERS #20.

artists) should be paid for what he considered writing (i.e. plotting of stories as they drew them from a synopsis or even a suggestion provided by the scripter), Wood was prepared to quit Marvel over the issue, something he'd soon do after another couple of months. But in the meantime, he agreed to some inking, including this job over penciler Don Heck here in the second part of the story that introduced the Swordsman. Inking, thought Wood, didn't involve any plotting and so was easier in his mind to take on than penciling. And as readers learned here, if they couldn't have his penciling, Wood's inking was clearly a strong second choice, as can be seen by this issue's spectacular cover image executed by Jack Kirby. Here, Kirby's meticulously rendered background detail of a building under construction is delineated by Wood in every girder and rivet with the falling Captain America seemingly suspended in the air as he plummets to his death! Inside, though he proves to be a tad too literal for Heck's style of art, Wood still left little to complain about as the Swordsman is whisked away by the Mandarin to have his sword endowed with a number of built in powers (Check out page 7, panel 4 as the Swordsman faces the Mandarin in the latter's throne room for how Wood's inks did over Heck's pencils; or page 10, panel 5 as Quicksilver races one of Hawkeye's arrows). As the action unfolds, the Swordsman infiltrates the Avengers and is eventually sworn in as a member. (Don't ask, just buy it!) Meant to betray the others, he backs off at the last minute: "There's something about being an Avenger," thinks the Swordsman, "even a bogus one, that seems to get into your blood and never let go!" And it doesn't, as events in *Avengers* #100 would someday demonstrate! **Fun Fact:** Fans with an eye for detail would have noticed there was a slight change in Cap's costume, namely the fact that the red and white stripes around his middle didn't go all the way around! Such may have been the case in Cap's original run back in the 1940s, but the Marvel Age had changed that. Some suspect that Larry Ivie, who was assisting in the Wood studio at this time, may have slipped the change in, not only because he was a fan of the Golden Age of comics, but also was slightly miffed at being let go by Lee as his potential editorial assistant!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #21

"To Free a Hostage!"; Stan Lee (script);
Dick Ayers (pencils); Carl Hubbell (inks)

Penciler Dick Ayers surprised fans with a really nice-looking cover for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #21 (Aug 1965). Those who kept the faith in the artist

and knew that he could be up there within shouting distance of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck, were rewarded here with a low angle image of Fury and his Howlers returning fire upwards toward a basement window wherefrom a squad of Germans have discovered their hideout. Maybe it came from inking his own work? Whatever the reason, it showed that if Ayers was given the time and had the inclination, he could impress. He'd produce a few more decent covers for the title over the next few months, even as his interior work continued to disappoint. Inked this issue by Carl Hubbell (a Golden Age veteran who'd returned to Marvel performing mostly touch ups to art and other production work), the results were the worst readers had seen in some time.

Frank Giacoia's inks were already sorely missed. But at least scripter Stan Lee's story is up to snuff about a rescue mission the Howlers must perform to retrieve the family of a Czech scientist who are being held hostage against his giving further help to the Allied cause. The only glitch comes in Lee's continued putdown of McGiveney and his Maulers, who are once again shown as the definite inferiors to the Howlers when it comes to barroom brawling. When the brawl is interrupted and the Howlers are called away on their mission, Lee takes the opportunity to poke fun at McGiveney: "Didja see 'em run from me?" gloats McGiveney. "We pulverized 'em!" "Someone git McGiveney a medic! He's got shell shock," declares an unnamed Mauler. Later, in the story's final panel, McGiveney is seen running away as the Howlers return to finish what they started. It was too bad, as the Maulers gave Lee the opportunity to show that there were other commando units

at work equally as accomplished as the Howlers, thus expanding the tableaux of the series. Funny as these encounters no doubt were, it would have been better dramatically to have the Howlers and the Maulers somewhat on equal terms.

Tales to Astonish #71

"Escape...To Nowhere!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"Like a Beast at Bay!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

The Sub-Mariner feature snagged the solo cover spot on *Tales to Astonish* #71 (Sept. 1965) as the second chapter of the new serial barreled ahead. Giving the *Tales of Suspense* book a real challenge as Marvel's number one double feature value for twelve cents, this issue of *Astonish* not only featured the Subby lead story with art by Adam Austin (in reality the soon to be Marvel superstar Gene Colan), but also a Jack Kirby drawn Hulk in the second spot. Of course, on hand scripting both features was the by now ubiquitous Stan Lee, who wastes no time setting the overblown tone to the Sub-Mariner feature both in language (Imperius Rex!) and in overall gravitas. Here, no sooner

does Subby overcome a giant squid in his quest for Neptune's Trident, than he must face off with a seaweed creature! Not only that, but Warlord Krang and the beauteous Lady Dorma are in the wings providing the drama and romance in sufficient doses so as not to drag down the action that Marvel fans doted on. And just as an example of the level of exciting artistry being provided by Colan (aided and abetted by the inks of Vince Colletta), check out panel 1 on page 6, where the penciler uses nearly three quarters of the page to illustrate a moody, undersea shot of Namor swimming in the fathomless deep! It was all for sure, a strong opening to the new Sub-Mariner feature. But not to be outdone was the Hulk backup, as the jade giant tackles a humongous version of the Leader's plastic androids! Although watered down some by the fact that Kirby only did the layouts for this slam-bang chapter of the Hulk serial, they

were sufficiently strong enough to be recognizable as Kirby, despite the finishes and inks provided by Mike Esposito. Evidence of Marvel's increasing needs was in evidence this issue by the attendance of two longtime DC artists on both strips, Gene Colan and Mike Esposito, both of whom were forced to do their work under pseudonyms so as not to jeopardize their standing at the rival publisher while waiting to find out if their new employer's growing success was temporary or not.

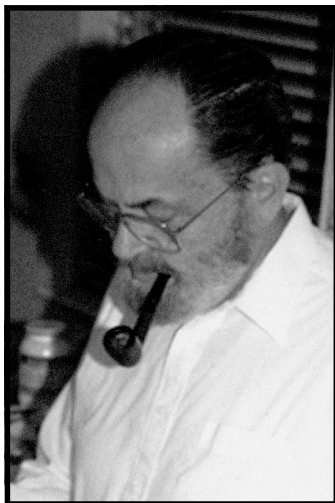


DESPITE A LONG HISTORY IN THE COMICS FIELD, INCLUDING A NEAR FORGOTTEN ASSIGNMENT TO MAGAZINE ENTERPRISES' CAPTAIN MARVEL, CARL HUBBELL'S PRESENCE IN THE MARVEL AGE WAS NEAR NON-EXISTENT.

Strange Tales #136

"Find Fury Or Die!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (layouts); John Severin (finishes/inks)
"What Lurks Beneath the Mask?"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (plot/pencils/inks)

The new SHIELD strip filed its second installment in *Strange Tales* #136 (Sept. 1965) and, combined with the Stan Lee scripted, Steve Ditko drawn Dr. Strange backup, finally lifted the *Strange* title into the ranks of must buy Marvel double feature books (With *Astonish* and *Suspense*, although the latter was still the leader). Here, Jack Kirby continued to provide the vision for the SHIELD strip, but this time falling back to layout artist, while veteran EC comics and Marvel/Atlas veteran John Severin was brought aboard to provide the finishes and inks. Severin's meticulously detailed style (often on full display with historical or war related subjects) gave a whole new spin to Kirby's art the same way that Vince Colletta was doing on *Thor* and Joe Sinnott would later do on the *FF*. Here, Severin's take proves just the thing for a strip that featured no brightly colored heroes but mostly business suited spies (although that would change as the strip progressed). Besides the in your face, super closeup of a Hydra agent holding some advanced type of camera in the opening splash page, Severin also knocked fans out in the very first panel on page 2, a bird's-eye view of New York done in impossible detail that seemed almost cinematic, with the Hydra agent suspended in the foreground. Later, readers are admitted into Hydra's secret HQ and glimpse costumed agents in training as well as their unseen leader (holding a cat a la James Bond's Blofeld). After that, readers are immediately launched into the action with a group of high-flying Hydra agents in a half page illo and their attack on SHIELD's barber shop HQ entrance. We get a look at Hydra's multi-purpose attack vehicle and their defeat by SHIELD. The story is concluded back at Hydra base where the



JOHN SEVERIN, A VETERAN PENCILER OF WAR COMICS FROM HIS DAYS AT EC AND ATLAS, ACTED PRIMARILY AS AN INKER DURING THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS. FOLLOWING A BRIEF STINT AS PENCILER ON THE NEW SHIELD STRIP, HE MOVED OVER TO INK DICK AYERS ON SGT. FURY AND HERB TRIMPE ON THE HULK. HE ALSO INKED SISTER MARIE'S PENCILS ON KING KULL LATER IN THE TWILIGHT YEARS.

leader of the failed attack is executed and replaced: "Hail Hydra!" The whole thing was a magnificent follow-up to the promise made in SHIELD's debut in the previous ish, and could only whet reader appetite for more, more! Meanwhile, readers went from one high point to another as the Dr. Strange strip again sees its hero keeping one step ahead of Baron Mordo while continuing to seek information about Eternity. Here, he comes to a dead end that causes him to fall into another dimensional trap, one he succeeds in escaping only to arrive at the conclusion that the only way to find out more about Eternity is through the mind of the Ancient One, a process that could kill his mentor. As with the *Spider-Man* book, artist Steve Ditko is now given credit as the strip's plotter, with Lee only providing guidance and scripting. There's little or no difference in quality, however, as the serial continued to unfold and Ditko showing no lack in imagination as he presents a new, weird world of masks and hidden identities, a subject that he enjoyed exploring throughout his career. **Fun Fact:** Dr. Strange seeks the help of a mysterious woman who says she owes him for saving her life at one time. Although Lee promises to tell that tale

at some future date, it never happens!

