

Marvel Comics

IN THE LATE 1960s:

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

by Pierre Comtois



Marvel Comics In The Late 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, Dick Ayers, John Severin, Jim Steranko, Barry Smith, Neal Adams, Roy Thomas, Gary Friedrich, Dan Adkins, Gil Kane, Gene Colan, John Romita, John Buscema, Sal Buscema, Marie Severin, Herb Trimpe, Howard Purcell, and everyone else in the Marvel bullpen who helped make those early years a great age of dawning potential for comics fans!

Special dedication to Christopher G. Porter, good friend, Marvel fan, and Bill Everett devotee deluxe!

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Bibliography

Alter Ego: Roy Thomas, editor (various issues), Twomorrows Publishing

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

Various on-line sources

Special thanks to Roy Thomas for being available for every little pesky question I had about Marvel Comics during his tenure at the company!

Introduction:

To paraphrase the opening of my introduction for *Marvel Comics in the Early 1960s*, welcome to the fourth volume in the Marvel Comics Field Guide series (the fifth volume if you count the expanded edition of the 1970s volume, published in 2021). As I stated there, and will reiterate here, it's hard to believe that it's now been almost seventeen years since the first volume appeared as *Marvel Comics in the 1960s: An Issue by Issue Field Guide to a Pop Culture Phenomenon*. At the time, the kind folks at Twomorrows allowed me to fulfill a lifelong dream of writing a book about my favorite comics of all time. I would have been happy and content if that first volume had been all there was. But very quickly, I was asked to do a follow-up volume, *Marvel Comics in the 1970s*, and after that, something I'd certainly never planned, *Marvel Comics in the 1980s*. After all that, I think I had every right to believe that the market had been flooded with no more demand for my work. But I was wrong!

Two years ago, Twomorrows asked me to "fill in the gaps" so to speak, with all the comics that were left out of that first sixties volume. As it so happened, I had those reviews written and ready to go in case I ever had the chance to complete my dream project. Thus, *Marvel Comics in the Early 1960s*. But even so, there was much too much material to be included in a single volume so that the remaining reviews had to be divided

into two books. Now, with *Marvel Comics in the Late 1960s: A Field Guide to a Pop Culture Phenomenon*, the work will be completed. The fact that this project has extended well beyond that first 1960s volume to encompass four more volumes, is (as I stated in my intro to the *Early 1960s*) "a testament to the enduring interest in the material covered" by fans who recall the thrill of first reading these comics decades ago as well as (I hope) new readers who've had the pleasure of discovering them since.

That said, even I have to admit (though I love them every bit as much) that most of the contents of this new volume may not measure up to the issues reviewed in the original 1960s volume. That's because not knowing whether there would ever

be more volumes, that first book cherry-picked Marvel's first decade by spotlighting the best and most famous issues of each title: the Galactus Trilogy, the Inhumans saga, the Master Planner trilogy, the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants maxi-series, first issues, first appearances, key crossovers, etc. As a result, this new volume and the next comprise all of the issues in-between landmark stories and events. These in-between issues are no less interesting and fun and well written and drawn (and sometimes *not* so well written and drawn... even Silver Age Marvel wasn't perfect; almost, but not quite!) and well deserving of their own place in the critical spotlight.



As a result of all that, this volume will mark my last word on Marvel's era of the 1960s as it fulfills my original intention (formed many decades ago now) to write "capsule reviews" of every single Silver Age Marvel comic of note, which realistically meant the first one hundred issues of the company's main titles including *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Fantastic Four*, *The Mighty Thor*, *The Avengers*, *The X-Men*, *Daredevil*, *Tales of Suspense* (Iron Man/Captain America), *Strange Tales* (Human Torch/SHIELD/Dr. Strange), and *Tales to Astonish* (Ant-Man/Giant Man/Hulk/Sub-Mariner). There would also be a scattering of lesser titles such as

IRON MAN #11

JAN

P.23

MARVEL BULLPEN BULLETINS • MARVEL BULLPEN BULLETINS • MARVEL BULLPEN BULLETINS

HERE IT IS! PROOF POSITIVE THAT THE BIGGEST BRAINS AT MARVEL ---DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING!

ITEM: Now that you're starting to recover from the sensational shock of seeing CAP-TAN AMERICA #11, and the rest of their own magnificent mags — hold tight! Here comes the next dazzling development in the Second Golden Age of Marvel — On sale now, and for the first time ever (in the THREE!) more comic titles to boot you out of your tree! You guessed it — IRON MAN and SPIDER-MAN, plus the first issue of a full-length, monthly mag of their own — and adventures will never be the same! You'll be able to read about the latest in any other Marvel masterpiece would be today — such as the first edition of FANTAS-TIC FOUR! And you'll be able to read it well, just imagine how much IRON MAN #1 and SUB-MARINER #1 will be worth after you've known them for white! One thing's for sure, even before you get into the excitement, drama, and suspense we've jam-packed into each gala premiere issue — you'll be talking about it (and chattering)! They're on sale now! They're great! Get 'em!

ITEM: And we mentioned THREE new titles didn't we? (Thought we goaded again, heh? Nah!) Well, here's the other one you've been eagerly awaiting — possibly the biggest, most important comic book title ever! NOT BRAND ECHIN! So overwhelming has been the reaction to the new star of MARVEL'S #11 that the Marvel boys have been forced to give none other than CAPTAIN MARVEL his own full-length monthly mag — that's right, CAPTAIN MARVEL #1! Every month, you'll get a new comic book that what that a Marvel fan wants — GETS! And even THAT isn't all! (See what we mean?)

ITEM: And here's another surprise with MARVEL SUPERHEROES since we kicked C. M. upstairs, and do something we did! We've decided to use the monthly comic book monthly as a vehicle for experimentation, and for presenting the most off-beat strips of all, both old and new! So, just for starters, we've got a brand new, never-before-preserved, full-length adventure of SPIDER-MAN in the issue of MARVEL #11 — and it's a doozy! (Sorry, we know! However — it's a different type of Spider-Man — drawn by a different artist — just as an experiment — and we'll see how it goes! So do with it — so, instead of keeping it hidden on a shelf, we thought we'd present it to you, and see what you think!)

ITEM: And here's a new twist! CAPTAIN MARVEL has put together a totally different type of publication, just for a lark! It's a hilarious, laugh-packed illustrated joke book called MARVEL JOKES, and it's yours for no more than the price of any other comic mag — and if you're a bugger, we urge you to get it! (It's a great book on other subjects, before you start thinking that this is the bizarro for us!)

ITEM: One last word, and we're saved! After all, it's the thought of Marveldom you'd be interested. So, without any further ado —

Dear Bullpenn, I want to compliment all you guys for the great new comic books you're putting out — especially the invalids and the ill in our nation's hospitals. Being a volunteer worker at a hospital in Miami, I can assure you that the patients are, so I gather up all of my doubles and distribute them among the patients. I have a large collection, enough for one floor, so I'm asking all kids with any extra Marvels to bring them to the nearest hospital if they want to make a little happy.

Let's meet 26 more
M.M.M.S. members!

Eric Lamp
Alexandria, Va.
Steve Lester
Lynchburg, Va.

Bay Mosh
Bridgeport, Conn.
Dan Lynch
New Haven, Conn.
Arthur Goodwin
Miami, Fla.
Steve Kellner
Gary, Ind.

Thanks from myself and the many patients for the hours of enjoyment you furnish, Sincerely,

John Zeman
6126 N. 17th St. R. Phila., Pa.

Our thanks to you, Josh, for a most wonderful gesture and a grand idea. Marvel suggests that all issues of MARVEL COMICS — or, indeed, ANY worthwhile periodicals — to the nearest hospital as often as possible. And we'd like to add that there are things like that which make life just a little bit nicer for others — and isn't that really all there is?

MORE SURPRISES next-ish — plus the final chapter of Marveldom for you to memorize and treasure forever! But now, since we're running out of space, we'll have to leave the heads for the nonce and think thy thoughts, as we get into the mood for our own comic book — and we'll leave that to our grrrrr' grrrrr' Smilin' Stan himself!

STAN'S SOAPBOX!

We TOLD you that Marvel would make '68 the year of the big changes: the new star of MARVEL, the new star of CAPTAIN MARVEL, and the new star of SPIDER-MAN. Well, believe it or not, there's still more in store for you! We've another couple of surprises in store for you on this next-ish — and still more surprises, goodies to dangle before you as the promise of a pledge to make good on a promise we'll be all part of a major comic book adventure in a month from now, when we vowed to continually improve the quality of comic mag, and to do our best to make sure that Marvel's (incidentally, did you know that more than a dozen college professors are teaching comic book art in their English Lit. courses as supplemental material?) it's only a start — but we're presently working on a totally new magazine, which may completely change the shape of comic books as we know them — in book format. We expect it to be the most sensational success since Marvel itself first burst upon the public scene. (And we'll be sure to keep the Hulky Watch for clues in the months to come, and we meet again — it's been a great year, and we're looking forward to some hope for a race that keeps racing for the stars — Smiley)

THE MIGHTY MARVEL CHECKLIST

Marvelous Maggs On Sale Right Now!

NOT BRAND ECHIN: #7: So hilarious that it's a must-read! And it's the first issue to miss the hysterical ORIGIN OF THE FAMOUS FANTASTIC FOUR — or the brain-blasting OFF-SHOW-UPSTAIRMAN! But hurry — there's not much time left!

FANTASTIC FOUR: #74: We only need to mention one word — and to advise you to get to it right away! It's the new, improved, of course, is — GALACTUS! And we'll just whisper that the SILVER SURFER is

SPIDER-MAN: #60: Have you ever had one of those days when everything goes wrong? Well, when it happens to you or me, so help us, we'll be thinking of SPIDER-MAN — while he's engaged in a life-and-death battle with the craven KINGPIN — look out!

AVENGERS: #51: Goliath regains his strength, and the team is back in action! The mischievous COLLECTOR tries once more to add the AVENGERS to his trophy case! In all adds up to action, loyalty and — we dare say — lots of fun for you!

Jim Lucas
Baltimore, Md.
Pat Gerard
New York, N.Y.
Lucas
Baltimore, Md.
Arthur Goodwin
Rochester, N.Y.

David C.
Los Angeles, Calif.
Peter Shred
Astoria, N.Y.
John Lucas
Chicago, Ill.
Burton
San Diego, Calif.

X-MEN: #21: WITH PROFESSOR X dead and the now leaderless X-MEN at their lowest ebb — MAGNETO struck! This drama-filled issue is the most suspenseful must for all mutant-watchers! (Nuff said)

DEADEVE: #39: This is what you've been clamoring for! A new, truly unforgettable comic book — and it's the best comic book ever! (And it's not hard to guess why!) Plus the return of APE MAN, BIRD MAN, and CAT CAT! (And the return of DOG! How lucky can ya be?)

THOR: #151: At last! The mightiest hero of all regains his matchless power during the final confrontation with the villain he created! But, it looks as though it may be too late to gain a vital victory over the DE-ODORANT! (And the return of the DE-ODORANT!) CAPTAIN AMERICA #101: We're so excited about this one, we can hardly get the words out! Remember the almost legendary CAPTAIN AMERICA #100? Well, it's still there — it was a FORTH — and, not only that — THE RED SKULL lives again! (And the return of the DE-ODORANT!)

INCORPORAL HULK: #103: The HULK returns to Earth and discovers his last living friend, RICK JONES, has turned into a giant! (And the return of the DE-ODORANT!) CAPTAIN AMERICA #102: We're so excited about this one, we can hardly get the words out! Remember the almost legendary CAPTAIN AMERICA #100? Well, it's still there — it was a FORTH — and, not only that — THE RED SKULL lives again! (And the return of the DE-ODORANT!)

SUB-MARINER: #21: At last! The long-awaited return of the SUB-MARINER — and with the senses-shattering secret of Subby's amnesia-plagued years! This one's a real page-turner — eagerly-anticipated! Marvel premiere ever!

CAPTAIN MARVEL: #1: Now, in his own magnifico! And, CAPTAIN MARVEL #1 is the first issue to miss the hysterical ORIGIN OF THE FAMOUS SENTRY in a titanic, twenty-page epic you'll never forget! At least, we hope not! STRANGE TALES #168: JIMMY WOO becomes the new star of the team, and the team is back, while battling a monstrous new menace — and DOC STRANGE battles YANDRO! It's the biggest, baddest comic book of 'em all — and it's here now!

SFT, GUY: #53: In their most deadly mission yet, the HOWLERS do go for broke to capture HULK — and the return of the invincible fortress in the Bavarian Alps! It's the biggest hulk-mag blockbuster of 'em all — and it's here now!

CAPTAIN SAVAGE: #2: Acclaimed such a shell-shocked sensation that we're leaving it on sale for another month — and no reason to return — BARON STRUCKEN!

MARVEL SUPERHEROES: #14: An all-new, never-before printed super-size saga of the mightiest Marvels! And the return of all those more golden-age adventures of CAP-TAN AND RICA, SUB-MARINER, and THE HULK — and the return of a mere quarter! You'd better believe it!

MARVEL COLLECTORS: ITEM CLASSICS #141, #142, #143, #144, Doctor Strange, and the like — all in one super-size issue you'll never forget — unless, you're holding out on the Marvel Age of Comics!

MARVEL TALES: #14: SPIDEY, GIANT MAN, THOR, and the magnificent MARVEL BOY — almost more than mortal Marveline can bear — and the return of all those giddy groovers in this godly gathering!

Crime #3
Garden
Garden
Kim Lowawieski
Rockford, Ill.
Steve Rawl
Jacksonville, Fla.
Jim Harrington
Watertown, N.Y.

Mike Howard
Sparta, Mo.
Santa Gail
Bellevue, N.Y.
Ronney Harris
Atlanta, Ga.
Mike Roman
Chicago, Ill.

*Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos, Captain Marvel and Marvel Superheroes, and representative issues of Marvel's pre-hero monster books and westerns, as well as solo series such as *The Incredible Hulk*, *The Sub-Mariner*, and *Iron Man* that never struck me as being anywhere near as good as the others. (My apologies to fans who might disagree!)*

Briefly, the events covered in this volume follow on developments in the previous *Early 1960s* edition that began with the appearance of *Fantastic Four* #1. At the time, the company that would eventually come to be known as Marvel had been cut back in the number of titles it could release with its bread and butter being Westerns, fantasy, and teen humor books. The balance, however, quickly shifted in favor of a rising interest in superheroes which became the focus of Marvel editor Stan Lee and his team of top artists consisting of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck.

Here, we might pause to consider what I've called the four phases of Marvel's development. It might be advantageous to revisit my definition of the first three phases from my introduction in the *Early 1960s* volume:

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 only involvement in the plotting of the superhero books (with the exception of the *Fantastic Four* and *Hulk*) Scripting for the rest 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 and 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, where horizons for stories and characters would balloon beyond the wildest expectations of readers (and perhaps even the creators!)

BY THE LATE 1960S, THE RANDOM NOTES ON UPCOMING STORIES AND TITLES THAT HAD BEEN SCATTERED AMONG VARIOUS LETTERS PAGES, HAD MATURED INTO A DEDICATED PAGE GIVEN OVER ENTIRELY TO BULLPEN NEWS AND INSIDER CHIT CHAT, A MORE FORMAL CHECKLIST OF CURRENT TITLES, AND PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS BY THE MAN HIMSELF, ALL SERVING TO DRAW MARVELDOM ASSEMBLED INTO A MORE CLOSE KNIT COMMUNITY.

The Early Years and the Years of Consolidation were largely covered in the *Early 1960s* volume, ending just as Marvel was beginning to transition into its Grandiose Years—led chiefly by Jack Kirby’s evolving art style and with stories that expanded into areas of either cosmic significance or (conversely) more socially relevant subject matter. It’s this third phase that’s covered in *Marvel Comics in the Late 1960s*. It ends, in turn, with the transitory period between the Grandiose Years and the fourth phase, the Twilight Years, marked chiefly by Jack Kirby’s imminent withdrawal from the company, editor Stan Lee’s seemingly waning interest in his scripting chores, the rise of editorial assistant Roy Thomas, the expansion of the number of titles Marvel was permitted to publish, and the introduction of new artistic talent such as Neal Adams, Gil Kane, and Barry Smith.

As to my reasoning behind how I approached writing the capsule reviews, I’ll refer the reader to my introductory remarks for the previous volume:

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 those 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 how it became a pop culture phenomenon.

Finally, one more excerpt somewhat paraphrased from the conclusion of the introduction to *Marvel Comics in the Early 1960s* (simply because I can’t think of a better way to put my conclusionary thoughts and feelings than the way I did it last time):

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 (*Marvel Comics in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s*) 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 In the Late 1960s: An Issue by Issue Field Guide to a Pop Culture Phenomenon*, like those in *Marvel Comics in the Early 1960s*, 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 volumes, 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 the last 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!

It was always my dream since the earliest of my fannish days of the mid-1960s to write a book about Marvel Comics. For many decades it remained just that, a dream, but a dream I never really stopped wondering about. The book I’d intended to write bore little resemblance to the volumes Twomorrows ended up publishing, but that perhaps turned out for the best, with an approach that was somewhat more unique than a straight history of the company. And who knows? Maybe a more interesting approach.

I certainly had fun writing it, as it enabled me to take deep dives into the art and stories and characters that I’ve loved continuously for almost sixty years now. I hope the results prove as entertaining to readers as they do to me (whether they agree with my opinions or not!). My thanks go out to Twomorrows for giving me the opportunity to fulfill my dream, as well as to all those readers and fellow Marvel fans for supporting this project.

Excelsior!
Pierre Lortois

Avengers #24

"From the Ashes of Defeat!"; Stan Lee (script);
Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Was this the same Jack Kirby who was drawing all those larger than life, grandiose images over in *Journey Into Mystery* and *The Fantastic Four*? It sure was! That was the first thought die-hard Marvelites might have considered upon feasting their eyes on this issue's throwback cover image by the King himself. Only Kirby would have bothered to draw not a dozen but two dozen separate figures, all in individualized sets of armor, surrounding the four Avengers. No massive figures here, but old style, years of consolidation style, Jack Kirby/Chic Stone style characters as they prepare to overwhelm our heroes. Kirby even showed restraint enough to eliminate a background altogether with Stan Goldberg opting to leave it all white save for the dim, yellow spotlight at the Avengers' feet. Yup. It all added up to one of Kirby's most memorable cover designs! It was more than enough to tempt the comics rack browser to pick up *Avengers* #24 (Jan. 1966) to find out how Captain America and his team mates could get out of such an impossible predicament. Unfortunately, they don't: scripter Stan Lee has them overpowered and captured by Kang's forces. But there's a light at the end of the tunnel in the form of a revolt among Kang's army. The Avengers side with Kang to preserve the rule of Princess Ravonna who's also the apple of Kang's eye. They succeed but just as the team is being sent back to the present by Kang, Ravonna takes a bullet for him as one of the rebels takes a pot shot at him. Did she live or die? It wouldn't be until issue #69 before readers found out. Talk about your suspense! Meanwhile, this jam packed issue was drawn as usual by Don Heck but after Wally Wood and John Romita, the return of Dick Ayers on the inks was somewhat of a let-down. He does okay, but readers had become spoiled. Inking Heck properly was no easy task and the search for a perfect match would continue...

Tales to Astonish #75

"The End of the Quest!"; Stan Lee (script);
Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"Not All My Power Can Save me!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (layouts); Mike Esposito (finishes/inks)

Scripter Stan Lee brings Namor's quest for Neptune's Trident to a close in *Tales to Astonish* #75 (Jan. 1966) when the titular god acknowledges that the Sub-Mariner made the wise choice of choosing another person's welfare over continued search for the trident. To wit: Namor chose to abandon the quest to save Lady Dorma from the Faceless Ones. In reward, Neptune gives him the trident. Racing back to Atlantis, Subby has a twin purpose: to overthrew Krang and save a comatose Dorma by placing her within the rays of the Revitalizer (don't ask!). In the meantime, the art team of penciler

Gene Colan and inker Vince Colletta continued to impress with a pair of full-page splashes and pages filled with big, bold panel layouts. Colletta's extensive use of cross hatching to delineate Sub-Mariner's musculature looks great even as Colan demonstrates a weakness that he'd have through most of his career at Marvel, namely running out of space and having to crowd the final page in a series of small, undersized panels. But there was no harm done (Lee found the room to tell his story anyway) and readers were rewarded with fast-paced storytelling. Meanwhile, Jack Kirby seemed to apply himself a bit more in the Hulk feature. He was only doing the layouts, but in more than one place his distinctive style was obvious, making for a more satisfying reading experience for fans who couldn't get enough of the King (Mike Esposito's finishes were still largely inadequate, though). There was also no end in sight for ole Greenskin's ongoing serial as scripter Lee has the Hulk travel to Washington to seek help from the president to free Rick Jones from prison. There, General Ross is ready for him with Bruce Banner's final invention, a T(ime)-Ray. Zapped by the ray, the Hulk is transported into some indeterminate future era. But judging by the dress and weapons of his latest adversaries, it's far in the future!

Daredevil #12

"Sightless, In a Savage Land!"; Stan Lee (script)
Jack Kirby (layouts); John Romita (finishes/inks)

Scripter Stan Lee's first tale without Wally Wood as artist stumbles out of the box. And unfortunately, the uninteresting results would drag on for another two issues. This fish-out-of-water tale finds Matt Murdock



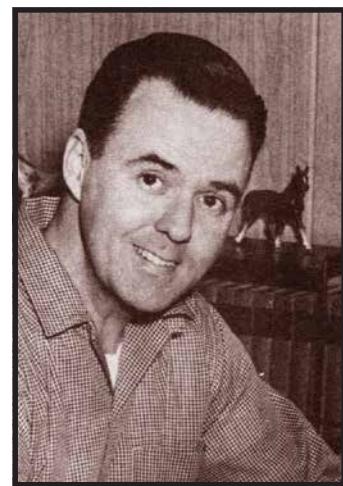
POOR DC COMICS! BY THE LATE 1960S, THEY WERE LEFT IN THE DUST BULLPEN-WISE AS GIL KANE, THEIR ONLY REAL ACTION ARTIST, MIGRATED OVER TO MARVEL JOINING THE LIKES OF JACK KIRBY AND JIM STERANKO (SEEN HERE IN COMPANY WITH STAN LEE) ADD TO THEM THE LIKES OF STEVE DITKO, GENE COLAN, JOHN BUSCEMA, AND DON HECK AND, WELL...

on a cruise ship hijacked by modern day pirates led by the Plunderer. Daredevil manages to hold his own with the pirates until the Plunderer threatens the hostage crew. DD surrenders and discovers that the Plunderer's ancient-looking two masted ship actually folds up into a sleek modern submarine. Clever, huh? Wrong! Lee actually borrowed this twist from an old pulp magazine hero called the Skipper who traveled the oceans in the same kind of ship. Unfortunately, Lee's failure of imagination doesn't stop there. After being taken to the Savage Land and an encounter with Ka-Zar (his first appearance outside of *X-Men* #10) readers learned in subsequent issues that Ka-Zar is possessed of a fortune and a royal title back in merry old England. Sound familiar? It should. His background was shamelessly lifted from Edgar Rice Burroughs' Tarzan. But then, the whole concept of Ka-Zar, back in his original pulp magazine appearances in the 1930s, was inspired by the king of the jungle. Still, if all that wasn't enough, we later learn that the Plunderer is actually Ka-Zar's evil brother, setting up yet another opposing set of siblings *ala* Thor and Loki. ho-hum. On top of all that, this was a story so out of Daredevil's streets of New York bailiwick as to be way off target for the character. Unfortunately, readers were doomed to slog through three long months of this stuff before the title picked up again. It wasn't very promising material for a new artist to make his debut but finisher/inker John Romita took advantage of it to hone his style to fit into the Marvel brand of action storytelling. Lee had only recently brought Romita back to the bullpen after an exile amid DC comics' romance line and kept him busy inking a SHIELD feature pending *Daredevil* #12 (Jan. 1966) to become available. Helping him to make the transition, Jack Kirby was brought in as usual to do the layouts. It helped to open Romita's eyes somewhat with page 3 (showing DD getting into costume) as the exemplar of what it meant to be a Marvel artist: even a character changing his clothes needed to be shown in an exciting manner! But Romita was a quick study and within a couple of issues, Kirby was gone. The overall result here was solid with Romita's romance background helpful for quieter moments among the supporting cast. Of the action sequences, the best that could be said here is that Romita was really good over Kirby. But that storyline, blah! The last place DD belonged was in the jungle and the sooner Lee got him out of it, the better.

Strange Tales #140

"The End of Hydra!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Joe Sinnott (inks)
"The Pincers of Power!"; Stan Lee (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Under a wild cover image by Jack Kirby crammed with dozens of figures, half of them riding skateboards(!) is a Stan Lee scripted story that isn't quite what it's



UNFORTUNATELY, ARTIST DON HECK WOULD LOSE HIS REGULAR GIG ON THE AVENGERS IN THE LATE SIXTIES AND BEGAN TO BOUNCE AROUND AMONG DIFFERENT FEATURES WITHOUT THE BENEFIT OF HIS OWN INKS. MEANWHILE, JOE SINNOTT'S STAR WOULD CONTINUE TO RISE AS HIS INKS OVER JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS IMPRESSED FANS AND PROS ALIKE.

title suggests (namely, "The End of Hydra!")—but almost! Inside *Tales to Astonish* #140 (Jan. 1966), Kirby is still doing the layouts but this time Don Heck has replaced Joe Sinnott on the pencil finishes while Sinnott sticks to the inking. Readers could be forgiven if they couldn't keep up with the ever-shifting credits here and elsewhere in the Marvel lineup, but at least they could count on story quality as the Lee/Kirby team continue to deliver this time. The final, cataclysmic battle between the forces of Hydra and SHIELD with Nick Fury (in tandem with the Supreme Hydra's traitorous daughter), fighting their way through Hydra HQ to link up with the invading SHIELD forces. Whew! Meanwhile, Tony Stark pilots the unlikely named braino-saur into orbit to defuse Hydra's betatron bomb. The dizzying half-page panel depicting the braino-saur about to launch is pure Kirby with the contraption's design even looking like a brontosaurus! But as was said, this wasn't quite the end of Hydra... that'll come next ish as this one ends with the Supreme Hydra about to blow up his HQ along with his own daughter! Meanwhile, Lee and artist/plotter Steve Ditko have picked up Dr. Strange where they left him last issue, namely about to go hand-to-hand with the dread Dormammu. Required to fight the lord of the dark dimension using the "pincers of power," Doc manages to gain the upper hand in their duel, but just as he's on the point of winning, Baron Mordo zaps him from behind. The rat! Continued next issue! **Fun Fact:** Was Kirby's use of skateboards in the SHIELD story here what gave him the idea to adapt other sports equipment for super powered characters? For instance, did it inspire him to later create a character that rode the spaceways on a surfboard?

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #26

"Dum Dum Does It the Hard Way!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Carl Hubbell (inks)

Penciler Dick Ayers surprises readers again with a great cover image for *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #26 (Jan. 1966)! Not known for striking artwork, Ayers' work was usually serviceable if not downright bland (and often awkward but when he set his mind to it).

But, likely when he had the time, he could really deliver the goods. And he does so here with a nice cover depicting Dum Dum Dugan in a life raft with fellow soldiers as a German battleship bears down on them. Portraits of Dum Dum's fellow Howlers lining a strip on the left side of the cover are also well done. If only he had two or three months to do the interiors, maybe all of his *Sgt. Fury*s could have looked this good. Unfortunately, he was never given that kind of leisure and readers had to settle for average Ayers' pencils. This time, they were inked by Carl Hubbell who does a pretty good job over Ayers and gives his pencils much needed detail. Hubbell was especially fine, eliminating Ayers' stoney faces and lending them all more emotion

and expression. If only Hubbell had jumped on the book earlier in Ayers' run or stayed on beyond this ish, but it was not meant to be as in an issue or twain, John Tartaglione would return for the long haul. On the scripting front, Stan Lee turns in a superior yarn that shines the spotlight on Dum Dum as his plane bringing him back from the states is shot down and he and the crew are captured by the infamous Sea Shark, a battleship commanded by one Vice Admiral Ribbindorf. Suffice to say, this story had everything fans of the book could want and then some! **Fun Fact:** Off-and-on guest star the Skipper returns for a more or less prominent role with Lee having a good time coming up with inter-service insults the soldiers and sailors exchange before joining forces to rescue Dum Dum and the air crew. The Skipper proved popular with readers and would be awarded his own title in 1968, as well as a name: Captain Simon Savage!



LIKEWISE, DICK AYERS' PENCILS WOULD BE SEEN LESS FREQUENTLY IN MARVEL'S FLAGSHIP TITLES BEING RELEGATED TO SUCH WAR BOOKS AS *SGT. FURY AND CAPT. SAVAGE* AND THE LINGERING WESTERNS.

Journey Into Mystery #124

"The Grandeur and the Glory!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

A whole lot goin' on this ish as the Thor feature in *Journey Into Mystery* #124 (Jan. 1966) marks a transition from one extended story-line to another. It also marked the transition from the sometimes looser inks of Vince Colletta over Jack Kirby's power-packed pencils to surer footing. This is where the art team of Kirby/Colletta kicks into high gear, thrilling fans at the time and establishing them as the Thor visionaries to top all others. No one since has even come close to matching the "grandeur and the glory" as scripter Stan Lee titles this issue's epochal tale. And among the elements that went to making this ish so memorable, was the scene on page 9 where Don Blake reveals his identity as Thor to Jane Foster! Where once such an event was deemed big enough to warrant a cover image, now, amid so many other things happening, it never even got a cover blurb! The revelation, though, doesn't go down well in Asgard where big daddy Odin loses his cool ("To think that I should ever witness so sordid a sight!") and plans the proper punishment. Back on Earth though, Thor decides he can't ignore news reports about the Demon's exploits in central Asia and the issue ends with their coming face to face. That's when Thor recognizes, belatedly, that the Demon's power comes from the Norn stone dropped by the Thunder God way back in the immediate aftermath of the Trial of the Gods. But even as the two square off, back in Olympus, readers are reintroduced to Hercules (last seen in the *Journey Into Mystery Annual* #2). Kirby does it in spectacular fashion with a half-page full shot of Herc jousting with Atlas! "I weary of your never ending rivalries...your constant battles in Olympus," says Zeus as he dispatches his son to Earth ("All these long centuries, we thought Zeus had forgotten Earth!" muses a nearby centaur) on a mission that he never gets around to explaining. Finally, perhaps the issue's best scene takes place right at the start as Thor stands on a busy New York street corner reading the paper. A little girl comes up to him and asks him if he's ever been to Vietnam where her father is serving. "Yes, my dear, I have been to Vietnam and to many other far off places and I have met many daddies who are brave, and patriotic, just like yours. Next time you write to your daddy, tell him that Thor wishes him well, as he fights to hold aloft the lamp of liberty!" "How about that?" wonders an off-panel bystander. "Those arms of his can crush concrete. And yet..." "He's holdin' that kid as gently as if she was made outta egg shells!" "What a man!" Later, to avoid hurting people in the crowd with his swinging hammer, Thor retreats to a nearby office building to take the elevator up to the roof. In these scenes, Lee has a bit of a field day putting thoughts into the minds of passersby: A cop tells Thor he can't swing his hammer on his beat; a bank manager thinking about hiring a security guard sees Thor and thinks no way

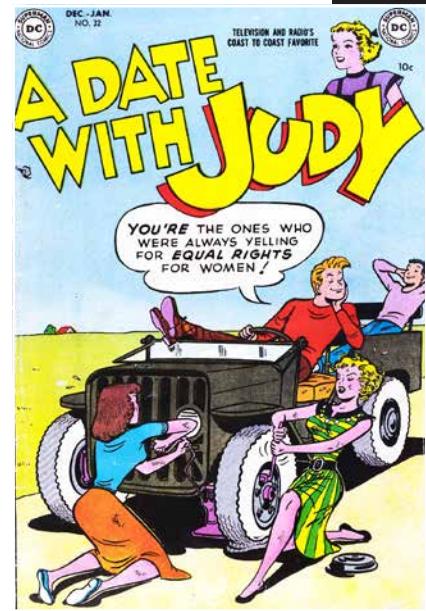
Al Hartley

Though his name is likely unfamiliar to the average fan of 1960s super-hero comics, artist Al Hartley was a long time veteran before he ever showed up in the Marvel bullpen. In fact, he worked for the company when it was still called Atlas drawing every kind of story from science fiction to jungle to romance.

In fact, it was the romance books, or at least those Marvel comics aimed primarily at a female readership like *Millie the Model* or *Patsy and Hedy* that Hartley eventually gravitated to.

Before that, however, Hartley's working relationship with editor Stan Lee, beginning as early as the mid-1950s, had already evolved into what would later be called the "Marvel method." That involved a process in which Lee would provide a simple plot from which the artist drew the completed story. After that, Lee would add captions and dialogue as required. Thus the system was already in place when the burden of writing all the new super-hero titles became too much for Lee to handle.

According to Hartley, from that beginning, he soon graduated to plotting and scripting his own stories for *Patsy Walker* and *Patsy and Hedy*. He tried editorial assisting for Lee for a couple months but it wasn't the right fit. It was probably for the best though, especially for female readers, as Marvel's dramadies remained popular for many years.



they could afford him; a woman in the elevator sees his hair and is reminded of a hairdresser's appointment. It was all classic Lee/Kirby Marvel magic! And the sort of occasional brush with the average citizen that fans loved to see. And all enhanced by the Kirby/Colletta team at the height of their respective powers. And speaking of the Kirby/Colletta team, they were still on hand for this issue's "Tales of Asgard" back-up, as the flying trolls of Queen Ula attack the Asgardian argonauts still on their mission for Odin. Yowza!

Patsy and Hedy #104

"No More Tears!"; Roy Thomas (script); Al Hartley (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

So, Roy Thomas had just passed his writing test and was hired by editor Stan Lee as his assistant and fledgling scriptwriter. Settled in at the Marvel bullpen (actually a tiny space among Martin Goodman's publishing offices at 625 Madison Avenue), he was immediately given his training wheels with assignation to the company's handful of remaining

romance comics which, by this time, had begun to evolve from short, gag-ridden Archie style stories to full-length, semi-serious tales of romance and friendly rivalry among the female leads. Such was the situation when Thomas took over the scripting chores on *Patsy and Hedy* (*Career Girls*) #104 (Feb. 1966). Right off, readers could see the captions and blurbs that adorned the cover the same way they did on the superhero books. ("You are cordially invited to attend Nan's swingin' engagement party...in this issue!") What remained the same though was how our leads were dressed. on the cover: red-haired Patsy and black tressed Hedy are draped in fashionable evening gowns (in contrast to the book's new cast member sporting a leather jacket and motorcycle). Inside, some things hadn't changed: readers were still encouraged to write in with their suggestions for hairdos and clothing styles, with which penciler Al Hartley would adorn the heroines on pin-up pages scattered throughout. The book even boasted a letters page, just as all the superhero and western features did by this time! As for this issue's tale, Thomas hits the ground running about how the girls are offered a new opportunity to

tour the country writing in dispatches about the places they visit. Along the way, Thomas picks up the threads of an ongoing relationship for Hedy, introduces biker Cord Ryan, and Beach Boys wannabes the Zip Tones. Issues immediately prior to this one were already interesting in their admittedly simple plots dealing with the two girls' friendly rivalry



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PATSY AND HEDY #104, PAGE 5: WORDINESS. AS CAN BE READILY SEEN HERE, WAS SOMEWHAT OF A TRADEMARK FOR THE EARLY SCRIPTING EFFORTS OF NEWCOMER ROY THOMAS. UNFORTUNATELY, AL HARTLEY'S ART IS NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT AND SO, PERHAPS NEEDED BOLSTERING IN CHARACTERIZATION AND PLOT. HELPING MUCHLY, IS THOMAS' FEEL FOR SMOOTH FLOWING, NATURAL SOUNDING DIALOGUE THAT MANAGES TO AVOID THE AWKWARD USE OF HIP REFERENCES THAT MARRED SIMILAR EFFORTS BY OTHER PUBLISHERS.

and Thomas manages to keep that ball rolling and even adding enough to make readers actually look forward to what happens next. (Roy was no doubt supervised closely by Lee but already, his own scripting style was apparent; he must have impressed Stan, because he was quickly shifted over to the *Sgt. Fury* book to takeover directly from him) On the other hand, Hartley's art is barely serviceable here. One can only imagine what a John Romita or Gene Colan or even Werner Roth could have done with the material! It's uncertain what inker John Tartaglione brought to the book but it is interesting to consider that at the same time he was working here, he was inking Dick Ayers over on the decidedly different *Sgt. Fury!* **Fun Fact:** It's also interesting to consider that with Patsy and Hedy's appearance at the wedding of Sue and Reed Richards over in *FF Annual* #3, their adventures here have been confirmed as being part of the Marvel superhero universe! That reality would only be emphasized in the twilight years when Patsy was transformed into the superheroine Hellcat.

Fantasy Masterpieces #1

Stan Lee (script); various artists (pencils/inks)

As editor/scripter Stan Lee and Marvel began to feel their oats, they started to get cocky. After feeling out the market for reprints first in the annuals and then with such collections as *Marvel Tales* and *Marvel Collectors Item Classics*, editorial decided to reach even farther back for *Fantasy Masterpieces* #1 (Feb. 1966). Unlike the earlier reprint collections though, *Fantasy Masterpieces* would begin as a

regular 12-cent comic and feature reprints of the pre-hero Atlas monster stories that Jack Kirby had cut his early Marvel teeth on, ghost stories that Don Heck had drawn, and the weird little fantasies of which Steve Ditko was the master. (Besides all that, it was no doubt seen as a win-win for the publisher who didn't have to pay the writers or artists anything to reprint their material, making whatever was earned pure profit.) The issues would be filled out with stories by other current Marvel stalwarts such as Joe Sinnott and Dick Ayers. Even by 1966, it was believed that many of the company's current crop of readers were likely unfamiliar with these early tales written and drawn by Lee (aided and abetted by brother Larry) and their fave artists. To sweeten the deal, the inside front cover featured a soon-to-be oft reprinted pic of Stan the Man perched on a stool complete with short brimmed hat and size ten brogans offering long winded run downs of each story presented in the issue. The stories themselves lost none of their charm over the intervening years and piqued the interest of enough readers to keep the title going for a number of issues, eventually growing to the 25-cent format with the inclusion of Golden Age reprints of *Captain America*—complete with new cover images by Cap creator Kirby himself!

Daredevil #13

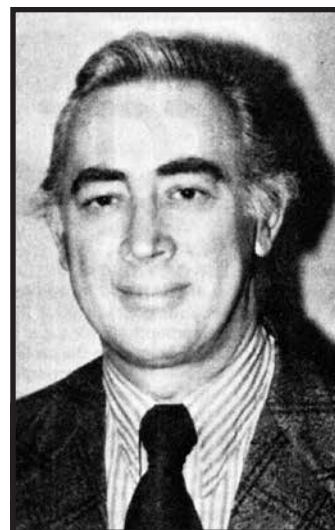
"The Secret of Ka-Zar's Origin!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); John Romita (finishes/inks)

Jack Kirby was still doing the layouts on *Daredevil* #13 (Feb. 1966)...not so anyone could tell! More to the point, the artwork this ish seemed more in newcomer John Romita's court. Not that Romita ignored what Kirby had left for him, but that he was a fast learner and began to put more of himself into the work and leaving out much of Kirby's layouts (There was far more of the King on this issue's iconic cover image with DD fairly leaping into the reader's lap!). Inside, scripter Stan Lee's story was again so-so as DD continued his Hidden Land adventure. There was more "Mighty is Ka-Zar, lord of the jungle" stuff, as well as the piratical Plunderer. Luckily, though, the action moves quickly away from the jungle to merry old England where Daredevil (and the readers) learned about Ka-Zar's origin. It seemed that Ka-Zar and the Plunderer were brothers, the sons of an explorer who discovered a mineral with the power to destroy anything made of metal by issuing vibrations (You guessed it! This mineral has properties the exact opposite of the vibranium that absorbs vibrations to be found in the Black Panther's Wakanda!). It's the seizure of this metal that the Plunderer really wants so he can become master of the world. But if readers had their fill of this storyline that seemed unsuited to Daredevil, they were in for a disappointment. It continued into the next issue...hopefully to conclude there!

Tales to Astonish #76

"Uneasy Hangs the Head!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"I, Against a World!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Scott Edward (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)

It had been coming for a while, but editor Stan Lee finally transitioned the split book covers to single subjects. Some fans had been calling for the change for some time and, as the months passed, one image would dominate the covers while a second, much smaller one would get squeezed in somewhere (usually at the bottom). But now, the second image was completely gone with covers entirely given over to a single subject. To be sure, subjects would alternate between the two features every other issue (with the exception of *Strange Tales*, wherein Dr. Strange would be subordinate to SHIELD for some months to come) with *Tales to Astonish* #76 (Feb. 1966) dedicated to the Sub-Mariner



GIL KANE, PERHAPS THE ONLY ARTIST EMPLOYED BY DC COMICS AT THE TIME WHO COULD ADAPT TO THE MORE ACTION ORIENTED MARVEL STYLE. MOONLIGHTED AS "SCOTT EDWARDS" ON THE HULK STRIP. WAS ANYONE FOOLED?