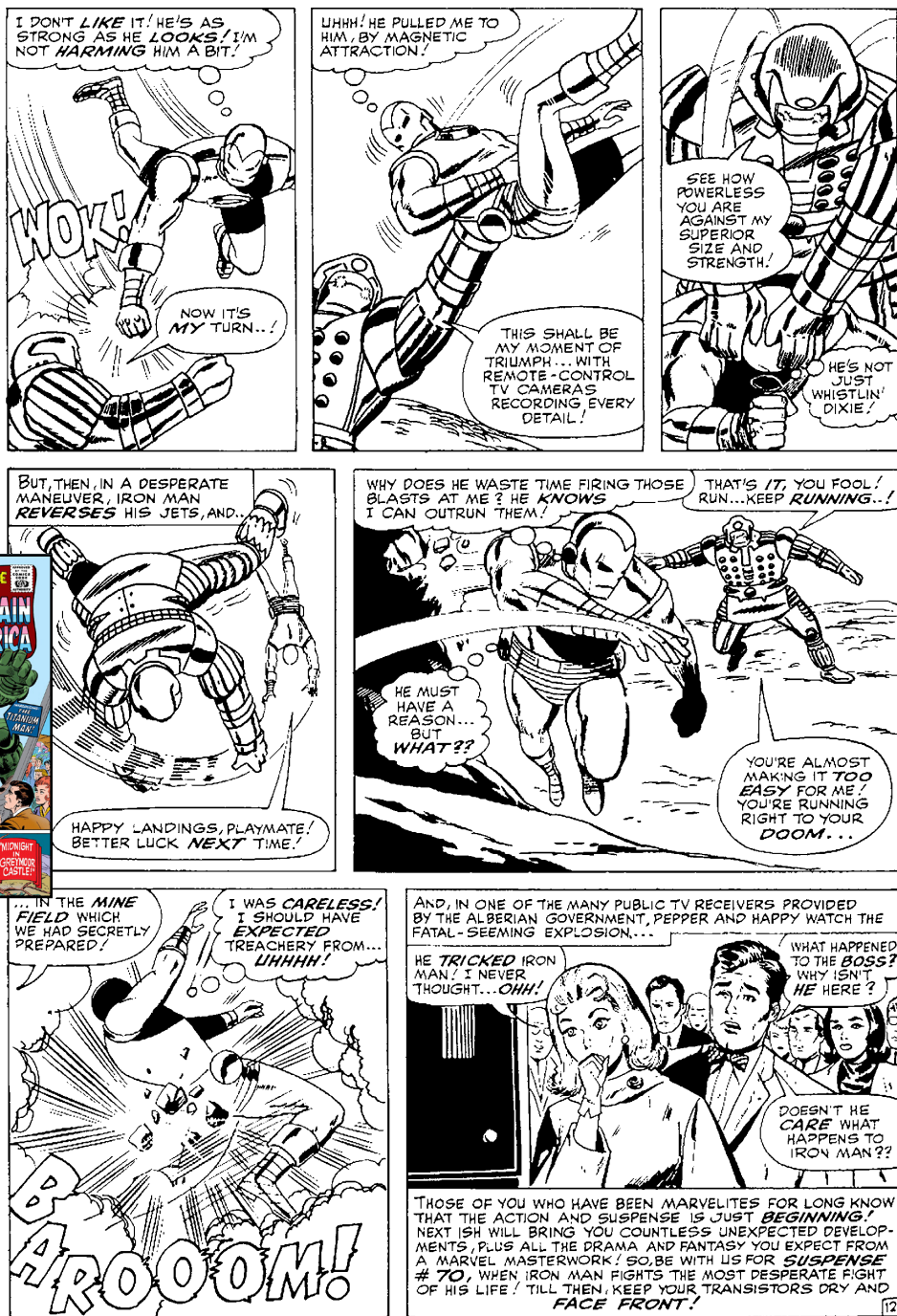
Tales of Suspense #69

"If I Must Die, Let It Be With Honor!";
Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"Midnight in Greymoor Castle!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (layouts); Dick Ayers (finishes/inks)

In what was to prove to be the beginning of artist Don Heck's last stand on the feature, *Tales of Suspense* #69 (Sept. 1965) opens one of Iron Man's greatest battles and most satisfying victories. By this time, Heck had been recognized by fans as the Iron Man artist, his vision of the hero superseding even that of Jack Kirby, who'd penciled a number of the character's early issues. But those were in

Iron Man's formative years. It wasn't until Heck returned as the strip's permanent artist that scripter Stan Lee's work on the feature really began to gel, and stories and characterization came to the fore. And though Heck was eventually forced off the inks, those like Dick Ayers and Vince Colletta here did little to harm his vision. In what was already becoming a rarity, Iron Man this issue is challenged by the Soviet Titanium Man in a battle that promised to be a propaganda victory for the Communist block should the villain win. And of course, since the Reds had no honor and believed anything was justified if it advanced the cause of communism, they booby trapped the battleground ahead of time to ensure the Titanium Man's success! Heck's cover image of a downed Iron Man with Titanium Man looming over him in a green Stan Goldberg color scheme is a bona fide classic. Somewhat less impressive this ish was the Captain America co-feature, due mostly to Kirby only doing the layouts this time instead of full pencils. It was a disappointment to fans of course (especially coming off the Project Vanish story in the previous issue), but having Dick Ayers on the inks, a man with long experience inking the King, helped somewhat. In many panels for instance, Kirby's hand is obvious (the Lee scripted story's opening splash page and the first two panels of the following page are unmistakably Kirby) while in most others, Ayers' less exciting work is on display. The story itself follows a different pattern than usual, in

that Cap and Bucky are separated, with Cap in his identity as Pvt. Steve Rogers accompanying his unit on a raid to the Continent while Bucky goes into action solo to investigate an act of sabotage only to fall into the hands of enemy agents. The tale itself still takes place in a World War II setting, with the Red Skull again behind a plot to kill the star-spangled duo, this time with the aid of a British traitor. The Cap feature still had what it took to hold reader interest but with Kirby's influence in retreat, how long could it last? Time would tell!



TALES OF SUSPENSE #69, PAGE 12: THE ACTION PACKED CLIMAX TO DON HECK'S MEMORABLE STAND AS PRIMARY IRON MAN ARTIST. HIS DEPARTURE COINCIDED WITH FILL IN WORK ON SHIELD AND HIS CHORES ON THE AVENGERS WHICH WOULD EVENTUALLY INCLUDE BOTH PENCILS AND INKS.

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Journey Into Mystery #120

"With My Hammer in Hand..!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Things in *Journey Into Mystery* #120 (Sept. 1965) both heat up and get back to normal following the Trial of the Gods and Destroyer storylines. The good news is that Thor returns to Earth, meets up with mystery, and ends up confronting an earthbound supervillain, the Absorbing Man. It starts off in what would become a regular feature of the strip as Thor rubs shoulders with the common man in a now classic scene in which he repairs his damaged hammer (a piece got sliced off by the Destroyer's disintegrator beam...remember?) in the only place powerful enough to do the job: one of Pittsburgh's famous steel foundries (which penciler Jack Kirby chose to illustrate with a photo

background on page 2): "Remember," says Thor after the work has been done and gladhands the mill workers, "whenever my hammer strikes for justice, you will have helped!" From there, Thor travels to Asgard to finally return Loki's Norn stones to Odin as proof of his brother's cheating during the Trial of the Gods. But as he takes off for Asgard, one stone falls from the bag. Where it ends up will be the subject of a running sub-plot culminating in a future ish. Meanwhile, Loki plots again, this time bringing back the Absorbing Man to Earth for another round with Thor. But before that confrontation takes

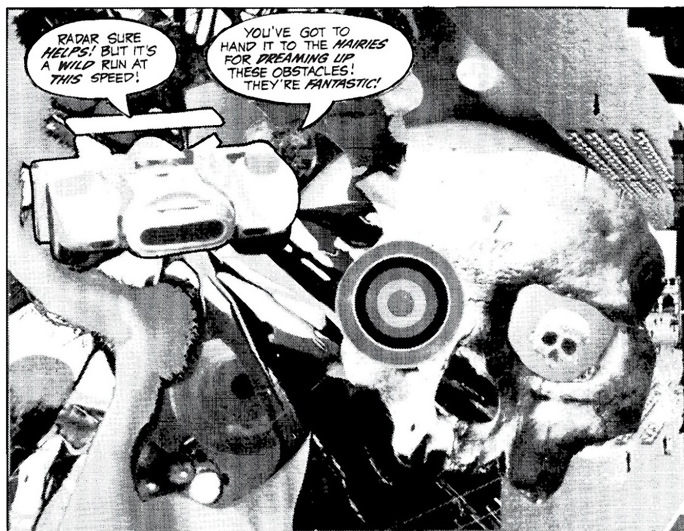
place, Thor returns to Earth as well, only to find Dr. Blake's office shuttered, and Jane Foster disappeared. Scriptor Stan Lee and Kirby even manage to squeeze in a guest shot of Hawkeye, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch as Thor visits Avengers Mansion and meets his replacements for the first time (He's not impressed). From the main feature, we segue to the latest installment of "Tales of Asgard," as Thor and his companions set sail on "the strangest voyage of all time!" The ship, of course, is crewed by Loki and a bunch of untrustworthy sailors as well as newcomers Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg, who turns out to be the breakout character of the bunch, providing much

needed comic relief for the usually grim and serious Asgardian adventuring. Here, he accidentally catches a glimpse of his wife and falls back in a panic: "That is neither man nor beast...it is my wife," says Volstagg as he attempts to keep himself out of sight. "Well might you hide, trembling one," comments another warrior, "Her face hath the fury of a thousand storms!" "A damsel good and true is she, but she understands not a warrior's yearning for adventure!"

Journey Into Mystery #121

"The Power, the Passion, the Pride!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

In the midst of the first of a series of extended story arcs, *Journey Into Mystery* #121 (Oct. 1965) continues Thor's latest encounter with the Absorbing Man,



ARTIST JACK KIRBY BEGAN TO EXPERIMENT WITH PHOTO BACKGROUNDS IN HIS PANEL WORK DURING MARVEL'S YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION BEFORE EXPANDING THEIR USE IN THE GRANDIOSE YEARS AND BEYOND. HERE, FOR INSTANCE, IS A COLLAGE USED IN ONE OF HIS JIMMY OLSEN COMICS DONE FOR DC AFTER HE LEFT MARVEL IN 1970.

this time with nearly the whole of the book's lead feature given over to pulse pounding Jack Kirby style action. One could only wonder what an inker like Chic Stone might've done with this material, but as it is, Vince Colletta was now the regular inker on the entire Thor book, both the lead and "Tales of Asgard" backup. And here, Colletta really begins to show what a melding of he and Kirby's talents looked like and what it boded for the future of the series. In contrast to his artistic failure on the FF, on Thor, the fit was nearly perfect. Here, Colletta took Kirby's solid lines indicating musculature and by feathering them instead, created a texture that only added to their robustness. That worked for the first six pages of action that climaxed in the eye-popping page 7, a full-page splash with a giant Absorbing Man towering over New York's skyscrapers! The following pages were equally as impressive, with the only drawback being the first indication of Colletta's turning Kirby's meticulously detailed skyscrapers into checkerboard boxes resembling the newer glass towers that would soon dominate the real city's skyline. But such shortcuts would soon (if only temporarily) fall by the wayside in coming issues. For now, however, no one could say

that Colletta skimmed on the details in scenes with the Absorbing Man grabbing hold a handful of girders from a building under construction, Thor ripping out a safe's giant door, or the numerous crowd scenes. Meanwhile, what of the hooded character holding Jane Foster prisoner? Loki's ongoing scheming? Or the fate of the lost Norn Stone? Stay tuned! Colletta was still on the ball for the opening splash page of "Tales of Asgard," with its gigantic stone Pillars of Utgard! The second page of the story, also a splash, is equally eye catching in its detail of Thor's ship under sail, and the next three pages are all top notch as well. Take note though, of Colletta's inking of the extended arm of the warrior on page 5, panel 1: a perfect example of what he could bring to the table in enhancing Kirby's art. By feathering and cross hatching the shadows of musculature instead of leaving it solid black, Colletta is able to open up the page while giving the man's arm almost a three-dimensional feel. In later issues, certainly, Colletta would take liberties with Kirby's art but for now, his approach to the material was at a peak or nearing it.