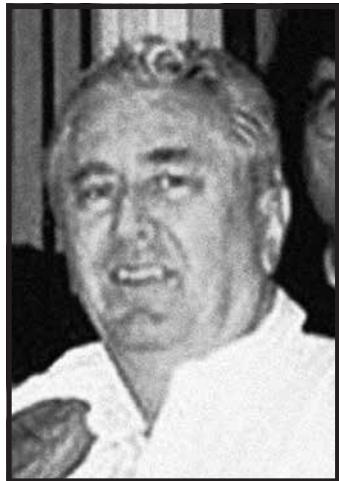
and its Gene Colan artwork. Inside finished off the serial that began with Subby's introduction to *Astonish*. The quest for Neptune's trident is over, Namor defeats Krang, and restores Lady Dorma to health via the revitalizer. Again, penciler Colan lays out the story almost exclusively in oversized panels (with three full-pagers!) while Vince Colletta knocks himself out on the inks—all making for a satisfying end to the Stan Lee-scripted epic. Lee is also on hand as usual to script the Hulk co-feature as the green goliath prepares to face off against an army of future era soldiers. With Jack Kirby still doing the layouts, much of his style emerges from the Scott Edwards finishes and Mike Esposito inks particularly on the first few pages (that Delta missile launcher on page 3, panel 1, could only have been dreamed up by the King!) Edwards allows Kirby's style to emerge as well in later pages especially on page 6, panel 1, with its big, half-page image depicting the future soldiers' massive fortress. All together, this effort came close to satisfying many fans' craving for more Kirby on the Hulk! If only this team would stay together long enough to do the next installment wherein the Hulk looked to be facing off with Thor villain the Executioner! But, who

was this Scott Edwards who did such a good job teasing Kirby's style from his layouts? Turns out that was a pen name for another DC artist moonlighting for Lee. First, there was Colan as Adam Austin, then Mike Esposito as Mickey Demeo, and now it was Gil Kane as Edwards! Yes, this was officially Kane's first work for Marvel after establishing himself as a DC mainstay with his work on *Green Lantern*, The Atom, and Rex the Wonder Dog. None of DC's action artists at this time would be much good as Marvel illustrators but of them all, Kane stood the best chance of making a good fit. He'd return to do full pencils on the Hulk a few issues hence before vanishing again only to return in full force on the *Spider-Man* book some time after that. In the twilight years, he was destined to replace Kirby as Marvel's main cover artist and jack-of-all-trades penciling practically every kind of subject for the company.

Tales of Suspense #74

"If This Guilt Be Mine!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Gary Michaels (inks)
 "The Final Sleep!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); George Tuska (finishes/inks)

Gene Colan continued to amaze with the Iron Man feature in *Tales of Suspense* #74 (Feb.. 1966)! The opening four and half-pages are pure gold with the artist showing off his unique ability to create mood and atmosphere as our hero lies near helpless in the Black Knight's castle, having exhausted his power. And complementing Colan's pencils are the smooth inks of Jack Abel, here working under the pseudonym of Gary Michaels (Abel was yet another DC employee working for editor Stan Lee on the side). As with his concurrent Sub-Mariner work, Colan continues to use large sized



ALSO KEEPING HIS IDENTITY UNDER WRAPS WAS INKER JACK ABEL WHO MASQUERADED AS "GARY MICHAELS" WHEN HE PARTNERED WITH PENCILER GENE COLAN FOR THE ARTIST'S REVELATORY WORK ON THE IRON MAN FEATURE.

panels to tell Lee's story, throwing in a full pager here and there with the feature's knock out panel being the first on page 12 showing a shadowy, transformed Happy Hogan slinking around Boston's Faneuil Hall! The story itself, though well written by Lee, was somewhat less interesting than usual for IM in that Happy is changed into a colorless brute as a result of being placed under Tony Stark's experimental enervation intensifier (It says here). Over on Captain America's side of the book, finisher/inker George Tuska almost gets Jack Kirby's layouts enough to do a big Cap figure on the splash page so it kinda looks like the King's work. He manages to hold on to that for the first panel on page 2 (and briefly again on page 8, panel 4) before losing control for the rest of the Lee scripted tale, the second installment of the Sleeper saga in which the Red Skull's doomsday weapon is unleashed to destroy the world (If Hitler couldn't have it, then nobody would!). Well, at least fans had Kirby's full size symbolic cover to drool over!

Avengers #25

"Enter...Dr. Doom!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Taking somewhat of a breather between such continued stories as the Swordsman and Kang two-parters, scripter Stan Lee has our recuperating heroes enjoy a single issue story for a change. Consequently, *Avengers* #25 (Feb. 1966) opens with Cap's kooky quartet back to normal, that is, arguing amongst each other. More particularly, Hawkeye finds himself upset that the Scarlet Witch seems to have "the big eyes for wing head." Unable to stand it, he makes it as if to leave before being stopped by Captain America, who tells him he hasn't been dismissed yet. That sets off an argument with Cap giving in and letting Hawkeye go. Cap ends up brooding as usual until Wanda and Pietro receive a letter from an aunt in Latveria (uh oh!). The rest of the team decides to accompany the brother and sister to eastern Europe and wouldn't you know it? They fall into the clutches of Dr. Doom! Well, it was bound to happen. Every Marvel hero sooner or later met Dr. Doom and it was about time the Avengers did, too. So with the FF sidelined due to international ramifications if they interfered, the Avengers were on their own. Not to worry, though: they escape and fight Doom to a standstill. It was another fun story from Lee ably delineated by penciler Don Heck, inked this time by Dick Ayers. But the most exciting part of the whole issue came in the final panel of the story, wherein the next issue blurb announced the return of the Wasp! And with the Wasp around, could Giant-Man be far behind? Long suffering high-pockets fans, wondering what happened to their towering hero since the cancellation of his feature in *Tales to Astonish*, could only hope that his return would be of a permanent nature! **Fun Fact:** On this month's Bullpen Bulletins page, Lee explains the secret behind the "Marvel method" and the excitement it can generate vis a vis "brands X, Y, and Z." "...all Stan has to do with

JACK KIRBY'S STUNNING COVER FOR X-MEN #17 WAS MADE ALL THE MORE IMPRESSIVE BY THE MONOCHROMATIC RED COLORING GIVEN IT BY STAN GOLDBERG (WITH ART DIRECTOR STAN LEE'S BLESSING) UNFORTUNATELY, READERS OF THIS VOLUME WILL HAVE TO TAKE OUR WORD ABOUT IT'S VISUAL IMPACT!

pro's like Jack 'King' Kirby, dazzling Don Heck, and darlin' Dick Ayers is give them the germ of an idea, and they make up all the details as they go along, drawing and plotting out the story. Then, our leader simply takes the finished drawings and adds all the dialogue and captions!" It sounded simple, but it was the reason artist Wally Wood had earlier quit penciling for Marvel believing that he was required to do more work than what he was being paid for. Perhaps it felt that way coming to the new operation cold. But Kirby, Heck, and others didn't seem to mind. Perhaps they'd had time to get used to it or accepted it as just another way to produce comics. Different companies had different styles and "the Marvel method" was now Marvel's.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #27

"Fury Fights Alone!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Editor/scripter Stan Lee attempts some needed retconning in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #27 (Feb. 1966) when he addresses the issue of how Fury ended up with an eye patch in his present day adventures as an agent of SHIELD. In its small way, it was one of the reasons why Marvel could so excite readers as opposed to what was happening at other publishers. There, each title published, often each issue of each title published, existed in a universe of its own with little to give a sense that things that happened in each happened in the same time continuum. Though heroes appeared together in the Justice League for instance, there was little sense that after they finished their shared adventure and went their separate ways, that they did anything on their own until the release of the next issue of the *JLA*. But at Marvel, heroes would fight each others' villains and would cross over into each others' books. Events (such as the wedding of Reed Richards and Susan Storm) that occurred in one book had reference or ramifications in the others. Such was the case here where Fury sports an eye patch in his present day adventures, and because readers whose consciousness regarding continuity had been raised, "ordered" Lee and penciler Dick Ayers to tell the story of its origin. Turns out that Fury's eye was injured when he failed to throw a German grenade far enough to avoid the blast. It didn't seem to slow him down as he ends up going after "fatso Goering" himself, the commander of the Luftwaffe. Our tale ends back in England where readers are told that an operation has saved Fury's sight temporarily thus explaining why he had no eye patch



in his early appearances as a CIA agent in *FF* #21. Presumably, his sight gave out sometime between that issue and his appearance in *Tales to Astonish* #135.

X-Men #17

"...and None Shall Survive!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes); Dick Ayers (inks)

Wow! Jack Kirby really came through with a fantastic cover for *X-Men* #17 (Feb. 1966)! Aided and abetted no doubt by colorist Stan Goldberg who (with the approval of editor Stan Lee) heightened its dramatic potential by deciding to present it using the single color red. Red is the color of warning and/or danger and it certainly conveys that kind of immediacy here as the issue's unseen menace, having obviously defeated the team (in a symbolic group shot), prepares to make his identity known, but not to the casual viewer, however. The reader of this issue, unless they peeked at the last page, would have to read through the entire story before finding out the identity of whoever it was who could humble the entire X team, including Prof. X himself. And when the discovery was made, readers were asked by a blurb on the cover: "You must not reveal the incredible ending to any living soul!" Well, at this

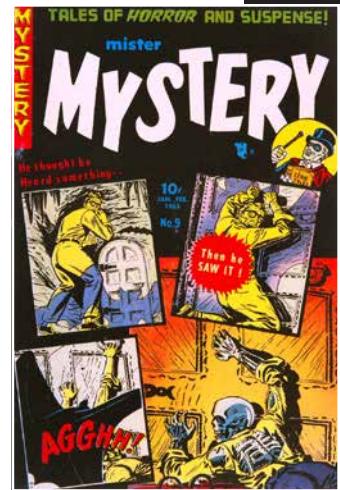
Werner Roth

Impressed with newcomer Werner Roth's ability to draw attractive females, editor Stan Lee coaxed publisher Martin Goodman into giving the artist a title all his own to be called Lorna of the Jungle.

Early success however, didn't save Roth from the ax when Goodman downsized his comics operation in the mid-1950s. But his facility at depicting pulchritudinous fems served him well yet again. Landing on his feet and in the offices of DC comics, his talent was recognized by the editors there who immediately assigned him to the company's popular line of romance books.

Which was where Lee found him in the mid-1960s after Atlas changed its name to Marvel and a new line of super-hero titles were not only taking off, but proliferating. One of those titles was *The X-Men*, somewhat the orphan of the lineup as both scripter Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby prepared to abandon the feature. Thus, the veteran Roth (moonlighting as Jay Gavin) found himself teamed up with newcomer Roy Thomas. Unfortunately, Roth struggled to meet Kirby's standard of action and managed to produce only a handful of good looking issues. Straight ahead action, it seemed, was not his forte.

Unlike peers such as John Romita and Gene Colan who'd been likewise plucked from DC's romance titles, Roth returned to the competition and found success with *Superman's Girl Friend Lois Lane* where, teamed with inker Vince Colletta, he managed to give new life to the moribund title by giving it a much needed face lift.



late date, it wouldn't be spilling many beans to say that the mystery villain turns out to be Magneto, back from being kidnapped by the Stranger in ish #11 and this time, he's bigger and badder than ever (as could be seen in the fantastic final page wherein layout artist Kirby uses a full size splash to increase the impact of the revelation) and not encumbered by any lesser "evil mutants" either. This time, Magneto flies solo! Adding to the delight of this landmark ish (besides the regular scripting by Stan Lee), is the fact that Kirby was still doing the layouts (as he was doing seemingly everywhere else in these months) with newcomer Jay Gavin doing the finishes and Dick Ayers on the inks. Gavin, by the way, was actually Werner Roth. Yet another DC artist plucked by Lee from that company's romance department to try his hand with Marvel. Although Ross would peak early, his initial efforts on *The X-Men* would show promise and in a few issues, he'd become downright good! For now though, like John Romita and others, he was being given beginner guidance on the Marvel style by Kirby, who managed to give readers some delicious panels where his own style emerged more obviously than elsewhere. In fact, his style hits the reader right off with this issue's opening splash page with its score of figures showing a

number of different things going on at the same time but in general depicting the aftermath of the X-Men's battle with the Sentinels. Again, on page 3, panel 1, Kirby's style comes out in his depiction of the Sentinels' shattered base. Kirby must've had a liking for the Angel because he gives him a starring role this ish, beginning with a full page actioner of the high flying hero making his way back to the group's school. Wow! There, Kirby creates an air of menace with a triptych of panels suggesting a villain is occupying the school building. Page 8 is an all-Angel sequence as Kirby draws him in a number of dramatic shots before he's taken down by the villain. Later, on page 12, Kirby falls back on a trick he liked to use: breaking the page down to nine equally sized panels in order to show a movement by movement sequence with Cyclops battling the unseen enemy. (More famously, Kirby would use this same technique in an issue of *Suspense* with Captain America vs. Batroc!) Throughout, Ross manages to keep up with Kirby's kinetic pace, and covers for him nicely in the quieter moments that Kirby was less interested in, making for a really satisfying issue and a great follow-up to the Sentinels saga. Yeah, it was still a mystery why *The X-Men* continued to lag behind Marvel's other books in popularity. It just didn't make any sense!

Daredevil #14

"If This Be Justice..!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

The training wheels were off for penciler John Romita in *Daredevil* #14 (March. 1966)! After two issues with layouts provided by Jack Kirby helping to give the newcomer a sense of how Marvel did things, Romita was judged ready to fly on his own (To mix a metaphor!). Not that it was ever in doubt, but after years of doing romance comics for DC, it might have been presumed that he'd grown rusty since the days in the 1950s when he drew the short-lived revival of Captain America. But Romita signalled his readiness to take over the art completely with an exciting cover design that had a dominating DD figure leaping through the air toward the Plunderer (now sporting one of the dullest costumes any villain ever wore) situated just where it would do the most good on comics spinner racks! Editor/ scripter Stan Lee could hardly contain his joy at Romita's successful transition, praising him in a blurb on this issue's letters' page claiming that Kirby was satisfied with the artist's progress and wanted him to take over on the Captain America feature in *Suspense*. "... it's like old times now... both Jack and Johnny are bullpenners from way back! Yes sir, there are some great days a-comin'...!" Inside, things were no less exciting as Lee has Daredevil battling Plunderer in parallel with courtroom action with Foggy and Karen called in by Matt to help defend Ka-Zar in the English courts. Add to that, some building tension as Foggy struggles with his conscience regarding loyalty to his friend and his own growing interest in Karen, and you've got some territory where Romita already was a past master. There was a lot of ground to cover this ish, what with the continuing story of Ka-Zar's origin and scheming by the Plunderer to seize his title and fortune (not to mention the vibranium) so the physical action could only be squeezed in a couple of places. With the interminable Ka-Zar story finally at an end, Lee was ready to really get the *DD* book in gear with a series of stories more in keeping with the big city superhero's M.O..

X-Men #18

"If Iceman Should Fail..!"; Stan Lee (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Although Jack Kirby drew the cover for *X-Men* #18 (March. 1966), he had no involvement with its interior pages. Like John Romita over on *Daredevil*, Werner Roth (or Jay Gavin as he was credited here) had been cut loose to fly on his own as penciler of the X feature. Perhaps as a safety measure, editor/ scripter Stan Lee retained the services of Dick Ayers as inker to provide a suggestion of Kirbyness to the proceedings. Like Romita, Roth had spent most of his immediate career on DC's romance comics and that experience proved a strength in this issue's quieter moments, such as scenes at the hospital where medicos try to work on an injured Iceman (who somehow retains his icy form even while unconscious!).

Roth quickly proves that he was more than up for the action oriented sequences as well, drawing a nice looking Magneto and using bigger, more expansive panels for battle scenes. Roth even shows some layout inventiveness by coming up with a succession of panels showing the passage of time, as the high altitude balloon in which the X-Men are held captive descends from the edge of the atmosphere. Not only that, but the artist

also showed some proclivity in his design of scientific machinery, a definite advantage for any artist seeking to succeed at Marvel! His only slip-up was how he drew the Stranger (page 19, panel 4), sort of like one of those cartoon depictions of the east wind or something. Oh, well. Nobody's perfect! Also, Lee's conclusion to a story that began the issue before is no less satisfying as Prof. X, captured along with the rest of the X-Men, uses his mental powers to compel Iceman out of his sick bed and come to their rescue. All ends well, of course, as Iceman manages to survive his one-on-one fight with Magneto, but it was Roth's performance here that boded well for the future, beyond Kirby's long association with the title.



EDITOR STAN LEE HAD GREAT SUCCESS PILFERING ARTISTS FROM RIVAL DC'S STABLE OF ROMANCE ARTISTS. LARGELY UNRECOGNIZED AND UNAPPRECIATED BY THE COMPANY'S COTERIE OF ENTRENCHED EDITORS, GENE COLAN (LEFT) AND WERNER ROTH (RIGHT) WOULD SHINE BRIGHTLY AFTER GRADUATING TO THE SUPER-HERO GENRE.

Tales to Astonish #77

"To Walk Amongst Men!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"Bruce Banner is the Hulk!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); John Romita (finishes/inks)

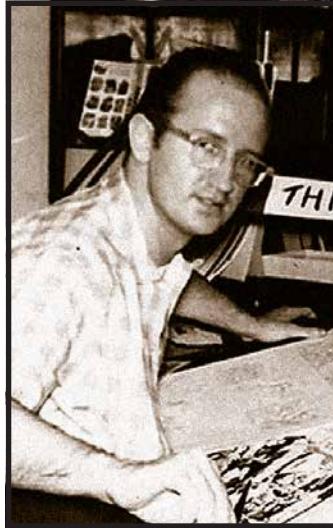
Gene Colan and Vince Colletta, penciler and inker respectively, continue to provide the immensely satisfying thrills in the Sub-Mariner half of *Tales to Astonish* #77 (Mar. 1966) with Colan this time providing three full page illos (which seemed to be his M.O. for the Subby strip...wonder if he'd been allowed such extravagances while doing romance comics at DC? Not!). Meanwhile, in a story provided by scripter Stan Lee, the latest serial in the Subby series proceeds on two tracks: in the foreground is Namor's confrontation with surface dwellers drilling the ocean floor and causing earthquakes that threaten Atlantis; in the background is the looming menace of the Behemoth, a creature created by Atlantean scientists ages before and buried beneath the city against an emergency. By the end of the chapter, the Behemoth is rising from his underground prison and Namor confronts drilling project head scientist, Henry Pym in a fitting return to the title he once headlined as Ant-Man/Giant-Man! (Yay!) Also, in a crossover with the next ish of *Avengers*, Janet van Dyne re-assumes her role as the Wasp to fly off to seek help against the Sub-Mariner...but that would be a tale for another time. There was a lot going on here; plenty for fans to sink their teeth into! Meanwhile, over on the Hulk back half, Lee was also scripting, this time continuing the Hulk's sojourn in the far future and his battle with Thor villain the Executioner! Fans lucked out again with Jack Kirby still doing the layouts and John Romita the finishes and inks preserving much of Kirby's verve while keeping the imagery pleasing to the discerning eye! But the action is just a sideline to the story's main drama which focused on Rick Jones, who believes Bruce Banner (aka the Hulk) died when he was struck by the T-ray that actually thrust him into the future. Accused of being a traitor to his country by General Ross, Jones suffers a crisis of conscience and thinking that revealing what he knows would exonerate Banner from suspicion of being a traitor as well, tells Major Talbot that Banner and the Hulk are the same. Just then, the Hulk is returned to the present. Surprise! He's not dead. Has Rick revealed his secret for nothing? Stay tuned for the next exciting chapter of the ongoing Hulk story! And how! All that and one of Kirby's most dramatic cover images illustrating the Hulk story. Man o man! Marvelites must have been living right at the start of 1966!

Amazing Spider-Man #34

"The Thrill of the Hunt!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

With the three-part Master Planner epic concluded, readers would be forgiven if they thought plotter/penciler Steve Ditko would give them a chance to catch their collective breaths. But they'd be wrong! A lot happens in *Amazing Spider-Man* #34 (March. 1966), not least including a turning point in the life of Peter Parker. But first, some loose ends: Betty Brant ignores her subconscious trying to tell her that Peter Parker and Spider-Man are one and the same and awakens from sleep relieved to discover that she was only dreaming. As for Peter, he discovers that Aunt May is on the mend thanks to the radioactive isotope he rescued from Dr. Octopus. Catching up on his studies, Peter returns to college only to discover that he's alienated everyone after ignoring them through the Master Planner adventure and concern for Aunt May's safety. In particular, Gwen Stacy can't see Peter for dust. (In a drawing that was out of date even in 1966, Ditko draws Gwen wearing bobby socks and saddle shoes! Oh, well, everyone knows that artistic geniuses have their idiosyncrasies!) Back on the streets, Kraven begins a campaign to blacken Spidey's reputation by harassing J. Jonah Jameson while dressed as our hero. Spidey goes after him and in a typical romp that Ditko has by now fully mastered, Spidey defeats Kraven while fending off a mob of baddies with the action taking place in an abandoned building. But though Spidey is victorious, his heart's not in it. Estranged from Betty Brant due to his refusal to come clean with her about his secret ID, Peter can't even muster the enthusiasm to sell pix of his victory to Jameson. Determined to split with Betty once and for all, for both their sakes, we leave Peter alone in his shadowed room wondering if he's a coward for

not telling her the truth. "I've got to learn to accept things as they are. I've got to stop thinking of Betty. To me, it must be as though she doesn't exist. It's the only way. Because she'd never accept me as Spider-Man...but Spider-Man I've been, and shall always be...for as long as I live!" Here, scripter Stan Lee really rose to the occasion, perfectly matching his prose with Ditko's final three panels of the story, a masterful depiction in visual terms of Peter's recognition of his fate and the awful realization of what it means to have super-powers and the sacrifices it demands. Ditko's skill in rendering facial emotion is brought



BY THE TIME OF
SPIDER-MAN #34,
ARTIST STEVE DITKO
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EDITOR STAN LEE HAD
BECOME STRAINED TO
THE POINT NEITHER
CREATOR WAS TALKING
TO EACH OTHER.

BY THE LATE SIXTIES, THE PRESENCE OF MARVEL COMICS IN THE POP CULTURE MAINSTREAM WAS GAINING MOMENTUM. IN FACT, 1966 PROVED TO BE A WATERSHED YEAR FOR THE FLOOD OF LICENSING AGREEMENTS THAT WOULD COME IN THE YEARS AHEAD. AMONG THE FIRST, WAS A DEAL STRUCK WITH AURORA PLASTICS CORPORATION THAT SAW THE INTRODUCTION OF MODEL RESIN KITS FEATURING SOME OF MARVEL'S TOP CHARACTERS INCLUDING, OF COURSE, SPIDER-MAN (WHICH THIS EAGER FAN SCOOPED AS SOON AS HE LAID EYES ON IT!)

home in the sad look on Peter's face as he stares out his window and then the last panel where the camera pulls back leaving the reader with only the silhouette of Peter on the other side of his bedroom window, all exemplifying the lonely burden he must carry. Beautiful! **Fun fact:** In 1966, Marvel had contracted with Aurora Plastics Corp to produce plastic model kits for a number of its heroes including Spider-Man. The question is: was the image in panel 4, on page 12 of this issue, showing Spidey standing on a bannister the inspiration for his pose used for the model kit? It may very well have been since this issue's villain, Kraven, also appears defeated on the base of the model kit!



Tales of Suspense #75

"The Fury of the Freak!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Jack Abel (inks)
"30 Minutes to Live!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Dick Ayers (finishes); John Tartaglione (inks)

Sure, it had a great script from Stan Lee and sure, Gene Colan did the pencils, and of course Jack Abel was still doing the inks, but even with *all* that, sometimes a story just misses the target. To wit: the old plot involving the hero being unable to go full tilt against the villain because the villain is a friend who, through no fault of his own, has been transformed into a monster with no memory of his real self. No colorful super-villain. Not even an alien invader or subterranean menace. In this variation, Happy Hogan is the monster, transformed due to a dose of Tony

Stark's experimental enervation intensifier. ho-hum. That said, if anyone could make such a cliched plot seem fresh and exciting, it was Colan! Falling back on his expert use of shadow and light, the artist provides page after page of dimly lit action as Iron Man tries to cope with the Freak, leading him on a chase through a sunset world of approaching darkness. Add to that, Colan's ability to sculpt realistic looking faces (Sen. Byrd, Pepper Potts) and you have some mighty nice visuals. Only Colan could've drawn a full-page illo as he does on page 8 where the only action is Pepper fainting at the approach of the Freak, and make it as exciting to look upon as any of the action scenes! The downside: this story continues into the next ish. Meanwhile, Jack Kirby's style comes through well even if he was only doing the finishes on the Captain America feature at the back of *Tales of Suspense* #75 (March. 1966). Maybe that was because his pencils were being finished by Dick Ayers who'd spent years inking the King long before Marvel returned to superheroes. In any case, the look was returned just in time for a Stan Lee scripted tale of espionage as Cap stumbles into a SHIELD operation involving a substance called Inferno 42 being transported by a female agent who'll end up becoming an important element in Steve Rogers' life. Another important element is the introduction of new Cap villain, Batroc the Leaper! Expert at the French fighting style of *la savatte*, the mercenary Batroc would prove to be a perfect foil for the acrobatic Cap (not to mention a perfect subject for Kirby's style of balletic action art!) And Kirby obviously has fun with the character putting more of himself into the art as Batroc and Cap tangle for the first time. The only problem with this story is that...you guessed it! It's also continued into the next issue! Argh!

Avengers #26

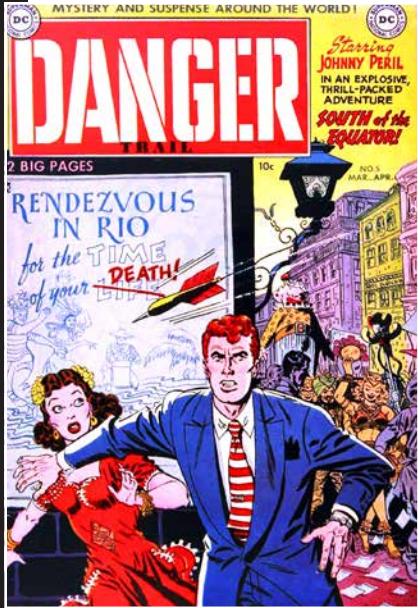
"The Voice of the Wasp!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Frank Giacoma (inks)

Editor/scripter Stan Lee takes a baby step in the right direction here in *Avengers* #26 (March. 1966), namely bringing back Giant-Man to the Avengers! Ever since being forced out of his regular gig in *Tales to Astonish*, fans had been asking what happened to Giant-Man. Sure, he'd quit the Avengers along with Thor and Iron Man so he could have more time for personal pursuits, but unlike his colleagues, he didn't continue to have superheroic adventures in his own feature. It was true that by the time his feature did peter out, Lee seemed to have run out of ideas on how to make a size changing hero interesting in his own right. Given that such a hero might present creative problems (the key word here is "might," since the Ant-Man/Giant-Man combo had many exciting and interesting adventures during his long tenure in *Astonish*), among a

Frank Giacoia



A mainstay in the comics industry since he dropped out of school in the 1940s to work full time in the offices of Atlas comics, Frank Giacoia started out as a penciler before finding his true calling as an inker for Marvel comics in the 1960s.



Starting out there under the pseudonym of Frankie Ray, Giacoia lent his bold ink line to all of Marvel's top artists of the mid to late 1960s including work over the pencils of Gene Colan, Jack Kirby, and Don Heck.

Working steadily through the years, he was still on board in the 1970s when he came to the rescue of many less stellar pencilers such as Ross Andru for whom he inked the first appearance of the Punisher in *Amazing Spider-Man* #129.

In fact, Giacoia made every penciler he worked over look even better. Kirby's art became more solid, more 3D in effect, Colan's art more fluid, shaded, and bold, and Heck's more down to earth and accessible to the average fan. The Marvel age of comics would have been a poorer place for the lack of him.

combination of weaker heroes such as an athlete, an archer, a speedster, and a probabilities alterress, someone with major strength (albeit not Thor-level strength) could shine. And shine he would in later issues, but for now, Giant-Man was still low profile appearing only in the form of scientist Henry Pym who, ironically, was currently guest starring in his old hang-out in *Astonish!* There, after surviving an attack by the Sub-Mariner at his oceanic drilling site, Hank sends the Wasp to the coast to enlist the Avengers in heading off the sea prince. On the way, she's captured by a roving Attuma, but she still manages to send a distress call to the Avengers. Meanwhile, Lee continues to develop relationships among the team members including this time, wherein Hawkeye rebels again and ends up missing the distress call. Visually, Don Heck's art continues to satisfy with Frank Giacoia's inking seeming to be some of the most sympathetic work over the artist's pencils yet (Soon, relieved of his *Iron Man* duties, Heck would begin to ink his own work). So, along with the possible reintroduction of Giant-Man (and a mystery villain that appears in the final panel of the story), this issue was another fun entry that lays the groundwork for all out action next time!

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #28

"Not a Man Shall Remain Alive!"; Stan Lee (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

It had to happen sooner or later. The writing was on the wall. Scripting Marvel's entire lineup of superhero offerings had become too much for one man. Add to that, editorial responsibilities, art directing, and an increasing presence away from his Madison Avenue offices, and it was obvious that it was too much for even a dynamo like Stan Lee to handle. He'd tried to ease the burden somewhat already with the abortive attempt to train up professional fan Larry Ivie as an assistant and hiring fill-in writers like Robert Bernstein and Steve Skeats, who didn't work out. Meanwhile, brother Larry Leiber was busy writing and penciling the company's remaining westerns. What to do? That question was answered one day when a youthful Missourian English teacher had written to him inviting him out for a drink! Roy Thomas had changed his intention about attending Georgetown University in New York City when he was offered a position as assistant to DC editor Mort Weisinger. But after experiencing Weisinger's tyrannical ways, he knew he had to get out. And so, taking a writer's test for

Lee (scripting four pages from *FF Annual #2*), he was quickly hired as editorial assistant, which meant doing anything that needed doing around the office, including scripting. Beginning at the bottom, Thomas was assigned to script some of Marvel's last remaining romance comics including a run on *Patsy and Hedy*. Doing well there, he moved up to the next rung in the ladder with *Sgt. Fury*, a title still somewhat removed from the more front-and-center superhero books. Although Thomas' debut on Fury would only come with the next issue, in scripting *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #28* (March 1966), Lee left Thomas with a cliffhanger that would end in #29 and mark something of a fitting close to the book's first era of greatness. Setting up the plot here, Lee has Hitler ordering Baron Strucker to seize a town and hold everyone in it hostage against the surrender of partisans fighting in the area. Of course, the Howlers become involved, setting up a climactic confrontation between Fury and Strucker amid the apocalyptic surroundings of a town in flames. The only thing holding back the story from total greatness was, again, the overall lackluster art of Dick Ayers helped slightly by the inks of John Targlione (One can only imagine what Jack Kirby would have done with it! That said, Ayers did provide yet another nice cover image to this ish.) But despite the artistic drawback, Lee manages to include

some surprising flourishes including the first shadings of grey in a Nazi personality as Strucker himself expresses pangs of conscience about destroying a whole town and acknowledging (if only to himself), Hitler's madness. It would've been nice if this kind of nuance could have been maintained as the stories moved forward, but it was largely overlooked as the Howlers continued their war against the Third Reich. **Inside joke dept:** At one point during this issue's mission, Fury says "All we gotta do now is find the rest o' the squad, break the back of the Kraut occupation here, and make it back ta base in one piece! Nuts! Some day I'd like ta meet the creep who dreams up these missions!" Was Lee poking a bit of fun at himself? Likely!



AFTER A COUPLE OF FALSE STARTS, EDITOR STAN LEE STRUCK GOLD WHEN HE HIRED ROY THOMAS AS HIS EDITORIAL ASSISTANT IN 1966. PART OF THOMAS' DUTIES WAS SCRIPTING AND AFTER GETTING HIS FEET WET ON PATSY AND HEDY, MOVED UP QUICKLY TO SGT. FURY AND THEN X-MEN. HE NEVER LOOKED BACK.

Tales to Astonish #78

"The Prince and the Puppet!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

"The Hulk Must Die!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Bill Everett (finishes/inks)

It was another power-packed issue of *Astonish* with both its features providing thrills in story and art. First up, as usual, was the Sub-Mariner. There, Gene Colan and Vince Colletta were both still on pencils and inks respectively with a Lee scripted chapter that picks up where it left off the issue before, namely, with the re-introduction of Giant-Man to his old bailiwick. (Or his alter ego Henry Pym, anyway; but with Pym present, could his heroic persona be far behind? Giant-Man fans everywhere hoped that was to be the case!) Anyway, Namor has dropped into Pym's ocean drilling project to put an end to it, but just as things look dire, the sea prince stops and walks away headed to New York. The Wasp volunteers to fly ahead of him and warn the Avengers (continued in this month's *Avengers #26*, natch!). The only drawback is that Namor is under the control of a newly costumed Puppet Master (boring!) but how else to get him to fight any good guys that might be around? Needless to say by this time, the Colan/Colletta art team is top-notch and more than holds its own with the Jack Kirby layout job that follows in the Hulk backup for *Tales to Astonish #78* (April. 1966). But there was yet another change with the art team there as Bill Everett returned to the fold to take over the finishes and the inks over Kirby's layouts. As fans recalled, Everett was last seen after struggling to finish the first issue of *Daredevil* and was enthusiastically welcomed back by Lee in this month's Bullpen Bulletins: "Bill is hankering to rejoin the bullpen again on a permanent basis and we're all hoping he will. His style is as exciting as Kirby's (going some!), as different as Ditko's (true), and as unforgettable as (Colan's)!" Be that as it may, Everett here proves that while not as good as Kane had been in preserving Kirby's style, his own layered atop the King's layouts, was quite exciting enough! Possibly a better inker than he was a penciler, Everett's finishes added a ton of detail as well as a certain kind of lushness to Kirby's layouts, producing a whole new kind of look for the Hulk. Suddenly, the jade giant was as ugly as Lee's prose always assured us he was (check out the triptych of panels on page 8) and characters like Rick Jones and others all wore distinctive facial features that not only set them apart but made them look like no one else in Marvel's burgeoning universe. Lee's story is no less interesting as the military succeeds in capturing the Hulk, government employed mad scientist Konrad Zaxon suits up in armor the better to siphon off the Hulk's bio-energy preparatory to conquering the world (you guessed it, Zaxon is a full time nut!), and Rick tells Betty Ross Banner's secret. Along with the Sub-Mariner feature, *Astonish* continued to add up to a real buy for Marvelites everywhere!

THE INCREDIBLE HULK!

"THE HULK MUST DIE!"



LAST ISH, THINKING THE HULK IS DEAD, RICK JONES FINALLY REVEALED HIS GREATEST SECRET... THE FACT THAT DR. BRUCE BANNER AND THE INCREDIBLE HULK ARE ACTUALLY ONE AND THE SAME! BUT, AS THE LONELY CAVE WITH A SHOCKED MAJOR GLEN TALBOT, NEITHER OF THEM REALIZES THAT THE GREEN TITAN IS SLOWLY RETURNING FROM THE FAR-DISTANT FUTURE, IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN TRAPPED...

ANOTHER TRULY INSPIRED
TALENT LINEUP BY MIGHTY
MARVEL'S MASTERFUL
CASTING DIRECTOR...

STORY BY:
STAN
LEE
(CERTAINLY!)

LAYOUTS BY:
JACK
KIRBY
(NATURALLY!)

ARTWORK BY:
BILL
EVERETT
(SURPRISINGLY!)

LETTERING BY:
SAM
ROSEN
(INEVITABLY!)

Amazing Spider-Man #35

"The Molten Man Regrets!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

The writing may have been on the wall by the time of *Amazing Spider-Man* #35 (April, 1966) but it was likely most readers didn't notice. That was because Steve Ditko, who by this time had long become established as not only penciler and inker, but plotter as well, showed no let-up in the verve by which he choreographed Spidey's various battles. That was the case this issue as the wall crawler conducted a rematch with the Molten Man. On the other hand, Ditko's focus on straight out action here with little given over to the soap opera of Peter Parker's personal life suggested the artist was simply marking time to a planned withdrawal from the title in particular, and Marvel in general, in a few months' time. That said, he does concede one non-action scene to fans waiting with bated breath to find out what happened next on the domestic scene; that is, the ongoing and recently deteriorating relationship between Peter Parker and Betty Brant. As if preparing to wind up his historic run on the title, Ditko seemed to be tying up loose ends by ending the Peter/Betty relationship in the only way it could: with a breakup. That happened more or less over previous issues or, at least, was loudly broadcast. But if some readers were still not getting the message, it was hammered home this time with a final scene wherein a still hopeful Peter discovers that Betty quit her job at the Daily Bugle and was replaced by someone else. The only word Peter gets of Betty's departure is the return of a framed picture of himself given to Betty from happier times. Given word that Ned Leeds has left for the west coast, Peter puts two and two together and deduces that the pair have eloped. "To Betty, forever. Peter," Peter reads from the photograph. "Forever! I wonder when I wrote that? Must have been a lifetime ago!" The picture is tossed in the trash, the glass shattering over a smiling photo of Peter in more innocent times. The final panel of the story has a lonely figure of Peter walking away, haunted by ghostly images of the past. In a way, the scene, despite being deftly scripted by Stan Lee, had an air of finality about it; the finality of Ditko's pending exit from the book and Marvel comics. **Fun Fact:** Did you know that panel 5, page 8 was taken to illustrate one of a line of plastic pillows that were sold circa 1968 by the Massachusetts Arts Co? They were part of a wider merchandising push by Marvel capitalizing on the company's growing popularity!

(OPPOSITE PAGE) TALES TO ASTONISH #28, PAGE 1: WITH JACK KIRBY RESTRICTED TO LAYOUTS ON THE HULK FEATURE, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FIND AN ARTIST WHO WAS BOTH STRONG ENOUGH TO TIGHTEN HIS PENCILS WHILE PRESERVING THEIR INHERENT VERVE. FOR A NUMBER OF ISSUES, EDITOR STAN LEE FOUND THAT MAN IN VETERAN ARTIST BILL EVERETT.

Tales of Suspense #76

"Here Lies Hidden...the Unspeakable Ultimo!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Jack Abel (inks)

"The Gladiator, the Girl, and the Glory!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)

The award-winning creative team of Stan Lee on script, Gene Colan on pencils, and Jack Abel on inks continue their magic on the Iron Man lead feature in *Tales of Suspense* #76 (April, 1966), this time using a technique that would become increasingly common at Marvel, albeit mostly those books where Jack Kirby had a hand in the plotting: having one story-line end and a new one begin within the same story or issue. To wit: Iron Man manages to end the threat of the Freak as this latest installment begins with Tony Stark's enervation intensifier doing its job and changing the Freak back to Happy Hogan, now conveniently saddled with amnesia (so that he doesn't remember that IM is really his boss

Tony Stark) But even as Happy reclines in the arms of fiance Pepper Potts (the enervation intensifier not only turned Happy back to normal, it also improved his looks. Thanks, Gene!), there's no rest for Stark as he's arrested by Sen. Byrd then kidnapped by the Mandarin's "multi-dimensional trans-scanner" (!) and transported instantly to China (Well, actually, it took three big, diagonal panels for Colan to do it on page 8!). There, even as the Mandarin separates Stark from the attache case containing his IM armor, the villain gloats over his latest scheme to conquer the world, namely unleashing upon it a giant robot called Ultimo! Readers hardly had a chance to catch their collective breaths before turning the page and dropping into the middle of Captain America's own ongoing adventure, namely dealing with Batroc the Leaper while trying to



JOHN ROMITA, WHO'D BEEN A MAINSTAY AT MARVEL BACK IN ITS ATLAS DAYS, HAD SINCE FOUND HIMSELF EXILED TO DC'S ROMANCE LINE. HE WAS THE FIRST ARTIST THAT EDITOR STAN LEE RESCUED FROM THAT PARTICULAR FATE BUT HE WOULDN'T BE THE LAST.

catch up with a female SHIELD agent before the Inferno 42 she's carrying explodes! For the first time since the inception of the Cap feature in *Suspense*, artist Jack Kirby was nowhere in sight, having finally given up doing the layouts upon the arrival of John Romita. Doing

full pencils as well as inking here, Romita turns in an okay job (after all, he'd done it before back in the 1950s when Cap was briefly revived). Nevertheless, still being a newcomer to Marvel's action style, his work here, at least in comparison to Kirby (not to mention Colan), is still somewhat laid back. It'd still be some months before Romita really got the hang of what was needed. Or maybe it was just that he found it difficult to warm up to the kind of action needed to make the Cap stories work. After the star-spangled Avenger was finally awarded his own book a couple years hence, Romita again took over from Kirby with similar underwhelming results. It wasn't until his own personal style had evolved farther that a third stint on the character finally gelled helping Romita to produce some of the best-looking Cap comics ever. For now though, his style fell short of being completely satisfying despite a good script from Lee which for the first time (and was it coincidental that Kirby was absent?) attempted some characterization for the hero in the shape of the female SHIELD agent reminding him of a girl he'd loved back during WWII, and whom he loses again at the end of this story when the unnamed agent apparently dies of radiation poisoning.

Daredevil #15

"And Men Shall Call Him...Ox!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Now this was more like it! Well, almost. Finally free of the ill-fitting Ka-Zar plot, scripter Stan Lee brings Daredevil home to New York City just in time to face off with one of his old time foes. Or is it really the Ox he knew from his days with the Fellowship of Fear? That's the question as penciler John Romita also returns to more familiar territory with plenty of everyday scenes among Matt Murdock, Foggy Nelson, and Karen Page (including a ratcheting up of the tension between Matt and Foggy for Karen's affections) as well as more ground level action that begins in state prison. There, the Ox has fallen under the sway of cell mate Karl Skragg, a mad scientist type who promises to raise his intelligence level in return for helping him to break out of prison. The Ox complies, but Skragg betrays him by switching their minds instead. Now Skragg's more intelligent persona occupies the Ox's powerful body while the Ox's mind resides in Skragg's more frail frame. But somehow, being in a strong body seems to reduce Skragg's intelligence as he goes on a rampage, luxuriating in his new found strength. That's when DD gets into the act. Throughout, Romita shows his increasing skill at handling action Marvel style, easing into the use of big bold panel layouts. He might have even gone too far in lessons learned from Jack Kirby in that he portrays the Ox as being too powerful. He doesn't possess super strength after all and yet there he is snapping streetlight poles in two and crushing cars etc. For his part, Lee slips in a plot development wherein Skragg as the Ox, dresses up DD in the Ox's clothes in order to frame him



MIND SWAPS WERE CERTAINLY NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN, BUT LIKE THE CONTEMPORANEOUS HAMMER FILMS' *EVIL OF FRANKENSTEIN* (1964), SCRIPTER STAN LEE AND PENCILER JOHN ROMITA FOUND A WAY TO AT LEAST MAKE THE CONCEPT FEEL LIKE NEW WITH SUCH STORIES AS THAT FOUND IN DAREDEVIL #15.