Journey Into Mystery #122

"Where Mortals Fear to Tread!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Journey Into Mystery #122 (Nov. 1965) is a perfect example of how the weaving of sub-plots into main storylines could then crop up or come to fruition when least expected. Here, it likely took readers who expected more bludgeoning action between Thor and the Absorbing Man by surprise when most of the issue was given over to a sub-plot that had been building dealing with Jane Foster's abduction. Thor's battle with the Absorbing Man continues only for a few pages before the villain is whisked away to Asgard by Loki. Thor is prevented from following when he rescues Jane and is captured on film by her abductor just as he changes from god to Dr. Don Blake. Reporter Harris Hobbs hopes to blackmail him into giving him the full scoop about himself, but Thor tries to intimidate him by taking him on a whirlwind tour of time and space (the vision of a future Earth inhabited by weird mound dwelling creatures is awesome as well as chilling as presented by penciler Jack Kirby and inker Vince Colletta!). Convinced that Thor needs his privacy, Hobbs makes a deal, he won't reveal Thor's secret in return for a trip to Asgard! Which plays into the main plot because when they reach Asgard, they'll discover that the Absorbing Man has challenged Odin himself! "What madness is this?" says Odin. "You still stand? After having been struck with a cosmic bolt by Odin?" "Gramps, you got a lot to learn!" replies the Absorbing Man,



ARTIST JACK KIRBY'S GRANDIOSITY WAS SHOWING IN THIS COVER FOR JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #122. HIS RENDITION OF ODIN, RULER OF THE NORSE GODS, BULKS LARGE IN THIS IMAGE, DOMINATING THE ACTION AND REDUCING THOR AND THE ABSORBING MAN ALMOST TO INSIGNIFICANCE. ALSO BEING REDUCED WAS THE HYPERBOLIC BLURBS THAT EDITOR STAN LEE WAS WANT TO INCLUDE ON COVERS. AS MARVEL MOVED INTO ITS GRANDIOSE YEARS, SUCH BLURBS WOULD DISAPPEAR IN FAVOR OF SIMPLY PROCLAIMING THE STORY'S TITLE OR EVEN NOTHING AT ALL!

now glowing with power. "I can absorb anything you shoot at me! I'm like loaded with cosmic energy now!" Thor has his job cut out for him, that's for sure! Meanwhile, over in "Tales of Asgard", the quest continues, but this time is interrupted by a mutiny led by who else? Loki! Here readers thrilled to seeing the Warriors Three go into action for the first time; that is, if you call Volstagg's accidentally falling onto a bunch of mutineers action! ("A jackal hath felled the lion of Asgard!") It was all great stuff that, believe it or nuts, would only get better with the next ish and beyond as scripter Stan Lee and Kirby eventually launched Thor onto his next multi-part epic involving Hercules!

Journey Into Mystery #123

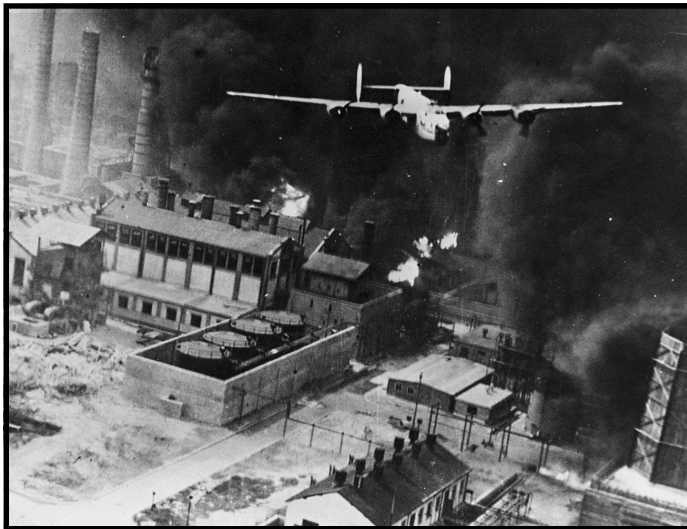
"While a Universe Trembles!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Journey Into Mystery #123 (Dec. 1965) was a minor turning point of sorts for the main Thor feature. Inker Vince Colletta seemed to settle down, having become used to Kirby's pencils filling out figures, taking chances with his inking to create special FX not present in the penciler's work, and applied himself more with the earthbound material. In particular, his inks over the scenes of the rise of the Demon are quite excellent (It was a brilliant touch by Kirby never to show the Demon's face, but only portray him with his mask on). All the scenes with the Demon are fantastic, especially page 15 and the first panel of page 16 wherein Kirby uses only three big panels on the former. There, the team of Kirby and Colletta combine to wow readers as the Demon demolishes a gigantic wooden palisade on his way to supremacy. The first panel of page 16 is equally impressive as the Demon upends an entire building with his bare hands. Turns out that the Demon is a local witch doctor who found one of Loki's stray Norn stones lost by Thor many issues back. His story would continue to evolve over the next couple of issues until climaxing in a battle between himself and Thor. Meanwhile, the Absorbing Man's challenge to Odin goes as one would expect, he and Loki's greed get the better of them and they suffer the consequences, namely banishment to the extreme reaches of outer space. Lesson learned: you don't tackle big daddy Odin unless you know exactly what you're doing! And what about Harris Hobbs, the reporter Thor was forced to take to Asgard? Seems he missed all the action and then back on Earth again, is doomed to forget everything he saw except "some nights, in your sleep, when you think your dreams are merely dreams, there will be some small part of you that... knows!" With the conclusion of this multi-issue arc, and in tandem with the *Fantastic Four*, the Thor strip would embark on its legendary run of continued stories that would lift the title into truly classic territory. Everything up to now was but prologue!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #22

"Don't Turn Your Back On Bull McGiveney!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Carl Hubbell (inks)

Artist Dick Ayers came through with yet another good cover for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #22 (Sept. 1965), his second in a row. Not only does the main imagery spotlight Sgts. Fury and McGiveney charging at each other in what



IT WAS HARD FOR FANS TO DECIDE WHICH WAS MORE EXPLOSIVE: THE ALLIED RAID ON THE PLOESTI OIL FIELDS OR THE LONG AWAITED ONE ON ONE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN Sgts FURY AND MCGIVENEY IN SGT FURY AND HIS HOWLING COMMANDOS #22!

appeared to be the brawl fans had been waiting for, but the facial lineup of the Howlers along the bottom was really quite excellently rendered! The story inside, however, is done with Ayers' usual level of dull layouts and uninspired figure work (The irony was that he was much better with people standing around talking than with action). Luckily, the Stan Lee scripted story in itself is interesting, as the Howlers and the Maulers are finally united for a single mission, in support of the historic air raid on the oil fields of Ploesti, Romania. Ayers does an admirable job in coming up with different ways to present American service uniforms in order to differentiate the Howlers from the Maulers (who seem to prefer flight jackets and peaked caps) Unfortunately, in the scene that fans were looking forward to seeing, Ayers manages to have the Howlers and the Maulers tangle in Romania but without ever showing them! The fight takes place in a single panel and in long distance silhouette. Argh! At least in the main part of the story, Lee manages to maneuver Fury and McGiveney together and, captured by the Nazis, they're forced to fight each other. Of course that scene as depicted on the cover was merely a trick to catch the German's with their pants down and the two escape. Meanwhile, the rest of the Howlers end up tangling with Baron Strucker and his Blitz Squad who, of course, get the worst of it. In sum, even with the disappointing art that had plagued the title since Jack Kirby's departure, the *Sgt. Fury* strip could still entertain the way no rival publisher's war comics ever

could! **Fun Fact:** Page 3 of this ish includes a surprise appearance by Ayers and Lee. In a mere two panels, they manage to capture the comedic spirit of longer features from Marvel annuals poking fun at the creative relationship between Lee and artists such as Kirby or Steve Ditko: "Hey, Sarge—looks like the Howlers are gettin' ready to push out again!" notes a soldier busy doing nose art on a parked plane. "So, what're you-? The town crier? Keep that brush movin', Corporal!" replies the man's sergeant. "Boy, after this man's war I'll never haveta take guff like that from a crumb like Lee again," thinks the artist. "When we get back to the states, I'm gonna write me some stories about the Howlers!" reveals the sergeant. "How'dja like to draw 'em, Ayers?" "Oh, nooo!"

Tales to Astonish #72

"A Prince There Was!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
 "Within the Monster Dwells a Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Mike Esposito (finishes/inks)

Behind the beautiful Gene Colan/Vince Colletta full image cover for *Tales to Astonish* #72 (Oct. 1965) the ongoing story of Sub-Mariner's quest continues. As readers will recall, the previous issue left Namor at the mercy of the Seaweed Man, from whom he duly escapes while at the same time gaining a clue to his next objective in his search for Neptune's Trident. Meanwhile, the evil Warlord Krang demands that the Lady Dorma join him in wedlock. She refuses, of course. Krang then condemns her to a fate worse than death. No, not that! Instead, she's lowered into the pit of the Faceless Ones! Who will rescue her when the chapter ends with Namor powerless before the diamonds of doom? Artistically, this was another strong effort by penciler Gene Colan (here credited as Adam Austin) aided wonderfully by inker Vince Colletta. Don't believe it? Then check out pages 6-7 as Krang confronts the Lady Dorma and the full page illo wherein Dorma is encased in a plasti-cage or pages 9-10 (especially panel 1, page 10 where Colletta creates a sense of blinding glare with a combination of shadow and a bare minimum of line work...wow!), as Dorma is lowered into the pit of the Faceless Ones. The Namor strip alone was worth the issue's twelve cent cover price, but there was more! Jack Kirby was still on the job for the Hulk second feature with just enough of his energetic pencils peeking through Mike Esposito's finishes and then inks to perhaps satisfy the more discerning fan. The truth was, the end result was so watered down, as to

be near unrecognizable Kirby and in that regard, barely satisfactory. There were inkers who could finish Kirby and bring out enough of him to make the work look like a Kirby job, but Esposito wasn't one of them (Dick Ayers, for instance, was doing a much better job at it over on the Captain America strip in *Tales of Suspense*). Luckily, the Stan Lee script was up to par, maintaining the interesting elements that had been ongoing in the Hulk strip for the past year with again, more on the Leader and the ongoing complications among supporting characters including Bruce Banner, Major Talbot, and Rick Jones. The question was though: how long could Kirby hold on doing just layouts before editor Lee could find a permanent replacement on the pencils? Or even a more compatible inker?