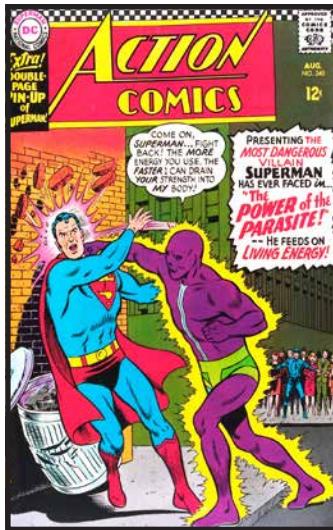
for his rampage. And the cops take the bait?! Add to the unlikelihood of that the fact that the Ox just happens to have two sets of exactly identical clothes for himself and DD? Not! Still, even with these lapses, *Daredevil* #15 (April. 1966) was a giant step back in the right direction, following the departure of artist Wally Wood back in issue #11 and the subsequent three part Ka-Zar detour. And things would only get better from here!

X-Men #19

"Lo! Now Shall Appear...the Mimic!"; Stan Lee (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

It was bound to happen sooner or later. Every superhero team eventually faced off against a foe who combined all of their powers. The Fantastic Four had the Super-Skrull; The Avengers had (or would have at this point) the Super-Adaptoid; and in *X-Men* #19 (April. 1966), Marvel's merry mutants had the Mimic! Dreamed up by scripter Stan Lee (for his final direct contribution to the book, as next issue would see the arrival of Roy Thomas on the scripting chores) the Mimic would prove to be one of the most interesting additions to the book's lore. However, though Lee seems to end the Mimic's career at the end of this issue, Thomas would return to the difficult to like character in later issues, build on him, and turn him into a potentially exciting addition to the X-team mix. Here, though, Lee tells a more or less cut and dried tale of Calvin Rankin who gained his powers to copy the abilities of others in a lab accident. As readers would learn later in the story, upon discovering his abilities, local residents attacked his father's hidden lab

and ended up killing the senior Rankin and burying the lab in rubble. Vowing vengeance on the human race, Cal schemes to access the buried lab and use a machine his father had been working on to make his powers permanent (at the moment, his power to mimic those of others lasted only while he was in their presence). Anyway, through happenstance, Cal discovers the identities of the X-Men and, following them to their school, he dons his own colorful costume and announces his intentions to defeat the team. His real plan, though, is to lure them to the buried lab and get them to uncover the machine that will make his powers permanent., but the opposite happens: Seems Rankin Senior wanted to depower his son allowing him to lead a normal life. To help that intention along, Prof X erases Cal's memories of everything that happened, including his knowledge of the X-Men's identities. There was a lot of story to cover here and penciler Werner Roth does a manful job doing it all. To succeed though, he had to jam all of the action into mostly smaller panels that were in turn, crowded with the story's extensive cast. Besides that, he also had to make sure all of Lee's character bits were presented including allowance for Cal's abrasive personality ("I've never seen such a nasty-tempered specimen," thinks Marvel Girl upon meeting Cal). Yet, at the same time, there was something beneath Cal's rough edges that grabbed readers, something that Thomas would latch onto and explore to good effect in later issues. All in all, this was another solid entry in the post-Jack Kirby era and another piece to the puzzle of why the X-book never totally caught on with Marvelites.



ALSO NOT NEW WAS THE CONCEPT OF THE VILLAIN THAT POSSESSED ALL THE POWERS OF MEMBERS OF A SUPER-HERO TEAM. ALTHOUGH DC'S VERSION WAS AMAZO (WHO HAD POWERS OF ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA), HE WAS HOBBLED BY A SILLY SOUNDING NAME, UNLIKE THOSE OF MARVEL'S COPYCATS: SUPER-SKRULL, SUPER-ADAPTOID, AND THE MIMIC!

Avengers #27

"Four Against the Floodtide!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Behind its action-packed Jack Kirby cover, the insides of *Avengers* #27 (April. 1966) featured a Don Heck illustrated story scripted by our Leader, Stan Lee! In it, Attuma has captured three of the Avengers and plans to turn a wave making machine onto the surface world, but Hawkeye arrives in the nick of time and helps to turn the tables. Penciler Don Heck really comes through this time with a great art job using plenty of big, open panels including a half-pager on page 11 depicting Hawkeye and Quicksilver's one man sub heading directly into the multiple arms of a giant octopus! Meanwhile, Frank Giacoia does Heck proud on the inks. Strangely, however, the issue begins with the mysterious appearance of Human Torch villain the Beetle at Avengers HQ. He's defeated by Hawkeye but by the end of the issue, he's disappeared again along with the Wasp who just managed to leave a message for our heroes upon her arrival from the pages of *Tales to Astonish*. What was in the message? That would be telling but whatever it was, it'd likely have a direct bearing on the biggest news in Marveldom (for April. 1966 anyway!) namely "the return of Giant-Man" as the next issue blurb announced at the bottom of this issue's concluding panel! Knowing what the news of high pockets' return would mean to old time fans, Lee really trumpets the news on the letters' page as well. He knew how eagerly anticipated the return of Hank Pym was among fandom and Giant-Man's re-emergence into the Marvel mainstream would totally energize an Avengers book that had slowed down a bit in the months since the original team members quit. Giant-Man's return would mark another turning point in the series. From there, things would really take off; first under the pen of Lee and then the typewriter of Roy Thomas. After that, there'd be no looking back!

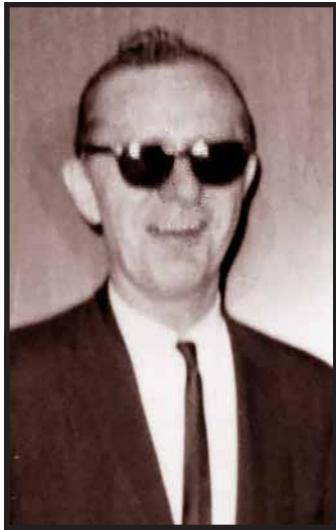
Tales to Astonish #79

"When Rises the Behemoth!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Bill Everett (inks)
"The Titan and the Torment!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Bill Everett (finishes/inks)

In a major shift, Marvel's number one "double feature value" for 12 cents had switched from *Tales of Suspense* (where Jack Kirby had temporarily left the Captain America stories [as he had the SHIELD feature over in *Strange Tales*]) to *Tales to Astonish* with its Gene Colan drawn Sub-Mariner lead feature and the Kirby/Everett team on the Hulk! In fact, the latter art team was heralded in no small way with the power packed cover to *Tales to Astonish* #79 (May. 1966)! This was the grandiose years writ large as the cover shot concentrates on the gigantic forms of Hulk

and Hercules in hand-to-hand combat that does what Kirby did best, namely seem as though the two would fall right off the page! And the insides were hardly less impactful as the story begun in the last chapter of the Hulk serial ends with Konrad Zaxon becoming the victim of the weapon that he'd intended to use on ole greenskin. Escaping his military captors, the Hulk goes on a mini-rampage, this time ripping up some railroad tracks, but these tracks happen to hold the train upon which Hercules is riding to a destiny in Hollywood! And as any Marvelite knew by now, that was a recipe for action! More than any previous finisher over Kirby's layouts, Everett not only preserved the King's verve, but added a ton of himself to the proceedings, giving characters a three-dimensional feel while throwing in tons of detail making the Hulk strip visually, one of the most distinctive in the company's lineup. Meanwhile, scripter Stan Lee was not sitting on his hands, capturing the pathos of the Hulk as the story ends with Hercules none the worse for wear heading for fame and fortune in Hollywood while our hero sulks alone in a dank cave: "as the slowly mounting ever-simmering fury rages within him, he thinks his dark and lonely thoughts, one human being, hunted, hounded, with all mankind against him!" Lee was also on hand as usual for the issue's lead Sub-Mariner feature where Gene Colan continued to hold sway over the penciling. Surprisingly, though, Vince Colletta (who'd been with it since the outset in #70) was gone and replaced by Everett.

Here, again, Everett proves to be a good match with yet a different penciler; his bold inks matching nicely with Colan's shadowy style. Lee's story calls for Namor vs. the US Army in New York City and Colan and Everett deliver, especially with an in-your-face splash on page 4. It didn't hurt either that Everett was the creator of Sub-Mariner and that this marked his return to the character after too long an absence! Stay tuned!



ALTHOUGH PENCILER BILL EVERETT HAD A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO JOIN THE MARVEL BULLPEN IN A BIG WAY WITH HIS WORK ON DAREDEVIL #1, HE FAILED TO FOLLOW UP ON IT. LATER, HE STARTED OVER AGAIN AS AN INKER FOR JACK KIRBY'S HULK FEATURE BEFORE GRADUATING TO PENCILS ON THE SUB-MARINER, A CHARACTER HE CREATED BACK IN THE 1940S.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos Special #2

"A Day of Thunder!"; Roy Thomas (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Actually, *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos Special #2* (1966) was really *Sgt. Fury Annual #2*, but for some reason, a decision was made to change Marvel's Annuals to Specials. Perhaps, as Roy Thomas has suggested, representing an intention by publisher Martin Goodman to do more than one a year if sales warranted. Whatever the case may be, this issue still had all the hallmarks of an old time Marvel annual, namely a story that contained a noteworthy element outside the run of the regular monthly title. In the previous *Annual #1*, Fury and his fightin' fanatics made it through to the Korean War (thus obviating any suspense in the regular title over who among the Howlers might not make it through the Big One). In #3, they'd show up in Vietnam. But for this issue, the star attraction are the beaches of Normandy where the Howlers come ashore ahead of the D-Day invasion force to soften up the enemy defenses. Along the way, of course, they tear through enemy formations, blow up ammo dumps and gun emplacements, and rile up Hitler himself (who makes a cameo appearance along with General Eisenhower). Meanwhile, jamming all the action in the *Special* into a mere 24 pages, Thomas (who took over the scripting of *Sgt. Fury* only a few months before) here, makes sure readers get their money's worth, filling each panel with a cascade of wordage, the trademark of his early scripts. But the big question was: did the story alter the status quo of the regular series with future Howler missions to take place post-invasion? According to Thomas, his intention was to keep the stories in the regular book in a pre-invasion mode...at least while he remained the writer. Be that as it may, regular *Sgt. Fury* artist Dick Ayers also does the pencils here in the *Special*, filling the story mostly with talking heads punctuated here and there by an exploding ammo dump. The combination of art and word heavy scripting made for a ponderous pace for what was expected to be a fast-moving Howler adventure. Unlike earlier annuals however, the lead story is the only piece of original content in the issue. The rest is filled out with reprints including a regular past issue of *Sgt. Fury* along with the initial installment of his present day identity as an Agent of SHIELD from *Tales to Astonish* #135. No pin ups, no diagrams, no secrets of the Howlers. It was a portent of what future "Specials" would become: all reprint vehicles with no original content at all. Bummer.

Amazing Spider-Man #36

"When Falls the Meteor!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Plotter/penciler/inker Steve Ditko continued to wind down his stay at the House of Ideas with this third-to-last installment in his groundbreaking run on *Spider-Man*. And though his leavetaking must have been on his mind by the time he produced *Amazing Spider-Man* #36 (May, 1966), it hardly shows as he once again comes up with a neat little stand-alone tale with a new type villain worthy to stand beside all the others the artist had created over the years. Sure, Lee has some fun at the Looter's expense (or was it the Meteor Man?)

The question would bother fans for years), first by giving him the goofy sounding sobriquet of Norton Fester, then by giving him dialogue like this: "Just because I flunked science in school doesn't mean I can't discover the secret of the universe," muses Fester, tapping at a meteor fragment with a hammer and chisel. "I've as much chance as anyone else. I'll just chip away on my own. Maybe I'll accidentally stumble over something...like Isaac Newton!"

And to make the point in case any readers couldn't figure it out from the preceding lines, Lee adds a footnote: "You guessed it, friend! N.G. F. is a part-time nut!" But nut or not, Fester does make an accidental discovery, releasing a mysterious gas from the meteor that grants him super-powers! Dressing himself up in a colorful costume, he goes to work robbing banks and jewelry stores to finance his experiments before deciding that he needs other meteors to tap in case the effects of the gas that gave him his powers wear off. That's when he runs into our friendly neighborhood Spider-Man (as Peter Parker continues to have problems getting in good with his fellow college students, and looking like a coward in the eyes

of Gwen Stacy when he races off to get into costume so he can tackle the Looter) In the meantime, Ditko, as usual, paces the story excellently displaying his established mastery of panel-to-panel action and smoothly moving events from scene to scene. Lee's scripting, as previously noted, is also flawless. For a creative team that had ceased even talking to each other, he and Ditko were still operating as a well-oiled machine churning out classics till the very end!



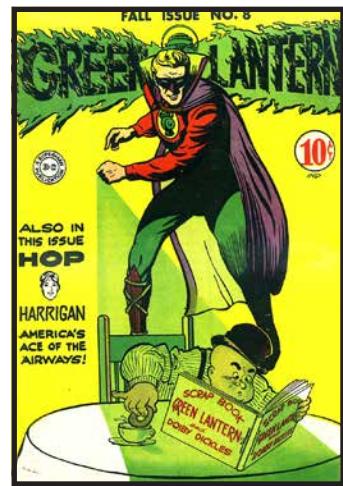
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AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #36, PAGE 2: IN THE CLOSING DAYS OF HIS MARVEL TENURE, PENCILER STEVE DITKO PROVED HE STILL HAD WHATEVER MAGIC IT WAS THAT HAD ENABLED HIM TO CREATE POSSIBLY THE MOST IMPORTANT SUPER-HERO CHARACTER SINCE SUPERMAN. HERE, WITH THE SCRIPTING OF CO-CREATOR STAN LEE, THE TWO MEN CAPTURE THE ESSENCE OF THE STRIP: CHARACTERIZATION, WONDER, AND HUMOR.

Strange Tales #144

"The Day of the Druid!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (layouts); Howard Purcell (finisher);
Mike Esposito (inks)
"Where Man Hath Never Trod!"; Roy Thomas (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Now that his new editorial assistant was firmly on board, editor Stan Lee wasted no time bringing Roy Thomas' scripting skills up to his standard. First assigning him to Marvel's remaining romance comics where a neophyte, presumably, could do little harm if he slipped up, Lee quickly next assigned Thomas to *Sgt. Fury* and last month to the Dr. Strange feature (Next month, Thomas would take over *The X-Men* from Lee). To be handed over so quickly to a newcomer who'd yet to barely prove his *bona fides*, all three venues must clearly have been considered by Lee as Marvel's low-hanging fruit. Although solid, both *Sgt. Fury* and *X-Men* were the slower sellers in the company's lineup while Dr. Strange had never been a big draw for *Strange Tales*. That, and the fact that Lee had never been that enamored of the latter strip: a creation of Steve Ditko, who also plotted the series, Lee had little of himself invested in it and by that point in his relationship with the artist, and was no longer even in direct communication with him. By assigning Thomas as scripter, Lee could have been thinking that maybe Ditko might talk to the younger man instead. It didn't happen, with the artist remaining as uncommunicative as ever. In fact, the irony was, Thomas wasn't that interested in Dr. Strange, either! However, his scripting on the feature never skipped a beat with hardly any difference between his own style and Lee's to be noticed. (Unless that only proved that Lee was guiding Thomas with a heavy editorial hand). Be that as it may, Ditko was still plotting and, in *Strange Tales* #144 (May, 1966), had Strange decoyed by Dormammu into the dimension of the tyrannical Tazza. Strange went there in search of Clea, the other dimensional girl who'd helped him in his recent battle with Dormammu. But of course, she wasn't with Tazza and so it was another dead end for the mystic mage. Of course, Ditko himself, despite plans to leave Marvel, was still having fun, coming up with any number of cool images for Strange's struggle with Tazza. Meanwhile, Lee was still on hand to script the SHIELD feature that headed up the issue with Jack Kirby still doing the layouts. This time Nick Fury is up against a joker calling himself the Druid who, behind a screen of mystic fakery, is actually a high tech bad guy out to confound SHIELD. This time, it's Howard Purcell on the finishes, managing a so-so job not helped by inker Mike Esposito. The otherwise ho-hum nature of the story is enlightened considerably with the introduction of new SHIELD recruit Jasper Sitwell. The straight arrow Sitwell would soon prove to be a perfect vehicle for Lee's tongue-in-cheek approach to comics when things seemed to get too serious.



EDITOR STAN LEE REACHED WAY BACK TO RECRUIT GOLDEN AGE ARTIST HOWARD PURCELL TO HELP FINISH JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS ON THE NICK FURY STRIP IN STRANGE #144. PURCELL WOULD CONFIRM LEE'S INSTINCTS AFTER COMPLETING A BLACK KNIGHT SOLO TALE IN MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #17.

Tales of Suspense #77

"Ultimo Lives!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Jack Abel (inks)
"If a Hostage Should Die!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); John Romita (finishes); Frank Giacoia (inks)

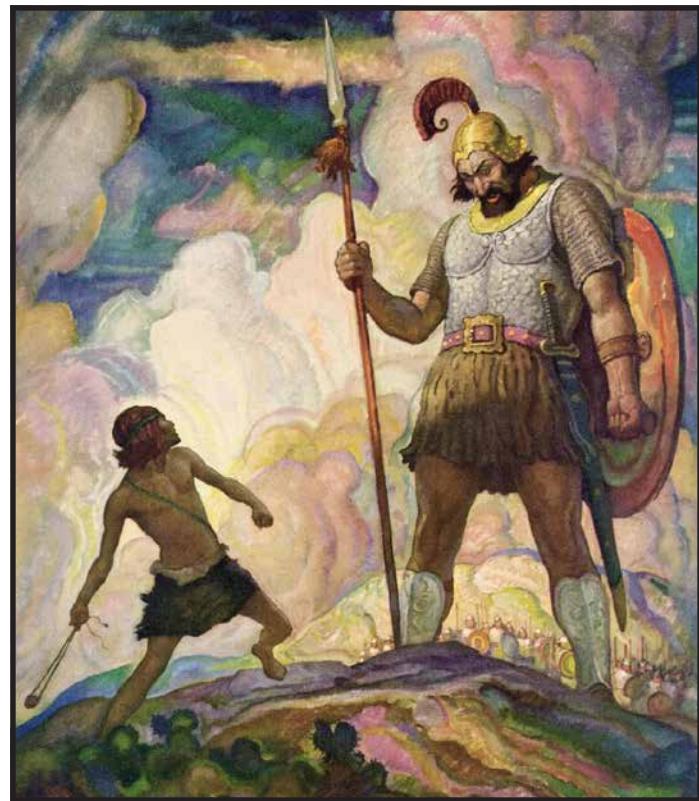
Yeah, superhero vs.. robot = boring. superhero vs. giant robot = even more boring, and only a step below superheroes vs.. aliens or subterranean mole people. But Ultimo was on a whole different scale! It's true that probably under anyone else's pencil (except maybe Jack Kirby's), he still would've been boring (after all, even Kirby had his off days, as witness his design for the robotic member of the three sleepers in previous issues), but Gene Colan transforms something that should have been dullsville, into something awesome! Still enhanced by the inks of Jack Abel, Colan lets out all the stops in *Tales of Suspense* #77 (May, 1966), beginning with the shot on page 4 of Ultimo being birthed and then never letting go in succeeding pages, giving some of the earliest examples of the type of wild panel layouts that the artist would become famous for in coming years. Using his layouts to create big, wide angle panels, Colan keeps the action moving commensurate with a towering blue robot that can shoot death rays from its eyes! And throughout, Abel's inks underscore Colan's liberal use of blacks giving the whole Stan Lee scripted story a sombre feeling cut off from the workaday world of Washington D.C., where Sen. Byrd is busy closing down Tony's manufacturing plants! It was going to be really tough to follow up this act in the Captain America backup feature and, for once, that failed to measure up. Sure, Kirby was still doing the layouts, but John Romita's work with the finishes was just not capturing the in-your-face action it demanded. Conversely, he did all right in the character development

scenes as Cap reminisces about the girl he loved and lost during World War II, recollections that leave him saddened and lonely in the final panels. Will he ever find happiness and fulfillment in a present he still finds alien to his own 1940s? Time would tell as things were due to pick up in the next issue as Kirby returned to full pencils helping *Suspense* to regain its place as Marvel's best double feature value for 12 cents!

Avengers #28

"Among Us Walks...a Goliath!"; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Giant-Man was back in a big way in *Avengers* #28 (May. 1966). And how! Readers didn't have to look any farther than its spectacular Jack Kirby cover image with Captain America and the three other regular Avengers in the foreground, dwarfed by an imposing, forced perspective up shot of Giant-Man (helped immensely by the graded colors of Stan Goldberg). But it was a Giant-Man not immediately recognizable by fans who'd been waiting patiently for his re-introduction to Marveldom Assembled. Sure, editor/scripter Stan Lee's blurb on the cover announced "Back at last! Giant-Man!" But what was the title scrawled across a banner at the bottom? "Among Us Walks...a Goliath!" Was it just hyperbole, or did it auger a change in our favorite size-changing hero, as did the unfamiliar new costume he wore? It turned out that both were right. It wasn't just hyperbole and there were changes afoot for Hank Pym. Gone were his old red and purple threads with the inexplicable suspenders design and in was an impressive new blue and yellow look that emphasized his size. Also gone was the Giant-Man code name. From now on, Giant-Man was to be known as Goliath, a less literal but more evocative name to be sure. The new costume was provided by the Scarlet Witch who'd decided to use her sewing skills to prepare it against the day when Giant-Man would return to the fold. Maybe she didn't like that suspenders look either! With Stan Lee still at the writing helm, this issue's story picks up on the twin mysteries of the missing Wasp and Beetle. Following in the Wasp's footsteps, Hank Pym appears at Avengers HQ and after proving his *bona fides*, joins the others as they make their way to the lair of new bad guy, the Collector who's decided to add superheroes to his collection of artifacts (to go with his collection of super-villains such as the Beetle, apparently). A battle ensues with penciler Don Heck giving much of the spotlight to the new Goliath until the Wasp is rescued and the Collector makes his getaway. But it wouldn't be a Stan Lee story if it didn't end in a twist, with plenty of potential for future angst: when he tries to shrink back to normal size, Goliath falls unconscious...stuck at ten feet! It was a soul satisfying return of a much beloved and missed Giant-Man in a new and exciting format. Eventually joining the team on a regular basis, his return only boded well for future issues and would signal not only the eventual return of the other original members, but a more constantly rotating membership that would become the hallmark of the team.



EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE, AS HE OFTEN DID, DREW UPON BIBLICAL SOURCES (SUCH AS THE STORY OF DAVID AND GOLIATH) IN RENAMING THE FORMER GIANT-MAN AND REINTRODUCING THE CHARACTER IN A NEWER, MORE DYNAMIC, MANNER IN AVENGERS #28.

X-Men #20

"I, Lucifer..."; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Still fuming over his defeat by Prof. X and the X-Men (back in issue #9), the evil Lucifer returns to strike back at his foes this time duping ex X bad guys Unus and the Blob into robbing a bank wearing X-Men uniforms, the better to pin the blame for their crimes on our heroes. Turns out that his manipulation of the bad guys is only a dry run for a device that Lucifer intends on using to subjugate the entire human race! Taking over the in *X-Men* #20 (May. 1966) from editor Stan Lee, this was a pretty ambitious story for new X-scribe, Roy Thomas. It was all the more audacious because, besides revealing the nature of Lucifer, it also included the story of how Prof. X lost the use of his legs. Turns out it happened in Xavier's younger days when he operated solo. At the time, he'd stumbled upon Lucifer and in the ensuing battle, triggered a booby trap wherein a stone block fell and crushed his legs. Thomas packed a lot into this tale including a sub-plot involving a self-pitying Cyclops' unrequited love for Marvel Girl and some early mutant resentment by the general public. It also presented a lot of ground to cover for penciler Werner Roth who nevertheless manages to get it all in, even finding room

for a full page splash with a forced perspective shot of Lucifer's mento-wave beam projector that fairly bursts off the page! It was a decent job but Roth (as well as a somewhat verbose Thomas) still had a bit of a ways to go to reach optimum Marvel madness!

X-Men #21

"From Whence Comes...Dominus?"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

X-Men #21 (June, 1966) continues the team's battle with Lucifer, the other-dimensional villain responsible for crippling Prof. X back in his early days. The revelation of Lucifer's affiliation with another dimension and its plot to take over the Earth was somewhat disappointing. In Lucifer's first appearance back in *X-Men* #9, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had successfully created a genuinely intriguing non-mutant character but scripter Roy Thomas here manages to erase all that in favor of more prosaic origins. Add to that a bunch of boring robot servants and you've got a recipe for disappointment. Even Werner Roth's art was failing to excite (so soon after showing such promise only a few issues back) the result, no doubt, not only of having to cram so much story in the book's twenty pages, but his habit of trying to squeeze every one of the X-Men into practically every panel in the story. A full page illo on page 8 is an attempt to break up the tedium and widen the scope of the action but it ends up looking empty and unnecessary with most of its space given over to mostly featureless computer controls. Not the greatest outing for Thomas or Roth and readers who'd remained faithful to the book might have wondered if their faith had been misplaced. Could the two neophyte Marvel creators shake out the cobwebs, streamline their storytelling, and rescue the title from the doldrums? Only the next issue would tell.



"AT LAST IT CAN BE TOLD!" ADMITTED EDITOR STAN LEE IN THE PAGES OF TALES OF SUSPENSE #80: NAMELY, THAT FORMER BULLPENNER TURNED FULL TIME DC ROMANCE ARTIST WAS NONE OTHER THAN GENE "THE DEAN" COLAN! AS IF ANY SHARP (AND NOT SO SHARP) EYED FANS NEEDED TO BE TOLD! WONDER HOW MANY LETTERS TO THE EDITOR HAD TO BE SUPPRESSED BECAUSE READERS RECOGNIZED RIGHT OFF COLAN'S DISTINCTIVE STYLE?

Jack "King" Kirby's, was too ugly to interest readers! To them, such tried and true reliables as Curt Swan, Kurt Schaffenburger, Joe Kubert, Ross Andru, Ramona Fradon, Carmine Infantino, and Murphy Anderson were the epitome of what comics should look like. Their dull, predictable, but easily understood presentations were deemed perfect for the little tykes who read DC's comic books (and who were expected to quit before entering their teens). Such bombastic fare provided by the likes of Jack Kirby or the unattractive people that populated Steve Ditko's work, or the wild layouts that Gene Colan had suddenly unleashed on his readers, were totally inexplicable to the suits at DC. In fact, when other companies attempted to emulate Marvel's style, they all fell flat on their collective faces, missing entirely what really grabbed readers, namely the sophistication of character building, the involved plots, taking their subjects seriously while poking gentle fun at them when things got too heavy (an issue also taken up by Lee on the Bullpen Bulletins page). The visual histrionics were only icing on the cake. All those attributes were on display in this issue beginning with the Colan drawn Sub-Mariner story wherein our hero had to face off against the giant Behemoth. Increasingly comfortable at Marvel (now that he knew the company could provide him with all the work he needed and so could go public with his name), Colan was really letting loose with his layouts this time, helped by the inks of Dick Ayers who does himself proud here. The inking was also center stage on the Hulk backup as Bill Everett continued to finish Kirby's layouts as scripter Lee brings back Tyrannus, last seen way back in *The Incredible Hulk* #5. Seems the old boy needed the Hulk's

Tales to Astonish #80

"To the Death!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

"They Dwell in the Depths!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Bill Everett (finishes/inks)

"At last it can be told," declared editor/scripter Stan Lee on this month's Bullpen Bulletins page. What could be told? Namely the fact that Iron Man and Sub-Mariner artist "Adam Austin" was really Gene Colan, news that, as Lee conceded up front, likely didn't come as much of a surprise to hard core fans since Colan's style was totally unique and unmistakable. In fact, it would've been shocking if Colan's editors at DC didn't recognize his style right off as well but incredibly, probably never even looked in *Tales to Astonish* #80 (June, 1966) or various issues of *Suspense* in order to notice, which was likely why the editors there couldn't figure out why Marvel was catching up to them in sales (and would soon overtake them). To them, Marvel's art, including

Amazing Spider-Man #37

"Once Upon a Time, There Was a Robot...!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Despite the years of speculation and rumors that followed Steve Ditko's departure from Marvel, the events depicted in *Amazing Spider-Man* #37 (June, 1966) don't seem to line up with the belief that Ditko had opposed editor/scripter Stan Lee's desire to reveal the secret identity of the Green Goblin. As plotter for the title at least as far back as #25 (and likely farther back than that), it was Ditko who'd quietly introduced Norman Osborn as a background character at the businessman's club that J. Jonah Jameson belonged to. As the months passed, the character had been given some words to speak and then, finally, with this issue, he takes center stage as a vengeful Prof. Stromm sends different robots after him with the intention of destroying his company. Seems Stromm didn't like being framed by his ex-business partner and being sent to jail. Wonder why? Anyway, Spidey becomes involved as he continues to keep tabs on the mysterious Patch even as Osborn, far from being grateful for Spidey's running interference for him, becomes angry instead. Something was definitely up with Osborn and it wasn't good. In fact, the story ends as a

sniper shoots Stromm and disappears from a high window with no possible way down. Later, we find Osborn, a rifle in his hands, plotting to give Spider-Man the same medicine! In light of what was revealed only two issues later (after Ditko left the book), it seems clear that the artist himself may have planned to set Osborn up as the Green Goblin. Or maybe not. Be that as it may, there was no diminution in the quality of Ditko's art and plotting here with events dealing with Patch, Gwen and Flash at college, Norman Osborn and son

help in fighting off the rival Mole Man for supremacy in Subterranea. As ole Greenskin goes into action, the highlight is the robotic "octo-sapien," surely one of Kirby's most outlandish creations and just the sort of thing the DC suits might've pointed to as proof that Marvel didn't know what it was doing!



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AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #37, PAGE 20: IF ONLY EDITOR/SCRIPTER STAN LEE HAD STRUNG OUT THE MYSTERY OF NORMAN OSBORNE AND THE GREEN GOBLIN A LITTLE WHILE LONGER, HE COULD HAVE BUILT ON THE IDEA OF WHO WAS THE GREATER MENACE TO SPIDEY, ONE OR THE OTHER... UNTIL THE SURPRISE REVELATION THAT BOTH WERE ONE AND THE SAME! UNFORTUNATELY, LEE SEEMED TOO IMPATIENT FOR THAT AND CHOSE TO CLEAR EVERYTHING UP WITHIN A COUPLE ISSUES OF ARTIST/CO-PLOTTER STEVE DITKO'S DEPARTURE WITH #38.

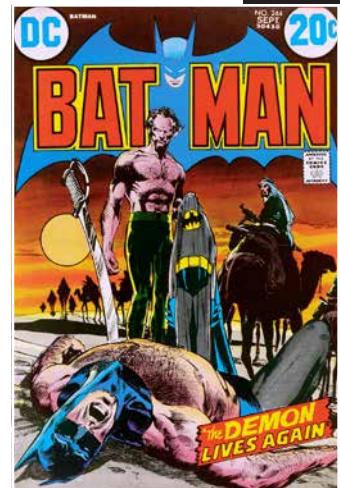
Denny O'Neil

Like Marvel assistant editor Roy Thomas, Denny O'Neil hailed from the state of Missouri and began his writing career as a local reporter. It was his discovery of the resurgence of comic books at the dawn of the silver age that prompted him to write an article on the subject through which he came to the attention of Thomas. Knowing that editor Stan Lee was looking for more writers, Thomas invited O'Neil to try out for the job and in the mid-1960s, he was hired.

O'Neil most notably filled in for Lee on *Dr. Strange* and most notably on *Daredevil* #18 but work didn't seem to pick up. He next surfaced at low rent Charlton Comics before migrating to DC with editor Dick Giordano. There, O'Neil finally made a splash. Teaming up with artist Neal Adams, they revamped Batman from camp to serious creature of the night and later co-created a string of "relevant" stories for the Green Lantern feature.

Later, O'Neil rejoined Marvel as an editor and oversaw Frank Miller's takeover of the *Daredevil* feature. O'Neil eventually took over the title himself and managed to create stories and new characters that compared well with those of the influential Miller.

More impressive as an innovator than as a storyteller, O'Neil was frequently called upon when a new direction was needed for a failing title. Sometimes it worked as it did with Superman, and sometimes it didn't as with the "new" mod Wonder Woman.



Harry, and J. Jonah Jameson all juggled in such an expert way as to keep readers turning pages and eagerly awaiting what happened with them next. For any readers not privy to the numerous fanzines being cranked off ditto machines in basements across the country where such rumors might have appeared, there was no hint that the seismic event of Ditko's leavetaking was imminent.

Strange Tales #145

"Lo! The Eggs Shall Hatch!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)
"To Catch a Magician!"; Denny O'Neil (script);
Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

It was a change of pace story for the *Dr. Strange* second feature in *Strange Tales* #145 (June, 1966) as plotter/penciler/inker Steve Ditko has our hero shot by one Mr. Rasputin when the villain senses that he's about to lose in a mystic combat with the good doctor. But luckily, Strange isn't killed and ends up in the hospital where Mr. Rasputin dispatches hired thugs to finish him off! As good as this little tale was, it was merely a placeholder pending next issue's climax to Ditko's stand on the feature, which had gone unbroken since issue #110. *Strange Tales* #146

would mark the artist's final *Dr. Strange* story with a spectacular Dormammu vs.. Eternity final battle. One that, unusually, would not be scripted by Stan Lee but neophyte Denny O'Neil who also wrote the words for this issue's entry. O'Neil was recruited as a scribe for Marvel by editorial assistant Roy Thomas, after having made his acquaintance back in Missouri when O'Neil had interviewed him for a local newspaper. Passing a writers' test, he was hired and immediately assigned to the *Dr. Strange* stories (perhaps evidence of just how little Lee cared for the feature, or perhaps his exasperation over how Ditko had become increasingly difficult to work with). In doing so, O'Neil's script here is as smooth and polished and, most importantly, as Lee-like as anyone could want, begging the question of just how much Lee's editorial hand had had in the final results. Meanwhile, on the front half of the book (behind a busy Jack Kirby free-for-all on the cover) is the end of the Druid as SHIELD puts *finis* to the latest secret cabal to bid for world domination. Kirby is still on hand for the layouts, most of which are unrecognizable beneath Don Heck's finishes (except maybe where Fury faces off for a hand-to-hand meeting with the Druid on pages 7-9). The whole Lee-scripted magilla ends in uncertainty as Fury wonders if the "eager beaver" Jasper Sitwell was aiming to take over

his job as SHIELD ramrod. An interesting point as Lee would continue to sharpen Sitwell's personality, especially after he transferred the character over to Iron Man in *Suspense*, to the point where readers became convinced that Boy Scout Sitwell could never take over for the hard bitten Fury. But as Lee intended, they had no choice but to stick around and find out for sure!

Tales of Suspense #78

"Crescendo!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Jack Abel (inks)
"THEM!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kiby (penciler); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Suspense was back on top! On top of what? On top of the greatest double feature value for 12 cents contest, that's what! After briefly handing the crown over to *Tales to Astonish* with its Colan drawn Sub-Mariner and Jack Kirby/Bill Everett produced Hulk features (both scripted by the incomparable Stan Lee of course), it was forced to yield again once *Tales of Suspense* #78 (June, 1966) hit the stands! Why? Merely because in addition to its continuing incredibleness of the Lee/Colan/Jack Abel Iron Man lead feature, it now had the full, undivided services of King Kirby on the Captain America back-up, ably inked by Frank Giacoia. Wow! Fans must have thought they were living right when they picked up this baby (after months of watered-down Kirby, who was stuck doing only layouts with lesser artists finishing them off making for an overall lacklustre product). The change was signaled by an in-your-face cover image where Kirby spotlights both Captain America and Nick Fury as they're split off from each other by a chemical burst from some new superpowered menace that only the King could've come up with! Inside, the action was no less furious, beginning with an opening splash page of a huge Cap figure dodging something called "shock rollers!" That's followed up with the first meeting of Cap and Fury since *Sgt. Fury* #13 as the SHIELD leader fills Cap in on the latest outfit to threaten the free world, namely THEM. But just as Fury finishes up, they're attacked by "a walkin' test tube" dispatched by THEM to kill our two heroes. The Krazy Kirby Kombat that follows is only briefly interrupted as the reader is taken to THEM HQ where they see dozens of the chemoids being grown artificially in a giant solution tank. But the agents of THEM are only seen in the identity hiding yellow uniforms that would become familiar to readers of a dozen later stories as those belonging to AIM (Advanced Idea Mechanics... and why hasn't some high tech company taken that cool acronym as their own name by now?), which would only get revealed in subsequent appearances. For now, they were just THEM, a league of rogue scientists out to, what else? Take over the world! Meanwhile, Cap and Fury find a way to overcome their own chemoid and Fury leaves Cap with an invitation to look him up, guaranteeing more full bore action in issues to come. But the front half of the book was nothing to sneeze at, either! There, Iron Man



ANOTHER BEAUTIFULLY LAID OUT COVER DESIGN BY ARTIST JACK KIRBY. WHILE KEEPING THIS ISSUE'S VILLAIN SOMEWHAT UNDER WRAPS BY FACING HIM AWAY FROM THE READER, KIRBY MANAGES TO FOCUS ON SUSPENSE #78'S MAIN ATTRACTION: THE INITIAL TEAM-UP BETWEEN OLD WWII BUDDIES CAPTAIN AMERICA AND NICK FURY AS THEY SHARE EQUAL PORTIONS OF AN IMAGE DIVIDED BY THE VILLAIN'S ATTACK.

was facing off against the Mandarin's volcano sized robot, Ultimo, led off by another suitable for framing opening splash by Colan and inker Jack Abel. That's followed by more action, action, action as IM battles Ultimo and escapes the Mandarin back to the good ole US of A all courtesy of wide open layouts by Colan. And whoever was doing the coloring on the feature deserved a medal. Was it still Stan Goldberg? Sure looked like his hand on the color wheel as he uses sombre blues and greens throughout. Added to Abel's generous use of blacks and you've got a moody, atmospheric mini-masterpiece that perfectly captures the downbeat nature of a story wherein the hero must battle a heart condition on one hand and government harassment on the other! Zowee!

Avengers #29

“This Power Unleashed!”; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

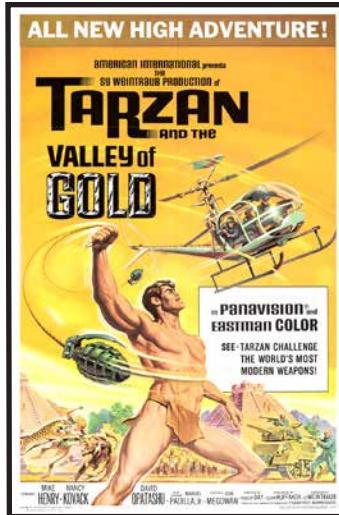
Not a dream! Not an imaginary tale! Giant-Man really was in *Avengers* #29 (June, 1966), his second straight appearance in the *Avengers* since #28! Or rather, it was Goliath now but any way you cared to see it, Giant-Man fans must've been ecstatic at his return with a new name and jazzier costume. And was penciler Don Heck born to draw the new, improved Goliath or what? Aided by inker Frank Giacoia, Heck really delivered in his scenes with high pockets starting right off with this issue's opening splash page as Quicksilver tries desperately to revive the fallen hero, who collapsed at the end of the previous ish and became stuck at ten feet. Heck continues to dazzle as scripter Stan Lee's densely written tale unfolds. Featuring the return of the Black Widow, Swordsman, and Power Man, plenty of action was guaranteed. For proof, check out the dazzling Heck drawn half-page panel on page 12 with Captain America rocking Power Man back on his heels with his shield. No wonder Heck was among Marvel's most popular artists at the time! Meanwhile, Lee piles on the angst. Besides the usual sniping among Cap, Hawkeye, etc, there was the added drama of Hawkeye's past relationships with the Widow, as well as Swordsman to contend with, and the new wrinkle of Goliath being unable to regain his normal height on pain of death. Whew! It was plain that with the addition of Goliath (and the Wasp), an already interesting book could only get better!

Avengers #30

“Frenzy In a Far-Off Land!”; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee splits up the team in *Avengers* #30 (July, 1966) as Goliath, Hawkeye, and the Scarlet Witch and brother Quicksilver all go their separate ways. But surprisingly for this team, it's not because they had a falling out. Goliath travels to South America to seek out a Dr. Anton whom he believes could help him change his size without killing himself; Hawkeye tackles Power Man and the Swordsman on his own, due to his continued love for the Black Widow; and Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver return to their native land hoping to find a way to enhance their suddenly fading powers. With the help of the Widow, Hawkeye defeats Power Man and the Swordsman even as Goliath finds himself battling the forces of a lost civilization. It was a good change of pace story structure for Lee that gave penciler Don Heck plenty of room for big panel action. He takes the opportunity and runs with it, highlighting Goliath in battle and Hawkeye's one-on-one with Power Man and Swordsman. It was another solid, fun, fast-moving issue that made the *Avengers* the

LOST CIVILIZATIONS HAD BECOME OLD HAT EVEN BY THE TIME OF AVENGERS #30 BUT THAT DIDN'T MEAN AUDIENCES WEREN'T TIRED OF THEM! EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS ALONE HAD SPENT DECADES WRITING NOVELS ABOUT THEM INCLUDING THE RETURN OF TARZAN (1913) WHERE THE APE MAN DISCOVERS THE GOLDEN TREASURE OF OPAR, A LOST OUTPOST OF ATLANTIS. DECADES LATER, FILM PRODUCERS BORROWED THE IDEA FOR TARZAN AND THE VALLEY OF GOLD (1966) SET IN MEXICO.



best selling, offbeat title it was. If only *The X-Men* could have shared this kind of story telling because the likelihood was that it would've been higher up in the Marvel sales sweepstakes. But what was the deal with this issue's cover? It looked like it was drawn by Jack Kirby but the inking was definitely off. It seemed to be more presentation art than a serious attempt at an *Avengers* cover, what with

Goliath front and center carrying some non-descript baddie under one arm. Not exactly what fans had come to expect from the King!