IN WHAT WOULD SOON BECOME STANDARD PRACTICE FOR MARVEL'S SPLIT BOOKS, EDITOR STAN LEE ACCEDDED TO MANY FANS' REQUESTS TO HAVE THE COVERS ALTERNATE SO THAT THE STARS OF THE BOOKS COULD BENEFIT FROM A FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATION INSTEAD OF BEING SQUEEZED INTO A MERE CORNER OF THE COVER.

Amazing Spider-Man #29

"Never Step On a Scorpion!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Even as the rest of Marvel's line up of titles slowed down a bit creatively following the company's best year (1964-65), the quality of the *Spider-Man* book was not only maintained, but actually surpassed as editor/scripiter Stan Lee gave up the plotting reins to penciler Steve Ditko. Which is not to say the rest of Marvel's books were falling behind. It was just that they seemed to have paused for breath while the *Spider-Man* feature didn't. In different places, Jack Kirby was supplying features such as Captain America, Hulk, and SHIELD only with layouts and Wally Wood was doing the same over on *Daredevil*. And though Vince Colletta had done sterling service over Kirby's pencils on "Tales of Asgard", he was taking some time to find his footing on the Thor main feature and was proving wholly incompatible with Kirby on the *FF*. Meanwhile, *Sgt. Fury* was stuck with Dick Ayers on the art. Only the Don Heck drawn Iron Man and *Avengers* features remained in the completely satisfactory column along with Sub-Mariner, who was enjoying newcomer Gene Colan's pencils. And, of course, the Dr. Strange feature was still riding high, with Ditko plotting and drawing. So *Spider-Man* really had a chance to stand out in these months before the grandiose years really began to take off. And that quality can be seen here in the

action-packed *Amazing Spider-Man* #29 (Oct. 1965)! The plot's simple: the Scorpion has escaped jail and immediately seeks out J. Jonah Jameson for revenge. Spidey finds out about his escape and figures the villain will make a bee line for the *Daily Bugle*. He figures right and there's a great battle sequence in the offices of the *Bugle* as Spidey



ARTIST STEVE DITKO. IF THERE WAS ANY TRUTH TO HIS BEING ENAMORED OF THE PRETTY BRUNETTE, WASN'T THE ONLY ONE SO SMITTEN WITH STAN LEE GAL FRIDAY, FLO STEINBERG. GUARDIAN TO THE GATES OF THE MARVEL OFFICES AND WHO REPRESENTED THE COMPANY AT EARLY CONVENTIONS. SHE ALSO BECAME THE SWEETHEART OF MANY A FAN WHO HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET HER!

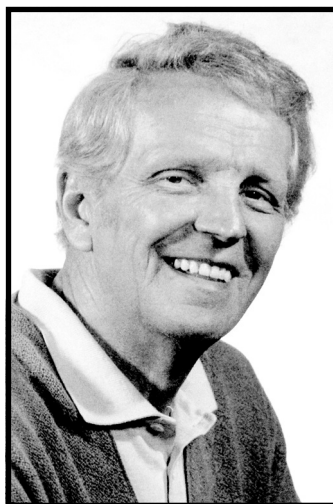
tangles with Scorpy while trading quips with a returned Ned Leeds who, to our hero's annoyance, is using the situation to get in good with Betty Brant. "I'll look after Miss Brant... you concentrate on your fight... and watch out for that tail of his!" Leeds tells Spidey after he's thrown against a wall. "Bro-ther! First he muscles in on my girl, and now he's giving me advice on how to protect myself! Yeesh!" Soon the action moves outdoors, where Ditko really lets loose in a choreography of violence starting with page 14 that's divided into four big panels that puts the artist's mature handling of superhero brawling on full display. The fight then moves to the river, where Ditko ends it in a unique fashion, as Scorpy becomes entangled in Spidey's web and has to finally be hauled out in a dripping, wet mess. But Ditko and scripiter Lee don't ignore the Peter Parker half of the equation even with all that action. There's a hint of upcoming danger with mention of the Cat Burglar and the Master Planner, the return of Ned Leeds and his growing rivalry with Peter for Betty's affections, Jameson's hypocrisy and venality, and finally, Aunt May suffers a dizzy spell. In short, this ish had everything! Everything Spider-Man fans had come to expect from the strip with no one walking away feeling the slightest bit dissatisfied! **Fun Fact:** Well except for Ditko himself, who may have been spurned early on by Lee's secretary Flo Steinberg. It has been suggested that he may have asked the attractive brunette out at one time but was turned down. Steinberg may have been the basis for Betty Brant, who did sport a hairstyle similar to the popular gal Friday. Was there any truth to it? You be the judge!

Strange Tales #137

"The Prize Is...Earth!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); John Severin (inks)
"When Meet the Mystic Minds!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (plot/pencils/inks)

Artist John Severin is still on the job as of *Strange Tales* #137 (Oct. 1965) beginning with a nice-looking cover image with our indomitable agents of SHIELD (actually our indomitable Howling Commandos!), charging at the reader. Inside, artist Jack Kirby continues on the layouts with Severin's super detailed style superimposed over it giving the SHIELD strip its distinctive, ground level look. Despite Kirby's way-out gizmos and weapons, visually, the feature remained one rooted in a realistic look with no super-suits in sight, agents dressed in suits and ties, and white helmeted MPs on duty as security. In a way, it'd be too bad when the strip lost this contact with the real world after Jim Steranko took over

and transferred the strip solidly into superheroic fantasyland. For now though, SHIELD remained firmly planted in the world of spy craft as Fury gets outfitted with a backwards viewing fedora, a radio tie, an explosive shirt, and bulletproof suit! Meanwhile, a plain clothed SHIELD agent is on a train with hot info about Hydra. But he's intercepted by said group in an exciting sequence involving a moving train and amphibious car. Also in the mix are a Hydra betatron bomb, more clues as to the Supreme Hydra's identity and his pretty daughter (also a member of Hydra and a possible romantic interest for Fury), who's not crazy about her father's plans. Yessir, there was a lot going on in the SHIELD strip, plenty to keep interest high among readers. And the Dr. Strange feature at the back of the book wasn't a letdown either, despite its being diametrically opposed to the real-world, high-tech goings on in the SHIELD feature. Here, Steve Ditko, besides penciling and inking the strip as he'd been doing for some time, was also plotting the ongoing serial detailing our hero's search for Eternity (whoever or whatever that turned out to be, and by this time having become familiar with Ditko's fertile imagination, readers had no idea what to expect; they only knew it was likely to be something wild) Aided only by the scripting of Stan Lee, Ditko here spends most of the story's ten pages detailing Strange's efforts to get past mental defenses in the Ancient One's mind to find out how to find Eternity. Page 6 is the artistic standout as Ditko has Strange attacked with a defense "that feeds my brain hallucinations!" Here, Ditko envelops Strange in a mystic bubble as his body distorts and is surrounded by a tangle of hallucinogenic shapes. Colored by Stan Goldberg in contrasting tones of yellow and green, the effect is really cool. Finally, Strange learns what he has to know and the story ends with him stepping through a portal that is an enlarged version of his amulet. But right behind him, is Baron Mordo!



Tales of Suspense #70

"Fight On, For a World Is Watching!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)
 "If This Be Treason!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); George Tuska (finishes/inks)

Iron Man's grandiose, multi-chapter battle with the Titanium Man continues in *Tales of Suspense* #70 (Oct. 1965), with the added complication of a device he needs to help win the fight being stolen from his hotel room. Excitingly, even breathlessly scripted by Stan Lee, the sub-plot follows Happy Hogan as he tracks down one of Tony Stark's jilted girlfriends to retrieve the device. But in delivering it to the battlefield, Happy is struck down by the Titanium Man. (However, not before surprising both Iron Man and readers with the revelation that he's known Tony

Stark was IM all along! Not to mention the fact that it's now certain that Happy and Pepper are an item!) The chapter ends with Happy lying near death and a fighting mad Iron Man about to tear into the Soviet villain. Inked by the harmless pen of Mike Esposito (still sporting his identity-hiding pseudonym of Mickey Demeo), penciler Don Heck knocks 'em out again this ish, beginning with a great opening splash page of Iron Man caught in a land mine. Heck does a good job going back and forth from the action on the field of battle to the jilted girlfriend and Happy's search for her. The only quibble one might have with the art was Heck's



ARTIST GEORGE TUSKA ENTERED THE COMICS INDUSTRY DURING THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS BEFORE MOVING INTO NEWSPAPER COMIC STRIPS. LOOKING FOR MORE WORK, HE CONTACTED MARVEL EDITOR STAN LEE JUST AS THE COMPANY'S LINE OF SUPER-HERO COMICS WERE TAKING OFF. STARTING WITH ODD JOBS PENCILING AND INKING, TUSKA FINALLY LANDED A PERMANENT ASSIGNMENT WITH THE IRON MAN TITLE WHERE HE REMAINED FOR A NEAR TEN YEAR RUN.

failure to present the action in bigger panels. But that might have been due to having too much plot to cover. Meanwhile, over in the Captain America second feature, Jack Kirby was still restricted to layouts, where little of his style shone through finishes and inks provided by George Tuska. Tuska's famous overbites were on frequent display here, as the dulled art robbed an otherwise exciting Lee scripted story of Steve Rogers' desertion under fire and Cap's subsequent dash to Britain to rescue Bucky from Greymoor Castle. Editor Lee, similar to

the intro blurbs he gave for artist Wally Wood over in *Daredevil* and *Avengers*, here heralds the advent of Tuska to the Marvel Bullpen: "Reintroducing the matchless artistry of one of the giants of the great Golden Age of comics." Unfortunately, whatever skill Tuska had in the 1940s and 50s, had dissipated as exhibited here with the rather poor job he did over Kirby's layouts (Admittedly, layouts were a pretty slim framework from which to work from, but still, a better artist/inker could have teased out a more satisfying result). Tuska would go on to further inking jobs before being assigned to pencil the new solo *Iron Man* book a few years down the line. There, he acquitted himself a bit better, but not much better. Clearly, without full Kirby pencils, the Cap strip had hit a snag, a slowdown in excitement that would last until the artist returned full force in issue #78. To get a good idea of what the Cap story inside should have looked like though, just take a gander at this issue's cover, given over to a full-size image of a Kirby rendered Captain America being assaulted by a group of knights in a castle courtyard. Oh, if only Kirby could've split himself in two and doubled the number of pages he turned out each month!