Avengers #31

“Never Bug a Giant!”; Stan Lee (script); Don Heck (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

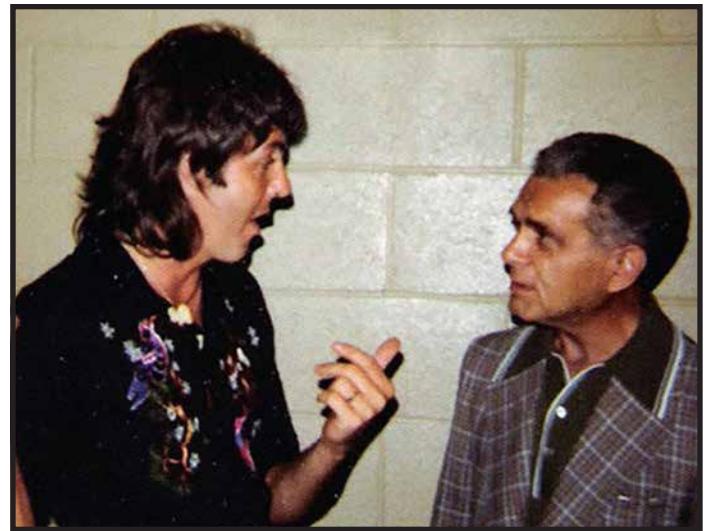
You have to hand it to editor/scripter Stan Lee when it came to inventing a title for a story! On the one hand, he could dip into literature or the Bible and find a bit for a title that oozes drama and on the other, could draw upon his own imagination for pure whimsy. And that's what's going on here in *Avengers* #31 (Aug. 1966) with a title like “Never Bug a Giant!” And though the title might be whimsical, the story it headlines isn't (or at least, not any more whimsical than most of Marvel's output was in these years ie never taking itself too seriously). Be that as it may, Lee is in fine form as he concludes the tale begun last ish wherein Goliath travels to South America in search of a Dr. Anton, whom he hopes can help cure him of his height problem (unable to reduce from ten feet without killing himself). Captain America and Hawkeye, along with the Wasp, follow Goliath and all are captured by the tyrant who rules the hidden civilization. All except the Wasp, that is. She proves her worth by helping to free them and together, the *Avengers* destroy the

cobalt flame with which the tyrant had planned to conquer the outside world. It was a pretty much action-packed story with penciler Don Heck approaching the height of his Marvel era powers. Assisted by the wonderfully compatible inks of Frank Giacoia, Heck provides readers with page after page of visual delight starting with this issue's exciting cover image and then proceeding to a really nice opening splash panel of Cap, Hawkeye, and the Wasp at Avengers mansion. Like Heck himself would have done, Giacoia isn't bashful about using heavy shadows throughout. As for Heck, he continued to lavish attention on Goliath, correctly sensing that with his size and adorned in his blue and yellow uniform, he immediately becomes the focus for colorful action scenes highlighted here on page 12 with a big, half-page illo of our hero being zapped by the Keeper of the Flame. It was beginning to look as though the size changing character would work much better as the star of a group than he did as a solo hero. The issue ends on an ironic note when Dr. Anton tells Goliath that although he can't help him with his problem the man who can is...Henry Pym!

X-Men #22

"Divided...We Fall!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Scripter Roy Thomas doesn't do penciler Werner Roth any favors in *X-Men* #22 (July, 1966) when he again presents the artist with a story calling for not only the five members of the X-Men (plus Prof. X) and the Beast and Iceman's girlfriends, but also a raft of yesterday's villains including Plantman, the Unicorn, the Eel, Porcupine, and the Scarecrow all in addition to their leader, Count Nefaria. Whew! As readers would recall, Roth had a devil of a time in the previous issue trying to squeeze all the X-Men into practically every panel of the story; this time, he still manages to do the same in about half the book (including crowded scenes while the X-Men are out on dates) but mercifully, Thomas' script called for the individual X-Men to be taken down one at a time by their villainous counterparts. That was done at the command of Nefaria who thinks he can recruit them in his latest plot to kidnap Washington D.C. Of course, the X-Men turn him down and all the elements are in place for a showdown next ish. Artwise, it was becoming obvious that Ayers just wasn't a good match for Roth, turning much of his work into cartoony unsightliness. Even what should've been Roth's strength, coming as he did from DC comics' romance titles, was mitigated in the depiction of scenes involving the X-Men's private lives. Where previous issues had concentrated mostly on action, Thomas picked up on some hints left lying around by predecessor Stan Lee and began to build on them, accentuating Scott Summers' unrequited love for Jean Grey with Warren Worthington playing the wild card

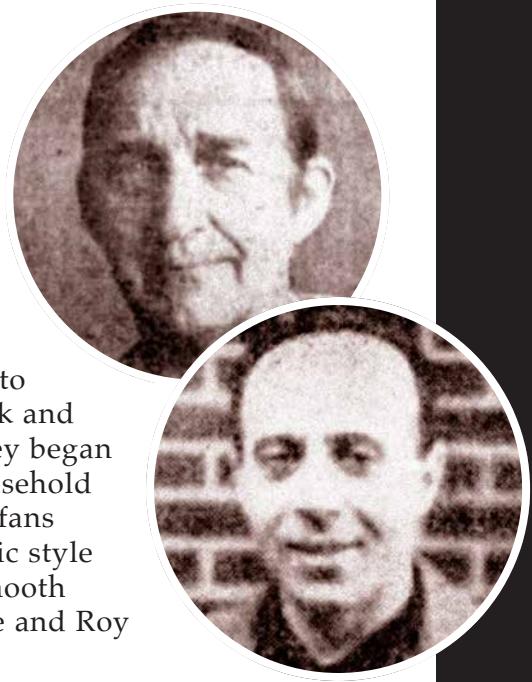


THE WORLDS OF COMICS AND POP MUSIC CAME TOGETHER WHEN MARVEL ARTIST JACK KIRBY AND WINGS FRONT MAN (AND, OH YEAH, EX MEMBER OF THE BEATLES) PAUL McCARTNEY MET IN 1976. McCARTNEY, AT THE TIME, HAD INCLUDED MARVEL CHARACTERS IN SOME OF HIS SONGS. THEIR MEETING HOWEVER, WASN'T ANYTHING NEW AS EDITOR STAN LEE HAD ALSO MET WITH VARIOUS ROCK ROYALTY THROUGH THE 1960S.

while using Bobby Drake and Hank McCoy's double dates with Zelda and Vera and the beatnik scene mostly for comic relief. As the previous story-line involving Lucifer and this Nefaria two-parter shows, it was these scenes of off duty lives that were turning out to be the most interesting thing about the X book, not the superhero action. Something would need to be done about that soon if the book were to overcome its status as a marginal seller. **Fun Fact:** It seemed that the beatnik scene that Bobby and Hank frequented was falling behind the times. Ever since the Beatles invaded America in 1964, rock 'n' roll had become the hottest pop culture movement around and the Marvel offices were not immune. Take this issue's edition of the Bullpen Bulletins, for instance, as editor Lee recounts a visit by Peter Asher of the British singing duo Peter and Gordon. There, Lee assures readers that not only is Peter a Marvel fan and that he wanted to sell Marvel comics in a new bookstore he wanted to open back in England, but that the Beatles themselves were also "merry Marvelites!" To underscore the growing popularity of Marvel's product, Lee goes on to inform readers that "more than a hundred" newspapers across the country as well as radio and television have presented articles and interviews with Lee himself about the growing Marvel phenomenon. Little did Lee know however, that one of those interviews appearing in the Jan. 9 edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* involving both he and artist Jack Kirby, would lead to resentment on the part of the latter and eventually his break from Marvel in 1970.

Artie Simek and Sam Rosen

The true unsung heroes of comics are undoubtedly its letterers! Traditionally, they labored in obscurity and if they did their jobs right, readers were never even conscious of their contributions. But if they slipped up, were just not at their best on any particular day, their failure could stick out like a sore thumb. Charged with not only cramming all those little words in balloons and captions, but in tracing panel borders, designing now classic cover logos and blurbs, and inking in those crazy, unique to comics, sound effects. And thanks to Marvel editor Stan Lee's determination to give credit where credit was due, Adorable Artie Simek and Slammin' Sammy Rosen (unknown to readers since they began working in the industry back in the 1940s) became household names with fans, or at least households where Marvel fans lived! It was Simek and Rosen's warm, easy calligraphic style that made Marvel comics of the 1960s such an easy, smooth read and that made the scripting of writers such as Lee and Roy Thomas flow with such distinctive ease.



X-Men #23

"To Save a City!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Count Nefaria was up to his old tricks again. Just as he framed the Avengers back in *Avengers* #13, he pulls the same stunt with the X-Men in *X-Men* #23 (Aug. 1966). This time, he creates images of the team as they appear to authorities in Washington, D.C. to demand one hundred million dollars in ransom for the city, over which Nefaria has thrown an impregnable dome. Scripter Roy Thomas complicates things further when he has Nefaria's henchmen, Scarecrow, Porcupine, Unicorn, Plantman, and the Eel plot to steal the money for themselves and then betray each other for the same reason! Meanwhile, the real X-Men are compelled by Nefaria to act as his bag men and end up having both the military and civilian crowds chasing after them. The whole thing ends up like one of those comical football games wherein the "football," in this case, a briefcase holding the cash, is tossed from one costumed character to another until a disguised Prof. X comes to the rescue with a false pair of legs that allow him to walk. Whew! It was an okay story, but the way Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had originally set *X-Men* was to place it in its own little corner of the Marvel universe; an underground strip (so to speak) in which the X-Men

battled a secret war against evil mutants intent on conquering the human race. This story with the Maggia's Count Nefaria, regular super-villains, and very public action in the nation's capital all somehow seemed to go against the grain. The sooner the X-Men got back to the war, the better it would be for the health of the book. Meanwhile, penciler Werner Roth was again saddled with cramming a dozen characters in almost every panel of the story. What Thomas needed to do was slow things down a bit and have the team tackle a single villain, if only to give Roth a breather (Was that why it seemed that he'd slipped up at some point and began drawing the torso section of the X-Men's uniforms in a wraparound style instead of the "open sides" style designed by Kirby? It wasn't an improvement, that's for sure). That slowdown would come soon enough with the very next issue, one of the highlights in this period of the comic's history. A hint of things to come was given at the end of this issue when Marvel Girl announces that she has to leave the school. Oh, no! How will that affect Scott and Warren's rivalry for her affections let alone the team's dynamics (Every team needed a distaff member, after all)? That development would open up an interesting sub-plot for a number of issues, even as readers are introduced to the menace of the Locust and a way cool cover fitting the grandiose years!

Strange Tales #147

"The Enemy Within!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)
"From the Nameless Nowhere Comes...Kaluu!"; Stan Lee/Denny O'Neil (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

For the first time, the lineup in *Strange Tales* stumbled: both features in *Strange Tales* #147 (Aug. 1966) were less than stellar. First up, as usual, was SHIELD: Still on duty was Jack Kirby doing layouts with Don Heck on finishes. Mike Esposito provides the inking. The Kirby style was just about invisible in this Stan Lee scripted tale as the agents of AIM go on the attack. Ironically, it's in the quieter scenes with talking heads that's the more attractive visually than those with action. There, Heck falters as if he found them less interesting than the talky scenes. He's not helped much by Esposito's inks, either. Meanwhile, we have the first installment of Dr. Strange without creator Steve Ditko at the helm. There, Lee seems to have begun the story (credits indicate that he wrote pages 1-5 before going on vacation) while neophyte scripter Denny O'Neil finished the rest. Judging by the events of this issue, it seems as if Lee had intended the story to be a reset of sorts, including some by now expected Marvel riffs on everyday life and problems. So Strange is seen at his neighborhood pharmacy picking up some aspirin and "24-hour cold capsules." We also discover that the doctor's tab is in arrears! After foiling a robbery and returning home, Strange discovers that the city will condemn his building unless he brings it up to code. To raise the cash needed to repair his home, Strange contacts an agent about doing a magic act in night clubs. Hoo, boy! This wasn't your Steve Ditko magic meister! But all that is placed in abeyance by the looming threat of Kaluu! Taking over for Ditko on the art is Bill Everett, who provides both pencils and inks. And though Everett was doing excellent work over Kirby on the Hulk and Gene Colan on Sub-Mariner in *Tales to Astonish*, he comes up short here. Too down to earth and lacking that otherworldly *je ne sais quoi*, Everett's look is stiff and unimaginative and characters' faces cartoony, even fey. His Ancient One especially is downright weird looking as if he were wrapped in an over large sleeping bag instead of monk's robes. So, except for the issue's cool Kirby cover, *Strange Tales* #147 must be considered a let down compared to previous efforts. How long would it be before it bounced back? Who knew? But bounce back it surely would if the track record for Marvel's double feature books was anything to go by.

Fantastic Four #54

"Whosoever Finds the Evil Eye!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

After a year-long creative explosion that included the Frightful Four, the Inhumans, the Silver Surfer

and Galactus, and the Black Panther, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby finally took a breather with *Fantastic Four* #54 (Sept. 1966). That breather is depicted in a literal fashion at the opening of our tale wherein readers catch up with their heroes as they participate in a friendly baseball game while relaxing in Wakanda. Although it's a mystery how the other team could even have a chance against a team composed of the FF and the Panther who, apparently, are allowed to use their powers in the game! Lee and Kirby take advantage of the downtime to shift the focus to the Hidden Land to bring readers up-to-date on doings there since Attilan was trapped beneath an impregnable barrier by the mad Maximus. Those scenes then offer a natural segue back to the FF, where the Torch mopes for girlfriend Crystal, who is trapped behind



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FANTASTIC FOUR #54, PAGE 11: STILL AMIDST THE TITLE'S MOST FECUND PERIOD, CO-PLottERS STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY INTRODUCE THE ONE SHOT PRESTOR JOHN TO THE MARVEL UNIVERSE AND AN OPPORTUNITY WAS MISSED TO MAKE MORE OF HIM A LA THE HIGH EVOLUTIONARY OR THE WATCHER. MORE'S THE PITY.

the dome. As the Panther hands out gifts to his departing guests, he holds out the best for last: a “gyro-cruiser”, a traveling device whose insides remain upright no matter how its outside bubble is buffeted about (The idea for this device was replicated by the 2015 film *Jurassic World*, only there it was called a “gyrosphere” Hmm...). With it, the Torch and friend Wyatt Wingfoot set out on a journey to find Attilan and somehow reunite Johnny and Crystal. But the two no sooner set off, than they're swallowed up in a sandstorm and find themselves in a cavern wherein the legendary figure of Prestor John sits in suspended animation. Here, Kirby shows why no one could come even close to him in the depiction of lost worlds, with Prestor John himself introduced in a huge, half-page illo. Kirby then takes the reader on a tour of ancient civilizations using quarter-page panels to dazzle the eye and stun the senses (No lie!). Soon enough, though, the Torch hears of John's weapon, the Evil Eye, and decides to use it to try and break through the dome over Attilan. There's one catch: when Johnny seizes it from John, he leaves before finding out that the safety switch was left off, allowing the power to build until it explodes in an atomic flash. Hoo, boy! Well, when it was all over, the issue hardly felt like a breather after all, but hey! This was Marvel and this was Stan Lee and Jack Kirby at the controls! There was no such thing as a boring day in the life (at least not since *FF* #11) That kind of indulgence would have to wait for other creators later in the twilight years. As it is, Stan and Jack would take more such “breathers” over the next few issues as well and by now, if readers didn't know what that meant, they were barking up the wrong tree!

Strange Tales #148

“Death Before Dishonor!”; Jack Kirby (script/layouts); Don Heck (finishes/inking)
“The Origin of the Ancient One!”; Denny O'Neil (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

“Another mighty Marvel surprise!” That's how vacationing editor Stan Lee described the earth-shattering credit line that revealed King Kirby had not only laid out the SHIELD feature in *Strange Tales* #148 (Sept. 1966) as usual, but also scripted it! If so, it was likely the best scripting job Jack Kirby had ever done (considering the way-out writing he did over at DC comics after he left Marvel). So it's strongly suspected that Lee took a hand in polishing the final script. Be that as it may, the results were also as pleasing as usual with SHIELD's war with AIM heating up, and concluding with yet another cliff hanger as Fury jumps from the heli-carrier to escape trial. It was a good installment packed with drama, espionage, and characterization rather than



JUDGED BY HIS UNFETTERED SCRIPTING OF SUCH TITLES AS *FOREVER PEOPLE* AND *JIMMY OLSEN* FOR DC A FEW YEARS LATER, IT WAS HARD TO BELIEVE THAT JACK KIRBY'S SCRIPT FOR *STRANGE* #148 DIDN'T INCLUDE AN EDITORIAL HELPING HAND. SCRIPTS FOR HIS LATER WORK AT DC WERE NOTABLE FOR THEIR QUIRKY, INDIVIDUALISTIC STYLE THAT MANY FANS FOUND OFF PUTTING.

straight-ahead action. The latter would wait until the following ish and “the end of AIM!” Artwise, Don Heck's finishes proved a nice match for Kirby's layouts with the former including much detail and his knack for using blacks on occasion. Nice work. The same, unfortunately, couldn't be said for the Dr. Strange backup with its Bill Everett pencils and inks. While Everett was doing bang-up jobs inking over Kirby and Colan elsewhere, his own art fell considerably short of fan expectations. The artist's imagination seemed to fail him for a character that famously relied on rampant creativity. Everett's costuming was dull and his faces downright weird. He wasn't helped any by a Denny O'Neil story telling about the origin of the Ancient One, possibly the most boring ever written. Clearly, the more he was left to his own devices, the more lost O'Neil became. Luckily for Marvelites however, O'Neil quickly departed the Marvel stable before reemerging at DC, where he got really lucky and ended up teaming with artist Neal Adams for a series of beautifully drawn but mostly uninteresting Batman epics.

Daredevil #20

“The Verdict Is Death!”; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Penciler Gene Colan (now under his own name rather than his Adam Austin *nom de plume*) makes his debut as regular artist with *Daredevil* #20 (Sept. 1966), a run that would extend almost unbroken

Marvel Cartoons

By the mid-1960s, the Marvel brand had begun to gain some traction, enough that publisher Martin Goodman greenlighted the first Marvel fan club, the MMMS (Merry Marvel Marching Society) that in turn issued its own swag, some free, but some for sale to members only. Soon, however, as the popularity of Marvel's heroes grew, outsiders took notice with the consequent explosion of model kits, plastic pillows, and trading cards. But the one with the biggest footprint had to be television after rights to the Marvel heroes were sold to Gantry-Lawrence Animation which proceeded to produce cheap but perhaps the most faithful adaptations of the comics to screen ever...because animation cels were shot direct from the pages of the comics themselves! Premiering in 1966, the shows featured Iron Man, Sub-Mariner, Captain America, and the Hulk who were usually introduced by a live actor, sometimes in costume himself. The results may not have been much to crow about production-wise, but they had the distinction of being the first broadcast or film versions of the Marvel heroes ever!



to the title's one hundredth issue. Replacing John Romita on the pencils, Colan hits the ground running and proves right off that he was born to draw the red garbed hero. With nary a panel wasted, he starts the story with action, segueing immediately into the large panel format that he'd been experimenting with over on both the Iron Man and Sub-Mariner. By now fully into the action oriented Marvel style, Colan has DD running, jumping, leaping, and swinging, keeping everything in motion (soon, he'd also develop his strobe effect, using multiple images to simulate speed) and culminating in a coda of sorts with a small panel at the top of page 5 showing a close up of a hand turning a key (A panel that editor/scripter Stan Lee would one day point out as the kind of crazy thing Colan would include challenging the writer's imagination to come up with something to say about it)! But the real payoff came with the rest of the page: a full-size splash depicting a group of gunmen barging into the home of Matt Murdock. With Murdock a willing victim, the gangsters whisk him off to the Owl's hideout where the villain wants Murdock to defend a Judge Lewis in a mock trial. Seems the Owl still resents Lewis for sending him up the river and now wants to execute him all legal like. Inked by Frank Giacoia, Colan's pencils take on a completely different feel from say, the Sub-Mariner, while retaining much of the moody atmosphere of

Jack Abel's inking over on the Iron Man stories. In other words, the results are beautiful! And with a full-length story to play with (unlike his 12 pages for IM and Subby), Colan could really go to town layout-wise with multiple usages of full and half-page splashes that really open up Lee's storytelling. And speaking of Lee, his scripting here is as smooth and likeable as ever, making this initial effort by the new creative team a sure winner! **Fun Fact:** As announced on this issue's Bullpen Bulletins page, Marvelites everywhere were no doubt electrified to learn that their favorite heroes would be appearing on television as animated cartoons! Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, and Sub-Mariner would all have their soon to be immortalized theme songs. In the Boston area, at least, the show was broadcast in the late afternoon with the local weatherman dressed as Captain America introducing the episodes. Oh, it was heady stuff, all right...until fans actually saw the cartoons. Admittedly, seen in retrospect, they were the most slavish adaptations of the comics in movies or television ever, shot as they were directly from the comics themselves. But as such, they were also extremely limited in their animation with for the most part only characters' lips moving with the rest of it done by simply moving the camera over the comics illustrations. It was hugely disappointing, but at least it was Marvel and Marvel on TV!

Daredevil #21

"The Trap Is Sprung!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia, Dick Ayers, Bill Everett (inks)

INKED BY NO LESS THAN THREE ARTISTS, Gene Colan's pencils for *Daredevil* #21 (Oct. 1966) hardly suffered at all under the varied hands. In fact, dedicated readers might have been hard pressed to spot the difference in inking styles from page to page of this Stan Lee scripted epic conclusion to DD's battle with the Owl begun in the previous issue. Suffice it to say, our hero escapes from the bird cage trap he was caught in at the end of #20 and from there, its action all the way with Daredevil ending up atop a giant, runaway mechanical owl as it plummets toward the mainland. And all the blind superhero has to help him steer the furshlugginer thing is his enhanced sense of balance! Breathless readers had to wait till the following ish to find out if he survived the oncoming crash landing!

Mighty Thor Annual #2

"If Asgard Falls!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

IT WAS A WASTED OPPORTUNITY. By now, at the height of the grandiose years, with a number of classic annuals under Marvel's belt, fans had come to expect turning point events to be highlighted in the once-a-year specials—events like weddings and team ups and introduction of new characters. That was why the *Mighty Thor Annual* #2 (Sept. 1966) came as such a disappointment. Not only did it feature just another slugfest (which would've been all right if it were on the scale of excitement as the previous year's Thor vs. Hercules mash up), but a return engagement with possibly scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby's least inspiring creation: the Destroyer. When the muse doesn't strike, there's always Loki to fall back on and that's what happens here as Loki revives the Destroyer who sets out immediately to crash the Tournament of Titans back in Asgard. There, for the first time in Thor's current adventures, Hogun, Fandral, and Volstagg make the scene and just in time, too, as the Destroyer soon shows up to cause trouble (As usual, Volstagg provided the laughs as he chooses a dwarf to challenge in combat: "Since you alone remain, I do not question the will of fate," declares Volstagg, pointing at the little man. "Fearless Volstagg shall not shirk the deadly ordeal. I shall challenge you!" "Think twice, buffoon," replies the seemingly harmless looking dwarf. "Perhaps there be one yet smaller than I." "Nay! Size means nothing. Big as thou art, I shall fight thee!"). And though the story wasn't the greatest, Lee's pseudo-Elizabethan prose was up to par and Kirby's art (enhanced by Vince Colletta's inks) was even more colossal than ever. Taking advantage of the extra pages in the 30-page story, Kirby fills it with numerous full page splashes, and big half and quarter-page panels filled with gods and warriors all clashing in continual combat.

Kirby's panels dealing with the revival of the Destroyer were especially cool and reminiscent of the artist's work on the first issue of the *Eternals* book he'd do upon his return to Marvel in the early-to-mid twilight years. The rest of the book was rounded out with reprints of earlier Thor stories, a disappointment to long time fans perhaps who'd been spoiled by earlier annuals that were crammed from cover to cover with original material. Oh, well. There was always next year.

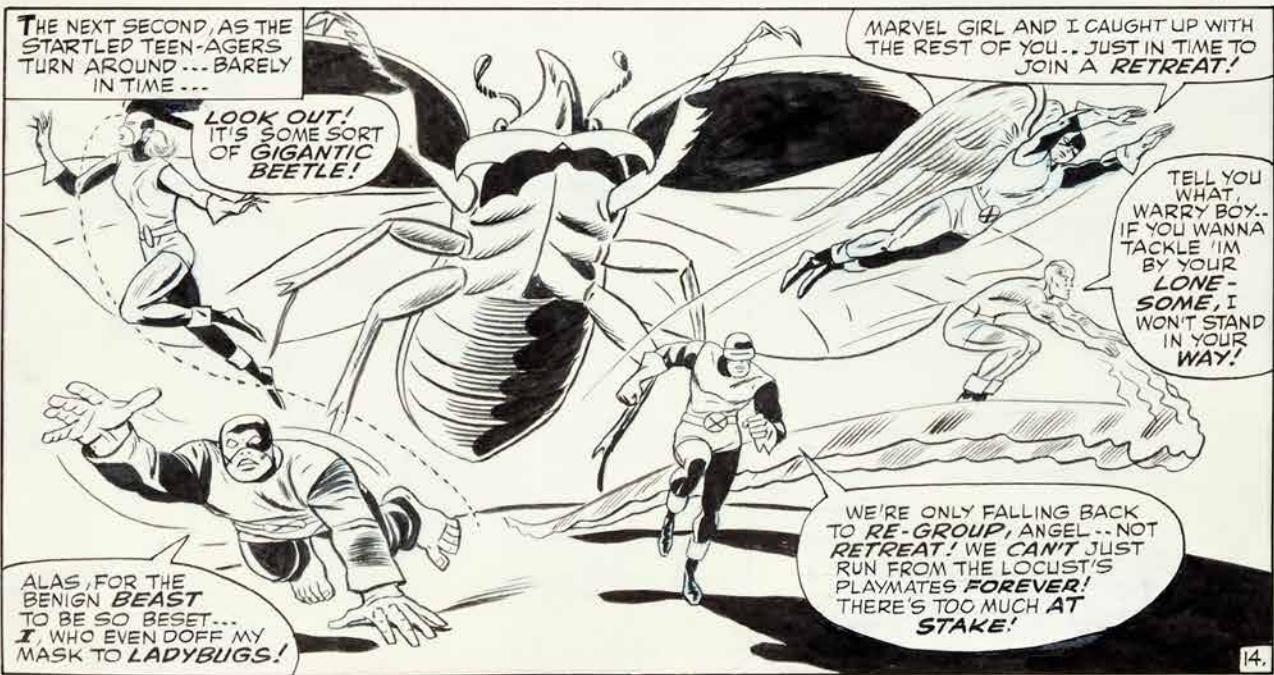
X-Men #24

"The Plague of...the Locust!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (penciler); Dick Ayers (inks)

IT WAS A RETURN TO NEAR GREATNESS WITH *X-Men* #24 (Sept. 1966) as the talents of scripter Roy Thomas and penciler Werner Roth finally began to mesh. Here, Thomas laid some soap operatic groundwork that would fuel development of the various characters for any number of future issues, most especially including Jean Grey's departure from Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters for Metro College and complicating her relationship with both Scott Summers and Warren Worthington (that triangle was made more complicated with the introduction here of fellow student Ted Roberts). In



THINGS WERE GETTING RESTLESS ON AMERICA'S COLLEGE CAMPUSES IN THE LATE SIXTIES. LED BY SUCH GROUPS AS THE STUDENTS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY (SDS) AND FUELED BY PROTEST AGAINST THE VIETNAM WAR, YOUTHFUL COMPLAINTS SOON EXPANDED TO INCLUDE CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREE SPEECH. (OPPOSITE PAGE) *X-MEN* #24, PAGE 14: DESPITE SPARSE BACKGROUNDS, PENCILER WERNER ROTH SEEMED TO BE GETTING THE HANG OF THE ACTION ORIENTED STYLE OF MARVEL COMICS AS DEMONSTRATED BY THESE UNCLUTTERED PANELS. NOTICE THE EXPANSIVE USE OF THE LOCUST'S CAPE IN PANEL 3, THE BETTER TO ACCENTUATE THE MOMENTUM OF HIS FALL, AND THE VILLAIN'S GRACEFUL ARM MOVEMENTS IN PANEL 4.



addition, Thomas and Roth also come up with their first original super-villain. And not one of those boring alien or other dimensional invaders, but an honest to gosh old time colorful super-villain. The Locust isn't a mutant, but entomologist Dr. August Hopper, who invents a device that allows him to grow insects to monstrous sizes. His plan is to loose such insects onto mankind and then save the day himself to get the credit and earn the respect of his peers. To do so, he designs himself an insect-like costume (that appears much cooler on this issue's nice looking Roth cover; whoever decided to leave the foreground figure of the Locust in dark greys was a genius!) and goes into action. But the X-Men are on the scene and what follows is a fast-moving story with a single villain providing a focus that the past few issues had lacked. What results is the standard Marvel-style approach to storytelling with the Jean Grey sub-plot percolating in the background even as the X-team tackles the bad guy who turns out to be less bad than misguided (another traditional Marvel motif). Although Roth was still trying to crowd too many figures into his panels (this ish featured few, if any, larger sized panels) the story still worked much better than the Lucifer or Nefaria two-parters that preceded it. This one likely really whet readers' appetites for more and more would come next ish with the introduction of El Tigre!

Tales to Astonish #84

"Like a Beast at Bay!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)
"Rampage in the City!"; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett, Jack Kirby, Gene Colan (layouts); Bill Everett, Dick Ayers, Paul Reinman, John Romita (finishes/inks)

"Almost the whole blamed bullpen" produced the art for the Hulk back-up feature in *Tales to Astonish* #84 (Oct. 1966) including Bill Everett, Jack Kirby, Gene Colan, Dick Ayers, Paul Reinman, and John Romita. Who did what was anybody's guess but the apparent breakdown in the creative process hardly slowed editor/scripter Stan Lee down at all, as a blurb on the story's splash page proclaimed: "Unanimously voted the best Hulk thriller ever produced by mortal man...!" Did the story live up to that boastful blurb? Not quite. Mostly, the reader follows the Hulk around New York City as he drops into a theater incognito. There, he sees a newsreel that brings readers up-to-date about doings in the most recent installments. The tale ends with the Hulk escaping from the subway only to wonder: "I'm free! Free...to do what?" Indeed. Did our man Stan run out of ideas? Perish forbid! In the meantime, close examination of the story discloses that despite the long list of contributors, Bill Everett's hand is most in evidence artwise with seemingly little of Kirby's layout magic. Was Kirby off it for good? Only time and the next issue would tell. Meanwhile, at the front of the book, Gene Colan was more firmly at the artistic helm with Dick Ayers doing nice work on the shadowy inks as an amnesiac



ARTIST PAUL REINMAN HAD BEEN A BULLPEN MAINSTAY SINCE THE 1940S AND HAD INKED MANY A SEMINAL TALE, MOST NOTABLY OVER JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS, SINCE THE DAWN OF THE MARVEL AGE.

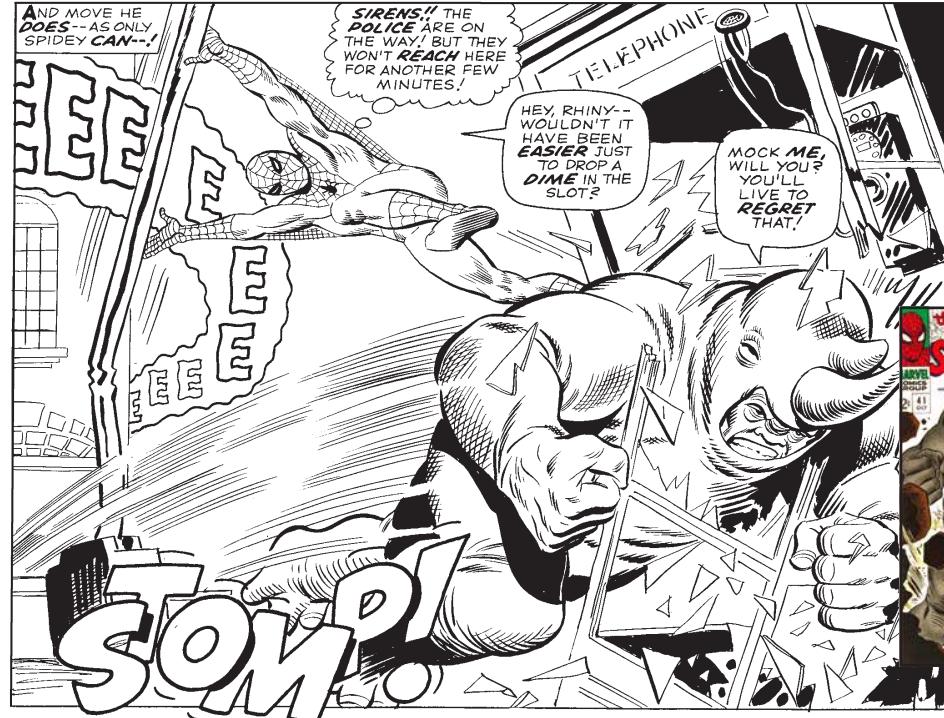
Sub-Mariner is convinced by Number One, the leader of the evil group called the Secret Empire, that they're allies and that Subby must fight the Hulk. Use of the Secret Empire was an interesting experiment by scripter Lee to inter-mix story elements from the Hulk and Subby stories in a non-linear way. Though the Secret Empire was present in both, their activities in both were on different tracks. That said, Colan's art here is superb using his usual over large panels and experimenting with the use of blurry FX for a racing Sub-Mariner suggesting speed. Another Lee provided curiosity was the fact that both the Sub-Mariner and the Hulk, while remaining apart in their separate features, end up in the same theater at the same time to view the same newsreel! In effect, suggesting that the action in the two were happening at the exact same time. So even when some things fell short (such as the artistic confusion in the Hulk stories), there were always things to fascinate readers in any Marvel comic!

Amazing Spider-Man #41

"The Horns of the Rhino!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Now that editor/scripter Stan Lee and new penciler John Romita cleared the table of a number of the book's outstanding plot points involving the Green Goblin, it was time to chart a new course for everyone's favorite wall crawler. A course that would prove the right direction for the book as sales took off even as more and more older readers discovered Spider-Man and Lee himself began to hit the lecture circuit. In many ways, *Amazing Spider-Man* #41 (Oct. 1966) featured the very elements that appealed to Marvel's growing college-aged readers. Peter Parker was now showing a certain maturity in look and demeanor (thanks to John Romita's

long experience drawing romance comics for DC) as he buys a motorcycle to get around town when not web slinging and attends classes at Empire State University. There, he catches up to the new cast of characters including Gwen Stacy and Harry Osborn and old ones such as Flash Thompson. Meanwhile, he meets Betty Brant upon her return to the city. It turns out to be an awkward encounter. "What's wrong? What's happened between us? We're like two strangers groping for words," thinks Peter. "All these months I thought about her, dreamt about her, longed for her! So, now she's



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #41, PAGE 15: AFTER SOMEWHAT APING DEPARTED ARTIST STEVE DITKO'S STYLE IN HIS FIRST TWO OUTINGS AS THE NEW ARTIST ON THE SPIDER-MAN FEATURE, JOHN ROMITA QUICKLY BROKE AWAY TO ESTABLISH HIS OWN TAKE ON THE CHARACTER AND IN THE PROCESS WAS SOON TO PRESIDE OVER THE STRIP'S MOUNTING POPULARITY.

returned...and...nothingville!" It's with relief that Ned Leeds shows up to cut the meeting short and Peter hurries off. Again, it was Lee clearing the old deadwood of the Steve Ditko years to prepare the groundwork for a new era in the life of the title. That new era is signaled in more dramatic fashion with the introduction of the Rhino, a new super-villain for Spidey to tackle, one that proves almost too much to handle. The Rhino was kind of cool beyond mere strength in that no one knew anything about him or even if his rhino outfit was a costume or his actual hide! Yeah, it was tough getting used to the fact of Ditko's departure, but Lee and Romita, as demonstrated here, made it easy to get over the loss. It was a different take on Spider-Man but not so different that the transition didn't feel like a natural one. Thus, readers would stick around to see how things progressed and to their surprise, found that they enjoyed this next evolution as much as they did the Ditko years.

Fantastic Four #55

"When Strikes the Silver Surfer!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

It was a long climb up to the heights of the Galactus trilogy in issues 48-50 where the entire history of comics seemed to peak. From there, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby, themselves at the height of their respective powers, were able to maintain the quality as FF plateaued and leveled off for a good fifteen or so issues before the first suggestion of decline set in. They did it starting with a series of single-issue stories peppered with sub-plots involving the trapped Inhumans and the search for them by the Human Torch and pal Wyatt Wingfoot. But the main story in *Fantastic Four* #55 (Oct.



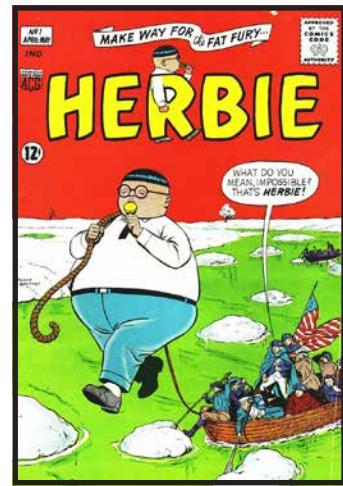
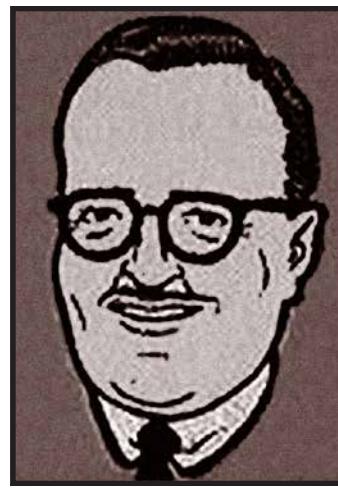
1966) is a real doozy, wherein Kirby goes hog wild depicting the Thing and the Silver Surfer going at each other with no holds barred! And it all begins with a simple jealous rage on the part of the Thing that quickly escalates to a battle of near cosmic proportions. "I'm the prize chump of all time," thinks the Thing as the Surfer powers up to near infinite levels. "He's turnin' himself into a walkin' atom bomb and it's all on account'a me. I been so busy havin' a temper tantrum, that I fergot the biggest danger of all...he ain't human! He don't even know what he's doin'. He can probably blow up this whole hunka geography without half tryin'!" The action soon moves to the city (amid a neighborhood slated for urban renewal, natch!) where Kirby has a field day amid crumbling tenements and collapsing buildings until the battle peters out with Mr. Fantastic acting as peacemaker. Meanwhile, deep in the Himalayas, Johnny and Wyatt come across Crystal's pet dog, the teleporting Lockjaw. By following the dog on its inter-dimensional travels, the two hope to eventually be led inside the dome that covers the home of the Inhumans. Yesirree, there was no apparent slowdown to the wonderment of the high grandiose years as expressed in its number one vehicle, *The Fantastic Four!*

Strange Tales #149

"The End of AIM!"; Denny O'Neil (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Ogden Whitney (finishes/inks)
 "If Kaluu Should Triumph!"; Denny O'Neil (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

Oh, how the mighty had fallen! Creator Steve Ditko had barely been gone a few months and already his triumphant march to greatness via the Dr. Strange had been reduced to a pale shadow of itself. The less said about scripter Denny O'Neil's story concerning Ancient One enemy Kaluu the better, and Bill Everett's art here is almost as bad. It was painfully apparent that on his own, bereft of guidance such as that of Jack Kirby's layouts, Everett just didn't have what it took to be a crowd pleasing Marvel artist. As the years passed, the point would only be driven home as he supplied wonderful-looking inks on Kirby and Gene Colan, even as he failed with his own pencils when he returned to the Sub-Mariner feature later in its *Tales to Astonish* run. It would only be later in the twilight years, when

(OPPOSITE PAGE) FANTASTIC FOUR #55, PAGE 11: GRANDIOSITY WRIT LARGE! THE HORIZON SEEMED LIMITLESS FOR THE FF AS SCRIPTER STAN LEE AND PENCILER JACK KIRBY REMAINED AT THE HEIGHT OF THEIR RESPECTIVE POWERS FIVE ISSUES AFTER THE END OF THE GALACTUS TRILOGY. HERE, KIRBY'S PANELS EXPLODE WITH RAW, CRACKLING POWER EVEN AS LEE'S SCRIPT KEEPS THE ACTION GROUNDED IN REALITY: "STAND STILL BLAST YA!" SAYS THE THING AS IF HE WERE A DENTIST WORKING WITH A RELUCTANT PATIENT. "IT'LL ONLY HURT FOR A MINNIT!"