Daredevil #10

"While the City Sleeps!";
Wally Wood (scripter/layouts/inks);
Bob Powell (finishes)

Unemployed after the Giant-Man strip in *Tales to Astonish* had been replaced by the Sub-Mariner, Bob Powell next found himself here, on *Daredevil* #10. Actually he began

work finishing Wally Wood's layouts the issue before but let that go. The main thing is that Wood himself continued to hold off doing full pencils on the book and, likely due to complaints to editor Stan Lee that he wasn't being paid for what he considered story development, was now actually doing the scripting. Doing so, Wood decided to embark on an ambitious mystery yarn that included a number of suspects, as well as the introduction of a new character that would loom large in the strip long after he'd left. We speak of Deborah Harris whom Foggy here



DAREDEVIL #14, PAGE 14: WALLY WOOD'S INKS OVER BOB POWELL'S PENCILS HERE SUFFICE (AS DOES HIS SCRIPTING) AS DD EMBARKS ON A MYSTERY INVOLVING SEVERAL SUSPECTS, A NEW MASKED CRIME LORD, PLUS A TEAM OF COSTUMED HENCHMEN CALLED, RATHER UNIMAGINABLY, THE ANI-MEN.

falls for...hard. As an added bonus (or complication), Wood also threw in the Organizer as well as a trio of low-level bad guys with the uninspired monikers of Ape-Man, Cat-Man, Bird-Man, and Frog-Man! Wood's sudden turn at writing was explained by Lee in a blurb on the opening splash page: "Wally Wood has always wanted to try his hand at writing a story as well as drawing it and big-hearted Stan (who wanted a rest anyway) said okay!" Whether the situation was really as hunky-dory as all that was another story. Be that as it may, by inking Powell's finishes over his own layouts, enough of Wood's style remained so as to be immediately recognizable by alert readers. The opening pages involving a jailbreak are pretty good (complete with Wood's eye for mechanical detail, dealing with the helicopter and ending with a newspaper headline) as is a party scene aboard a yacht with a dozen characters/suspects hanging about, followed by a cutaway view of the Organizer's skyscraper hideout. There's plenty of DD action with the Ani-Men, and Wood's scripting is smooth all around (polished perhaps by Lee's editorial eye). But all of it represented Wood's swan song on *DD*. Quitting penciling with a huff, he left the solving of his mystery story for Lee to figure out, as readers discovered when they reached the letters' page: "Wonderful Wally decided that he doesn't have time to write the conclusion next ish (right!), and he's forgotten most of the answers we'll be needing! So, Sorrowful Stan has inherited the job of tying the whole yarn together and finding a way to make it all come out in the wash." Lee was likely putting a happy face on a tense situation wherein Wood refused to do any more penciling if he wasn't going to be paid for story development. As a result, he'd return next issue to ink, but that would be it for his involvement with *Daredevil*.

Daredevil #11

"A Time To Unmask!"; Stan Lee (script);
Bob Powell (pencils); Wally Wood (inks)

"Wally Wood wrote part one of this two-parter last ish, just for a lark! But, now it's up to sly ol' Stan to put all the pieces together and make it come out okay in

the end! Can he do it?" Such was the bouncy question asked of readers of *Daredevil* #11 (Dec. 1965) as Wood finally bowed out from the book. Months before, he had complained about not being compensated for what he believed was writing when he fleshed out the plotting as required by the new Marvel method. For that, the writer (in this case, editor/scripter Stan Lee) would provide the artist with a synopsis of the plot from which the artist was expected to flesh out a 20-page story. Failing to come to an agreement with Lee over proper compensation, Wood opted out of the penciling chores and confined himself to



AFTER LEAVING DAREDEVIL, WALLY WOOD LANDED ON HIS FEET. IMMEDIATELY PICKING UP THE EDITORSHIP FOR TOWER COMICS' NEW LINE OF SUPER-HEROES THAT CAME UNDER THE MASTHEAD OF T.H.U.N.D.E.R. AGENTS. IN ADDITION TO HIS EDITORIAL DUTIES, WOOD WOULD ALSO PROVIDE SCRIPTS AND ART.

layouts and then just inking, as he does this issue over Bob Powell's pencils. But certainly there was still some tension between himself and Lee, something Lee's lighthearted blurb on this issue's opening splash page was intended to cover up. Something of that tension is more apparent on the letters' page, where Lee confesses to not knowing what the story he just scripted was about. A backhanded way of admitting that he and Wood were not on the same wavelength, perhaps not even speaking to each other at that point. Which, of course, was too bad, as Wood certainly was one of the premiere artists of the time and recruiting his services for the *Daredevil* book was a coup for Lee. The issues Wood did work on when he was doing full pencils would stand as some of the best of the entire run, and he'd be a tough act to follow. But against the odds, Lee would do it despite this issue's rather talky windup to the mystery set up the issue before involving Debbie Harris, the Organizer, and the Ani-Men. And contrary to Lee's assertion that he didn't understand the story, he did a swell job

winding things up, with Wood's final appearance on the title giving a much-needed veneer of quality over Powell's pencils. With the Wood drama behind him, Lee planned for the future. Without missing a beat, the final panel of the story announced "New artist! New story line! New surprises!" for the next issue. Could Lee pull it off? He lacked nothing if not confidence, as the cover of this issue also announced to readers that *Daredevil* had gone monthly so the pressure to deliver was on! **Fun Fact:** If readers thought that there was something odd about this

issue's cover, they were right. It was lifted directly from an interior panel, maybe the only exciting looking panel in the whole issue, most of which was given over to talking heads. Wood, it seemed, was serious about not doing any more penciling, not even for a cover. That, or he'd left Marvel in hurry!

Avengers #21

"The Bitter Taste of Defeat!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Wally Wood (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee wastes no time with pleasantries or long drawn intros or recaps in *Avengers* #21 (Oct. 1965) but plunges immediately into what he did best, and what Marvelites at the time expected from their comics: characterization! In this case, the underlying resentments and suspicions among the new team's members, elements that Lee began exploring early and that made the Avengers at this time more interesting than their fights with supervillains. Not that the villains were ignored this ish. Back in South America, one of Zemo's henchmen finds his way back to his boss' ruined base, where the Enchantress helps him gain super-strength with the use of the machine Zemo operated to give Wonder Man his powers. The new villain is named Power Man by the Enchantress ("It's corny as all get out, but who cares?"), and the ground to defeat the Avengers prepared for him with a series of false alarms that tarnishes the heroes' reputation. At their low point, Power Man strikes, defeating each of them in turn. By the end of the story, the Avengers have been declared a "public nuisance" by the authorities and ordered to disband. Well, readers had heard that song before, but not as a two-part story! Once again, Don Heck's pencils were inked by Wally Wood and together, they provided some nice work here. Lee too came through with a well-textured story with plenty of interpersonal action including the continuation of a possible romance between Captain America and the Scarlet Witch ("His touch! So strong and yet so gentle..."). It was too bad Lee didn't keep at it, because Cap's later relationship with SHIELD

agent Sharon Carter was doomed to failure due to her already being married to her job. On the other hand, the Scarlet Witch would likely have preferred living a normal life. Oh well... **Fun Fact:** This issue's cover includes one of the most famous goofs of the Marvel Age, namely the placement of two "A's" on Cap's uniform, one on his head mask and the other on his chest. As all Marvelites knew, Cap sported a star on his chest, not an A. So what happened? The cover itself was another dramatic rendering by King Kirby, one of Cap's co-creators, so you'd think he'd have known how to draw the Star-Spangled Avenger. That left it to inker Wally Wood. But then, Wood would've simply inked what was on the page...unless

Kirby forgot to put the star on Cap's chest. Which was more likely? You decide!



ALL THE GOOD ADJECTIVES WERE TAKEN: POWER MAN WAS ANOTHER NEW AVENGERS VILLAIN WITH SIMILAR ORIGINS TO THAT OF WONDER MAN INVOLVING THE ENCHANTRESS AND THE EXECUTIONER. ALSO SIMILAR. WAS A PREFIX TO HIS NAME THAT ALREADY SPORTED A VENERABLE COMICS PEDIGREE AS FOR EXAMPLE THE GOLDEN AGE POWER MAN WHO STARRED IN FICTION HOUSE' FIGHT COMICS.

Avengers #22

"The Road Back!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Wally Wood (inks)

The drama continues in *Avengers* #22 (Nov. 1965) as scripter Stan Lee applies the screws! As readers will recall, the Avengers were forced to break up last ish after being framed as wrongdoers by Power Man. The story picks up here as the frustrated team members fight among themselves after Captain America tries to convince them not to give up. "We're finished," declares Quicksilver. "The team is washed up!" As the others leave, Cap is left alone with his thoughts and guilt for letting the original Avengers down. Meanwhile, the others try to find jobs and after failing everywhere end up joining the circus, natch. That circus turns out to be the Circus of Crime, but in an ironic twist, when they refuse to cooperate, the Ringmaster calls the police and accuses the heroes of trying to rob him! Meanwhile, Cap has maneuvered Power

Man to admit framing the Avengers and gets the confession on tape. What follows is a battle royale, as Cap and Power Man go toe to toe. Eventually, the other Avengers join the melee and help defeat Power Man and the Enchantress. Whew! The issue ends in typical Marvel unexpectedness as Power Man is allowed to go free ("Since there are no official



A THREATENING POWER MAN LOOMS LARGE ON THE COVER OF AVENGERS #22 WITH ART BY JACK KIRBY. ALTHOUGH EDITOR STAN LEE HAD TAKEN THE RISKY MOVE OF CHANGING THE ENTIRE ROSTER OF THE AVENGERS, HE PLAYED IT SAFE BY KEEPING CAPTAIN AMERICA FRONT AND CENTER MOST OF THE TIME.

charges against him, he's free to go," says the chief of police), and despite apologies from his teammates for their intemperate behavior, it's Cap's turn to quit the team! "I've played straight man to you jokers long enough!" says Cap. "You can get yourselves another clown! Now that our names are cleared, I'm kissin' you off—!" It was 20 pages of densely packed plot and dialogue by Stan Lee, ably illustrated once again by Don Heck, again inked by Wally Wood (who does a magnificent job right off the bat with the opening splash page sporting a big profile of the beautiful Scarlet Witch). Topped off with a nice cover by Jack Kirby (this time with no goofs in it), it all made for a wonderful package. Yes sir, the *Avengers* book was on a roll, with Lee and Heck really getting a handle on the group's dynamics. What red blooded Marvelite couldn't wait until the next ish?