ON THE SURFACE, ARTIST OGDEN WHITNEY, THE CO-CREATOR OF HERBIE, THE FAT FURY, WAS AN ODD CHOICE TO PAIR UP WITH JACK KIRBY ON THE SHIELD STRIP. BUT WHITNEY DID HAVE A LONG CREDIT HISTORY COVERING MORE SERIOUS GENRES SUCH AS HORROR AND WESTERN.

he came back to Subby yet again that his work finally caught up to his reputation. But here, on Dr. Strange, Everett was dreadfully inappropriate. Coupled with O'Neil's uninspiring script, something had to be done if Strange was to be saved. O'Neil was also on hand for this issue's SHIELD entry as Nick Fury and his agents battle to finish the evil scientists of AIM. This time, Golden Age artist Ogden Whitney does the finishes over Kirby's layouts and falls almost as flat as Everett did on the Strange half of the issue. Virtually nothing of Kirby's influence seems to survive Whitney's finishes leaving a bland, dull result that saps whatever drama there might have been in the story. Whitney himself arrived at Marvel fresh from a multi-year stand drawing the adventures of Herbie, "the Fat Fury" for the American Comics Group. Needless to say, that experience didn't exactly promise great things when he arrived at Marvel. Luckily for fans, he was soon relegated to the dying Westerns. Even this issue's cover image was messed up. It was done by Kirby all right, but what happened to the inks? The finishes on the cover's explosions and smoke are strictly from hunger. Oh, well. After the double whammy offered here, in *Strange Tales* #149 (Oct. 1966), there was no place to go but up, right?

Tales of Suspense #82

"By Force of Arms!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
 "The Maddening Mystery of the Inconceivable Adaptoid!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Fans were made aware of Jack Kirby's return as regular penciler on Captain America in *Tales*



TALES OF SUSPENSE #82: AN EARLY INSTANCE OF THE USE OF DROPPED HOLDING LINES. THIS ISSUE SPORDED ANOTHER COOL SYMBOLIC COVER BY THE KING. AT THE SAME TIME, IT ALSO GAVE KIRBY THE CHANCE TO BRING BACK SOME OF CAP'S EARLY ADVERSARIES FROM THE GOLDEN AGE!

of *Suspense* #82 (Oct. 1966) by its spectacular symbolic cover image of our hero besieged by a bevy of past villains while the issue's mystery bad guy is silhouetted off in a lower corner. The image was made all the more striking by its Stan Goldberg chosen dominant green coloring with its imagery of villains in yellow with dropped holding lines. Eager readers must have flipped open the book with trembling hands hoping against hope that the King was indeed on full pencils and they weren't disappointed! Kirby was indeed on full pencils, ably delineated by the inks of Frank Giacoia as the Stan Lee scripted story opens with a spectacular opening splash page depicting the World War II Cap and Bucky in full bore action! The splash proved but a prelude to a visitation of a number of enemies from the dead past including Agent Axis, Warlord

Fang, and various Nazis before Cap faints from the hallucinatory shock. Later, readers are informed by a SHIELD field team of the disappearance of AIM's last invention hinted at by the coffin shaped container from which it was birthed. That creature turns out to be an Adaptoid, an android that can copy the semblance and powers of anyone it's close to which it proceeds to do with Cap by the end of this story. For sure, the King was back in full force and it'd be a looong wait till issue #83! But hold on! Captain America wasn't the only feature in *Suspense*. There was Iron Man, too, at the front of the book and there, readers were no less dazzled by the opening blows of IM's fight with the new and improved Titanium Man! Under Giacoia's inks, Gene Colan's pencils take on new heft and weight as Lee's script maintains suspense throughout. The fight has its ups and downs until finally ending with Pepper Potts caught in the Titanium Man's stasis beam. With the Red Menace threatening to kill Pepper if Iron Man so much as moves, what's a red, white, and blue hero to do? Stay tuned till next issue for the answer!

X-Men #25

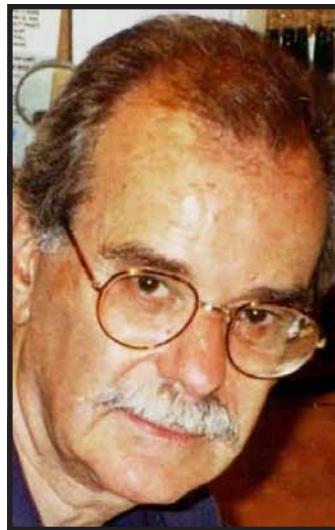
"The Power and the Pendant!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

The King struck again, gracing the slowly improving X-book with yet another classically designed cover, this time featuring the story's villain, back to the reader, as he gestures menacingly toward the charging X-Men with the Angel given pride of dramatic place front and center! Add to that, coloring by Stan Goldberg with El Tigre's violet and orangish-yellow dominant, and you've got one heckuva cover image! Inside *X-Men* #25 (Oct. 1966), the Roy Thomas/Werner Roth team continue their turnaround with a tale involving South American ne'er do well El Tigre and his pair of bolo/machete bearing henchmen searching for the pendant of Kukulcan to transform its bearer into a living Mayan god. Needless to say, our heroes find themselves mixed up with the planned theft but fail to stop it, with the result that El Tigre is transformed in a near full page final panel into a rejuvenated Kukulcan. Throughout, Roth's art continues its slow upward trajectory with his penchant for crowding too many figures in every panel easing off. In fact, he even finds room over a couple of pages for some solo Angel action. In the meantime, Thomas continues to give fans more than their money's worth in the sheer amount of verbiage to read, he uses it well both in the action sequences as well as the ongoing soap opera dealing with Marvel Girl's new college locale and her being sought after not only by Cyclops and Angel, but new competition in the form of college chum Ted Roberts. Consider this ish as solid and providing hope for the series' future.

X-Men #26

"Holocaust!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Things heat up beyond the X-Men's battle with El Tigre last issue (readers will remember that El Tigre was transformed into the Mayan god Kukulcan at the end of the previous issue). Regarding that development, *X-Men* #26 (Nov. 1966) picks up where the previous issue left off, tracking Kukulcan to Central America where the villain restores an ancient ruined city and lays plans to, what else? Conquer the world! But the real action as scripted by Roy Thomas, happens on the personal level. There, on the campus of Metro College, Jean Grey runs into Calvin Rankin, formerly the Mimic but currently with no memory of his short career as someone who could copy the abilities of anyone he's near. Ominously, Rankin feels that he recognizes Jean from somewhere... Meanwhile, tension between Cyclops and Angel over Jean's affections continue to roil and when Cyclops accidentally strikes the Angel with his power beam, the latter claims it was done on purpose: "Because...you love her... too," gasps the Angel before falling unconscious. Now Cyclops is wracked not only with guilt but with self doubt on the question whether he subconsciously wanted to hurt the Angel or not. It was all good stuff and working in the right direction to make the X book a more interesting read than heretofore. For his part, penciler Werner Roth was still trying to place too many characters in every panel but did manage to break free at the climax of the story with some large panels featuring mostly the Beast and Ice Man, thus opening things up a bit. Not only that, but Roth also provided a fine cover image colored nicely by Stan Goldberg with its purple shading to brown background matching the color scheme of Kukulcan's wardrobe. Since the appearance of the Locust and Marvel Girl's moving on to Metro College, things were looking up for the X book with fans likely keeping their fingers crossed that the upward mobility would continue...



MARVEL'S SECRET WEAPON: MUCH OF MARVEL'S SUCCESS FROM THE EARLY YEARS TO THE GRANDIOSE, WAS DUE TO THE COLORING BY STAN GOLDBERG. WHOSE JUDGMENT AND EVEN NUANCE, WAS KEY TO DRAWING CUSTOMERS' EYES TO THE PRODUCT AND KEEPING THEM THERE.

Tales to Astonish #85

"...and One Shall Die!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Bill Everett (inks)

"The Missile and the Monster!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Reaching back once again to the early days of Marvel when the company was still known as Timely, editor Stan Lee sought out another Golden Age artist to recruit for work with his growing line up of superhero comics. Like Jack Kirby, John Romita, and Gene Colan, John Buscema began his artistic career at Timely in the late 1940s before the company's contraction in the following decade. In the 1950s, he bounced around different comics companies before drifting into advertising, where Lee found him when the summons arrived to return to the fold. Lee recalled Buscema as one of his favorite artists of the period and was happy to have an excuse to call him back. It took some cajoling but once Buscema arrived, he quickly adapted his realistic style to the outsize, exaggerated action that Kirby had since popularized. Buscema's first assignment was on *Strange Tales* #150. There, Kirby had done the layouts for him to finish as the King had been doing for almost every newcomer to the Marvel bullpen. But Buscema, having noted Kirby's direction, ignored the layouts and proceeded to pace the story himself. His instincts were proven correct as can be seen in the Hulk feature for *Tales to Astonish* #85 (Nov. 1966) where Buscema's facility with figure work and facial features (the close ups of both the Hulk and Bruce Banner's faces as they hang onto a runaway missile) combined with action (the Hulk's battle with a robot) were immediately apparent. Lee's story was a decent one, too, with a sub-plot involving Rick Jones merging seamlessly in with that of the Hulk's. Buscema would stay on for another two issues and by the end, readers would be saddened to see him go. But he wouldn't just disappear! Buscema was destined for a long career at Marvel filled with classic issues produced under his skilled hand. Meanwhile, penciler Gene Colan and inker Bill Everett were still teamed on the book's Sub-Mariner lead feature wherein Subby, his memory restored, breaks off with the Secret Empire's Number One. Here, for some reason, Everett's inking falls short, stripping much of Colan's dramatic art of its texture and leaving most of the interest on the side of the story rather than its art. A rarity for a Colan produced instant classic.

Amazing Spider-Man Special #3

"...to Become an Avenger!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Don Heck (inks)

It was still early in penciler John Romita's tenure on *The Amazing Spider-Man*, so he can be forgiven for turning in the somewhat lackluster performance on display in the *Amazing Spider-Man King Size Special* #3 (Nov. 1966). On the other hand, it might just have been the

fact that Spider-Man as a character, never really worked well as a team player. That was quickly recognized by editor Stan Lee resulting in Spider-Man's omission from membership in any super-team for decades, before the rule was broken in the late twilight years only to prove the rule. Here, however, scripter Lee never had any intention of signing up Spidey to the Avengers. The story's real purpose was to provide a unique story worthy of a Marvel annual. In this case, a crossover between Spider-Man and the Avengers guest starring the Hulk. (Another special milestone was also included, perhaps with Lee not quite realizing it: the reunification of the original Avengers with the new Avengers for the first time since the original team members retired [albeit sans the absent Quicksilver and Scarlet Witch who, as Avengers readers would've known, were off to Central Europe to find out why their respective powers seemed to be diminishing].) The Avengers, seeking to increase their ranks, decide to consider Spider-Man for membership. To prove his worth, he's given the challenge of luring the Hulk to the Avengers for capture. But upon finding the Hulk, our hero learns his tragic secret and thinking that the Avengers want to turn him over to the authorities (they really only wanted to help their old teammate), he tells them that he couldn't even locate "the green gloop." It was a fairly slight story with most of the interest centered around the bickering between the Avengers and Spider-Man with Romita's art seeming somewhat half hearted, still finding its footing as the artist transitioned from *Daredevil* to succeeding Steve Ditko on *Spider-Man*. Disappointingly for old time fans, the rest of the issue is taken up with reprints of *Spider-Man* #11 and #12. Oh, well. Maybe this month's FF annual would prove more satisfying...

Fantastic Four Special #4

"The Torch That Was!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

It was a Marvelite's dream and the perfect subject for a special annual event. We speak of the appearance in *Fantastic Four King Size Special #4* (Nov. 1966) of the original Human Torch from the golden era of the 1940s. Certainly, the current Human Torch was originally conceived as an updated version of the original created by Carl Burgos, but the personality created for him by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby differentiated him greatly from the first. In fact, they made him a far more interesting character. But when Lee brought back the Sub-Mariner, another Golden Age creation, in the regular *Fantastic Four* comic, it became inevitable that fans began to question the whereabouts of the original Torch. And as Lee often reminded readers, they were the real bosses at Marvel and their wishes were his commands. Thus, this special annual where the two Torches meet. The immediate cause of the original Torch's return is old FF villain the Mad Thinker, who discovers and revives the android body with the help of a super computer he

names Quasimodo. Wasting little time, he orders the Torch to find Johnny Storm and begin his attack on the FF. Meanwhile, the Human Torch, with the help of Lockjaw, has been teleported back home from his wanderings in time and space. He immediately takes off to try and break through the barrier that surrounds Attilan, the city of the Inhumans. But no sooner does he appear on the scene, than he's attacked by the original Torch. What follows is slam-bang Kirby action as the two firebrands clash climaxed in a full page splash before the battle moves beneath the earth. Eventually, the rest of the FF show up to separate the two just as the Thinker warns them that he's booby trapped the original Torch. In a final heroic act, the android steps away to be consumed by his own flames saving the lives of the others. It was a tight, 19-page story that managed to bring all of the regular cast together between two covers with plenty of action and plot that also answered the lingering question of whatever happened to the original Human Torch. It was only to be regretted that the rest of the book's 72 pages were given over to reprints, albeit the great FF/Hulk/Avengers two-parter of the years of consolidation, but even that was small comfort to fans who'd been weaned on annuals composed of all original material.

Amazing Spider-Man #42

"The Birth of a superhero!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)



JOHN ROMITA HAS SAID THAT HE BASED MARY JANE'S LOOK AND ATTITUDE ON THAT OF ACTRESS ANN MARGARET BUT ASIDE FROM THEIR BOTH HAVING RED HAIR, THE RESEMBLANCE SEEMED SLIGHT. OR WAS IT? YOU BE THE JUDGE!

Continuing his campaign to tie up dangling plot threads left by the departed Steve Ditko, editor/scripter Stan Lee ends *Amazing Spider-Man* #42 (Nov. 1966) with a bombshell: the revelation of the mysterious Mary Jane Watson. For months, plotter/penciler Steve Ditko had teased readers with the character finding ways for she and Peter Parker to just miss each other when meetings were set up by either Aunt May or neighbor Anna Watson. And when Mary Jane did show up, her face was always obscured, sometimes because it was turned away and once even hidden behind a giant sun flower! But did anyone really believe, as Peter himself suspected,

that any girl being pushed by his elderly aunt had to be unattractive? Certainly not, after the twin reactions of Betty Brant and Liz Allen when they first set eyes on Mary Jane. In any case, Peter was finally cornered this issue when Aunt May reminds him of their dinner date with the Watsons. "I've spent months trying to avoid meeting Mrs. Watson's niece," thinks a resigned Peter. "I guess I might as well meet her and get it over with. She may not be as bad as I expect...she'll probably be worse!"

So, imagine his surprise (and the readers') when in the final panel of the story, Mary Jane is finally revealed and she's every bit as gorgeous as former romance artist Jazzy Johnny Romita could make her! "Face it, tiger. You just hit the jackpot!" concludes Mary Jane in one of the most unforgettable lines of dialogue in comic book history. In comparison, the main part of the story in which Jonah Jameson's astronaut son becomes a psychologically rattled powerhouse due to some space spores he picked up on his last mission beyond the stratosphere is almost a letdown. But don't worry! The Rhino will make the scene again next issue and readers will learn just how different a character Mary Jane was. No wallflower, her!

Fantastic Four #56

"Klaw, the Murderous Master of Sound!; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Still on hiatus between epics (the Galactus trilogy and Cosmic-powered Dr. Doom), scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby continue their string of single issue stories threaded together by subplots involving the Inhumans still trapped beneath the impenetrable

dome that covers their city and the Human Torch's ongoing attempts to find a way inside to reunite with girlfriend Crystal. Whereas the Torch and then the Thing had the spotlight in the issues immediately preceding *Fantastic Four* #56 (Nov. 1966), now the Invisible Girl enters center stage as Klaw, "the murderous master of sound" returns to



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FANTASTIC FOUR #56, PAGE 14: JOE SINNOTT'S INKS ON THE CROWDS IN PANEL 4 HERE, PERFECTLY REFLECTS THE GLARE FROM THE TOP OF THE BAXTER BUILDING IN PANEL 3, CASTING AN OMINOUS PALL OVER THE CITY AS THE FF'S BATTLE WITH KLAU ASSUMES OUTSIDED PROPORTIONS. IN A WAY, AS THE GRANDIOSE YEARS PROGRESSSED, THE DOINGS OF THE FF ATOP THEIR SKYSCRAPER HQ, BECOME INCREASINGLY REMOTE AND MYSTERIOUS TO THE AVERAGE MAN IN THE STREET AKIN TO THE GODS ATOP MOUNT OLYMPUS.

avenge himself on the FF who helped defeat him in his attack on the Black Panther. But this being the grandiose years, Lee and Kirby couldn't leave well enough alone. It wasn't enough to have Klaw able to create living beings out of solidified sound, now he demonstrates a whole range of new powers logically derived from his sound-based origins (detailed here for the convenience of readers). But that's not all that's going on here...not by a long shot! In what will prove to be the basis for a number of future stories, Lee and Kirby reintroduce the concept of sub-space first seen in issue #51. Sub-space would soon be renamed the Negative Zone with Mr. Fantastic and the Thing here studying it from afar on a huge scanner that dominates page 3 in an eye-popping Kirby image. The two heroes will be trapped in the sub-space lab by Klaw while the villain goes after the Invisible Girl caught on the outside. But while Mr. Fantastic and the Thing struggle to escape the sound barrier set up by Klaw (and wrecking all kinds of Kirby-tech as they do), the Invisible Girl holds her own until the others finally make their escape. They do so with the help of another crazy contraption dreamed up by Mr. Fantastic: "a counter sonic harness! "How come ya never cook up any gizmos that work better on guys who can stretch?" asks the Thing who always seems to be the one stuck with the dirty jobs. But whatever its name, the harness works and, freed from the lab, the Thing arrives just in time to save the Invisible Girl and come to grips with Klaw. The resulting clash lights up the Baxter Building with "sheer discordant vibra energy" that cuts off the city's power, throwing New York into darkness. Page 14, panel 5 shows the public on the street, fearful, wondering at the cataclysmic events with Kirby's pencils, as inked by Joe Sinnott, shadowing faces giving visual text to the public's fear. Between Kirby's imagery and Lee's prose, there's an unmistakable increase in the awesomeness of the FF's doings since the Galactus trilogy. Nothing they do now is on a small scale. Everything is larger than life. Everything is on a global scale. In effect, the FF themselves are like modern gods on a new, earthly Mount Olympus high up in the Baxter Building where remote and isolated, their doings remain mostly mysteries to the man on the street. But behind the walls of those upper floors, our heroes recover from the shock of the Thing's attack and Mr. Fantastic receives a special delivery from the Black Panther: a pair of vibranium bands with which he proceeds to defeat Klaw. "Imagine! Lover-boy Reed gittin' into a real clobberin' match all by his lonesome," says the Thing. "It's kind'a like the millineeyum!" But as rough as this battle was, it'd prove to be only an appetizer for the crisis that emerges next issue, one that's hinted at on the last page with the appearance of the Silver Surfer framed in the sights of someone's binoculars. Someone whose identity is quickly revealed in the next issue blurb: "Next: Doctor Doom!"

Strange Tales #150

"*Hydra Lives!*"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); John Buscema (finishes); Frank Giacoia (inks)
 "The Conquest of Kaluu!"; Roy Thomas (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

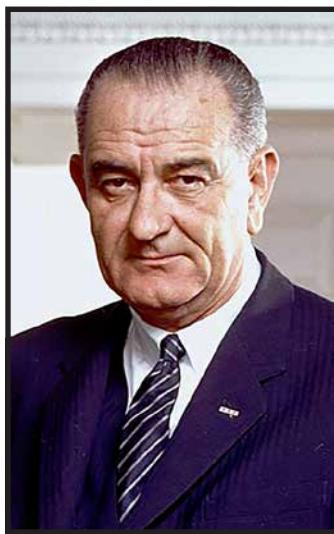
Penciler John Buscema lends a more realistic look to the more or less larger-than-life style of Jack Kirby who continues to do the layouts for SHIELD in *Strange Tales* #150 (Nov. 1966). Stan Lee is likewise still on the scripting keeping this latest resurgence of Hydra going in a chapter that was mostly set up for the more slam-bang doings next issue. Meanwhile, scripter Roy Thomas does what he can to keep the Dr. Strange vs. Kaluu story from becoming a snoozefest under the unsuitable pencils and inks of Bill Everett. Just too cartoony and two dimensional, Everett's style here just doesn't do it for capturing the phantasmagorical goings on of the Dr. Strange feature. But then, creator Steve Ditko was a hard act to follow. Maybe an impossible one.

Tales of Suspense #83

"*Victory!*"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Jack Abel (inks)
 "Enter...the Tumbler!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Led off with a slam-bang cover by Gene Colan showing a triumphant Iron Man socking it to the Titanium Man in no uncertain fashion, *Tales of Suspense* #83 (Nov. 1966) easily secured its place as one of Marvel's top

tier books. One of those, like the *FF* or *Spider-Man* or *Daredevil* or *Avengers* or *Thor* that promised total satisfaction for any fan or new reader testing the waters at the House of Ideas. And it did it in spades! The lead Iron Man feature started things off at the peak of its quality as Colan and inker Jack Abel concluded the Stan Lee scripted story of the return of the Titanium Man to challenge the values of the West. And though nothing could ever take away from artist Don Heck's similar effort when the armored foes clashed initially, Colan's style and layouts couldn't be more pulse-pounding as Iron Man really lets go, culminating in a full-page action shot followed immediately



THE TOPICALITY OF
 MARVEL'S COMICS
 WERE ENHANCED
 BY THE OCCASIONAL
 APPEARANCE OF REAL
 LIFE FIGURES SUCH
 AS THEN-PRESIDENT
 LYNDON B. JOHNSON.

by a half-page panel of Pres. Lyndon Johnson watching the contest on television! "He's like a human fighting machine," says presidential advisor Robert McNamara. "Irresistible, unstoppable, invincible!" Indeed, the irony in the Marvel Age was that Iron Man had become the country's sentinel of liberty much moreso than the obvious Captain America, whose own battles were far less ideological. The story ends in the "Victory" of the title, and as Titanium Man is abandoned by his angry Red masters, the readers learn



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TALES OF SUSPENSE #83, PAGE 3: WITHIN MERE MONTHS OF HIS ARRIVAL ON THE MARVEL SCENE, FORMER STAIRED ROMANCE ARTIST GENE COLAN'S STYLE EXPLODED IN A PAROXYSM OF ACTION! WITH INNOVATIVE, FREE STYLE LAYOUTS AND IN YOUR FACE ACTION THAT THREATENED TO BURST THE SEAMS OF PANEL BORDERS, HE PERFECTLY CAPTURED THE ELAN OF THE GRANDIOSE YEARS AND BECAME A FAN FAVORITE.

that Happy Hogan's full memory has returned along with his knowledge of Iron Man's secret identity...

But readers had little chance to catch their collective breaths as the Captain America feature began right afterwards with Jack Kirby still doing full pencils. There, the action begins immediately with the opening splash page as new villain the Tumbler crashes into Avengers Mansion to make a rep for himself by tackling the star-spangled Avenger. But finding Cap an easy mark, the Tumbler is unaware that his intended prey is actually the Adaptoid who has taken on Cap's form. In what proved to be an unadulterated, straight ahead Kirby action fest with

page after page of contentious combat (with only a brief single page pause to relate the origin of the Tumbler), the real Cap finally appears to put the kibosh on the Tumbler and place the now somnolent Adaptoid on ice. Man! Not even the most discerning Marvelite could've found anything to complain about with this incredible ish! Not since the old Giant-Man/Hulk double feature in the early years era of *Tales to Astonish* did a combo like Iron Man/Captain America deliver the goods like it does here! Oh, how sweet it was! But how long could it last? Fans could only hope it went on forever...

Daredevil #22

"The Tri-Man Lives!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacossa/Dick Ayers (inks)

It was amazing how quickly penciler Gene Colan had so completely taken over on *Daredevil*. Suddenly, no one could imagine anyone else more fitting for the job than the artist whose sprawling, atmospheric style seemed such a perfect interpretation of the mostly ground level book. Following his introduction to

the feature with the two-part Owl storyline, scripter Stan Lee immediately plunged the artist into a series of stories that quickly turned the title into one of the fastest, smoothest reads in all of Marveldom. And part of the reason for that was Lee's choice in bad guys: The Masked Marauder made for a great arch villain popping up frequently while keeping his identity a secret (much like the Green Goblin had kept fans guessing for so long over in *Spider-Man*) while the Gladiator fit the role as angry henchman not satisfied in being the smarter man's lackey. For *Daredevil* #22 (Nov. 1966), they team up with the object of defeating DD putting them in the running for leadership of the Maggia. Their plan calls for the defeat of Daredevil, not through any direct action by themselves, but at the hands of an android called the Tri-Man that shows up at a boxing match to challenge Daredevil to a fight. What follows is the kind of big panel, widescreen action that Colan was rapidly becoming famous for among Marvel aficionados climaxed in a full-page splash of DD throwing the Tri-Man for a loop. (Earlier, after having DD steer the Owl's flying mechanical contraption to safety, Colan uses a full page splash just to show Daredevil entering Matt Murdock's darkened office; there was no action but only Colan could've made such a calm scene look as fantastic as he does with its night time shadowing, billowing curtains, and dimly lit cityscape outside the window. It left plenty of room for Lee to give DD characterization as he contemplates revealing his secret identity to Karen Page.) Defeating the Tri-Man, Daredevil is prevented from enjoying his victory by a sudden announcement from the Masked Marauder that unless he surrenders, the lives of Karen and Foggy Nelson would be forfeit. But how did the Marauder know of DD's association with Karen and Foggy? Therein lay a clue to his identity...



MUCH LIKE THE MAGGIA BOSSSES MEETING TO DECIDE WHO SHOULD LEAD THEM IN DAREDEVIL #22-23, ACTUAL UNDERWORLD LEADERS HELD AN HISTORIC SUMMIT AT A QUIET FARMHOUSE IN APPALACHIA, NEW YORK IN 1957. BUT UNLIKE THEIR FICTIONAL COUNTERPARTS, THAT GATHERING WAS DISRUPTED WHEN POLICE AND FBI RAIDED IT, BAGGING A NUMBER OF HIGH PROFILE SUSPECTS.

Daredevil #23

"DD Goes Wild!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

The alliance between the Masked Marauder and the Gladiator doesn't survive *Daredevil* #23 (Dec. 1966), as our hero is teleported to the Marauder's hideout where he proceeds to defeat not only the Gladiator but the three goons upon which the android Tri-Man's power was based upon. In a fast-moving tale dominated completely by action, action, and more action, Stan Lee's script joins seamlessly with Gene Colan's pencils to create a mini-masterpiece in their *Daredevil* run. With his free use of large panels and frequent full page splashes, Colan, in a few short issues, managed to eclipse the contributions of every former *Daredevil* artist, including Joe Orlando, John Romita, and even Wally Wood! There's even an unexpected denouement in that not only is the Marauder defeated (and his plan to use the defeat of DD as his entrance card to leadership of the Maggia) but the Gladiator refuses to finish Daredevil after the latter saves his life from a rampaging lion. To top it all off, while the Maggia rejects the Marauder, they hire the Gladiator because they "like his style!" But the impressiveness of Colan's art and plotting skills (inked by Frank Giacoia) can't be stressed enough as the artist continued to knock Marveldom assembled on its collective heels. His work here and on *Iron Man* was incredible just as his earlier art on Sub-Mariner was eye opening to a fandom that had perhaps become overly certain that no one could ever meet the standards of Marvel style originators Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck. Together with John Romita and a soon to impress John Buscema, Colan had definitely entered the top ranks of greatest comics artists of all time. And he was only getting warmed up!

Avengers #34

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

It doesn't get sweeter than this! After his blockbuster art job on the previous two issues (featuring the Sons of the Serpent), Don Heck returns again this issue inking his own pencils! Not only that, but scripter Stan Lee, apparently still enamored of the idea of re-introducing Giant-Man to the Avengers, again gives the character pride of place in a solo matchup with newbie baddie, the Living Laser. Thus, the highlight of *Avengers* #34 (Nov. 1966) is Goliath's *mano a mano* battle with the Laser, as Heck unleashes his power-packed pencilings in a great action sequence. Why, oh why, couldn't the old Giant-Man in *Tales to Astonish* have been more like this? If it had, Giant-Man would at this time be starring in his own book! As it was, fans of ole high pockets were simply delighted in his return with a new costume

and a new name and presented in such a dynamic manner. But Goliath's eventual defeat of the Laser is only a momentary one as the baddie ends up escaping from the rest of the Avengers. And having developed a fixation for the beauteous Wasp, the Laser wasn't about to let go of his ambitions. Along with an upgraded version of his laser weapons, he strikes again, this time capturing the balance of the Avengers (without Goliath and the still absent Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver) including the Wasp. But whatever suspense there might've been was eliminated with the next issue blurb: "Victory!" But Lee wouldn't be around to share in the Avengers' glory. He'd be replaced on the scripting chores by protege Roy Thomas who'd begin a legendary run that would extend unbroken to issue #104.

Avengers #35

"The Light That Failed!"; Roy Thomas (script);
Don Heck (pencils/inks)

As he'd done with *Sgt. Fury* and then *The X-Men*, editorial assistant Roy Thomas takes over the scripting chores from Stan Lee on *Avengers* #35 (Dec. 1966). It would prove to be the start of a long tenure on the book during which time, the young writer would refashion the comic numerous times while retaining ongoing characterization issues pioneered by Lee. Hawkeye would continue to be the team's bête noir, Goliath would continue to have emotional/psychological issues, and Captain America would remain the old reliable while yearning to break out on his own with SHIELD. Thomas would also explore new avenues of characterization with the most significant romantic relationship between the Scarlet Witch and the

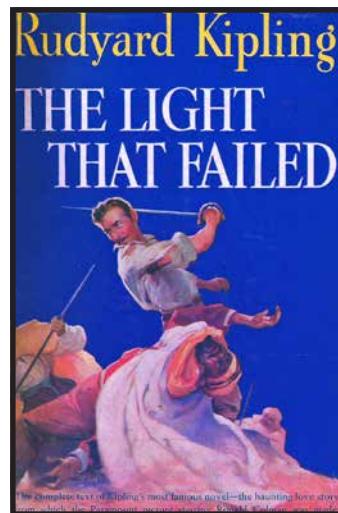
robotic Vision, an eventuality that would see the first division between Wanda and brother Pietro. Thomas, a former English teacher, makes his presence known almost immediately with a title for this issue's story taken from a Rudyard Kipling novel called *The Light That Failed*, an obvious reference to the ability of the Living Laser to harness the power of amplified

light. Paraphrasing or borrowing whole phrases from various literary sources would quickly become a Thomas hallmark (one no doubt pioneered by Lee himself) and readers were given an early taste of that here. The story itself was actually plotted by Lee, one that was begun in the previous issue, with Thomas mostly providing the script. In it, the Avengers follow the Living Laser to South America where the villain has absconded with the captive Wasp. In the engagement, Goliath shrinks to ant size to help save the day and in the process cures himself of being stuck at a ten foot size. Artwise, Don Heck once again thrills by both penciling and inking his own work, something that again works to good effect as he spotlights Goliath in much of the action. He does such a good job, one has to wonder how bad his Cap figure must have been on the cover for editor Lee to have it replaced by a too obvious Jack Kirby drawn figure lifted from the pages of *Tales of Suspense*! But judging from the impressive nature of the rest of the cover, readers could only wonder what could possibly have been so bad about Heck's version of Captain America?

Tales to Astonish #86

"The Wrath of Warlord Krang!"; Stan Lee (script);
Jerry Grandenetti (pencils); Bill Everett (inks)
"The Birth of...the Hulk Killer!"; Stan Lee (script);
John Buscema (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Nothing lasts forever. That was the dictum that fans of the Sub-Mariner feature in *Tales to Astonish* #86 (Dec. 1966) must have been repeating to themselves as they opened up the book only to endure the crushing disappointment of finding penciler Gene Colan replaced by one Jerry Grandenetti. A Golden Age artist who'd spent much of his later career at DC comics, drawing mostly for its war titles and producing nothing much of note, Grandenetti did manage to make his mark with a series of war mag covers done in a wash tone or graytone style. The results were nothing short of spectacular. Not many fans ever collected comics because Grandenetti drew a story on the insides, but many scrambled to acquire any book that sported one of his graytone covers. And with good reason. Still, his work here on the Sub-Mariner was up to Grandenetti's low bar. Featuring awkward, ugly work, it was far below the level of excellence set by Colan. Grandenetti was also not well served by inker Bill Everett. Despite being the Sub-Mariner's creator back in the 1940s, Everett had yet to prove himself as a penciler in general during the Marvel Age and in particular, as an inker on Subby. For some reason, his work here and on Dr. Strange failed to measure up to his exciting finishes/inks over Jack Kirby's layouts on the Hulk. Go figure. It also didn't help that scripter Stan Lee's landlocked plot prevented the use of more



SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS' ENGLISH TEACHER BONA FIDES OFTEN SHOWED IN HIS WRITING FOR MARVEL COMICS THROUGH STORY TITLES AND OTHER REFERENCES.

interesting visuals when action was required. Things were decidedly improved on the Hulk backup feature however where new penciler John Buscema was rapidly adapting himself to the Marvel style (i.e. never-standing-still) action. Here, Lee's story involves new super-villain the Boomerang as he plans for a rematch with the Hulk. But he'll have to stand in line as one of the Leader's deadliest androids runs amok and ends up flooring the Hulk! What would happen next? Readers had to stay tuned till the next issue to find out!



Amazing Spider-Man #43

"Rhino On the Rampage!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)

The saga of the Rhino continues and concludes in *Amazing Spider-Man* #43 (Dec. 1966) in an unusual story structure by editor/scripter Stan Lee. That is, while the Rhino was introduced and defeated by Spider-Man in issue #41, issue #42 featured a completely unrelated story about a transformed John Jameson. To be sure, #42 did include a scene of the Rhino in captivity, but it wasn't until the issue here that his story is properly concluded.

And while the

Spidey vs. Rhino action is exciting, especially choreographed as it was by penciler/inker John Romita (who further distanced his style from that of predecessor Steve Ditko), the events in Peter Parker's personal life that were the real attention grabber. Chief among them being Peter's first meeting with Mary Jane Watson at the dinner arranged for the two by Anna Watson and Aunt May. The interlude (one in which Peter berates himself for avoiding the vivacious Mary Jane for months) is interrupted by a news bulletin of the Rhino's escape. Wondering how he can get away from Mary Jane to fight the bad guy, Peter is surprised to find out that she's not exactly the wall flower type, suggesting the two take Peter's motorcycle to get where the action is: "Now that's the kind of gal friend a busy Spider-Man needs," thinks an approving Peter. Elsewhere, Ned Leeds and Betty Brant become engaged, Flash Thompson is drafted into the Army, Aunt May suffers a relapse, and the re-introduction of Curt Connors can only mean that the Lizard isn't far behind. Whew! It was plain that even with the departure of Ditko, who'd done the heavy lifting plot wise while he was on the book Lee had no intention of slowing things down now that he was the one in the driver's seat!

Tales of Suspense #84

"The Other Iron Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
 "The Super-Adaptoid!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Wow! *Tales of Suspense* was firmly at the top of the Marvel pack with the double barreled Iron Man/Captain America features in *Tales of Suspense* #84 (Dec. 1966)! First up, readers were able to drool over the Stan Lee scripted, Gene Colan penciled, twelve-page Iron Man shocker in which Tony Stark collapses while testifying before a Senate committee hearing! To make matters worse, when a doctor examines him, he's found to be wearing a metal chest plate! The drama here is highlighted with a triptych of big, half-page panels by Colan filled with crowding bodies and frenzied activity around the fallen Stark. Later, when questions arise about the possible connection between Stark and Iron Man, Happy takes it upon himself to don the armor and appear as Iron Man in public while Stark is still convalescing. As you'd expect, his inexperience with the powerful armor shows as he stumbles and dodges around the countryside in more large-sized panels that really make the story zip along. But just as he's about to return the armor, mission accomplished, he's suddenly teleported away by the Mandarin. Hoo, boy! But as thoroughly enjoyable and satisfying as the Lee/Colan IM feature had been, it's almost put in the shade by the Lee/Jack Kirby Captain America follow up that rounds out the issue. There, inked by Frank Giacoia, Kirby is in top grandiose form beginning with an eye-popping opening splash featuring the Avengers being led by Cap along a tech lined corridor. (And did Goliath ever look more



IN A SCENE FAMILIAR TO MILLIONS OF AMERICANS ON THE NIGHTLY NEWS, CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS INVESTIGATING THE VIETNAM WAR HELD IN 1966 AND CHAIRED BY SEN. J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT COULD ALSO HAVE EASILY CONVENED TO QUESTION TONY STARK ABOUT HIS TOP SECRET IRON MAN ARMOR!

powerful or imposing than under the pen of the King?) They gather in the room where the Adaptoid is being held while little suspecting that the creature is adapting himself to all of their powers. The result: the *Super-Adaptoid!* Sporting the combined powers of all the Avengers, he determines he's now ready for a rematch with Cap. And boy! Does Kirby ever go to town with the action that follows. Huge, quarter-page panels show Cap rocking and socking the Adaptoid with enough force that the reader could almost feel the blows. When the tale finally ends, the Adaptoid is mistaken in believing Cap has been killed and flies off (and to next appear in the *X-Men*). While the battle lasted though, this story, combined with the Iron Man lead feature, made *Suspense* #84 one for the ages! Things just couldn't get any better than this now, with Marvel at the height of its grandiose years. It was pure reader sublimity!

X-Men #27

"Re-Enter: the Mimic!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Both scripter Roy Thomas and penciler Werner Roth were really getting the hang of their respective departments by the time of *X-Men* #27 (Dec. 1966). To prove it, we have another jam packed issue with plenty of inter-personal action sprinkled throughout; it was the leavening needed to keep things interesting, even if the menaces the X-Men faced might be sub-par (such as the recent Lucifer two-parter). Here, for instance, Cyclops is still wracked with guilt over accidentally striking Angel with his eye beams, a concern that would plague him for months to come. Elsewhere, the Beast and Iceman continue their double dating habits with girlfriends Vera and Zelda while Marvel Girl's love life is complicated by possible feelings for fellow Metro College student Ted Roberts. (Luckily however, she makes time to redesign the X-Men's uniforms in a slightly more spiffy style!) Add on top of all that the return of the Mimic, whose memory is restored just in time for the Puppet Master to take him over and get him to attack the X-Men. There was a lot going on here with Thomas not skimping on the details, but Roth comes through, especially on the interpersonal characterization scenes. (The former romance artist really comes through with his depictions of Jean Grey making it plain for all to see just why Cyclops and the Angel were competing for her affections!) Action scenes seem a little less cluttered than in former issues but Roth's look for the Puppet Master left something to be desired, but his cover design was a perfect combination of action and simplicity, balancing the threat of the Mimic with the X-Men on defense. The issue ends with a question mark regarding the future of the Mimic who'll remain as not only a full fledged member of the team, but its leader in future issues. Thomas would succeed in making the Mimic a really interesting character and it was only to be regretted that the new hero didn't stay on on a more permanent basis.

Amazing Spider-Man #44

"Where Crawls the Lizard!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)

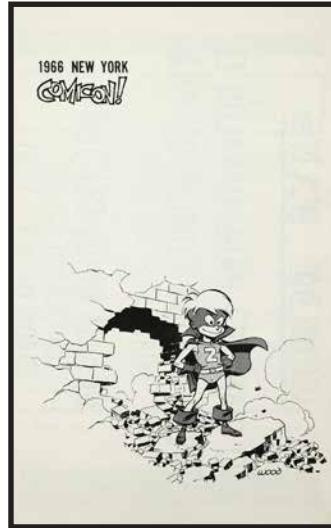
Well, if readers had to be subjected to another Lizard story at least it was scripted by Stan Lee and penciled and inked by John Romita! Of all the clever, wonderful, colorful super-villains dreamed up by Lee and Ditko, easily the least interesting had been the Lizard. If there was one thing less interesting for heroes to fight than alien invaders it was mindless monsters and the Lizard was both a monster *and* somewhat mindless. To be sure, Spider-Man's relationship with Curt Connors and his family was unique in his career. When he was in a corner, he could always count on Connors to help in a pinch. That was okay, but when the Lizard reared his ugly head...not so much. The good thing about *Amazing Spider-Man* #44 (Jan. 1967) was that it featured only the second appearance of the Lizard. The bad news was that it was a two-parter but, as noted earlier, at least this two-parter was done by Lee and Romita at the respective heights of their involvement with *Spider-Man*. That meant plenty of drama, plenty of sub-plots (including more Mary Jane, more JJ, more of the gang at the ole Silver Spoon, and more Aunt May), and plenty of action as Spidey (with one arm in a sling) tackles a resurgent Lizard and finishes this first chapter in classic Spidey fashion: with a final panel listing all of Peter Parker's problems. **Fun Fact:** A football game between Empire State University and Metro College is mentioned along with Metro's star player, Whitey Mullins. Famously, both the Human Torch and Wyatt Wingfoot attend ESU and their game with Metro would be seen in *Fantastic Four* #61! It's a game at which Peter Parker also attends.