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #23

"The Man Who Failed!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

By *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #23 (Oct. 1965), the strip was clearly running out of gas. Not that the concept wasn't still as interesting as it ever was, it was more like that lackluster art by Dick Ayers and neglect by editor/scripster Stan Lee combined to make the title uninteresting. Clearly, Lee himself had other fish to fry, or perhaps was inspired more strongly by Marvel's superhero lineup. For instance, at the same time the last half dozen issues of *Sgt. Fury* were being produced, multi-part story arcs had begun to appear in *Journey Into Mystery* and the *Fantastic Four*, continuity among the various superhero titles was strengthening such as that with the Hulk and Sub-Mariner chapter plays (with its epitome being this month's *Fantastic Four* Annual), soap operatic elements with supporting casts kept readers coming back to Spider-Man and Iron Man, and strong interpersonal relationships were the hallmark of the Avengers. With the death of Pamela Hawley back in ish #18, any attempt at such elements in the *Sgt. Fury* strip seemed to end. For the most part, the Howlers themselves showed little character development since their appearances in issue #1. Stories tended to remain on a single-issue basis and supporting characters were few. Very little had been done with Bull McGiveney, Sam Sawyer, or Hans Rooten. Lee's disinterest would be proven when the strip became the first that he handed off to new editorial assistant Roy Thomas with issue #29. Meanwhile, Ayers' art didn't help in the excitement department. Still mostly functional rather than inventive with his layouts, he added little to the strip, helping to make it one of Marvel's least attractive. Other artists of his caliber were being weeded out at this time, including Bob Powell and Carl Burgos. The only thing that sometimes saved Ayers was when his pencils were gone over by an inker who was a decent artist in their own right. Frank Giacoia was often one of them, and he performs those duties here, but to little effect. The story, one suggested by Ayers, gives some much-needed backstory to Pvt. Percival Pinkerton, as the Howlers are sent on an impossible mission to Burma, where they fall in with a nun and a handful of orphans, a common trope in war movies and television shows of the time.

Tales to Astonish #73

"By Force of Arms!"; Stan Lee (script);
Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"Another World, Another Foe!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (layouts); Bob Powell (finishes/inks)

Tales to Astonish was turning into something of a grab-bag for fans with its lead Sub-Mariner feature being penciled by Gene Colan (still working under the pen name of Adam Austin) and inked by Vince Colletta (his inks over the figure of Namor in the opening splash page were incredible!) Also, it went without saying, Stan Lee was still on the scripting, providing the strip with its veneer of royal dignity. Colan himself, this issue, had really begun to loosen up, telling this latest chapter in Namor's quest for Neptune's Trident in bigger and bolder panel layouts that provided a faster pace in the storytelling, something aided by Lee, whose use of text blocks became sparse. Replacing them with more dialogue helped maintain the narrative flow and move things right along. (Which included a battle with the Demon of the Diamonds, a palace revolt, and the plight of the Lady Dorma) There was less artistic certainty over in the Hulk backup feature, where Jack Kirby continued to provide only layouts for the strip with his distinctive style hardly recognizable beneath Bob Powell's finishes. But that was almost okay so long as readers were able to thrill to the latest exciting chapter in ole greenskin's ongoing adventures. This time, he finds himself captured by the Leader, who saves his life after removing a bullet from his head that could have killed Bruce Banner if the Hulk ever changed back to his alter ego. In return for the favor, the Leader dispatches the Hulk to the home of the Watcher to retrieve something called the Ultimate Machine. But when he gets there, he finds that an ape-like alien is also there for the same reason. To get an idea of what Kirby had had in mind for the look of the creature (and how woefully inadequate was Powell's interpretation) one only had to look at the cover to *Tales to Astonish* #73 (Nov. 1965) where the artist's pure, undiluted design was on full display! **Fun Fact:** The first letters

to react to the new Sub-Mariner feature in *Astonish* are featured (and they're both wildly positive) with one writer asking about Adam Austin, guessing that he was so good, he must have had experience in comics! Without letting the cat out of the bag, Lee admits that's true, with Austin having worked for Marvel in the 1950s. But diligent fans going back to look for the artist's name in their old comics were doomed to disappointment as "Austin" would have signed his name as Gene Colan back in those days. But then, any fan who couldn't recognize Colan's style and put two and two together wasn't worth their salt! Which begs the question: why didn't Colan's bosses at DC notice his distinctive style appearing in *Astonish*? A possible answer was that they weren't paying any attention to Marvel's product. It was their loss!



IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE WITH THE IMPRESSIVE ACTION ART HE WAS ALREADY PRODUCING FOR IRON MAN AND SUB-MARINER THAT GENE COLAN'S EDITORS AT DC KEPT HIM CONFINED MOSTLY TO THE COMPANY'S ROMANCE BOOKS! (ALTHOUGH HE WAS GOOD AT THOSE TOO!)

Amazing Spider-Man #30

"The Claws of the Cat!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

In a way, it seemed as if artists Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby were in competition. A competition of one-upmanship, as both men experimented and stretched their imaginations far beyond what had been expected for comics artists. This ability to stretch themselves was borne of the "Marvel method," in which artists would be given a synopsis (or attended a story conference) by the editor (in this case, Stan Lee), and it would be left to them to plot out the story to 10, 12, or 20 pages. That newfound freedom left the door open for innovation. So when Kirby began to experiment with collage or photo backgrounds for some of his covers and interior panels, used more splash pages, or began to plot stories that seemed to go on and on for issue after issue, Ditko followed suit with his own continued stories in the form of serials and multi-issue stories such as the Master Planner epic that would begin with *Spider-Man* #31. In addition, Ditko would also begin to experiment with cover presentations. Again, with the very next issue of *Spider-Man* he'd introduce his oft imitated spider design, with different events taking place inside shown between the legs of the spider. Likewise, this issue, he presents a cover in which the hero is

reduced to such a small size that readers had to check carefully to make sure Spider-Man was there. He was there all right, a small figure stuck to the side of a building as a blown water tank teeters overhead. He's spotlighted by lights cast by police far below. The effect is dramatically noir and one that Lee as editor (not to mention publisher Martin Goodman) would likely have rejected only a few years before. But now, as Marvel entered its most radical grandiose phase, where traditional rules would be loosened, and because he just wasn't speaking to Ditko at all anymore, Lee let it go. And lucky that he did, otherwise, fans would not have been able to enjoy this unique example of Ditko's growing maturity as an artist. And inside, things were no less advanced. In *Amazing Spider-Man* #30 (Nov. 1965), Ditko's plot lays the groundwork for the upcoming Master Planner sequence while finishing up the Cat Burglar story that had been hinted at in the previous issue. However, due to their not speaking to each other, Lee became confused at one point and mixed up the Master Planner's men with the Cat! Be that as it may, the story unfolds as excitingly as readers had come to expect of a Spidey yarn, with the villains periodically pushed to the background as developments in Peter Parker's life take the fore. In this case, that meant Peter's being told the startling news that Betty Brant has become engaged to Ned Leeds. Shocked and disheartened, Peter storms off to forget his troubles with a patrol of the city. Meanwhile, Liz Allen briefly re-enters his life with a request that he help get Flash Thompson off her trail. This brief revisit of the two characters from high school seemed to suggest that Ditko may have had plans for them, but as things turned out, Liz would disappear from the book for the next one hundred issues. Art wise, the issue's opening page is another interesting symbolic splash with Spidey suspended upside down before a circle containing all of the issue's key characters. A weird triptych of panels appears at the bottom of page 5 with imagery right out of Ditko's years drawing weird yarns for Charlton's *This Magazine Is Haunted* or Marvel's pre hero fantasy mags including a garish

image of Spidey with a maniacal smile on his mask (as well as eyeballs in its white eye pieces!) and Jonah Jameson surrounded by toothy, laughing mouths! This was all stuff that no other artist would even dare to try to pull off! Elsewhere, Ditko employs dramatic lighting effects for the two panels at the bottom of



STEVE DITKO WAS ABLE TO SPREAD HIS ARTISTIC WINGS EARLY ON WITH WORK FOR FAWCETT'S PRE-CODE THIS MAGAZINE IS HAUNTED WHERE ATMOSPHERE AND BROODING MENACE WERE STAPLES. ALTHOUGH THE TITLE WAS LATER ACQUIRED BY CHARLTON, THE COMPANY'S LOOSE EDITORIAL POLICIES STILL PLACED FEWER RESTRAINTS ON DITKO'S STYLE.

page 15, giving them drama and a night time atmosphere even as he dreams up interesting ways for an ordinary cat burglar to hold off a super-powered foe. Finally, the last panel of the story has the ghostly figure of Spider-Man standing between Peter and Betty, arms outstretched, keeping them apart. It would mark the end of an era really. Peter had graduated high school and was about to begin the next stage of his life. His horizons were expanding. When he was alone and reviled by his peers, Betty had been there to lift his spirits. But the two had grown apart, the shadow of Spider-Man standing between them. As had Ditko's storytelling, Peter had matured and was ready to move on.