Amazing Spider-Man #45

"Spidey Smashes Out!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)

Spidey's battle with the Lizard continues in *Amazing Spider-Man* #45 (Feb. 1967) while scripter Stan Lee succeeds in making this superhero vs. monster story as interesting as he can. Helping to make the pill go down easier, Lee sprinkles the tale with Peter Parker sub-plots: first he has to explain to the gang at school how he ended up with his arm in a sling (he said it was an accident with his motorcycle), and next, he can't make Gwen's going away party for Flash due to lack of funds. That's when Harry Osborn says he'll put in a good word for him with his father, opening up the possibility of future complications involving the Green Goblin (and setting up the plot for the second issue of the *Spectacular Spider-Man* magazine). On top of all that, there's still a concerned Aunt May vacationing in Florida and Frederick Foswell still unduly curious about how Peter manages to get all those great photos of Spidey. Hoo, boy! If anyone thought that after Lee tied up all those loose ends left by the departure of Steve Ditko there'd be nothing

BY THE MID-SIXTIES, A FAN CULTURE WAS TAKING FIRM ROOT AND GATHERINGS OF COMICS FANS WERE A NATURAL OUTGROWTH OF THAT MOVEMENT. AT SO-CALLED CONVENTIONS, NOT ONLY DID THE PRESENCE OF PRO GUESTS BECOME ROUTINE, BUT PROFESSIONAL ARTISTS OFTEN CONTRIBUTED IMAGERY FOR PROGRAM BOOKLETS SUCH AS THIS ONE SPORTING ART BY WALLY WOOD FOR THE 1966 NEW YORK COMIC CON.



left of interest, they were sorely mistaken! Add to all that, Spidey's ongoing problem of finding the Lizard and defeating him without hurting Dr. Curt Connors, and you've got a heady mix of everything that was making *Spider-Man* Marvel's number one seller. **Fun Fact:** This issue's Bullpen Bulletins notes that Jack Kirby had been guest of honor at a comics convention held in Manhattan and that another con was heavily represented by the bullpen

gang and headlined by Lee himself. It was a far cry from that first, early convention held in 1964 where only Lee's Gal Friday, Flo Steinberg, represented Marvel in an official capacity. In an unofficial capacity, artist Steve Ditko was the only creator present. The proliferation of comics conventions not only in New York, but around the country, was testament to a new popularity for comics in general and Marvel in particular.

Strange Tales #152

"The Power of SHIELD!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (layouts); Jim Steranko (finishes)
"Into the Dimension of Death!"; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

In a series that was obviously becoming more fantastic and even outlandish by the issue, especially with the arrival of newcomer Jim Steranko doing the finishes over Jack Kirby's layouts, the SHIELD feature in *Strange Tales* #152 (Jan. 1967) was sheer overthetopness! Trapped at the controls of a Hydra bomber, Nick Fury realizes that the dreaded overkill horn must be on board. And even as he's chased down by a SHIELD strato-mine, Fury manages to steer the bomber back to Hydra HQ and destroy it. With no rest for the weary, Fury next leads a SHIELD assault force to rescue Laura Brown from the last remnants of Hydra. Whew! And if all that weren't enough for any hardened SHIELD fan, Steranko's artistic overlay of Kirby's layouts continued to amaze even at this early stage: first, by adding incredible detail and second,



ARTIST JIM STERANKO CONSCIOUSLY CULTIVATED PERSONAL COOL TO GO ALONG WITH HIS GROUND BREAKING POP ART STYLE. COMICS THEMSELVES WOULD PROVE TO BE TOO SMALL A POND FOR THE RESTLESS STERANKO WHO SOON PUBLISHED AN OVERSIZED TWO VOLUME *THE STERANKO HISTORY OF COMICS* THAT BROUGHT NEEDED ATTENTION TO THE MOSTLY FORGOTTEN GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS. FROM THERE, THE ARTIST/WRITER WOULD GO ON TO PUBLISH *COMIXSCENE* MAGAZINE AND LATER, THE LONG RUNNING *MEDIASCENE/PREVIEW*.

with hints of Steranko's wild imagination. The bombers on display on page 2 are like no aeronautical design ever seen and a modest use of zipatone on page 3 is only a suggestion of the special FX yet to come. His designs for the overkill horn and strato-mine and the SHIELD Marine Division Pickup No. 7 sub are all out-of-this-world. And while his figure work still needed some work, it was clear that this new talent (the first of the next generation of artists to arrive on the Marvel scene), was going to be really fun to watch as the months passed. Unfortunately, the same could not be said for veteran artist Bill Everett, who continued to struggle with the Dr. Strange backup feature. Very dull stuff going on here not helped by another evil sibling plot by scripter Stan Lee, in a rare fumble for the editor.

Tales of Suspense #85

“*Into the Jaws of Death!*”; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
 “*The Blitzkrieg of Batroc!*”; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Tales of Suspense continued to give Marvel's top books a real run for their money! Not only did *Tales of Suspense* #85 (Jan. 1967) feature another full Jack Kirby pencil job on Captain America, but a knockout Gene Colan Iron Man lead feature, one that began with an eye popping opening splash of the Mandarin zapping our helpless hero. Or rather, Happy Hogan in the Iron Man armor! (Then again, the Colan cover spotlighting a

chained Iron Man again being zapped by the Mandarin was also an attention grabber!) By now, Stan Lee was sculpting his scripting style, streamlining it, cutting down on captions, and otherwise succeeding in making his comics some of the most easily digestible stories in the industry. He was helped in that regard here by Colan's continued use of gigantic panels and full bore action, with movement that never stopped until the very last panel. But if all that greatness wasn't enough for the reader, all they had to do was turn the page to have his senses assaulted by a full bore Jack Kirby action fest as he and Lee waste no time at all picking up Cap as he enters a trap set by Hydra. From that opening splash page, it's action all the way as Cap goes toe to toe with Batroc the Leaper in panel after panel of balletic movement that melds perfectly from one to the next. The whole thing is topped off first with page 7 that Kirby breaks into four quarter-page sized panels featuring Cap and Batroc's oversized bodies, blocking them out before segueing over to page 8 that Kirby breaks down into a nine-panel grid which Lee wisely leaves silent of script. There, Kirby does it again, conducting the movements of the two battlers in such a way that each follows logically into the next. All that's climaxed on page 9 wherein the two combatants team up to put an end to the Hydra trap and rescue Agent 13. Whew! If nothing else, this simple exercise in straight ahead action demonstrated in no uncertain terms that Kirby was the undisputed King of comics, actioners or otherwise! It also put paid to anyone who doubted that the *Tales of Suspense* title deserved to be listed alongside the *Fantastic Four*, *Thor*, and *Spider-Man* as Marvel's best titles.

Tales to Astonish #87

“*Moment of Truth!*”; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)
 “*The Humanoid and the Hero!*”; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Although editor/scripter Stan Lee gives penciler Bill Everett a big welcome back blurb on the first page of the Sub-Mariner feature in *Tales to Astonish* #87 (Jan. 1967), it's to no avail as Everett's performance here is as lackluster as it was on Dr. Strange over in *Strange Tales*. Something was going on with Everett that prevented him from showing his work in its best light. His figures were chunky and awkward and his storytelling not up to par. Not helping him with this issue is the fact that he wasn't able to complete all the inking, with almost the entire Marvel bullpen rushing in to fill the gap. The Sub-Mariner feature had surely fallen onto hard times following Gene Colan's triumphant run. Would it ever recover? The irony was that it would, but the recovery wouldn't begin in earnest until after the character received his own title, a title whose first artist would be the one currently penciling the Hulk feature at the back of this issue. Namely, John Buscema! There, the art would be everything Everett's effort wasn't: dynamic and anatomically correct. All a

reader had to look at was the story's opening splash page with its Kirby like, monumental figures of the Hulk and his humanoid antagonist in the midst of battle! As always, good art inspired scripter Lee as the story really moves along with Rick Jones getting involved and introducing the new Boomerang along the way. In a bit of a preview of things to come, DC artist Gil Kane executed this issue's cover. And though the artist's anatomical shortcomings were on display, the larger than life figures falling over the city with a Stan Goldberg coloring scheme makes it an eye catcher.

Daredevil #24

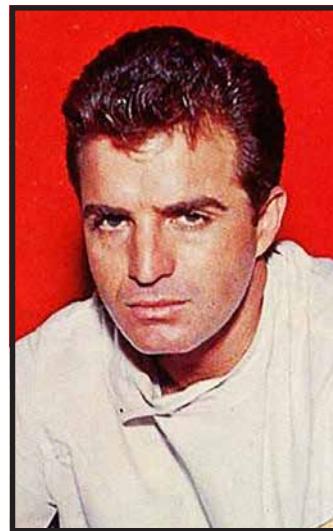
"The Mystery of the Midnight Stalker!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

No one hits a thousand and neither it seemed, did scripter Stan Lee. Fighting his way free of the Maggia at the start of *Daredevil* #24 (Jan. 1967), Daredevil makes his way to England where he discovers that Ka-Zar is accused of terrorizing his neighborhood as the "midnight stalker." DD offers his help and after the obligatory misunderstanding and fight, the two team up to tackle the Plunderer, Ka-Zar's evil brother, and expose him as the real terrorizer. Zzzzz. Out of his hidden jungle, Ka-Zar was always a snooze when it came to antagonists for Marvel's heroes and it was no different here. The only real saving grace was Gene Colan's art. Man! If he had drawn that earlier three part DD/Ka-Zar meeting back in issues #12, 13, and 14, that story might have been considered a classic today! As it was, readers had to slog through another yarn here with the nowhere Plunderer. The good news was that it'd be the last anyone saw of him, at least in the *Daredevil* book. From this point forward, it would only be pedal-to-the-metal Lee/Colan action, color, humor, and fast forward story telling!

Mighty Thor #136

"To Become An Immortal!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

It had to happen. The Thor/Jane Foster relationship was doomed from the start...or at least after it became clear that Dr. Don Blake was simply a persona given Thor by Odin to play out his punishment on Earth for being too brash and impulsive in Asgard. But the way scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby went about solving the problem in *Mighty Thor* #136 (Jan. 1967) was unique and interesting: In order for Thor to wed Jane, she first must be made an immortal (never mind any theological reservations Jane might have had in becoming a "goddess") and to do that, she had to prove her worthiness by passing a test that would measure her courage against the Unknown. Unfortunately, or perhaps predictably, she's found wanting and Thor is forced to save her. Driven half-insane by the sights of Asgard (let alone the crazy, hallucinatory nature of Kirby's



WAS MARVEL'S DR. DON BLAKE PATTERNED AFTER ACTOR RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN WHO STARRED AS DR. KILDARE ON THE TV SHOW WITH THE SAME NAME WHICH COINCIDENTALLY RAN FROM 1961 TO 1966? CERTAINLY, IT WASN'T THE DARKER, MORE INTENSE VINCE EDWARDS FROM THE BEN CASEY SHOW THAT AIRED IN THE SAME YEARS?

otherworldly vision of the home of the gods), Jane rejects the whole thing: "I won't be a goddess! I won't stay in Asgard! It's too horrible! Too unendurable! Don't you realize how mad it is?" And she's right! On close examination, nothing in Asgard makes much sense. But be that as it may, big daddy Odin immediately zaps her back to Earth, even as Thor cries out in anguish. But all-wise Odin has other plans for his son. Sending him after the Unknown now loose in Asgard, Thor suddenly finds himself side-by-side with a beautiful warrior maiden named Sif and right quick, he begins to forget all about Jane. Meanwhile, back on Earth, Odin has erased Jane's memory and set her up as a nurse in a hospital managed by Dr. Kincaid who could be the spitting image of Dr. Blake. (Or was he really supposed to be Dr. Kildare, a popular television show of the same name that starred the young, blond haired Richard Chamberlain?) With this ish, the Thor feature was primed for a new beginning. Now more or less cut off from any Earth bound associations (besides his later appearances with the Avengers where Thor would deal only tangentially with ordinary humans), Thor would see more of a concentration on Asgard and Asgardian menaces over Earthly ones. Whether removing Thor from the everyday world of the Marvel universe was a good idea or not only time (and sales) would tell. The new direction however, would make the Tales of Asgard backup feature somewhat redundant as there, too, adventures were confined to the Asgardian realm. More immediately, Odin observes the conclusion of Thor's battle with the dragon Fafnir; a battle that ends when Fafnir is swallowed up by the earth and from whose grave a tender shoot sprouts, foretelling a new flowering of the once blasted land of Nastrond!

X-Men #28

"The Wail of the Banshee!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

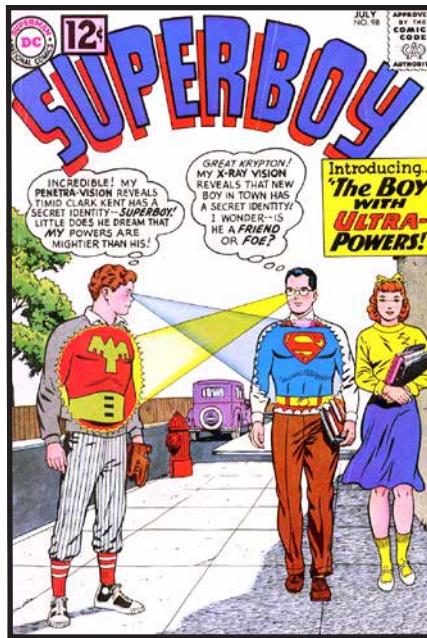
The fun continues in *X-Men* #28 (Jan. 1967) (and how could it not, with the Mimic now part of the team?) as scripter Roy Thomas introduces a new mutant menace, the first in quite a number of issues—in fact, the first since way back in issue #9! Actually, the Banshee isn't exactly a menace (despite his initial tangle with the X-Men), but a mutant forced to work for homo superior's latest community threat: Factor Three. This first mention of Factor Three begins a lengthy sub-plot that will only come to the fore in later issues. Meanwhile, on the face of it, it seems that the Banshee is a petty thief that the X-Men are determined to stop, but the Banshee isn't working alone. In partnership with the Ogre (who breaks with traditional bad guy physiognomy being pudgy rather than muscular) they plan to kidnap Prof. X. Their plans are foiled by the X-Men, however, and it's learned that the Banshee was an unwilling partner due to an explosive device set in his headband. This was another densely plotted tale by Thomas with plenty going on (including a major goof where he has Marvel Girl identify a pair of pliers as a screwdriver!) with groundwork laid for yet another sub-plot involving Ted Roberts' older brother. In addition, the relationship between the Mimic and the rest of the team continues to be a rocky one with the Mimic now named as deputy leader. But his ego and headstrong nature make for a bad fit and the formerly smooth group dynamic is constantly on the verge of being shattered. Furthermore, Cyclops discovers a locked door in the basement of the school. What's behind it? Ah, that's a sub-plot for another time! Throughout, Werner Roth's art continues to be serviceable. Not terribly exciting yet, but sufficient enough to provide fans with some hope of improvement. (His hang dog interpretation of the Banshee's face in particular; one suspects that Roth was shooting for some kind of ethnically Irish look that largely fails.) Overall, the Thomas/Roth team continued to do good service on the X book. They managed to maintain the title's quality at a certain level, even if that level didn't quite reach beyond the bottom of Marvel's lineup. (If one counts the half book features in *Astonish*, *Strange*, and *Suspense* separately, it certainly beat out the Bill Everett Dr. Strange and Sub-Mariner and the upcoming Gil Kane Captain America.)

Avengers #36

"The Ultroids Attack!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils/art)

The good news for *Avengers* #36 (Jan. 1967) was that Don Heck was still inking his own pencils. The bad news was that scripter Roy Thomas decided to go the super computer as villain route rather than introducing or re-introducing a colorful super-villain. After some bickering between Goliath and Hawkeye over admitting the Black Widow as a member of the team, the group (including the Widow) fly off to Europe in answer to a call for help. Turns out the call was a lure by a computer going by the name of Ixar that wants to siphon the life forces of the Avengers to increase its own powers. ho-hum.

In the process, the computer manufactures creatures called Ultroids. The Ultroids capture the Avengers save for Captain America and the Black Widow. Continued next issue! Thomas does a bang up job on the story despite the somewhat boring threat of a super-computer (that Heck does a heck of a job making look cool in an introductory splash on page 9) with an army of mindless androids. The story is helped immensely by Heck's art where only he seems to be able to spot blacks on his own work. (His technique works to perfection) Heck's only failing here is on some of the faces which come off as being too broad and plastic in places. But in compensation, no one did Goliath and Hawkeye better at this time than he did! And did Thomas revisit the Ultroid moniker (as well as Ultrana, an Ultroid that impersonates the Scarlet Witch) when he later called another mechanical Avenger menace Ultron? You be the judge!



THE WORD "ULTRA" WAS IN THE AIR IN THE 1960S INCLUDING THE INTRODUCTION OF SUCH CHARACTERS CONTEMPORANEOUS WITH AVENGERS #36 AS ULTRA BOY WHO DEBUTED IN SUPERBOY #98 IN 1962 AND ULTRAMAN WHO LIKEWISE DEBUTED ON US TV STATIONS IN 1966.

Avengers #37

"To Conquer a Colossus!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils/inks)

Avengers #37 (Feb. 1967) is the second part of a snoozer wherein the Assemblers battle a sentient computer intent on siphoning off their powers for itself with the ultimate goal of...what else? "supremacy in the galaxy!" So, our heroes have been captured by Ixar (the sentient computer) but escape thanks to Goliath. They're stymied however after Ixar threatens to kill

a human hostage. However, Ixar has forgotten the presence of the Black Widow who's not an official Avenger and so, not bound by the team's code against killing. The logical Ixar is unable to fathom the art of the bluff and so backs off. It was an okay yarn that was well-scripted by Roy Thomas, but it was time to move on to more exciting super-villains as Hercules makes his debut in the next issue. His presence on the team would require more formidable foes and they wouldn't be long in coming. One factor that really helped to make this ish more palatable was the art by Don Heck, for which he both pencils and inks. His combination of overlarge panels and way-out machinery were more than satisfying including Goliath's hand-to-hand battle with an anthropomorphized Ixar! It was only to be regretted that soon, Heck would be off the book even if his replacement turned out to be John Buscema. **Fun Fact:** Although this ish sports an early cover design by Gil Kane, Heck had actually drawn his own version

that was ultimately rejected, likely because most of the heroes faced away from the reader. Nevertheless, Heck's version was still the superior to Kane's more cartoony characters and flat figurework. That, and Kane doesn't even give Goliath any prominence. Phooey!

Tales to Astonish #88

"A Stranger Strikes From Space!"; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)
"Boomerang and the Brute!"; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils/inks)

Of all the artists working for DC (at least outside of its romance department, which had already been raided by editor Stan Lee of its best artists), whether on its superhero, war books, or adventure

titles, only Gil Kane might in any way have made an easy transition to Marvel. Although his style consisted of anatomically wild figure work and sometimes questionable placement of characters within the four borders of a panel, his depiction of exaggerated action was just what Marvel's readers



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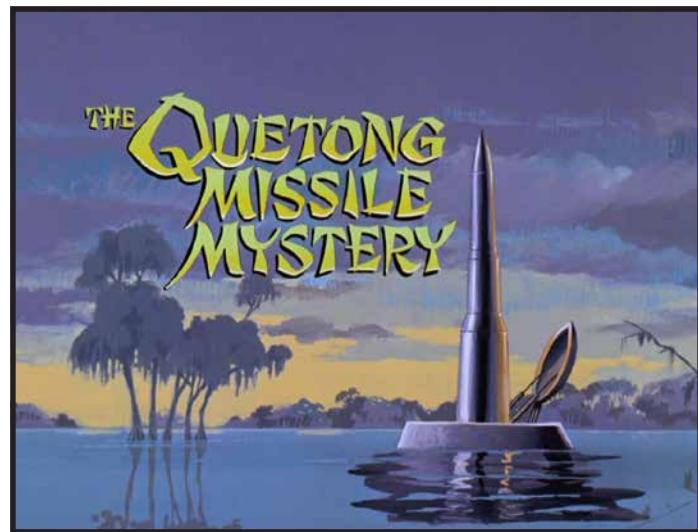
TALES TO ASTONISH #88, PAGE 7: LEAVING MUCH TO BE DESIRED ANATOMICALLY, THE ACTION AND MOVEMENT IN THESE PANELS FROM ARTIST GIL KANE'S FIRST PENCILING EFFORT AT MARVEL SHOWS WHY HE WAS THE BEST SUITED OF DC'S SUPER-HERO ARTISTS TO MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM ONE COMPANY TO THE OTHER. MORE MANNERED DC ARTISTS SUCH AS CURT SWAN, JOHN FORTE, WAYNE BORING, MIKE SEKOWSKY, THE BOB KANE GHOSTS, EVEN CARMINE INFANTINO OR JOE KUBERT WOULDN'T HAVE CUT IT WITHOUT MAJOR ALTERATIONS TO THEIR APPROACHES TO LAYOUT AND STORYTELLING.

had come to expect from the house that King Kirby had helped to build. After testing the waters as an inker under the pen name of Scott Edward (where he inked Kirby and maybe learned a bit of what was expected from a Marvel artist), Kane stepped in penciling and inking the Hulk feature in *Tales to Astonish* #88 (Feb. 1967) with his real name emblazoned boldly in the credits. (Which in itself wasn't his real name: Kane was actually born Eli Katz.) Interestingly, he was still penciling *The Atom* and *Green Lantern* for DC at the time so apparently, his moonlighting for Marvel was okay with his editors there. That, or his DC bosses never looked at Marvel comics, something that Roy Thomas has said wasn't beyond the realm of possibility. In any case, here was Kane with his first full bore Marvel assignment and though his weaknesses were apparent (funny looking faces, off-kilter Hulk, and strange body types), the energy in his work couldn't be denied. His Hulk and bad guy Boomerang were always on the move (even when they were standing still!) and his panel to panel continuity was smooth, effortlessly taking the reader along with him. Coupled with Stan Lee's by now diamond polished scripting, it made for one of the best Hulk interpretations following those of Kirby, Steve Ditko, and John Buscema (in that order). Unfortunately, the same couldn't be said for Bill Everett's interpretation of the Sub-Mariner in this issue's lead feature. There, as Subby fights off Attuma and a giant robot, Everett's art was as clunky and uninteresting as it was in previous installments. What had happened to the artist who first dreamed up Namor back in the 1940s and then returned to pencil *Daredevil* #1 and then did such a bang up job finishing over Kirby on the Hulk, no one seemed to know. But wherever that artist was, readers could only hope he returned...and soon!

Tales of Suspense #86

"Death Duel for the Life of Happy Hogan!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"The Secret!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

And the hits just keep on comin'! At least in terms of *Tales of Suspense*! As with the current run on the title, the art combo of Gene Colan on Iron Man and Jack Kirby on Captain America continued to thrill and amaze, even as Stan Lee's scripting smoothed over any hitches in the storytelling. As usual, *Tales of Suspense* #86 (Feb. 1967) begins where last issue's Iron Man cliff hanger left off, namely with Happy Hogan having been captured by the Mandarin in the belief that he was the real shellhead. But when the real deal shows up, it's action all the way with Colan pulling out all the stops in page after page of inventive panel layouts arranged to best display the titanic battle between IM and the Mandarin. But Colan didn't do it all alone. He had help by way of unsung hero Frank Giacoia who wasn't timid



CAPTAIN AMERICA WASN'T THE ONLY ONE TAKING ON SECRET ORIENTAL BASES! IN FACT IT WAS ALL THE RAGE IN THE 1960S FROM JAMES BOND TO JONNY QUEST!

about laying down a heavy ink line when needed, one that really brought out Colan's bulky figure work. The finished product was made all the more realistic and intense when Giacoia filled in Colan's shadowy edges, making it seem like the whole thing took place in a darkened castle at midnight! As a result, the Mandarin never looked so menacing and even creepy and Iron Man never so solid and three-dimensional. Comics just didn't get any better than this...except maybe if they were drawn by the King! And such was the case in this issue's Captain America backup where penciler Jack Kirby (again inked by the indefatigable Giacoia) also goes hog wild in depicting ten full pages of straight-ahead, bludgeoning action as Cap infiltrates a secret science city in the heart of Red China to make contact with a SHIELD agent and destroy something called a Z-ray. In doing so, he goes up against an army of bad guys, as well as an array of out-of-this-world gadgetry that only Kirby could've dreamed up. There's not much more that can be said about Kirby's art in this period than to point out that it was at the absolute peak of his grandiose style with his version of Cap more gigantic, more athletic, more in-your-face than ever before in his career. He does it by sticking to big, wide open panels with figures often filling them right out to the borders leaving precious little room for Lee's clipped, economic dialogue. All of it was summed up in a single image, namely this issue's cover where Kirby uses visual shorthand to encapsulate the action and excitement waiting inside. Add to Cap's dominating figure amid a clutch of enemy soldiers, coloring in which our hero's red, white, and blue stands out in stark contrast to the enemy's dull khakis. It was more Stan Goldberg magic as he includes subtle gradations of color over the figures that scream "instant classic!" worthy of any museum wall.

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WHO WOULD RETURN TO DO YOUR BAD DEEDS?
BUT THIS TIME -

TALES OF SUSPENSE 86

2



2.

DICKS HIMSELF UP AND

(OPPOSITE PAGE) TALES OF SUSPENSE #86, PAGE 2: FORCED PERSPECTIVE, REVERSE AND LOW ANGLE SHOTS, ALTERNATING PANEL SIZES AND SHAPES, GRANDIOSE FIGURES IN PRACTICALLY EVERY PANEL...AND ALL ON THE SAME PAGE! ARTIST GENE COLAN, BARELY A YEAR AFTER COMING OVER TO MARVEL FROM DC'S ROMANCE COMICS, MIGHT EVEN HAVE BEEN ABLE TO TEACH KING KIRBY A THING OR TWO!

Mighty Thor #137

"The Thunder God and the Troll!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

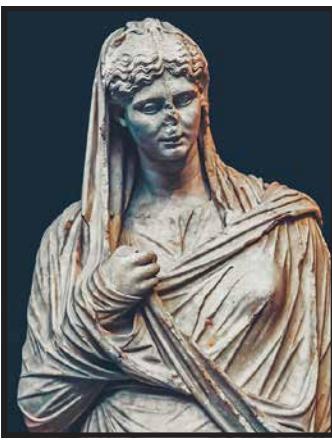
Wow! If the cover of *Mighty Thor* #137 (Feb. 1967) with its virtual 3D imagery of a battling Thor vs. Ulik rendered in all its Jack Kirby glory didn't instantly grab readers, well, they either had to be blind or brain dead! It was hard to believe that even here, at the pinnacle of the grandiose years, with knock-out Kirby covers like this one staring them in their collective faces, that there were still comics fans out there that never gave Marvel a tumble. Yes, believe it or not, there were fans of DC's more subdued approach to visual presentation that emphasized slow-moving Murphy Anderson or stiff Curt Swan or slow motion Mike Sekowsky art than the fast-moving, hurtling action of the King and the rest of Marvel's art stable. Not to put those other artists down, but man! It was like night and day with daylight definitely favoring Marvel! And it was just as good on the inside with an opening splash page depicting a full-figured (and we don't mean *zaftig*!) Lady Sif showing off her spearthrowing form to Thor. The following pages are composed mostly of big, quarter-page sized panels, anathema to DC artists (whom, to be fair, only drew what their writers' full scripts told

them to draw), as Thor and Sif are attacked by a horde of trolls climaxing on page 7 with a splash introducing new villain Ulik. Drawn in the by now patented Kirby grandiose manner, Ulik looked every inch a challenge for Thor, something he proceeds to prove in the following pages where Vince Colletta shows that he was the only inker who could possibly work over Kirby and succeed in capturing the outsized fantasy environment *Thor* demanded. The Kirby/Colletta team continued to amaze in the Tales of Asgard backup



MIGHTY THOR #137, PAGE 5: THE MOVEMENT AND BLUDGEONING ACTION WAS THERE, BUT ARTIST JACK KIRBY, UNLIKE MARVEL CONTEMPORARY GENE COLAN, SEEMED DETERMINED TO REMAIN WITHIN THE CONFINES OF THE FOUR AND SIX PANEL PAGE WHICH, TRUTH TO TELL, OFTEN SEEMED TO BE THE ONLY THINGS THAT COULD CONTAIN HIS BRAND OF GRANDIOSITY.

wherein we learn why Thor's companion Hogun is called "the grim." Turns out it's due to someone named Mogul who duly appears in dramatic fashion on page three: "Know you Hogun, thy rash challenge hath been heard, heard by Mogul, of the Mystic Mountain!" Mogul, with his eastern style armor, was like a character out of the Arabian Nights, a new area of myth that Kirby would explore over the next few issues. Daring Thor and his companions to follow him, Mogul departs in style, in the hand of a gigantic green genii! For sure, Kirby, Colletta, and scripter Stan Lee were firing on all burners at this time and on both features in the *Thor* title. The question was: how long could they keep it up?



Mighty Thor #138

"The Flames of Battle!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

The latest Asgardian epic continues in *Mighty Thor* #138 (March, 1967) as Thor travels to Earth to rescue Sif, who has been kidnapped by the villainous Troll, Ulik. There, Thor is himself captured while in the guise of Don Blake even as the Troll hordes conduct their initial attack on Asgard. But all that is but prelude to a full scale battle as the Trolls, under the advisement of Orikal (Oracle...get it?) tunnel under Asgard in preparation for a sneak attack. Meanwhile, back on Earth, Thor defeats Ulik, frees Sif, and travels back to Asgard just in time to join the coming fray. Whew! Of course this bare bones summary doesn't do justice to Stan Lee's scripting that again captures the otherworldly majesty of Asgardian fantasy as well as Jack Kirby's grandiose imagery exemplified by his full page intro of Orikal followed by Thor's blockbuster battle with Ulik. Great stuff! Meanwhile, at the back of the book, the grandiosity is again on full display as Thor and the Warriors Three tangle with the monstrous Ogur (ogre...get it?) as they seek the Mystic Mountain, home base of the evil Mogul. Here, as usual, inker Vince Colletta proves again why he was the best inker over Kirby's Thor, perfectly matching the artist's grandiose vision. Everything is on a gigantic scale: the action, the story, the characters. No one else at this time could possibly have captured the spirit of the grandiose years as Colletta, excepting the possibility of Bill Everett or Syd Shores. Come to think of it, maybe Marvel would have been better served if Everett had been inking Thor instead of penciling the Sub-Mariner, but be that as it may, with the evidence before us here, there was no doubt that Colletta was indeed the man of the hour!

SCRIPTER STAN LEE AND PENCILER JACK KIRBY, WHO BY THIS POINT SHARED IN THE PLOTTING CREDITS, DREW THEIR INSPIRATION FROM WHEREVER THEY COULD FIND IT: WAS ORIKAL IN MIGHTY THOR #138 BASED ON THE GREEK ORACLE AT DELPHI? AND THE MYSTIC MOUNTAIN WITH ITS JINNI DEVIL FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS?

his hammer from Ulik and the two go at it until in desperation, the Trolls' ace is played, namely Orikal, who turns out to be an alien creature enslaved by the Trolls to do their bidding. When Thor frees Orikal from the spells that bind him, the alien leaves, taking his powers with him, the powers that had energized the Trolls' weapons. As a result, the Trolls find themselves unequal to the Asgardians and abandon their plan to invade the home of the gods. It was another instant classic by scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby, a story that just barrels along with its Kirby grandiosity and Lee verbal pageantry. Thor's battle with Ulik fairly jumps off the page (readers could almost feel the impact when, on page 9, panel 3, Thor and Ulik strike each other's hammers in an illo expertly inked Vince Colletta!) and the half-page illo of Orikal amid his mystic flames is awesomeness personified! And yet, all this was just a start. The next issue would begin a sequence of stand-alone stories back on Earth where Thor reacquaints himself with a number of old time, colorful super-villains now reimagined in the new grandiose style. All of them were destined to be humdingers! Meanwhile, back here in ish #139, the action wasn't done as readers moved on to the regular Tales of Asgard featurette wherein our heroes learn "The Secret of the Mystic Mountain!" Here, Kirby continues to amaze as Thor unveils Mogul's capitol city, Zanadu (Xanadu...get it?) and is attacked by Mogul's green hued Jinni Devil. Kirby's art continues to be enhanced like there's no tomorrow by Vince Colletta who knocks 'em dead with an opening splash page featuring Mogul amid oriental splendor and page 2, divided into big, quarter-page panels including a fourth panel that's somehow chilling in its contrast between the head of the giant Jinni Devil and the tiny figures of Mogul and his counselors as they stand above it on a slender bridge. It didn't get much better than this, folks!

Mighty Thor #139

"To Die Like a God!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Thor's battle with the Rock Trolls continues in *Mighty Thor* #139 (April, 1967) as the thunder god brings the battle to the Trolls' own domain. There, he retrieves

X-Men #29

"When Titans Clash!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

The Roy Thomas/Werner Roth creative team hit its high point with *X-Men* #29 (Feb. 1967). There, the X-Men face off against the Super-Adaptoid which Cyclops has inadvertently disturbed in its cavern hideaway. A running battle ends with the Mimic going head to head with the Adaptoid concludes after the Adaptoid tries to add the Mimic's power to his own. "My nutty hunch paid off," thinks the Mimic. "Since my own borrowed powers are artificial, I guessed he couldn't absorb them any more than I could mimic his!" Reverting to his original form, the Adaptoid crashes into a frozen lake, vowing that "mankind has not heard the last of the Adaptoid!" It was another well-plotted, fast-paced tale by Thomas, where Roth seemed to finally have freed himself from the habit of crowding too many figures in a single panel. Falling back on standard five and six panel grids, Roth opens up the action while giving room for individual characters such as Iceman and Mimic to shine. In particular, Iceman's solo action vs. the Adaptoid and the Mimic's defeat of the same were both well handled and exciting to read. Meanwhile, Thomas didn't forget the character building stuff that he'd been developing over the past several issues including further work on Cyclops' unrequited love for Marvel Girl, one that he feels is impossible to fulfill due to his inability to control his optic blasts. Also, the Mimic's attitude problem is finally resolved here as the chip is knocked off his shoulder after he opens himself up to friendship. In addition, one of the best scenes in the Thomas/Roth era occurs in the first few pages of the story as the X-Men enjoy an ice skating session somewhere on the school grounds. Here, Roth's years as a romance artist for DC comes in handy as he presents one of the title's best day in the life scenes since the departure of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. There was



AN OFTEN OVERLOOKED INKER OF MARVEL'S SILVER AGE, JOHN TARTAGLIONE WAS ACTUALLY A PROLIFIC ARTIST FOR DELL COMICS SPECIALIZING IN TV AND MOVIE ADAPTATIONS. AT MARVEL HOWEVER, HIS BRUSH DID YOEMAN'S SERVICE FIRMING UP DICK AYERS' PENCILS ON SGT FURY AND ESPECIALLY ON THE HEART OF GENE COLAN'S ORDER ON THE DD STRIP.

here as the chip is knocked off his shoulder after he opens himself up to friendship. In addition, one of the best scenes in the Thomas/Roth era occurs in the first few pages of the story as the X-Men enjoy an ice skating session somewhere on the school grounds. Here, Roth's years as a romance artist for DC comes in handy as he presents one of the title's best day in the life scenes since the departure of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. There was

one fly in the ointment however: namely the Mimic's loss of his powers after the Adaptoid tries to copy his abilities. The Mimic had been an intriguing character from the start, despite the oft-repeated trope of being able to copy the powers of those around him. Even with all his rough edges he was made a member of the team and even deputy leader, a combination that guaranteed lots of friction with the other X-Men. There was tons of potential there for many future issues. Unfortunately, Thomas chose to cut his career short and even worse, to depower him, ensuring his disappearance into the sunset and unlikely to be used anywhere else. And as *X-Men* went on, his absence would become even more obvious as story telling bogged down and the title itself drifted to cancellation levels. With the Cyclops/Angel competition for Marvel Girl's affections ended, the Mimic could have provided the internal conflict needed to keep the team dynamic interesting. But it was not to be. Would the continued presence of the Mimic have made any difference to declining sales? Who knows? But it'd be nice to think it would have!

Amazing Spider-Man #46

"The Sinister Shocker!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)

Now this was more like it! After a two-parter with the Lizard (heroes vs. barely thinking monsters are boring...although it's to be admitted that scripter Stan Lee and artist John Romita did a great job making something of the situation), focus returned to costumed super-villains and for *Amazing Spider-Man* #46 (March. 1967), Lee and Romita came up with a doozy! Clad in an imaginatively designed quilted costume, the Shocker makes the scene committing a refreshingly simple bank robbery. In the initial encounter, Spidey is taken by surprise by the villain's vibratory powers and defeated. But what a way to go! Four pages of Romita action spread over a number of big panels perfectly showing how the artist had fully adapted from the romance comics he'd been doing at DC to Marvel's more dynamic way of storytelling. Sure, the two tangle again before the issue is over but in between, Lee catches up with Peter Parker's personal life as Flash Thompson's farewell party looms, Aunt May returns from Florida, Patch picks up Peter's trail, and Gwen and MJ continue to knock 'em dead: "Wow!" thinks Peter as he catches Gwen on the dance floor at the Coffee Bean, "Who's that doll dancing over th...It's Gwen! I didn't recognize her at first. Look at her go!" Then it's round two between Spidey and the Shocker and guess who wins? Again, Romita shows why fans quickly got over the departure of the beloved Steve Ditko with another series of great action panels that culminate in something Lee had probably been wanting to do for some time; namely move Peter out from behind Aunt May's apron strings and into his own pad. Following a tearful separation, Peter rides

his motorcycle uptown to the expensive apartment he'll be sharing with Harry Osborne for some time to come. But despite the radical changes, old time fans were likely reassured in the story's final panel wherein Peter is prevented from complete satisfaction with his move brooding instead over his seeming inability to be happy. It was another fine issue of *Spider-Man*, one that fell mid-way in Lee and Romita's initial run on the title as the new creative team and there was no sign as yet of any slow down in story quality. In fact, the best was yet to come, as the next half dozen issues would prove!

Strange Tales #154

"Beware, the Deadly Dreadnaught!"; Roy Thomas (script); Jim Steranko (plot/pencils/inks)
"Clea Must Die!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils/inks)

It'd only been a few issues since Jim Steranko came out of nowhere to finish Jack Kirby's layouts with issue #151, and here he was in *Strange Tales* #154 (March 1967) already plotting, penciling, and inking the SHIELD half of the book. This time, it was scripted by Roy Thomas but that would soon change as Steranko took over that chore, too, and made it his own. Here, Steranko's plotting leaves nothing to complain about as Laura Brown, daughter of the now deceased Supreme Hydra, is escorted by Agent John Bronson to safety. Meanwhile, Nick Fury is attacked by a Hydra robot assassin called the Dreadnaught but with the aid of new weaponry, the robot is defeated. But wait! Bronson turns out to be the Supreme Hydra, a fact contradicted by SHIELD computer AUTOFAC that identifies Laura as the Hydra leader! What gives? Artwise, Steranko supports all these goings-on with an eye-popping array of art styles, tricks, and effects, in a combination that would rapidly become a hallmark of his style. From an opening splash page whose every space is crammed with detailed machinery reminiscent of Wally Wood's art in his old EC Comics days, to a half-page blueprint detailing the layout of the helicarrier, to an in-your-face splash on page 5 of the Dreadnaught smashing through the hull of the helicarrier to attack Fury, to a chromatic effect emitted by the Dreadnaught's gamma ray device—Steranko made an immediate impression on every reader! Also, Thomas comes through with a high voltage scripting style that was quickly adopted by Steranko as later stories would be told in furious here and now fashion with adjectives and superlatives flying in every direction. With all that going on, it was hard to believe that Thomas and Steranko got it all done in only twelve pages! Compared to SHIELD, though, the Dr. Strange backup was definitely of lower wattage. There, Bill Everett had been replaced on the art by Marie Severin but her style was only marginally better than Everett's. Her figures were twisted and bent as if suffering from polio or some debilitating disease

and her imagination, at least here, was too literal, failing to capture the hallucinogenic past triumphs of originator Steve Ditko. And never a fan of the strip himself, scripter Stan Lee seemed to hit a trough with yet another tale of an evil sibling in the form of Dormammu's sister, Umar. Lee does, however, attempt to further the relationship between Strange and Clea, the girl who had helped him in an earlier battle with the lord of the Dark Dimension. Overall though, Dr. Strange had hit rock bottom. How long it'd stay there only time would tell...

Tales of Suspense #87

"Crisis at the Earth's Core!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"Wanted: Captain America!"; Roy Thomas (script); Jack Sparling (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Nothing lasts forever, especially artist Jack Kirby's stands on various Marvel titles. He came and went on the earliest Ant-Man/Giant-Man tales, *Thor*, and the *Torch*. He kicked off the *Avengers*, *Sgt. Fury*, and *The X-Men* before leaving them for others to continue. But it was his work on Captain America that seemed the most consistent with the artist leaving and returning on a regular basis all throughout his career at Marvel. And such was the case here in *Tales of Suspense* #87 (March 1967), wherein fans who'd been thoroughly pleased with the King's art in the past several issues (climaxing with the amazing Yashonka story in the previous issue), suddenly found him painfully absent from this issue. Instead, the perfectly horrid pencils of one Jack Sparling met them when they turned the page from the latest Iron Man thriller to that of the Star-



UNFORTUNATELY, PENCILER JACK SPARLING MADE FOR AN UNCOMFORTABLE FIT AT MARVEL. UNLIKE SECOND TIER DC ALUMNA SUCH AS GIL KANE AND WERNER ROTH WHO BOTH MANAGED TO FIND THEIR NICHES, SPARLING'S STYLE PROVED WHOLLY UNFIT FOR THE COMPANY'S GROWING MOOD OF GRANDIOSITY.

Spangled Avenger. Inexplicable as it seems, Sparling had been kept busy drawing for a number of different companies all through the Golden Age of the 1940s well into the 1960s. Bad posturing for his figures and goofy facial expressions were his forte, none of which was helped with a by-the-numbers plot from scripter Roy Thomas involving a villain called the Planner and his attempt to steal Cap's shield. Yawn. Luckily, however, fans were spared a complete waste of their twelve cents by the Iron Man lead feature which still sported artwork by Gene Colan and inker Frank Giacoia. The latter's inks still lent Colan's work an undercurrent of darkness that added a sombre feel to the goings on. Those goings on, scripted by Stan Lee, included Tony Stark's latest invention, the Earth borer which, of course, leads Iron Man underground and a confrontation with Marvel's resident under Earth monarch, the Mole Man!