Strange Tales #138

"Sometimes the Good Guys Lose!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); John Severin (finishes/inks)
"If Eternity Should Fail!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

By this time, Kirby was really spreading himself out too thin. Besides providing full pencils for the *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* (not to mention their respective annuals)

as well as most of the covers for Marvel's entire line of superhero comics, he was also doing layouts for the Hulk, Captain America, and SHIELD here in *Strange Tales* #138 (Nov. 1965). But the squeeze was needed when new artists were recruited who didn't have the chops to deliver fast moving, exciting Marvel style stories. They had to be broken in, led along for a while until they got the hang of it. Sometimes it didn't work, and the results were far from satisfactory, but sometimes it did, as in Kirby's pairing on the SHIELD strip with John Severin. So far, the team had produced some mighty nice work for the infant strip, and they did no less here, as Nick Fury works to foil Hydra's plan to orbit a betatron bomb and blackmail

the world. There's so much good stuff here that it's hard to pick out any single page for special study. Severin's penchant for super detail combined with Kirby's sense of drama and crazy technology turns this installment in the series into pure eye candy. That said, the sub-plot involving the Supreme Hydra and his daughter continues to intrigue, as does the big half page panel on page 4 detailing Hydra's different divisions (complete with their individual totems) shown on a giant roulette wheel. Oh! And let's not forget those big panels on page 9 showing Hydra's huge escape vehicle, followed immediately on the next page by a full-sized splash of the escape pod launched from the vehicle with the landscape below falling away as it reaches escape velocity. Wow! And need anything be said about Stan Lee's

awesome scripting here? Smooth as ever, he makes it all seem so effortless! As he continued to do over in the Dr. Strange backup, where our hero is seen on the opening splash entering a dimensional portal into one of artist Steve Ditko's most hallucinogenic environs, hitting the reader between the eyes with a big, three-quarter panel of total outrageousness! Lee was right when his caption read: "Then Dr. Strange beholds for the first time, the dazzling, description-defying dimension of Eternity!" That's right! Readers finally witnessed the climax of Strange's quest that had occupied him for so many chapters. Finally, he encounters the mysterious entity of Eternity, the personification of the universe (and possibly even... God?) Eternity first appears as "an actual universe...in microcosm! A world within a world!" Slowly, across several panels, that microcosm grows, expands, like the universe must have expanded at the dawn of creation, into the shape of a man, but merely the silhouette of a man with the universe encapsulated within its outline. Ditko parallels the concept of the expanding universe/man figure visually as it grows amid smaller panels until climaxing, in full size, in a single, splash panel on page 4. But in the end, Eternity refuses to grant Strange the power he seeks to defeat Dormammu and Baron Mordo. Instead, he tells him that he already possesses that power in the form of wisdom. Finally, this latest chapter ends with Strange confronting his mortal enemies. It was an incredible installment in the long running storyline, one that should have been climactic but wasn't. Lee and Ditko had more in store but what could possibly top the revelation of Eternity? What reader could resist not coming back to find out?



Sgt Fury and His Howling Commandos #24

"When the Howlers Hit the Home Front!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Beneath its great cover by Jack Kirby, *Sgt Fury and His Howling Commandos* #24 (Nov. 1965) turned out to be surprisingly good! As a change of pace, scripter Stan Lee arranged for the Howlers to finally get some real leave time and bring them all back to the States, where they break up to follow their personal interests. Here, at last, readers finally were given spoonfuls of bio info that fleshed out the many gaps in the Howlers' back stories: Izzy Cohen goes back home to Brooklyn and the family garage; Gabe Jones takes his buddies to the uptown jazz club owned by his uncle (here Lee has some fun at the expense of some zoot suiters: "Well, all reet! Reet-reet-a-rooty! Pipe the crazy soldier boy!"); Dino

JACK KIRBY AND INKER/FINISHER JOHN SEVERIN TEAM UP ON THE COVER TO STRANGE TALES #138 TO DELIVER AN EXCITING SCENE IN THE FAST FORWARD LIFE OF NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD! BUT WHERE'S DR STRANGE? HE WAS A VICTIM THIS ISSUE OF THE TRANSITION TO FULL COVER SPOTLIGHTS FOR INDIVIDUAL FEATURES.

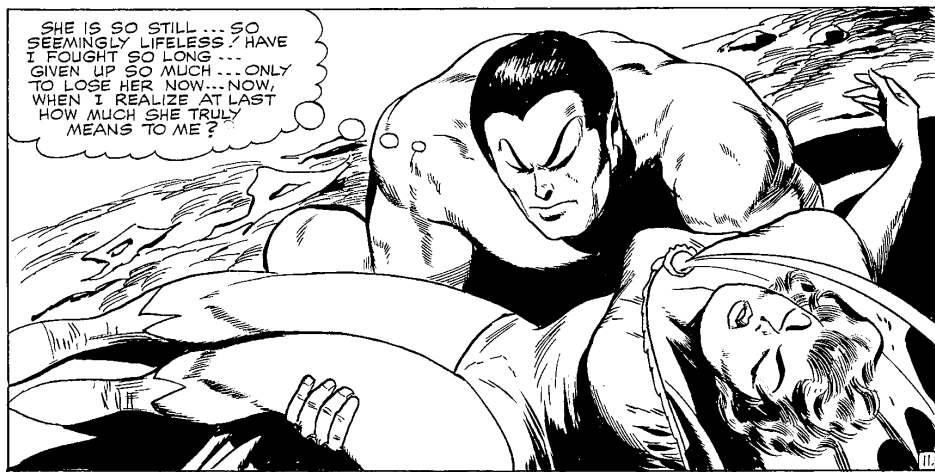
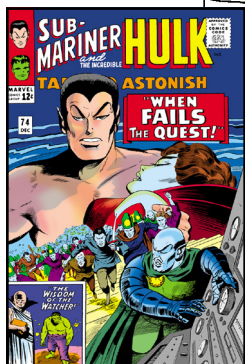
Manelli takes the gang to a stage door canteen where he introduces them to a gaggle of Hollywood stars, including Bob Hope and Bing Crosby; and in Kentucky, the boys go off to rescue Reb Ralston, whose family are being held hostage by Nazi Bundsters. And though readers never got to meet Dum Dum Dugan's wife and mother-in-law, he did, after being hospitalized with a flesh wound: "Oh, no! I didn't know when I wuz well off! If only the bullet had gone deeper!" Overall, the issue represented a welcome return to the humor that had been more prevalent in earlier entries and that had set the Fury book apart from the run of the mill war books produced by other companies. Meanwhile, the story itself even seemed to inspire penciler Dick Ayers, who managed slightly more interesting layouts this ish, including a nine-panel grid on page 18 that featured a Kirby style one-on-one fight scene between Fury and the Bund leader. Of course, inker Frank Giacoia had a big hand in making Ayers' pencils look half decent. There was even time to advance the story of Hans Rooten a little, as he accompanies the Howlers home and then is left with Reb's parents for some much-needed normality in his life. And then the whole thing ends with a bit of Lee inspired irony as the Howlers head back to the ETO wondering why the Bundists were so interested in something called "the Manhattan Project!" If every issue of the title could have been as satisfying as this one, the series would've enjoyed a higher profile among Marvel's offerings but alas! T was not to be.

Tales to Astonish #74

"When Fails the Quest!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

"The Wisdom of the Watcher!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Bob Powell (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee continues to ratchet up the tension in *Tales to Astonish* #74 (Dec. 1965) as Namor sacrifices his quest for Neptune's Trident in order to save Lady Dorma from the Faceless Ones. Elsewhere,



TALES TO ASTONISH #74, PAGE 11: MAYBE ALL THOSE YEARS DRAWING ROMANCE COMICS FOR DC DIDN'T GO TO WASTE; ARTIST GENE COLAN MANAGES TO BALANCE ACTION WITH TENDERNESS IN THIS PAGE FROM SUB-MARINER'S ONGOING QUEST FOR NEPTUNE'S TRIDENT.

Warlord Krang is chased from Atlantis by a palace revolt! Not much else actually happens, but the art team of Gene Colan on pencils and Vince Colletta on inks makes it seem as if more is happening than is going on and they do it in style! The combination of their talents continues to amaze with Colan using big, wide-open panels, unafraid to employ full page splashes (there were three, count 'em, three this issue!) quarter and even three-quarter size panels in other places despite having only 12 pages to work with! At this point, the Sub-Mariner strip was truly amazing to look at. Contrast that with the action-packed Hulk story that follows, much of whose Jack Kirby energy is drained by the finishes of Bob Powell overlaid by the inks of Mike Esposito, neither of whom manage to capture Kirby's verve. On the other hand, it's Lee's scripting that keeps the story afloat as the Hulk first defeats his alien opponent and then grabs the Ultimate Machine from the Watcher's home to give to the Leader. But when the Leader tries to use it, his triumph is brief, as the machine envelops his head and seemingly kills him! There wasn't much in the way of subplot this ish, but with the end of this particular story line, perhaps the Hulk strip might pick up those threads neglected in the meantime. Either way, *Tales to Astonish* was still firmly in the well worth its 12¢ cover price category!

Strange Tales #139

"The Brave Die Hard!"; Stan Lee (script);

Jack Kirby (layouts); Joe Sinnott (finishes/inks)

"Beware...Dormammu Is Watching!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Well, good things don't last forever, and after a mere three entries resulting in pure gold, finisher/inker John Severin was off the SHIELD strip by *Strange Tales* #139 (Dec. 1965). For three great issues, Severin proved a superb match for Jack Kirby's layouts, the best of those who were doing the same in other places such as on the Hulk strip in *Astonish* or the Captain America feature in

Suspense. His meticulous, detailed style would be much missed as the series went forward beginning right here, as Joe Sinnott takes over the inks. Now, as will soon be seen with the *Fantastic Four*, Sinnott would prove to be one of Kirby's best inkers ever, adapting his style perfectly with Kirby's hard-edged art. But here, with only layouts to work with, Sinnott was lost, his own art style too nondescript to make an impression. (Although it was fine for the



ALTHOUGH JOE SINNOTT HAD BEEN AN ARTIST FOR ATLAS IN THE 1950S AND LATER HAD CONTRIBUTED BOTH PENCILING AND INKING FOR PUBLISHER GEORGE A. PFLAUM'S TREASURE CHEST COMICS, UPON HIS RETURN TO MARVEL IN THE MID-1960S, HE'D FUNCTION ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY AS AN INKER, RENDERING PARTICULAR SERVICE OVER THE WORK OF JACK KIRBY AND LATER, JOHN BUSCEMA.

naturalistic work he had done for *Treasure Chest*, comics given away free in parochial schools) Thus, except for those handful of panels where Kirby might have put a bit more effort in his work, Sinnott does nothing to recommend him to fans of the strip. It was a shame too as the Hydra story line was drawing rapidly to a climactic finish, one that should have been a doozy if Severin had remained on the strip. As it was, readers still had Stan Lee's script to tide them over until the art department once more satisfied. Lee was also on hand for the latest chapter in the Dr. Strange serial, wherein our hero finally confronts and battles Baron Mordo in a Steve Ditko visual extravaganza. But both he and Mordo are prevented from concluding their battle after a watching Dormammu transports them both to his own Dark Dimension. If readers sensed the long running serial was reaching its climax, they were likely right!