Tales to Astonish #89

"The Prince and the Power!"; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)
"...Then, There Shall Come a Stranger!"; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils/inks)

The glue that kept the tottering *Tales to Astonish* book from complete dissatisfaction was the scripting of Stan Lee. Throughout, it's his guiding hand, his experience, his smooth through line, and ability to turn a phrase that at least keeps both Sub-Mariner and Hulk from being unenjoyable. Because what makes a pleasing comic book story is its appeal to both the mind and the eye and *Astonish* was failing in that regard with the Sub-Mariner in particular and the Hulk somewhat less so. That was only due to the fact that the Hulk was being penciled and inked by newcomer (to the Marvel bullpen at least) Gil Kane. There, the Hulk backup was at least holding on under Kane's somewhat eclectic art style, now free of needing to follow Jack Kirby's layouts. Quick to assert himself, Kane found a way to differentiate his work from what he was doing for DC's *Green Lantern* and *Atom*, which was all to the benefit of Hulk fans. Perhaps Kane's familiarity with science fictional themes (besides *Green Lantern* and *Atom*, he'd cut his eye teeth on DC's early SF anthologies such as *Mystery in Space*) allowed him to ease into the proper mindset for a story involving the Hulk's encounter with the cosmic-powered Stranger (who was originally featured in *X-Men* #11). Kane quickly establishes the Stranger's power with a dramatic low angle shot on page 2 before moving on to page 6 where he presents readers with their first look at his ability to design way out machinery that could give even Kirby a run for his money. And though he was still having trouble drawing the Hulk's head (it often looked lumpy and out of shape), he did manage to capture the character's sense of power in such near full-size panels as that on page 9. Together with Lee's fast-moving scripting (not forgetting some character beats



TALES TO ASTONISH #89: GIL KANE TAKES THE COVER SPOTLIGHT THIS ISSUE CHOOSING A LOW ANGLE UPSHOT OF THE STRANGER AS HE ZAPS OLE GREENSKIN. THERE'S STILL SOME RESIDUAL JACK KIRBY INFLUENCE IN KANE'S CHOICE OF DRAMATICS HERE, BUT HE'D SOON MOVE ON WITH HIS OWN TAKE ON EXAGGERATED FIGURES AND PANEL SHATTERING ACTION SEQUENCES.

among Rick Jones, General Ross, and Betty Ross), this latest entry in the Hulk serial was not bad at all, in fact, it was very satisfying. It was only too bad that the same couldn't be said for the Sub-Mariner feature that was still the opening act for *Tales to Astonish* #89 (March 1967). Though Lee's script was good, the uninspired art by Bill Everett seemed to be a drag on the pacing. Everett's figure work was still awkward and his inks totally lacked the detailed work he did over Kirby on earlier installments of the Hulk. What happened to that artist? Where'd he go? Why the change in style? Whatever happened to it, its loss really kept Everett's work on Subby from being anything more than merely serviceable. If something wasn't done quickly, *Astonish* was doomed to a mediocrity no Marvel title deserved.

X-Men #30

"The Warlock Wakes!";
Roy Thomas (script); Jack Sparling (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Although artist Jack Kirby returned to the book in style doing the cover for *X-Men* #30 (March, 1967), the effect was mitigated by having Jack Sparling guest pencil its interior pages. As he'd done with the Captain America feature in this month's *Tales of Suspense*, Sparling ruined the issue with his oddball figure work and boring action scenes that were all overlaid with a distinct lack of imagination. To be fair, though, the story by Roy Thomas wasn't exactly inspired this time out as the X-Men are inexplicably attacked by a villain calling himself the Warlock (but really just the same Merlin that Thor tackled way back in *JIM* # 96) who proceeds to play magical tricks on them. ho-hum.

Warlock tells the X-Men that his powers are explained by the fact that he's a mutant, too, and supposedly for that reason, feels he has a claim on Marvel Girl whom he duly kidnaps. (And what in the world was

that goofy winged scooter Prof. X is flying in the story's final panel?!?) The whole issue had the feel of being a fill-in on the road to the team's confrontation with Factor Three with Thomas scripting in his sleep; but at this point, Factor Three couldn't come along fast enough!

Amazing Spider-Man #47

"In the Hands of the Hunter!"
Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils/inks)

Halfway through their initial extended run on the title since the departure of co-creator Steve Ditko, scripter Stan Lee and penciler John Romita had all their ducks in order, had eliminated whatever kinks there might have been since they first

teamed up, and were humming like a well oiled machine. Smack dab in the middle of that classic early run, *Amazing Spider-Man* #47 (April, 1967), though appearing to be a single issue story, was actually the first in a three-part sequence that led into the climactic introduction of new Spidey foe, the Kingpin in ish #50. In fact, readers might have considered that the sequence,



AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #47, PAGE 2: THE START OF ONE OF THE MOST MEMORABLE THREE ISSUE SEQUENCES IN THE POST-STEVE DITKO ERA OF SPIDER-MAN. SCRIPTER STAN LEE REPEATS HIS OFFBEAT ON AGAIN/OFF AGAIN STORYTELLING TECHNIQUE THAT HE USED IN THE EARLIER RHINO STORYLINE. THIS ISH, HE BRINGS BACK KRAVEN THE HUNTER, ONLY TO DROP HIM IN ISSUE #48 IN FAVOR OF THE NEW VULTURE. BUT THEN, HE BRINGS THEM BOTH BACK TOGETHER FOR ONE OF THE MOST SATISFYING CLIMACTIC ISSUES OF THE ENTIRE SPIDEY RUN: NAMELY #49'S TEAM-UP OF KRAVEN AND VULTURE VS SPIDEY! IT DIDN'T GET BETTER THAN THIS, FOLKS!

made up of three standalone but related stories, was an interesting variation on the continued story format that Marvel had been pioneering through the grandiose years. Lee had flirted with the new "disjointed" continued story format with the earlier Rhino storyline in issues #41-43. There, the Rhino was introduced in #41, was sidelined but not ignored in #42, and returned for a final bout with Spidey in #43. Here, Lee begins with a self-contained story involving the return of Kraven the Hunter who's seeking money owed him by the Green Goblin (in an early instance of retro-continuity that didn't happen in the regular books but is told now in a current issue) but, because of the Goblin's apparent death, decides to lean on bagman Norman Osborn instead (unaware, of course, that Osborn had once been the Goblin). Kraven is foiled in his plan by Spider-Man and escapes. Next issue will introduce the new Vulture who seemingly defeats Spider-Man, and the sequence will conclude in #49, one of the most creatively satisfying issues of the title's first one hundred when Spidey defeats both Kraven and the Vulture at the same time. Not that this ish is any less satisfying than the story's climax! Now at the virtual height of his powers, Romita dominates when the action starts and only slightly less so during quieter moments of characterization (despite not quite getting the look of Peter Parker; even Ditko drew a more attractive Peter than the former romance artist at this point). Meanwhile, Lee's characterization of all the supporting players is right on the button with the main event this issue being Flash Thompson's draft party. All in all, it was no wonder that *Spider-Man* was quickly outpacing even the *Fantastic Four* in sales and popularity.

Strange Tales #155

"Death Trap!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)
"The Fearful Finish!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils/inks)

Scripter/artist Jim Steranko continued to do it all in the SHIELD half of *Strange Tales* #155 (April, 1967), even as his astonishing work garnered more and more fans to his side. And he deserved whatever attention he was getting, proving it with this issue's opening splash page showing Nick Fury and fellow agents being levitated via "vortex beam" into their Helicarrier headquarters! In addition, the panel was liberally sprinkled with textual information all topped off with the superlative: "A mighty Marvel spine-chilling suspense-charged SUPER-THRILLER of menace, mayhem, and mystery!" Think Steranko was getting the type of Stan Lee hype, right? He sure was! More incredibly, the superlatives were well earned as Steranko has the helicarrier infiltrated by Hydra, even as Fury's closest associates are hypnotized to do Hydra's bidding! It all ends with Fury confined to quarters by none other than Pres. Lyndon Johnson! Hoo, boy! Steranko's inventive layouts and special effects were only icing on the cake (including panel 4, page 7 which, strictly speaking, wasn't a special effect; it was



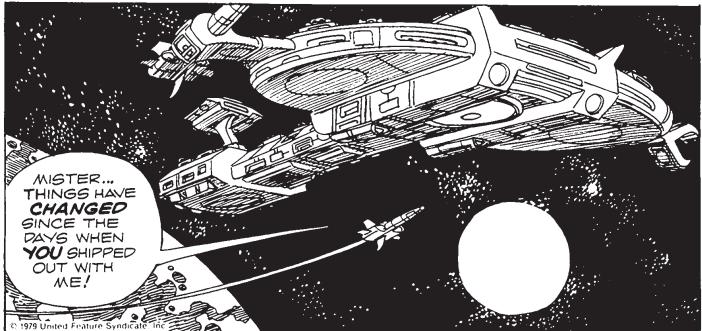
MARIE SEVERIN BEGAN HER CAREER IN COMICS AS A COLORIST FOR THE OLD EC COMICS LINE IN THE 1950S. WHEN SHE TURNED UP AT MARVEL IN THE NEXT DECADE, SHE AT FIRST PROVIDED THE SAME SERVICES, UNTIL PUBLISHER MARTIN GOODMAN NOTICED HER ART IN AN ARTICLE FOR ESQUIRE MAGAZINE AND ASKED EDITOR STAN LEE WHY SHE WASN'T PENCILING ANY OF THEIR COMICS? THE RESULT: HER FIRST ART ASSIGNMENT ON THE DR. STRANGE FEATURE FOR STRANGE TALES.

Steranko's choice of coloring and the detail of his art that made the explosion of autofac look like one!). After all that, the Dr. Strange backup was again, a letdown. In fact, since the departure of Steve Ditko, Strange had been stuck in first gear and would stay that way until the arrival of Dan Adkins on the art. Bill Everett had been a huge disappointment and Marie Severin's warped, even goofy, figure work was woefully inadequate to the demands of the feature. That said, she hadn't been helped over the past several issues by Stan Lee's story which featured Umar, the more evil sister of Dormammu. ho-hum. The only good thing about this story sequence was the further development of Clea, the girl who helped Strange in an earlier battle with Dormammu. It was from these early beginnings that she'd become an important player down the road when Dr. Strange graduated to his own book. But for now, fans had to just muddle through.

Tales of Suspense #88

"Beyond All Rescue!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"If Bucky Lives!"; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils/inks)

The Iron Man feature in *Tales of Suspense* #88 (April, 1967) is a great read with Stan Lee on the scripting chores as usual but the story leaves something to be desired. Yes, the Mole Man is a classic Fantastic Four villain, and yes, he enjoys the by now standard Marvel characterization, and yes, he qualifies as a super-villain but his main shtick involving coming from underground



POST-STAR WARS, ARTIST GIL KANE TEAMED UP WITH A SUCCESSION OF WRITERS TO PRODUCE AN SF NEWSPAPER COMIC STRIP CALLED STARHAWKS. THE STRIP DIDN'T LAST LONG, FROM 1977 TO 1981. BUT IT DID PROVIDE KANE WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE HIS ABILITY TO COME UP WITH DETAILED, OUT OF THIS WORLD TECH...AN AREA IN WHICH HE ACTUALLY RIValed KING KIRBY IN THE MID TO LATE SIXTIES!

with the backing of his mole-like minions never really amounted to much. He was used a couple times by Lee and artist Jack Kirby to interesting effect back on the FF, but other than that, his appearances were seldom very arresting. And he's no more interesting here as Iron Man, trapped underground with Pepper Potts, has to fight off a typical fire-breathing monster before his climactic confrontation with Mole Man, whom he defeats by tricking him into overloading an experimental boring device causing it to explode. Sound familiar? How many times has that old saw been used? Yeah, Lee stumbled a bit here but the whole thing still comes out smelling like a rose, due mainly to the art of Gene Colan, whose art continued to amaze. It was another somewhat of a stumble for Lee on the accompanying Captain America feature where our hero is fooled by a message apparently sent by a still-living Bucky Barnes. It was the first time this trope was used by Lee, but it wouldn't be the last time Bucky seemingly survives WWII. More's the pity. In any case, it's all a set-up leading Cap into a trap where he's attacked by Power Man and the Swordsman. He defeats them of course, only to find out that he's the prisoner of the Red Skull! (As will be revealed in the next ish; this one simply ends with Cap exclaiming "You!" to a partially revealed figure.) Lee's scripting is top-notch despite the return of Bucky theme and Kane's artwork is quite tolerable especially in the design work for his souped-up machinery. He certainly could give even Kirby a run for his money in coming up with out-of-this-world mechanisms that had the appearance of actually being able to operate. His figure work still took some getting used to for fans accustomed to more anatomically acceptable artistic styles as those belonging to Kirby, Colan, Ditko, or Heck. But it was for sure that Kane had what it took to be a Marvel artist, far more so than his confreres back at the more stodgy DC comics.

Tales to Astonish #90

"To Be Beaten by Byrrah!"; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

"The Abomination!"; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils/inks)

As it had been in the previous issue, so it was in *Tales to Astonish* #90 (April, 1967), namely, all the energy is with the Hulk backup feature rather than the visually uninteresting Sub-Mariner lead. There, scripter Stan Lee spotlights the return of old time Subby villain and evil cousin, Byrrah. (You guessed it! This was yet another in a long line of evil siblings/cousins a la Loki and Maximus.) A leftover from the 1940s editions of Sub-Mariner comics, Byrrah should've stayed there. As it was, readers were stuck with him for the duration. And since the credits this ish read simply "Produced with pageantry, presented with pride by Stan Lee and Bill Everett" with no designation of who came up with what, it's somewhat safe to assume that Everett may have had a hand in suggesting the return of Byrrah. Be that as it may, the evil cousin shows up to rabble rouse and convince the Atlantean citizenry to throw over Sub-Mariner for him. He succeeds, and when Subby challenges him to combat, Byrrah wins by cheating (natch!). Lee's scripting is his usual polished self but unfortunately, Everett's pencils (as inked by himself) still suffered with somewhat pedestrian layouts (giving a speech, Byrrah even reads from looseleaf notes...at the bottom of the sea yet!), cartoony faces, and dull anatomy. (To get an idea of how exciting this story could've been, just take a gander at this issue's dramatic Jack Kirby cover as inked by the incomparable Vince Colletta!) By contrast, Gil Kane's pencils and inks on the Hulk feature were overwrought and over-the-top. Maybe too much so with characters frequently conveying emotion by waving around clutching hands and standing with their mouths wide open. Kane's version of the Hulk also continued to suffer from an overly small and deformed head. But all that was made up for by the introduction of new Hulk arch-villain, the Abomination, who proceeds to knock the Hulk silly and kidnap Betty Ross! Here, Lee's scripting is much closer to the mark, energized no doubt by Kane's bravura performance. **Fun Fact:** Kane's appearance in the Marvel fold didn't go unnoticed by more discerning fans who immediately recognized his name and style. Among those was letter writer Bill Mantlo (who'd turn pro in the next decade when he himself joined the Bullpen as a Marvel scripter) who rhapsodized over Kane's cover for ish #87. Imagine his reaction when he learned that Kane took over Hulk in the very next issue?

Avengers #39

"The Torment...and the Triumph!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

The Black Widow throughline continues in *Avengers* #39 (April, 1967) as the Assemblers learn that she has apparently returned to her communist masters when she steals some secret plans. Actually, it was all part of her new undercover SHIELD assignment that would culminate in a big way in *Avengers* #43-44. In the meantime, the team is attacked by the Mad Thinker, out to steal Tony Stark's secrets supposedly kept under wraps in the team's mansion. In doing so, the villain uses the services of a threesome who came under the names of Piledriver, Thunderboot, and Hammerhead. But as usual, the Thinker has not taken into account the X factor. In this case, the wild card comes in the form of Hercules, who rescues the Avengers and helps to defeat the Thinker's plans. It was a fun, fast-moving story, albeit somewhat in the dull DC comics tradition of dividing the team of heroes into separate units before uniting them again at the end, but Thomas compensates for that with an early example of his interest in matters dealing with continuity. Here, he includes a number of instances where characters mention other events happening in the Marvel universe, including why Captain America is not present for the current mission, and Hawkeye's past as a villain, as well as the Thinker's history as a foe of the Fantastic Four. Page 14 even features Hercules singing a song about his mythic twelve labors, an early example of Thomas' ability to compose ditties that would prove useful when he wrote scripts for Marvel's later *Not Brand Echh*, that included funny lyrics to be sung to the tune of popular favorites! Also not to be overlooked is the art by *Avengers* regular, Don Heck. Although fans were denied Heck's inks over his own pencils this time, George Roussos does a handy job here with a story that provides Heck with a *tour de force* that has lots of Goliath action!



GEORGE ROUSSOS HAD BEEN A PENCILING MAINSTAY BEFORE THE MARVEL AGE, BUT THEN SOMETHING FUNNY HAPPENED: LIKE FELLOW BULLPENNER DICK AYERS, HE STARTED DOING MORE INKING THAN PENCILING MOST NOTABLY OVER EARLY EFFORTS BY JACK KIRBY. UNFORTUNATELY, ROUSSOS' ROUGH INKING STYLE WASN'T A FAVORITE OF FANS AND HE WAS EVENTUALLY REPLACED BY CHIC STONE. MARVEL WOULD LATER RESURRECT HIM AS A COLORIST.

X-Men #31

"We Must Destroy...the Cobalt Man!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

A sub-plot hinted at a couple issues before comes to a head in *X-Men* #31 (April, 1967), when Ted Roberts' older brother Ralph appears on the scene. Ralph, it seems, is an overachiever and among his other inventions has designed a suit of armor based on radioactive cobalt that he thinks is superior to that of Iron Man's. Due to an earlier knock on the head, as well as exposure to radiation, Ted dons the suit and goes off his rocker forcing Scott Summers and Jean Grey to take action as Cyclops and Marvel Girl, but the Cobalt Man proves too much for them and they call in the rest of the team. This issue was a welcome relief from #30's fill-in art by Jack Sparling and the rushed nature of its Merlin based story by Roy Thomas. Here, Werner Roth is back on the pencils and though not exactly Jack Kirby, he was a vast improvement over Sparling. His action scenes continued to at least satisfy the discerning Marvel reader and his handling of Thomas' script with its characterization bits among the X team players is above par. In fact, it's those character bits that are the real attraction this ish, as Thomas moves each team member's personal arc forward. In particular, the Scott/Jean/Warren knot was finally untangled as the Angel bows out of the competition for Jean's favor leaving the field open for Scott. Then, without missing a beat, Thomas links Warren up with old flame Candy Southern who'd prove most durable as a girlfriend, still being with him well into the twilight years. Meanwhile, Bobby Drake and Hank McCoy are not neglected as they meet up with ongoing dates Vera and Zelda. There, Thomas again picks up the humor where he left off before, namely at the Coffee-a-Go-Go where the couples are regaled by the "poetry" of house bard Bernard: "Like, life is like a yo-yo...and mankind keeps tying knots in the string!" "Isn't he marv, Hank? He's our answer to Bob Dylan," says an enraptured Vera. "Personally, I'm even a bit uncertain of the question," replies Hank. But all's well that ends well as the Cobalt Man is kept from doing any real harm and Ralph learns a good lesson: "Tony Stark was right. Armor like Iron Man's is too powerful, too dangerous for most men to handle." An observation that would hold true in the Marvel universe for some time until overthrown in the later twilight years. But unable to leave well enough alone, Thomas then leaves the question of the X-Men's secret identities open as the issue ends with a hint that Ted Roberts knows more than he should...

Strange Tales #156

"The Tribunal!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)
"Umar Walks the Earth!"; Stan Lee (script);
 Marie Severin (pencils/inks)

The action and special FX were still on hand in *Strange Tales* #156 (May, 1967) as triple-threat Jim Steranko continued to wow his growing legion

of fans. This time, agent Bronson kidnaps Laura Brown and takes her to Hydra Island for trial as a traitor to the organization. Meanwhile, a bomb planted in Nick Fury's quarters fails to kill him, due to the fact that he was never there! Instead, he'd been stowed away on Bronson's ship. But on Hydra Island, he's captured and in a spectacular, double-page spread closing out the chapter, learns that Bronson, leader of Hydra, is actually his old enemy from Sgt. Fury days, Baron Wolfgang von Strucker! Although Steranko's FX this time were more limited, their absence served to highlight his own impressive penciling prowess, beginning with an opening splash page right out of the '50s Wally Wood playbook. And another splash on page 8 is a vertiginous view of Fury amid a Steranko-ish expanse of gleaming, striated towers making up the futuristic Hydra Island: "...a multiplicity of lofty, tapering spires and tenuous conical needles," rhapsodizes Steranko in a purplish style he made all his own. "A colossus of steeples and pyramids, of turrets, domes and obelisks...like towering evil fingers of steel and glass reaching upward as if to blot out the very stars above!" By contrast with that, the Dr. Strange feature was as dull as dishwater. (Sorry Stan!) There, the uninspired Umar plot continued to grind on with the uninteresting art of Marie Severin still on hand to slow things down even more. And no, the introduction of new baddie Zom (for whose depiction Severin's imagination completely failed) didn't help at all.



STERANKO'S WORK ON THE SHIELD STRIP WAS HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE POP OR OP ART MOVEMENTS OF THE 1960S, INCLUDING WORK BY SUCH DESIGNER/ARTISTS AS BRIDGET RILEY, VICTOR MOSCOSO, JASPER JOHNS, PETER MAX, PAUL RAND, AND ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG.

Tales of Suspense #89

"The Monstrous Menace of the Mysterious Melter!";

Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils);

Frank Giacoia (inks)

"Back From the Dead!"; *Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils/inks)*

Good things don't last forever and, as had become the pattern for Marvel's double feature books, *Tales of Suspense* #89 (May, 1967) stumbled after a few incredible issues. As usual, the fault lay with penciler Jack Kirby who'd left Captain America once before returning again in triumph for the Super Adaptoid story-line. Now, he was gone again (maybe he was busy with the following year's annuals?), this time to be replaced by DC alum Gil Kane. Now for some things, Kane wasn't too bad. His concurrent fill-ins on the Hulk feature in *Tales to Astonish* were at least endurable. But for many other things, no worse artist could be found. And in particular, his style, filled as it was with deformed figure work, clutching fingers, and overwrought expressions, was just too jarring on Captain America coming as it did on the heels of the King himself. (The irony of the whole thing being that Kane was actually the DC artist best suited at the time for work at the more action-oriented Marvel Comics.) It was a huge disappointment, despite the entertaining tale concocted by scripter Stan Lee featuring the return of the Red Skull. It also included the first time that Bucky seemingly returns from the dead, a plot element that would be repeated ad nauseum over the years. However, readers weren't completely disappointed with this as the regular Iron Man lead feature was better than ever! Scripter Lee provides penciler Gene Colan with a fun story that reintroduces the Melter, one of those colorful super-villains that were all the rage back in the years of consolidation. With a power that was a natural in opposition to a hero encased in a metallic suit of armor, the Melter busts out of prison with a jury-rigged melting gun and makes a beeline to Stark Industries to force Tony into building him a new, miniaturized weapon with his miracle transistors. But as usual for many a Marvel tale, the real interest is what's happening in Stark's personal life. There, Tony finally figures out that Pepper Potts' affections are primarily reserved for Happy Hogan when she runs to him in tearful relief after he survives a factory accident. With that realization, Tony embarks on a whirlwind tour of the jet set, wonderfully encapsulated in a full page montage by Colan: "Oh, Tony! You're so utterly wonderful!" gushes a flattering debutante. "You're handsome, intelligent, wealthy, you've got everything a man could wish for." "Sure, pussycat! You better believe it," replies Tony, fully aware of the irony.

Tales to Astonish #91

"Outside the Gates Waits...Death!"; Stan Lee (script); Bill Everett (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)
 "Whosoever Harms the Hulk..."; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils/inks)



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TALES TO ASTONISH #91, PAGE 2: AN ARTISTICALLY BUSY PAGE BY PENCILER GIL KANE WHOSE OWN INKS LARGELY ESHED BLACKS AND SHADOWING OPTING INSTEAD FOR A CLEANER, OPEN STYLE THAT ACCENTUATED DETAILS SUCH AS THOSE FOR FACES AND BACKGROUNDS. AN OFTEN UNHELD EDITORIAL SKILL IS IN THE PLACEMENT OF WORD BALLOONS IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY ARE BOTH UNOBTRUSIVE AND MOVE THE DIALOGUE ALONG IN A CLEAR AND NATURAL MANNER. HERE, SCRIPTER/EDITOR STAN LEE, WITH MUCH TO SAY, GIVES A MASTER CLASS IN HOW IT'S DONE!

Once more, the attention grabber in *Tales to Astonish* #91 (May, 1967) is the Gil Kane penciled and inked Hulk feature. There, Kane continued to illustrate in his sharp, thin-lined, almost shadowless style (a departure from his slicker work over at DC where he was often inked by Sid Greene) and again impressed with his design work for out-of-this-world machinery. Meanwhile, Stan Lee's script is fluid and on point as he manages to insert some drama and characterization into what is essentially a rematch between the Hulk and the Abomination. In particular, the scenes of Rick Jones desperately trying to reconnect with the Hulk's buried humanity are striking and even emotionally intense. In short, this was another winning entry for the Lee/Kane team on the Hulk. By contrast, Lee wasn't able to save the Sub-Mariner lead feature, even with new inker Dan Adkins on board to backup Bill Everett's pencils. Still saddled with Subby's evil relative, Byrrah, the story limps along with more tiresome Everett art that just wasn't doing it. Would a fresh start in the following issue with all Adkins art be an improvement? Stay tuned.

Avengers #40

"Suddenly...the Sub-Mariner!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

Avengers #40 (May, 1967) was to be artist Don Heck's last hurrah on the title he first took over from Jack Kirby way back with issue #9 and that he'd been pencilning ever since. For the most part, his tenure on the book had not been disappointing, but it all depended on the kind of inking he received. His work seemed to be less interesting when inked by Dick Ayers early on (although even then, it was still

good) and much better under the more compatible inks of George Roussos, as can be seen here, but his best issues were those he inked himself. Next issue, Heck would be replaced by John Buscema as the former concentrated on the first *Avengers* annual. But for some reason after that, Heck was never returned to the regular book. He'd also draw the second annual down the road before taking over the *X-Men* for a spell. After that, it was the *Captain Marvel* book and later, in an ironic twist, he found himself doing the art chores on the Sub-Mariner's solo title. But truth to tell, by then, his peak had passed. That, however, was a couple years away. For now, Heck was still in top form as can be seen right here on this issue's cover image (that he inked himself). Inside, he hits the ground running with the story's opening splash page followed quickly by some character building scenes scripted by Roy Thomas. Meanwhile, the Sub-Mariner makes the scene as the Avengers (plus Hercules) go into action. But this time, it's Herc who gets the limelight as he does most of the fighting with ole Subby. As usual, Sub-Mariner by himself was a tough act to make interesting and Thomas is barely able to do it here. To spice things up a bit, he threw in the Cosmic Cube and an "amalgabeast" to keep Goliath and Hawkeye busy. Meanwhile the Black Widow sub-plot proceeds apace as she steals an Air Force jet as part of her mission for SHIELD...

Daredevil #28

"Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Planet!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Dick Ayers (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee may have stumbled a bit this time (before and after *Daredevil* #28 [May, 1967], he and penciler Gene Colan were on a roll, creating one classic issue of the title after another, a situation that would go on for almost another two years, right until #50 when Lee gave up the writing chores on the book), but he sure made up for it with a wing doozy of a title! He called the story "Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Planet" (a paraphrase of the original Biblical source, natch) and there was little doubt any other company but Marvel could have come up with one like it during those halcyon days! It conveyed just the right meaning for this otherwise out of place alien invasion story, as well as the tongue-in-cheek attitude effected by editor Lee across the Marvel line. Still, the story itself, despite being illustrated in Colan's usual high quality style, was a misstep for *DD*. Colorful but low energy super-villains combined with street level hoodlums had proven the perfect formula for the title and this detour into the otherworldly definitely felt out of place. In a somewhat ironically humorous tone, Lee has Matt Murdock lecturing at a local college about the legal implications if aliens ever visited the Earth. By sheer coincidence, some aliens do land on campus intending on taking over the planet by turning everyone blind. In a double coincidence, Matt happens to be blind and



"THOU SHALT NOT COVET THY NEIGHBOR'S PLANET" MAY NOT HAVE BEEN STRICTLY BIBLICAL, BUT MAYBE IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING THE NUMBER OF TIMES THE EARTH HAS BEEN THREATENED WITH ALIEN INVASION IN COMICS AND ELSEWHERE. ONE OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS OF WHICH WAS CHRONICLED IN A TRADING CARD SET RELEASED BY TOPPS IN 1962 CALLED MARS ATTACKS! ARTISTS WALLY WOOD AND NORMAN SAUNDERS SHARED THE ART CREDITS.

so, the alien ray doesn't affect his alter ego, allowing him to confound the aliens' plans. Colan starts the issue off with a nice cover showing DD frozen in a block of ice being hauled by a pair of haloed aliens before moving on to an opening splash page of Karen Page looking none too happy in contrast with a clownish "Mike" Murdock juggling in the background. Lee and Colan pile on the scene with another where Matt's "Mike" persona interrupts a date between Foggy and Karen as they clip clop through Central Park in a horse drawn buggy. "There's no more room up here," warns the cabbie. "Relax, I'll pay you double fare," assures DD. "All of a sudden there's room!" Then, as DD prepares to swing off, the cabbie reminds him "What about my fare?" DD's parting shot is "Foggy'll pay you. He's loaded!" Dick Ayers' inks are sufficient over Colan's pencils but better times were on the horizon. And speaking of better times, Marvel was beginning to ride high at the start of 1967 with a note on the bullpen page announcing Lee and Chip Goodman, the boss' son, making an early trip to Hollywood to consult Gantry Lawrence about the Marvel cartoon show. That visit would only be a precursor to a more regular presence for Marvel in tinseltown later in the twilight years. In the meantime, merchandising was also on the uptick with a page in every Marvel comic completely devoted to it including T-shirts, stationary, and posters as well as a coupon to join the "super heroes club" which seemed to be another name for the ongoing Merry Marvel Marching Society (MMMS) that still published the names of new recruits on the bottom of the bullpen page.

X-Men #32

"Beware the Juggernaut, My Son!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

This must have been the month for clever titles at Marvel! First there was Stan Lee's "Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor's Planet" from *Daredevil* #28 and now, here's scripter Roy Thomas with "Beware the Juggernaut, My Son," for *X-Men* #32 (May, 1967). And like Lee's title taken from an unimpeachable literary source (the Bible, natch!), Thomas paraphrases his from Lewis Carroll's famous nonsense poem "Jabberwocky." Whichever came first, the inspiration to quote from the poem or the desire to resurrect the X-Men's most powerful foe, it didn't matter because the Juggernaut was back. The story begins with a nice opening splash by penciler Werner Roth with a shadow of the Juggernaut cast on the wall of the Coffee-a-Go-Go, foreshadowing the danger to come. Inside, the X-Men in their civilian guises celebrate Iceman's eighteenth birthday and Thomas takes the opportunity to move forward on a number of character development fronts, including Bobby and main squeeze Zelda, Warren and new girlfriend Candy Southern, and the blossoming relationship between Scott and Jean. But before any of that can go too far, the action begins back at the school, where the team discovers that the power is out and the Professor is missing. (Unfortunately, Roth misses the opportunity for some extended Angel solo action. Oh, well.) After some confusion, they're ambushed by the Juggernaut, whom the Professor has kept comatose behind that locked door that readers were notified about in a past issue. Again, Roth manages to entertain with some big half-page illos before falling back on his old habit of squeezing too many characters in every panel. As always, he's strongest in the quieter moments. Still, if only for the character building bits, the X book under Thomas continued to be of interest despite seeming to drift away from the purely mutant sub-culture of earlier days.

X-Men #33

"Into the Crimson Cosmos!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

The action from last ish is continued in *X-Men* #33 (June, 1967) as the X-Men split up to perform two vital tasks in their effort to defeat the Juggernaut. Scripter Roy Thomas once again displays his interest in continuity by at once hailing back to the origin of the Juggernaut from *X-Men* #12-13 and then fast forwarding to the Dr. Strange-verse, where the X-Men learn about the Ancient One and his association with the crimson gem of Cytorrak, the object that turned ordinary Cain Marko into the supernatural Juggernaut. And so, even as Cyclops and Marvel Girl enjoy their journey into the Crimson Cosmos and a fight with a creature called the

Outcast, their teammates back in the real world keep the Juggernaut busy as he tries to make his way to Factor Three. It was a pretty jam-packed issue with the art done by Werner Roth nice but ill-served this time by the inks of John Tartaglione. Clearly, Roth's layouts were fine, especially when he uses big, quarter-page panels, but the finished art looks incomplete. Clearly what was needed was an inker who was either an artist in his own right or fearless in applying more of himself into the work. Pages 9 and 10, for instance, look more like coloring book art than comic book art. More detail and shading (as well as backgrounds) were needed to firm them up. It was this slimmed down art that, more than anything else, was holding back the X-book from Marvel's top tier of titles. Worse yet was this issue's cover by Gil Kane which was likely the worst cover art yet in this, the Marvel Age of Comics. True, it was rumored to be a last minute alteration to satisfy the Comics Code Authority (supposedly a depiction of the Outcast was deemed to scary) but that hardly excused the huge, ugly clutching fingers and an obese-looking Juggernaut that dominates the imagery while the stars of the book remain as tiny figures or simply representational floating heads. All in all, something was needed to really perk up the X book and get it back at least to the standard achieved only a few issues back during the Locust and Mimic stories.

**Strange Tales #157**

"Crisis!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)
"The End of the Ancient One!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

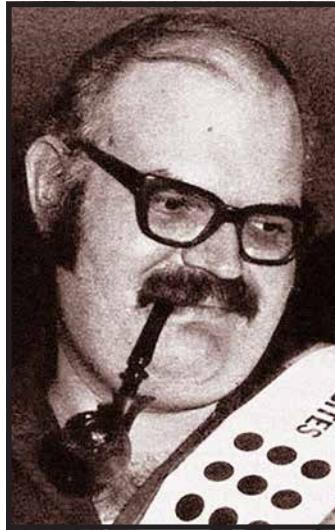
The story was called "The End of the Ancient One" and if only it had been true! For many an issue, the Ancient One had been a drag on Dr. Strange, often acting in the role of *deus ex machina*. Unlike Aunt May over in *Spider-Man* (another Steve Ditko character) whose ongoing health issues provided added tension to underscore the hero's long list of problems, the Ancient One didn't need Strange. His wisdom and greater powers almost made Strange superfluous in his own stories. Thus,

HERB TRIMPE BEGAN HIS LONG CAREER AT MARVEL INKING MARIE SEVERIN FIRST ON DR. STRANGE THEN MORE MEMORABLY ON THE HULK. LATER, WHEN THE HULK GRADUATED TO HIS OWN TITLE, TRIMPE WOULD TAKE OVER THE ART CHORES AND REMAIN ON THE BOOK FOR YEARS.

"JUMBO" JOHN VERPOORTEN, AS HE WAS AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN TO FANS, JOINED THE MARVEL BULLPEN IN 1967 AS AN INKER. HIS STYLE WAS OFTEN HEAVY HANDED, BUT SOMEHOW ATTRACTIVE, ESPECIALLY THE FEW TIMES HE WORKED OVER JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS. LATER, HE BECAME THE COMPANY'S PRODUCTION MANAGER AND TRAFFIC COORDINATOR, A POSITION HE HELD FOR MANY YEARS.

his seeming death in *Strange Tales* #157 (June, 1967) came as a relief. Unfortunately, though it appears the Ancient One dies here, he really doesn't. But for now, Strange is on his own battling Zom and eventually facing a new supernatural entity on the order of the personification of Eternity, this time called the Living Tribunal! Penciler Marie Severin's work this ish was as ugly as her past entries

but she did manage an intriguingly simple design for the Tribunal as revealed on the final page of this issue's story. Herb Trimpe makes his debut in the bullpen inking Severin (but not helping her much). Trimpe had just been discharged from the Air Force and sought out fellow School of the Arts classmate John Verpoorten. He was told that Marvel was looking for some office help that would also mean some freelance art assignments. He took the job and wound up here for his first art job. Soon enough, he'd take over the penciling of the Hulk from Severin and stay with the character for years. But as usual for *Strange Tales*, the star of the book was another newcomer, Jim Steranko, who continued to provide full service on the SHIELD lead feature including scripting, penciling, and inking. There, his ongoing story has Nick Fury a prisoner of the Supreme Hydra, who is now revealed as Baron Strucker. Here, the name of the game is action, and non-stop action that climaxed on page 7 wherein the artist takes a leaf from Jack Kirby's book by dividing the page into a nine-panel grid, showing a step-by-step battle between Fury and an assortment of Hydra goons. The whole thing is topped by a full-page, monochromed effect created by "one of SHIELD's most potent weapons," a hallucination cube! Wow! Stunned readers could well have wondered where Steranko was coming up with this stuff! The whole thing ends on another cliffhanging note as Fury is about to be ground to hamburger by Strucker and his Satan claw!" Hoo, boy!



Tales of Suspense #90

"The Golden Ghost!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"And Men Shall Call Him Traitor!"; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

As usual, while artist Jack Kirby was absent from Captain America, penciler Gene Colan shined all the brighter! Stan Lee's script for the latest Iron Man installment called for our hero to don his original robotlike armor in order to tackle the revived menace of the Melting Man. After some preliminaries wherein Stark is left for dead, the Melter challenges an army of police outside the factory while another army of Stark's girlfriends are held at bay outside the plant. Then, amid the chaos, Iron Man makes the scene and defeats the Melter. It was another thoroughly satisfying actioner by the incomparable team of Lee and Colan. In contrast, Lee stumbles with the Captain America backup in *Tales of Suspense* #90 (June, 1967). There, he sticks readers with the return of the Red Skull who off and does the impossible, namely scooping out a chunk of Manhattan and lifting it into the air with nary any property damage! It was stuff like this that a more down-to-Earth Marvel wasn't supposed to be doing. That kind of stuff was usually left to the Distinguished Competition. In the meantime, Joe Sinnott's inks added some weight to Gil Kane's pencils, which were okay except for the Red Skull having too big a head for his body, something Kane was also having trouble with on the Hulk. Although Kane's style seemed too wild and uncontrolled to be the perfect kind of Marvel artist, he was still the best of the rest that DC comics had to offer after editor Lee had recruited all of his old staffers back.

Tales to Astonish #92

"It Walks Like a Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)
"Turning Point!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

It was likely with a collective sigh of relief that readers discovered upon turning back the cover to *Tales to Astonish* #92 (June, 1967) that artist Bill Everett was nowhere to be seen on the inside. Instead, he was replaced by newcomer and Wally Wood assistant Dan Adkins who both penciled and inked the Sub-Mariner story here. And what a difference in quality he made! Right off, figures are regularly proportioned and of heroic stature and women such as the Lady Dorma are attractive again. There's definitely some of the Wood influence in Adkins' work, but that's not a bad thing as he goes to town on page 7 with a full splash depicting Atlantis like it had never been seen before. All in all, the quality of the artistic presentation was several notches up from the Everett issues. Things were looking up for the Sub-Mariner in a way they hadn't since the departure of Gene Colan. And away from the dull Byrrah story-line, Stan Lee's script this ish was also much improved involving

an awakened It and subsequent confusion between Sub-Mariner and an American submarine as to who was attacking whom, a situation with the potential to reignite war between Atlantis and the surface world. Unfortunately, the same good things couldn't be said about the art on the Hulk backup feature which continued to suffer under the pen of Marie Severin. There, despite some helpful inks by Frank Giacoia, Severin's work still favored disproportionate figures and even goofy postures such as the one of the Hulk throwing a punch on page 7, panel 3. (A style that would prove more suitable to the upcoming *Not Brand Echh*.)

Lee's script, setting up a confrontation next issue between the Hulk and Silver Surfer, is good but without decent visuals, it's sometimes hard to enjoy completely.



notice and goes into action. As the battle rages between Thor and Replicus, Sykes and Chuda have a falling out when the former admits that he plans to use Replicus to take over the country. But though he's a crook, Slugger still has an affection for the good ole US of A and in a fight with Chuda, ends up killing both of them. When the lab explodes, Replicus falls over and his battle with Thor is ended, in somewhat of a trite ending to a tale that was mostly



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Mighty Thor #141

"The Wrath of Replicus!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Amidst Thor's latest sojourn on Earth and taking a breather from all the fantasy goings on in Asgard, readers were treated to a great run of single issue stories of which *Mighty Thor* #141 (June, 1967) was the centerpiece. Sandwiched between Thor's battle with Kang and the Growing Man last ish and next issue's tangle with the Super-Skrull, we have here "The Wrath of Replicus!" Stan Lee's scripting of course, is wonderful, and Jack Kirby's pencils are as power packed as ever, but the story itself leaves a leetle bit to be desired. That's because it has a somewhat familiar plot in which a gangster (Slugger Sykes) teams with a mad scientist (Chuda) who has built a robot he calls Replicus that is intended to defeat Thor. Slugger likes the machine even more as it goes on a campaign of robbery that police can't stop. Being on Earth, Thor takes

MIGHTY THOR #141, PAGE 10: MEANWHILE, BACK ON THE FLAGSHIP BOOKS. PENCILER JACK KIRBY WAS STILL WOWING MARVELITES WITH THE KIND OF ACTION ONLY HE COULD DELIVER. STILL INKED BY VINCE COLLETTA, KIRBY WAS MOST COMFORTABLE WITHIN THE STANDARD SIX OR FOUR PANEL GRID FORMAT (WITH THE OCCASIONAL FULL PAGE SPLASH OF COURSE), BUT THE ENERGY CONTAINED INSIDE THOSE SOLID PANEL BORDERS COULD BARELY HAVE BEEN CONTAINED USING ANY OTHER MORE FLUID SHAPE!