Tales of Suspense #72

"Hoorah for the Conquering Hero!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils);

Mike Esposito (inks)

"The Sleeper Shall Awake!";

Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); George Tuska (finishes/inks)

After the climactic events of the previous issue, wherein Iron Man triumphed over the Titanium Man, anything else would seem to have been a comedown. With an air of starting over, scripter Stan Lee not only gave IM a new foe to tackle but set markers down for subplots he intended to explore in the future, among them Congressional efforts led by Sen. Harrington Byrd (a ringer for real life Robert Byrd?) to learn the

secrets of his armor and the hospitalization of Happy Hogan, who knows Iron Man's secret identity. The new villain is a borrowing from the FF in the shape of the Mad Thinker (and his Awesome Android), hired by jilted girlfriend the Countess de la Spiroza. It was a good story somewhat mitigated by a none-too-colorful villain. However, acting as a coda to his long tenure on the strip, *Tales of Suspense* #72 (Dec. 1965) would also mark the end of an era for Iron Man, as long time penciler Don Heck bowed out on the art chores. By this time, Heck had firmly established himself among fans as *the* signature Iron Man artist and many were alarmed to see him go. It was Heck who introduced Pepper, Happy, and Senator Byrd, and who was on hand when the strip's most distinctive features were developed. Now, though, his services were demanded elsewhere. He'd soon take over both penciling and inking the *Avengers* and finishing and inking Jack Kirby on the SHIELD strip. But his departure begged the question: who could possibly take over Iron Man from Heck? That burning question would be answered in spectacular fashion with the very next issue. And speaking of Kirby, that stalwart was still on duty over in the Captain America backup feature where he was still teamed with George Tuska, providing the finishing touches on the layouts and the inking. And though Tuska would continue to prove an ill fit for Kirby, the King managed to apply himself a bit more to this first installment of a new story line involving three Sleepers so that more of his style shone through the Tuska overlay (Check out page 7 for an example). But the big difference from past stories here is that somewhere along the line, editor Stan Lee decided to switch gears and update Cap's adventures so that they were now told in current Marvel time, rather than during World War II. (Readers are signaled the fact right off the bat, with an opening splash page that features Cap talking to his Avengers teammates and learn that all along, the previous WWII stories had been recounted by Cap to his fellow Avengers!) Be that as it may, for this initial yarn, the change in scene was a comedown from such WWII stories as Project Vanish. Compared to that full-on Kirby drawn story and those immediately preceding it, this multi-part Sleeper saga felt uninspired and even stretched out. Maybe if there had been more Kirby and less Tuska it might have been different. For instance, maybe the first Sleeper could have been designed differently than the goofy robot that it ended up being. That said, the story still ended up being recalled as a classic, due to its being featured in both the Marvel television cartoon show and in a series of bubblegum cards which debuted in 1966.

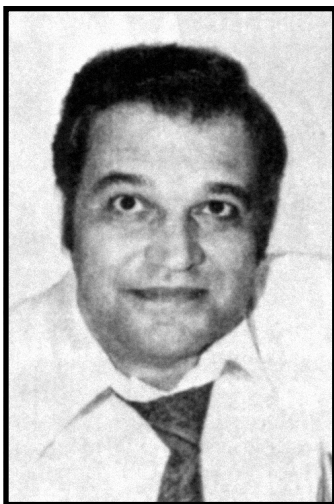


JOHN TARTAGLIONE HAD A LONG CAREER IN COMICS WITH A DOWN TO EARTH ART STYLE THAT MADE HIM A GOOD FIT FOR OUTFITS LIKE CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED, AND DOING SPORTS, CRIME, AND OF COURSE, ROMANCE COMICS.

Sgt Fury and His Howling Commandos #25

"Every Man My Enemy!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

This issue, scripter Stan Lee opts for a bit of Marvel Universe fantasy in his latest opus for *Sgt Fury and His Howling Commandos* #25 (Dec. 1965). To wit: the Red Skull has infiltrated the commando base using his mastery of disguise. He goes right to the top, impersonating Sam Sawyer to sow distrust among the Howlers. His mission: to destroy the base and the commandos whom Hitler has vowed to kill. But of course, Fury catches on and wins the day after a fight at an offshore gun tower. It was a fun, fast moving yarn with somewhat of a different look this time made possible by the arrival of John Tartaglione inking over Dick Ayers' pencils. Tartaglione wasn't a rookie. He'd been around since the 1940s and had been no stranger to Marvel in its Atlas days. Brought back to the Bullpen by Lee, Tartag (as he sometimes signed himself) would become the regular inker over Ayers on the *Fury* strip for the foreseeable future. But while Tartaglione's style was more detailed than previous inkers and gave Ayers' work much needed rendering, he unfortunately didn't go so far as to remove the stiffness out of Ayers' figures or to soften his often stony faces. But in a story involving Fury vs. the Red Skull (even though the villain never appears in his iconic red mask), what an artist like Jack Kirby could've done with a story like this!



ANOTHER ROMANCE ARTIST HEARD FROM! THIS TIME IT WAS JOHN ROMITA, DESTINED FOR LEGENDARY STATUS AT MARVEL BOTH AS THE ARTIST WHO PROPELLED THE SPIDER-MAN STRIP TO THE TOP OF MARVEL'S SALES LIST AND AS ART DIRECTOR. BUT AS WITH GENE COLAN (AND LATER WERNER ROTH) HE'D BEEN RELEGATED TO DC'S LINE OF ROMANCE COMICS FOR MANY YEARS FOLLOWING THE ATLAS IMPLOSION OF THE 1950s.

Avengers #23

"Once An Avenger..."; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); John Romita (inks)

Here's a switch...and a sign of things to come. By *Avengers* #23 (Dec. 1965), Wally Wood was gone as inker over Don Heck's pencils. In fact, the dissatisfied Wood had left Marvel completely and would soon publish his own independent comic called *Witzend* and later become editor and chief artist for a line of comics called *THUNDER Agents* for Tower Comics. Replacing him here is John Romita, who'd worked for Marvel back in the days when it was known as Atlas. More specifically, he'd drawn the *Captain America* title after it had been revived in the mid-1950s when publisher Martin Goodman guessed that superheroes might be making a comeback. They weren't. Then followed Goodman's sale of his distribution company and the subsequent implosion of Atlas when the distributor he'd signed on to went belly up. Goodman was forced to downsize and lay off his freelancers, of which Romita was one. Already picking up some work at DC, Romita had no trouble making the relationship permanent. But instead of action/adventure, the company assigned him to its line of romance comics, where he remained until editor Stan Lee had managed to get Marvel on its feet again. With star artist Jack Kirby being stretched to the limit, Lee needed to find other artists to help with the workload. Old timers like Bob Powell and Carl Burgos

were tried, but failed to fit in. The aforementioned Wood was hired for a while, but a difference of opinion regarding compensation drove him from the company. In the meantime, Lee had already managed to bring back another Atlas stalwart by the name of Gene Colan (another DC romance artist who was currently working under the pseudonym of Adam Austin while drawing the *Sub-Mariner* strip in *Tales to Astonish* and soon, Iron Man in *Suspense*). With that success, it was only natural that Lee return to the well and pilfer another unappreciated star from under the noses of DC editorial. Thus, Romita returned to the fold, and without a pseudonym, signaling his intention to make the transition a permanent one. And just in time too, as the *Daredevil* assignment opened up with Wood's departure. To get him warmed up though, Lee put him right to work here, inking Heck's pencils and right away proving with his apparent skill that he'd be a valuable addition to Marvel's growing Bullpen. Adapting nicely to Heck's unique style, Romita softened the penciler's edges and filled out the figure work and revealed himself as one of Heck's best inkers. Romita arrived just in time too, as the Avengers embarked on a new adventure involving being kidnapped by Kang and brought to his future time. But the strength of the story, as had been usual for the new Avengers lineup, is in the characterization orchestrated by Lee. As the balance of the team argue among each other about the blame for Captain America's decision to quit in the previous issue, Cap himself is seen at a training camp seeking to enter the boxing profession. Needless to say, guilt at leaving the Avengers in the lurch forces Cap to return to the fold. He finds a way to follow his teammates into the future and there they reunite, only to end up confronting an army of Kang's futuristic warriors. A thoroughly satisfying issue from any angle readers cared to look at! **Fun Fact:** This issue's symbolic cover of Kang looming gigantically over the Avengers was wonderfully executed by Kirby. It was only Romita's luck though that one of the first things he was called upon to do upon arriving in the Bullpen was to touch up one of the King's masterpieces! It was deemed by the Comics Code Authority that the way Kirby had drawn Kang's hands looked too threatening, so Romita was asked by Lee to redraw them! Such was Romita's skill that no one (except maybe Kirby himself) could tell the difference.

AVENGERS #23, PAGE 11: THE UNUSUAL TEAM UP OF DON HECK ON PENCILS AND JOHN ROMITA ON INKS QUALIFIED AVENGERS #23 AS A UNIQUE EVENT OF THE MARVEL AGE! IRONICALLY, THE TWO ARTISTS WOULD SWITCH DUTIES WHEN HECK INKED ROMITA ON SPIDER-MAN LATER IN THE GRANDIOSE YEARS TO EQUALLY GOOD EFFECT!

BUT, BEFORE THEY CAN REACH THE OTHER SIDE, AN OVERPOWERING GUST OF COMPRESSED AIR CATCHES THEM IN AN IRRESISTIBLE **SUCTION**...

SOMETHING'S STOPPED US IN MID-AIR!

SURE, WITH **KANG**, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN! HE'S GOT SCIENTIFIC GIZMOS WE NEVER EVEN THOUGHT OF!

THEN, HOW CAN WE EVER **BATTLE** SUCH A FOE?

BY NOT LOSING OUR **HEADS**, DREAMBOAT! REMEMBER HOW **CAP** USED TO SAY...

DON'T TIGHTEN UP! **GO LIMP! RELAX!**

RATS! NOW YOU GOT ME DOING IT!

THE SUCTION IS HURLING US TOWARDS THAT **WALL** IN THE DISTANCE!

TWIST AROUND! TRY TO **BACK** INTO IT!

UNHHH! WE'RE IN **LUCK!** IT'S NOT SOLID! LOTS OF OPENINGS ABSORBED THE IMPACT!

IT'S SOME SORT OF A **RESTRAINING WALL!**

BUT WE CAN'T LET OURSELVES BE PINNED DOWN HERE BY THE UNENDING SUCTION!

IF ONLY **HAWKEYE** COULD UNLEASH HIS **BLAST ARROW!**

AWWUPPP!



SUCTION TOO STRONG! CAN'T PULL BACK MY BOW... BUT... IF I CAN WITHDRAW THE ARROW, I'LL LET THE FORCE OF THE **AIR** DO THE REST!

THERE! I GOT IT! NOW ALL I HAVE TO DO IS TURN IT THE RIGHT WAY...

... AND THE **BLASTED AIR CURRENT** WILL PULL IT ALONG...

...TILL IT REACHES THE **SOURCE!**

BOOM!

TWOMORROWS AD PAGE