ALTHOUGH VINCE COLLETTA'S REPUTATION HAS SUFFERED IN RECENT YEARS AFTER IT WAS NOTICED THAT WHILE INKING PENCILERS LIKE JACK KIRBY, HE SAVED TIME BY LEAVING OUT MUCH OF WHAT THE ARTIST HAD DRAWN, DURING THOR'S GOLDEN AGE HIS CROSS HATCHED, THIN LINED STYLE CAME CLOSEST TO CAPTURING THE AIRY FEEL OF KIRBY'S RAW, UNVARNISHED PENCILS. A SKILL APPRECIATED AT THE TIME BY MANY A FAN.

an excuse for Kirby style action. Also familiar was Slugger's habit of buying a gardenia every day from Granny Gardenia. But all that didn't matter when you had Lee's script that always lifted even the most mundane of stories above the norm and made them seem fresh and exciting and Kirby's art and pacing (inked by Vince Colletta) that fairly burst off the page as antagonists traded a bevy of bludgeoning blows! By contrast, even though the Tales of Asgard backup

feature seemed to garner more attention from Kirby and Colletta and featuring as it did the advent of "Alibar and the Forty Demons," it still took a back seat to the more down to Earth goings on in the lead feature. It was a dichotomy for sure as the two stories represented the two halves of Thor's readership, those who preferred sheer fantasy to those whose cup of tea was Earth bound supervillains. Which would eventually prevail? Only Lee and Kirby could tell and as the title continued to unfold, they tried to have it both ways!

Avengers #41

"Let Sleeping Dragons Lie!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

It represented a sea change, for sure. When John Buscema took over the art chores on the *Avengers* from Don Heck, there was definitely a sense that an era was passing. The foundational years of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and Don Heck were slowly giving way to the peak of the grandiose years that would soon enough segue into the early twilight period. The transition was marked by the arrival of a number of new faces in the bullpen as artists like Gene Colan, John Romita, Werner Roth, Jim Steranko, Dan Adkins, and John Buscema arrived to ease the burden on the veterans. And though no one knew it at the time, not even scripter Roy Thomas (and maybe not even editor Stan Lee), Buscema's arrival on *Avengers* #41 (June, 1967) would become a permanent assignment. Originally,



he was given the job to give Heck the time to work on the upcoming *Avengers Annual* #1, but for some reason when the time came for his return, Lee found other places to use Heck and before readers knew it, Buscema became a fixture on the regular *Avengers* title. Not that it was a bad thing. No doubt Heck had been at the peak of his powers when he left (and he had the fan following to prove it), Buscema was no slouch, either. Catching on quickly to the new Marvel action style, his first issue here bore the marks of a more than successful adaptation. The story by Thomas was also a humdinger bringing back as it does Diablo and Dragon Man and providing opportunity for outsize action for both Goliath and Hercules in tackling the fire breathing Dragon Man while their teammates faced off against the potion-throwing Diablo. To be sure, George Roussos' inking over Buscema was not the best of matches, but that would soon be taken care of with the arrival of Vince Colletta and later of Tom Palmer. Here, Roussos' inks seem to take the edge off of Buscema's work, softening it somewhat and robbing it of some of its raw energy. But plenty of that energy is on display when Buscema has Goliath go into solo action vs. Dragon Man on pages 14-17! And how! Nothing on Heck, but Buscema's Goliath here comes off as convincingly powerful, what with his rippling muscles and correct Michaelangeloesque anatomy. If only the artist had been on hand for stories like this back when Giant-Man starred in *Tales to Astonish*! But this story was too big to be contained in a single issue and continues next issue just as the Black Widow sub-plot does. Speaking of which, Thomas gives over a number of pages to the Widow's ongoing mission for SHIELD, which is obviously shaping up to some big, climactic, soul satisfying *Avengers* issues down the road. How can it not as she (and readers) are informed of the latest Chicom secret weapon, the psychotron!

Avengers #42

"The Plan...and the Power!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

The powerhouse creative team of scripter Roy Thomas and penciler John Buscema return for a second outing in *Avengers* #42 (July, 1967) as the team winds up its battle with Diablo and the Dragon Man. While Thomas provides a script that demonstrated how quickly his style was adapting not only to standards set by editor Stan Lee, but to the increasingly stripped down style that was quickly becoming the norm during the grandiose years, while Buscema continued to prove to die hard Don Heck fans why he was a worthy successor to his predecessor on the art chores. Once again, Thomas provides Goliath with a starring role first as he wades in after Diablo and then defends the villain against his teammates. But the standout action sequences this time around are reserved for Hercules' battle with Dragon Man. First, on pages 9-10 where Buscema widens the scope of the fight with big, quarter-page panels ("Naught that lives could have

survived such a fearful pummeling," declares a confident Hercules just before his head is smashed into a cliff by Dragon Man. "By the zestful zither of Zeus!"), then on page 18 where the artist takes a full half-page illo to show Herc tossing Dragon Man around like a rag doll! Even inker George Roussos got into the act with some nice blacks that really gave the illusion of weight and mass to Dragon Man, making Herc's throwing him around seem actually impressive! Finally, Buscema was given his first chance to draw Captain America as the Sentinel of Liberty makes a surprise reappearance for a last-minute save. With only a couple pages, Buscema proved that he was likely the best artist so far in this, the Marvel Age

of Comics, to handle Cap outside of Jack Kirby himself. Meanwhile, not to forget the ongoing Black Widow sub-plot, the Avengers learn that she was on a mission for SHIELD for the last several issues and that she's now a prisoner behind the bamboo curtain. What to do? Go on a rescue mission, of course, which will lead into the first truly out and out classic tale produced by the team of Thomas and Buscema. After issues #43-44, Kirby and Heck's stands on the title would be placed permanently in the rear view mirror and a string of some of the all time best Avengers sagas quickly followed!

Strange Tales #158

"Final Encounter!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)
"The Sands of Death!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

The stark simplicity of Marie Sevein's design for the Living Tribunal on the cover of *Strange Tales* #158 (July 1967) worked in her favor as its haloed figure stood out prominently against Stan Goldberg's choice of a

deep red background, all that was notwithstanding the rather gnarled posture of a Dr. Strange that was confined to the bottom right of the image. Inside, the Tribunal was no less impressive in the handful of shots given him by Severin, including a daring page 6 that actually managed to suggest the cosmicism of the Dr. Strange originator: artist Steve Ditko. Otherwise, the rest of the art



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AVENGERS #42, PAGE 18: MERE MONTHS AFTER RETURNING TO THE MARVEL FOLD, ARTIST JOHN BUSCEMA BROKE WITH HIS JACK KIRBY PROVIDED LAYOUTS ON THE SHIELD STRIP TO BUST LOOSE WITH HIS OWN BRAND OF ACTION! IN THE PAST, THE INKS OF GEORGE ROUSSOS DIDN'T PROVE VERY SATISFYING OVER KIRBY'S PENCILS, BUT HERE, OVER BUSCEMA, HIS ROUGH INKS SEEM TO ACCENTUATE THIS MYTHOLOGICALLY BRUTISH BATTLE BETWEEN HERCULES AND THE DRAGON MAN.

was Severin's usual disappointing effort. Taking over the scripting from Stan Lee, editorial assistant Roy Thomas manages to make something of the goings-on with a story involving the shearing of Zom's forelock that somehow causes the latent mystical powers of average mortals to manifest themselves as evil and so, the Tribunal has judged the Earth to be unsalvageable. Strange begs to correct his mistake and is given some time (as determined by a giant hour glass) to save the world. The Strange tale as it had developed since the conclusion of the Umar story-line had become convoluted under Lee and Thomas was only to be admired for taking its disparate elements and making some sense out of them. But the fate of the world hangs on whether Zom's forelock was cut or not? Pretty far out! Far out in another sense, was the SHIELD lead story by triple-threat man Jim Steranko (he wrote, penciled and inked the whole furshlugginer thing). There, Nick Fury battles the Satan claw wearing Baron Strucker and defeats him. Then, in a double switcheroo, Fury impersonates him, gets the hordes of Hydra to kill their own leader (in the belief that he was Fury), and escapes with Laura Brown even as Hydra Isle is destroyed once and for all. Yeah, that's all! Once again, illustrated with the artist's unique, over-the-top style, Steranko delivers another thrilling chapter in the SHIELD series. But the question remained: how could he top this? **Fun Fact:** Marvel comics in these years continued to penetrate the world of pop culture with elements of this issue's Dr. Strange story appearing on the cover of rock group Pink Floyd's album cover for *Saucerful of Secrets*! It wasn't the first and wouldn't be the last rock and roll album cover to avail itself of Marvel imagery.

Tales of Suspense #91

"The Uncanny Challenge of the Crusher!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"The Last Defeat!"; Stan Lee (script); Gil Kane (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)



WHAT THIS COVER IMAGE FOR PINK FLOYD'S *A SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS* (RELEASED IN 1968) HAD TO DO WITH SAUCERS, FLYING OR OTHERWISE, IS ANYONE'S GUESS. BUT FOR DYED IN THE WOOL MARVEL FANS AT THE TIME, ANY ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR HEROES BY WIDER SOCIETY WAS NOTHING LESS THAN SOUL SATISFYING. SURPRISINGLY, ALBUM JACKET DESIGNER STORM THORGREN, CHOSE A DR. STRANGE FIGURE DRAWN BY MARIE SEVERIN RATHER THAN STRANGE CREATOR, STEVE DITKO. GO FIGURE!

Once again, the highlight of *Tales of Suspense* #91 (July, 1967) is the lead Iron Man story by scripter Stan Lee and penciler Gene Colan. Yeah, this issue's villain wasn't exactly hot stuff (a communist nation standing in for Cuba produces a serum that can turn a person into a human powerhouse, the result of which is immediately dispatched to the US to defeat freedom's most visible champion, namely ole shell head!) but what Colan did with it was (as usual) phenomenal! Aided and abetted by inker Frank Giacoia, Colan barrels through this single issue story like gangbusters! And Lee wasn't exactly off his game, either, producing dialogue that breezes the reader along with effortless skill, right up to the very end of the story where he matter of factly drops the news of the marriage of long running supporting characters Happy Hogan and Pepper Potts! Lee was also on hand for this issue's Captain America backup where his writing skills managed to smooth over a penciling job by Gil Kane and inked by Joe Sinnott. Here, at least, Lee manages to dispense with the kidnapping of New York City by the Red Skull and continues the story on more credible grounds., this time with the Skull hypnotizing the crew of a nuclear sub in order to take it over for himself. But Cap manages to gain the upper hand anyway and the menace of the Skull is seemingly over for good. It was an entertaining story but Kane's art just didn't cut it

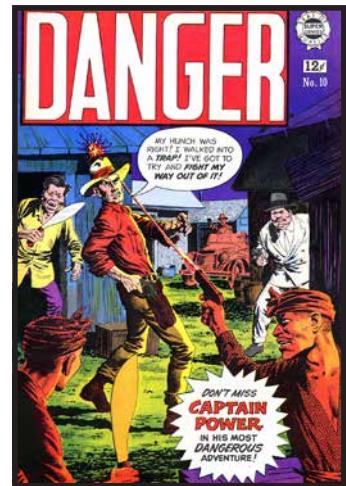
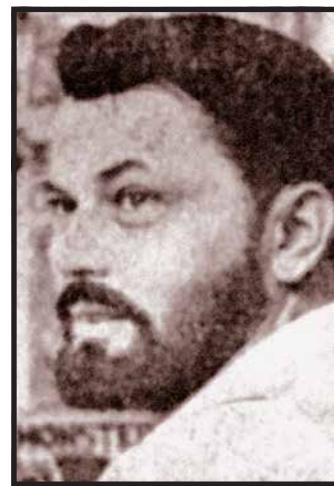
for Captain America. What it needed was an injection of Jack Kirby style, red, white, and blue action and thankfully for fans, the King was warming up in the bullpen! Meanwhile, there was all kinds of news from hither and yon on this month's Bullpen Bulletins page, among which was a Stan's Soapbox that was largely given over to MMMS member Mark Evanier who lamented the disorganized state of the fan club. His suggestion? To create a series of officers for the club who'd earn their rank through an ascending hierarchy of acronyms from RFO (Real Frantic One) given to any purchaser of Marvel comics to MM

(Marvel Maximus). MEO (Marvel's earthbound Odin) would be reserved to ole Stan himself. Lee expressed enthusiasm for the idea and presented it to Marveldom assembled for discussion and debate, the long and short of which would see the system adopted (with minor changes) and published on every Bullpen Page for months to come. It was only the most recent example of how Lee related to the company's fans giving them real input into the goings on. Evanier himself would later become involved in the disastrous Marvelmania fan club before joining Jack Kirby as an assistant after the artist moved to the West Coast.

Tales to Astonish #93

"The Monarch and the Monster!"; Roy Thomas (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)
"He Who Strikes the Silver Surfer!"; Stan Lee (script), Marie Severin (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Scripter Roy Thomas had the better of it in *Tales to Astonish* #93 (July, 1967) as he was teamed with up and coming artist Dan Adkins. Even better, Adkins was also inking himself in a nifty tale that included the Sub-Mariner vs. the US Navy in the form of a nuclear submarine. Throw the monstrous being known only as It into the mix and you have a thoroughly entertaining story that allowed plenty of scope for Adkins to show off his stuff (that included a full page splash at one point). Clearly, the Wally Wood trained artist was going to be someone to watch! Unfortunately, the same enthusiasm couldn't be extended to cover this issue's Hulk backup story by Stan Lee. Oh, sure, Lee's scripting was up to snuff, but in an historic first encounter between the Hulk and the Silver Surfer, it was only to be regretted that Jack Kirby couldn't have been drafted to handle the art. Instead, readers had to satisfy themselves with the less than interesting Marie Severin on the pencils. Her work somewhat stiffened by the inks of Frank Giacoia, Severin in a couple of places manages to at least suggest Kirby (mainly on this issue's cover and the story's opening splash page) but the rest is just uninspired at best. But despite such setbacks, Marvel was marching on. This issue's bullpen bulletins page, for instance, announces that a deal had been struck to present reprints of Marvel comics in England, thanks to that country's Oldham Press. And on the domestic front, with the demise of Marvel's first attempt to break into television via Gantray Lawrence, a new contract was signed with the ABC network to air half hour, fully animated cartoon shows featuring the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man. The FF cartoon in particular would be noteworthy for actually adapting stories direct from the comics. As Lee celebrated on the bullpen page, "Who says this isn't the Marvel Age of World Take-Over?"



DETAILED IN STYLE AND METICULOUS IN HISTORICAL ACCURACY, ARTIST JOHN SEVERIN'S MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS WERE HIS PENCILS ON EARLY INSTALLMENTS OF *NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD*, AND HIS INKS OVER DICK AYERS FOR *SGT. FURY*, HERB TRIMPE FOR *THE HULK*, AND SISTER MARIE FOR *KING KULL*. AFTER LEAVING MARVEL FOR A WHILE, SEVERIN WOULD RETURN IN THE LATE 1980S TO PENCIL AND INK *SEMPER FI*, A WAR COMIC BASED ON THE EXPLOITS OF THE US MARINE CORPS.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #44

"The Howlers' First Mission!"; Roy Thomas/Gary Friedrich (script); John Severin (pencils/inks)

Like Wally Wood before him, editor Stan Lee thought enough of artist John Severin to give triumphant notice of his arrival in the bullpen on the cover of *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #44 (July, 1967). And the hoopla didn't stop there: on the opening splash page, the credit box is headed by a gushing welcome to Severin while the new penciler gets another spotlight credit at the foot of the credit box! Was all that coverage really necessary? Well, since the rather more lackluster Dick Ayers had taken over the art duties on the title ever since following Jack Kirby's departure with issue #7, the arrival of a new, more accomplished artist could only be an improvement. And while Ayers forte might be said to have been westerns rather than war, Severin's past experience was more definitely in war comics and so likely to be a better fit for *Sgt. Fury*. In fact, Severin had made his reputation as a war artist way back in the days of EC comics before migrating over to Marvel precursor, Atlas, where he rendered the same services (in addition to westerns!). He disappeared from regular comics for a time when he worked for such humor mags as *Mad* and *Cracked* even as he dabbled for Marvel on early installments of the *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* feature in *Tales to Astonish*.

Dan Adkins



Among the group of new faces that broke into comics in the late 1960s, particularly at Marvel, Dan Adkins joined Jim Steranko and Barry Smith just as the number of titles published by the company exploded. Long established characters received their own books, new horror and romance anthologies were launched so there was plenty of work both in penciling and inking. And inking was how Adkins first broke in at Marvel, earned his bona fides, and was eventually rewarded with the penciling chores first on Sub-Mariner and then on the Dr. Strange feature in the waning issues of *Strange Tales*.

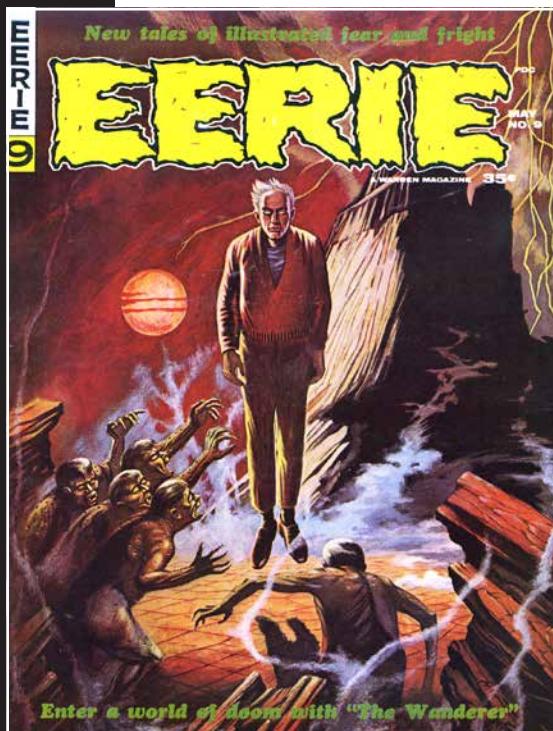
But by the then, Adkins was not a stranger to the industry. Having begun his art career while in the Air Force, his early work started to appear in fanzines and science fiction magazines before he landed a position as assistant to former Daredevil artist Wally Wood. He was still there when Wood launched the *T.H.U.N.D.E.R Agents* for Tower Comics doing both inking and penciling. When

Tower folded, he made the move to Marvel where his clean, sharp, and often shadowy style revitalized the Dr. Strange strip. The artist said that at first, he was instructed by editor Stan Lee to draw the strip the way original artist Steve Ditko did. And though he started out that way, he soon evolved his own style. A dark, moody style that he used in a string of installments in *Strange Tales* and continued into the character's first solo title.

Then controversy struck.

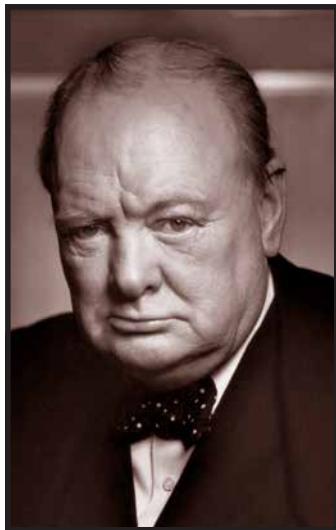
Readers had begun to notice familiar tropes in Adkins' art that they soon identified as "swipes." Although permitted on a limited basis by the unwritten code of comics artists, some felt that Adkins had gone too far in the lessons learned at the Wood studio. The artist himself said that it was the only way he could keep up with the workload. Be that as it may, his penciling work dwindled and inking assignments grew. But that too was a blessing for fans as his lush inks enhanced many another penciler including most famously, Gil Kane.

In addition, Adkins' own studio sponsored assistants became fan favorites after they joined Marvel as professionals including Val Mayerik, Paul Gulacy, and Craig Russell, each of whom enjoyed Adkins' sturdy inks at one time or another.



VOTED IN AS THE UNITED KINGDOM'S PRIME MINISTER JUST IN TIME TO SHEPHERD HIS PEOPLE THROUGH THE TRIALS OF WORLD WAR II. WINSTON CHURCHILL WAS NEVERTHELESS A RARE COMMODITY IN THE *SGT. FURY* STRIP. BUT WHEN HE DID FINALLY APPEAR, IT WAS FOR THE IMPORTANT TASK OF GIVING THE SQUAD THE SECOND HALF OF ITS NAME! WONDER IF HE WAS ALSO IN ON NAMING THE MAULERS?

Now, however, he was back on a seemingly permanent basis as the penciler of *Sgt. Fury* (and eventually, as inker over Herb Trimpe's *Hulk*). Unfortunately, that duty would only be temporary as with issue #47, he'd revert to simply inker with the return of Ayers to full pencils. So was the hoopla justified? Besides the brevity of Severin's stay on full pencils, his stiff, overly detailed style wasn't suited for superheroes, Marvel's bread and butter. Certainly, as an inker he could be outstanding over others. His work over Kirby on *SHIELD* in *Astonish* was, well, astonishing! And so was his work over sister Marie's pencils on *Kull the Conqueror* (and how!). His inks over Trimpe's pencils on the *Hulk* went a long way to making that book worthier to look at, to say nothing of his inking over Ayers' pencils on upcoming issues of *Sgt. Fury* and later on *Captain Savage*. With this issue of *Sgt. Fury*, however, his style was on full display with action scenes more dynamic than Ayers, his accurate rendering of the machines of war, and the detail he placed in uniforms and facial expressions all made Severin perfect for a war book. That said, the artist had arrived just in time to illustrate a key story in the Fury mythos: namely the Howlers' first mission! As noted in the credits, Roy Thomas wrote the prologue and epilogue with newcomer Gary Friedrich taking over when Howler Reb Ralston begins to recount the main part of the story. Friedrich submits a seamless job here as the writing assignment is passed to him from Thomas. As the first mission, it wasn't much different than most other Howler suicide missions except readers learn how the unit acquired the name "Howlers" (Hint: it derives from the "rebel yell" of Civil War fame) as well as how Winston Churchill himself rewarded them by naming them after his own nation's elite commando units. All in all, the *Sgt. Fury* title was still going strong for those readers still not fully on board superhero express!



X-Men #34

"*War...In a World of Darkness!*"; Roy Thomas (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

Dan Adkins seemed to be everywhere this month! He penciled and inked the Sub-Mariner over in *Tales to Astonish* and now here he was doing the same for *X-Men* #34 (July, 1967). Not that there was any complaining to do! As much as readers may have liked Werner Roth's efforts on the title, it was a sad fact that the artist had peaked some issues back. And because the X title was still one of Marvel's bottom feeders, it didn't warrant the attention of anyone better than artists such as the apparently washed up Jack Sparling. The thinking in Marvel's editorial office was likely that if Roth was unavailable, then a rookie was good enough to fill in for him on the X-Men, thus, the reason we find newcomer Dan Adkins on the art here. Luckily, however, there was a miscalculation: Adkins may have been a newbie, but he was a darn good newbie, instantly vaulting over such veterans as Bill Everett, Gil Kane, and Werner Roth. A former assistant to Wally Wood, his mentor's style was instantly identifiable in Adkins' work, but there was nothing wrong with that! If a new artist had to start somewhere, it was best to begin by being influenced by the likes of Wood or Jack Kirby. Adkins begins here with a pretty nice cover before diving inside to produce some Wood-based figure drawing. He really opens up the story with a drawing of a factory complex that takes up half of page 4 before the action moves underground as the team goes after subterranean villain, Tyrannus. Yeah, boring right? No argument there, as scripter Roy Thomas takes readers on one more diversion from the looming threat of Factor Three. So, anyway, it's dullsville plotwise as the X-Men tackled both Tyrannus and the Mole Man plus a giant robot to rescue Ralph Roberts. It was only to be regretted that a good up and coming artist like Adkins was wasted on this kind of a tale. Which was made even less interesting as Thomas continued to move the team away from the secret war involving mutant related threats. Occasional diversions such as the Locust and El Tigre were okay (at least they filled the bill as colorful super-villains), but not on a regular basis. It was one of the reasons why the X-Men continued to flounder, searching for all those Marvel fans who were making books like *Spider-Man* and *The Fantastic Four* best sellers.

Strange Tales #159

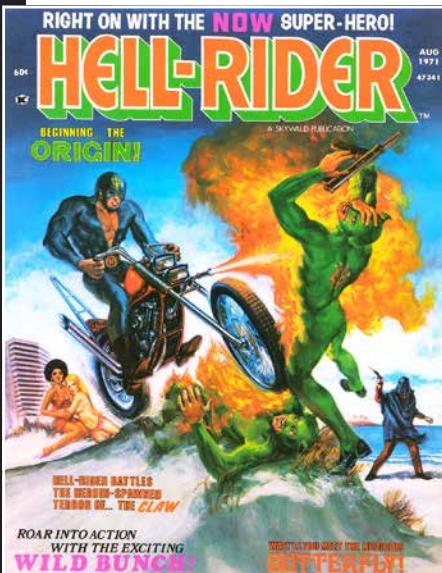
"*Spy School!*"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)
"The Evil That Men Do!"; Roy Thomas (script);
Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

Move over Jack Kirby! Not roughly, but with much respect. The reason he needed to make room was due to the fact that suddenly there was someone else in the bullpen (besides a rising John Buscema) who was almost as perfect as he was in depicting Captain

Gary Friedrich

With a background in newspapers, Gary Friedrich was

more or less prepared when friend Roy Thomas, then assistant editor at Marvel, suggested he try his hand at writing comics. But not at Marvel. Moving to New York City, Friedrich began his new career at Charlton Comics where he ended up scripting the revamped Blue Beetle drawn by famed Spider-Man artist, Steve Ditko. Soon, however, he found himself at Marvel where he began a celebrated run on *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* as well as the short lived *Capt. Savage and His Leatherneck Raiders*. Friedrich worked on many other features for Marvel including *The Monster of Frankenstein*. Most notably, however, he co-created an updated Ghost Rider who rode a motorcycle rather than a horse.



America in all his glory: Jim Steranko! In something of a reset for the SHIELD series after the end of Hydra in the previous issue, *Strange Tales* #159 (Aug. 1967) takes readers back to school as Steranko reacquaints them with SHIELD's HQ beneath the streets of New York. (The one that's accessed through a barber shop front, natch.) But before giving the two bit tour, Steranko re-introduces the players, including Gabe Jones, Dum Dum Dugan, Jasper Sitwell, and Nick Fury himself. On hand as well is former daughter of the Supreme Hydra, Laura Brown, whom Steranko continues to tease as a possible romantic interest for Fury. That is, until new agent Contessa Valentina Allegro de Fontaine is introduced later in the story! But before all of that, readers are given some additional biographical detail on Fury's life (he grew up on Yancy Street!) including the presence of a brother who'll loom large after Fury was eventually awarded his own title. In the present though, Fury is introduced to "the Gaff," SHIELD's answer to James Bond's Q. The Gaff would seemingly replace Tony Stark as the organization's chief inventor and be responsible for some of the most outre weapons and gadgets that were due to crop up as the series unfolded. Artwise, Steranko continued to wow fans, beginning with an opening splash page using a photo background of Times Square (a trick he uses off and on as the story

unfolds), a near full page illo of Fury's ultra modern apartment, and a full page montage of SHIELD agents undergoing a variety of outrageous training exercises (many of which seem to echo Steranko's own career as a former escape artist). But surely, the highlight of the whole story was Fury's hand-to-hand tussle with Captain America, which Steranko handles almost as wondrously as the King himself! It's here, with Cap's athleticism and exaggeration of body movements, that Steranko demonstrates his artistic influences from Kirby to Golden Age legend Alex Schomburg. All in all, it was another great installment in the series and one that surely whetted the appetite of fans for more, more, more of Steranko's SHIELD! But pity poor Marie Severin who had to follow up such a virtuoso performance. Still on the Dr. Strange stories, she was inked here by Herb Trimpe. Roy Thomas is still on the scripting chores as he winds up leftover plot elements from Strange's meeting with the Living Tribunal, namely putting the kibosh on the group of awakened mystics calling themselves the Circle Sinister. That is, until the umpteenth appearance of Baron Mordo. ho-hum. **Fun Fact:** For this issue's SHIELD chapter, editor Stan Lee is credited as producer while Steranko is given kudos for "script and cinematography." A fitting description for the source of the writer/artist's basic influences.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #45

"The War Lover!"; Gary Friedrich (script); John Severin (pencils/inks)

Scripter Gary Friedrich continues the tradition of over writing in *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #45 (Aug. 1967) in a hard hitting tale about "The War Lover." Somewhat of a variation of the Stan Lee scripted tale told back in issue #11 with "The Crackdown of Captain Flint," this issue guest stars one Paul Ryan, a general's son who's fanatical about combat. Captured by the enemy, the Howlers are charged with rescuing him from a German POW camp. Only problem is, once rescued, Ryan takes every opportunity to tackle the enemy, even at the risk of the lives of everyone around him. This leads to a number of dramatic moments that include a climactic fist fight in an English pub between him and Fury. Friedrich succeeds in giving the tale a grittier feel than Lee's version with much room given over to character beats among the Howlers and new additions Eric Koenig and sister, Ilisa. "The War Lover" is one of a series of stories written by Friedrich that earned recognition among fans as more realistic, even controversial, takes on the usual fantastically impossible missions the Howlers were used to getting. And justly so. This time for instance, there's an underlying theme involving the dehumanization of the enemy, much as was being charged against US forces in Vietnam toward the Viet Cong and the NVA. Adding to the grittiness was John Severin's detailed, scratchy style that seemingly left no empty spaces in his crowded panels. But his major strength turned out to be in the facial expressions given the cast that proved instrumental for such intense, character driven stories. All in all, *Sgt. Fury* was not only one of Marvel's best produced but largely unsung products, it was, at the time, probably the best war mag in all of comedom.

Not Brand Echh #1

"The Silver Burper!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

"The Fastest Gums in the West!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils/inks)

"The Human Scorch vs. the Sunk-Mariner!"; Stan Lee/Roy Thomas (script); Ross Andru/Bill Everett (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

"A Day of Blunder!"; Gary Friedrich (script); John Severin (pencils/inks)

Looking forward to the day when the company would be unleashed from the limited number of titles it was allowed to sell by its distributor, Marvel launched *Not Brand Echh* #1 (Aug. 1967). Titled after the teasing name by which editor Stan Lee frequently referred to Marvel's competitors, the new comic debuted as a regular 12 cents title before being expanded to 25 cent size with issue #9. Apparently, it was assistant editor Roy Thomas' idea to do a parody comic that would target every company that

published comics equally, but editor Stan Lee decided to keep the new mag focused on Marvel's heroes which, of course, didn't keep writers from bringing in other company's characters to guest star with those of Marvel's. The idea for the book actually wasn't terribly original. After all, Thomas had surely been familiar with *Mad* magazine which covered much the same ground and even more, its original EC incarnation that often did parodies on comic strip characters. As a result, the gist of *Not Brand Echh*'s parodies would adhere closely to the precedent set by those early *Mads*. And although Thomas would be the primary scripter on the series,



IF A SINGLE STORY LAMPOONING SUPERMAN BACK IN 1953 WAS ENOUGH TO LAUNCH MAD MAGAZINE ON A DECADES LONG RUN, WHY NOT A WHOLE MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO LAMPOONING SUPER-HEROES ON A REGULAR BASIS? BY THIS TIME, AN OFTEN SELF DEPRECATORY MARVEL FELT CONFIDENT ENOUGH IN ITS HOLD ON READERSHIP TO POKE FUN AT ITSELF (AND OTHERS!) ON A REGULAR BASIS. THUS, NOT BRAND ECHH! NOW, WITH NO HOLDS BARRED, EDITOR STAN LEE WENT WILD WITH COVER BLURBS OFTEN JAMMING BRAND ECHH WITH A DOZEN OR MORE... EVEN CROWDING THEM INTO THE CORNER ID BOX!

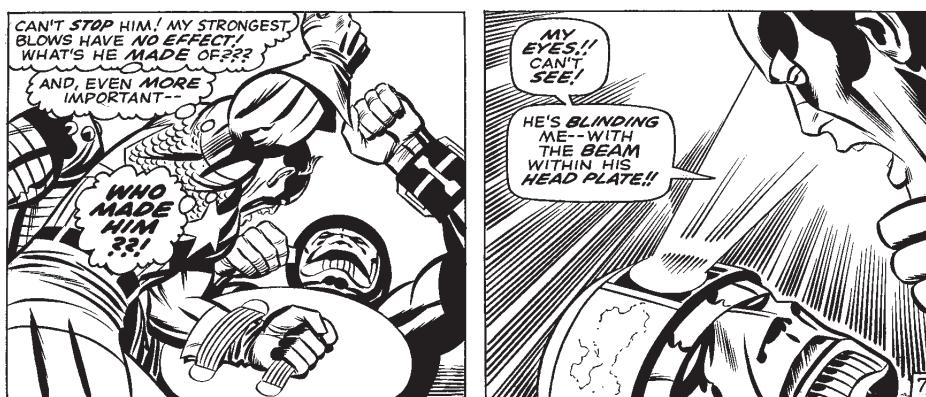
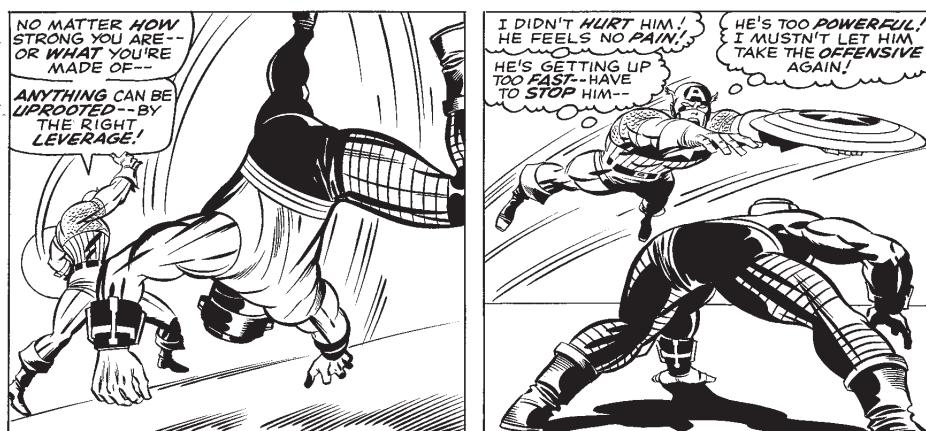
Lee himself wrote the lead-off tale here in conjunction with artist Jack Kirby and fittingly, they parodied the recent *FF* story that had Dr. Doom stealing the Silver Surfer's powers. Kirby would only be the first of a regular lineup of Marvel artists moonlighting for *Not Brand Echh* and therein lay a conundrum for fans: readers had come to love such favorite creators as Kirby and Gene Colan and though they liked them everywhere they showed up (for the most part), it was disconcerting if not very satisfying to see them more or less wasting their time drawing parodies when they could be doing more pages



of more serious stories set in the regular Marvel Universe. For others, like John Severin or Bill Everett, the wastage didn't seem so acute. In fact, one artist who didn't impress on the superheroes but found her niche here was Marie Severin. With an art style of rubbery figure work and strange facial expressions, she turned out to be perfectly suited to the material. It was also not coincidental that

Severin had already established herself as an office cut-up drawing humorous and sometimes cutting caricatures for the personal amusement of bullpen members. Here, she draws her very first tale for *Not Brand Echh* but certainly not her last with "The Fastest

Gums in the West," a parody of Marvel's western heroes. Overall, the humor in *Not Brand Echh* was pithy and well written, even funny a lot of the time, if, that is, the reader was familiar with Marvel's characters. ("Absolutely the funniest, most satirical humor I ever read or wrote," Lee is quoted on the cover, to which Thomas replies "Funny, that's just what I was gonna say!") For certain, the book was an "insiders" Marvel comic (despite topical references everywhere), testifying to the company's arrival at a place where its characters were familiar to enough readers to support such a comic even to the point of making imaginary mascot, Irving Forbush, not only an occasional walk on character, but the star of some of his own stories. He even makes the cover of this first issue as our heroes cower in fear and panic at the sight of him!



Tales of Suspense #92

"Within the Vastness of Vietnam!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks); "Before My Eyes, Nick Fury Died!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

TALES OF SUSPENSE #92, PAGE 7: PENCILER JACK KIRBY LOADS THIS PAGE WITH THE KIND OF ACTION THAT GOT HIM CROWNED THE KING OF COMICS! DON'T YOU LOVE IT THAT BY KEEPING PANELS 2-5 SOMEWHAT SPARSE IT GAVE HIM TIME TO LAVISH MORE ATTENTION ON PANEL 1, EVEN TO THE POINT OF GIVING THE FLOOR A CHECKERBOARD, BARBER SHOP FINISH? AND JOE SINNOTT'S SOLID INK LINES WERE NOTHING TO SNEEZE AT EITHER!



OF COURSE, THE ORIGINAL INSPIRATION FOR SHIELD'S BARBER SHOP ENTRANCE TO ITS SECRET HEADQUARTERS WAS THE MAN FROM UNCLE'S INNOCENT LOOKING TAILOR SHOP. NOW IMAGINE THIS QUIET SCENE FROM THE TV SHOW BEING SMASHED TO SMITHEREENS BY A KIRBY STYLE ROBOTIC KILLING MACHINE! BY 1967, THE SPY CRAZE IN GENERAL, AND THE MAN FROM UNCLE IN PARTICULAR, WERE STILL GOING STRONG WITH THE NEW GIRL FROM UNCLE SHOW PREMIERING THAT VERY YEAR.

Move over Jim Steranko! Sure, Steranko had just proven over in *Strange Tales* that he was the best choice to take the reins over from Jack Kirby if the King was unavailable to draw Captain America (and he'd do just that after Cap was finally awarded his own title later in 1969) but let's face it, no one, *no one*, could draw Captain America like Kirby could! And the master proves it here, in spades, as he arrives on the scene just in time to take over Cap's half of *Tales of Suspense* #92 (Aug. 1967) from the less than stellar Gil Kane. And with him came a whole new storyline as Nick Fury is apparently assassinated by a robotic android. Of course, it was all a set up that Cap had blundered into. Agent 13 has been infiltrated into AIM and part of her convincing them that she was loyal was to provide the target for AIM's robot. Now Sharon Carter's life is in danger and Cap will have to make amends by rescuing her, thus providing the opening for one of the greatest Captain America stories of all time! Inked by his *FF* cohort, Joe Sinnott, Kirby's art here is as exquisite as it could possibly be. With liberal use of big, quarter-page panels, Kirby doesn't stint on the action and perfectly captures the grandiose style right on this issue's cover image as Cap bursts in on the AIM robot who apparently has just killed Fury! But if all that wasn't enough to make this ish a must buy for any Marvel fanatic, there was also the lead Iron Man story drawn by Gene Colan and inked by Frank Giacoia! As with the Cap feature, Stan Lee was doing the scripting as he provides one of the best IM stories in a long time, one that would equal in interest and excitement the Cap story going on

in the other half of the book. (You guessed it, *Tales of Suspense* was again at the top of the heap of Marvel's trio of split books!) Here, Iron Man travels to Vietnam where he's asked to neutralize commie mad scientist Half-Face. After breaching the villain's castle and overcoming a number of odds, IM still must face whatever secret super weapon Half-Face has cooked up. What is it? That'll have to wait till next ish! Again, Colan is at the top of his game here not only for his IM action but also for his accurate depiction of American soldiers and Special Forces, as well as a cool shot of Half-Face's castle as it broods atop a lonely hill. Nice! **Fun Fact:** As giddily perfect as this issue is, it does come with a flaw. A Marvel trademark, as editor Lee was wont to say. It happens on page 9, panel 5 of the Cap story wherein our battered hero tells the AIM robot: "Only one of us is gonna walk out of here, under his own steam..." before continuing on to page 10, panel 1: "...and it won't be me!" But considering how Kirby had marked up Cap's face in the first panel, indicating how tough a fight he'd been in, the addled hero might be forgiven his blunder!

Tales to Astonish #94

"Helpless at the Hands of Dragorr!"; Roy Thomas (script); Bill Everett (pencils/inks)

"...to the Beckoning Stars!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

Oh, how the mighty had fallen! Aside from high quality scripting from Roy Thomas and Stan Lee respectively, the Sub-Mariner and Hulk each were accompanied by art from Marvel's least interesting pencilers. Where this month's *Tales of Suspense* soared, *Tales to Astonish* #94 (Aug. 1967) remained grounded in the art department. That said, Everett's hiatus from the Subby feature (spelled wonderfully last ish by Dan Adkins, who also did this issue's cover) seemed to do him some good. He returned with a new spurt of energy that left hints of the artist who inked those wonderful installments of the Hulk back when Jack Kirby was still doing the layouts. Although body language was still awkward, facial features were less cartoony and more attention was given to details such as the rivets in metal bomb casings, etc. Everett was helped with a more interesting story-line by Thomas, involving a revolution on the mythical island of Dragorr. Still, this was a long way from Adkins' work on the feature, let alone Gene Colan's. Likewise, penciler Marie Severin also seemed to have improved her game on the Hulk backup with a nice-looking opening splash page and better detail and figure work in a story that sees the Hulk going up against the High Evolutionary. Though both features still lacked the visual delight provided by other artists than Everett and Severin, there was evidence of improvement here (the good scripting goes without saying), but would there be enough time for the artists to complete their respective learning curves? By this time, the life spans of all three of Marvel's split books were numbered with only about a half dozen left before the end...

X-Men #35

"Along Came a Spider!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Werner Roth was back at the top of his game in *X-Men* #35 (Aug. 1967), or was it due to the inks of Dan Adkins? (A newcomer to the bullpen who seemed to be everywhere this month!) Or was it due to a solid story by Roy Thomas involving another one of those Marvel misunderstandings that end up with the heroes fighting each other until calmer heads prevail? Whatever the combination, it worked to provide long-suffering X



WITH A DRAMATIC COVER LIKE THIS ONE WITH SPIDER-MAN FRONT AND CENTER (EVEN IF HIS BACK WAS TURNED, THERE WOULD BE NO MISTAKING THAT COSTUME!). A BUMP IN SALES FOR X-MEN #35 WAS GUARANTEED! ALTHOUGH WERNER ROTH WAS STILL ON DUTY INSIDE, THIS COVER IMAGE WAS THE WORK OF NEWCOMER DAN ADKINS WHO WAS OBVIOUSLY CHANNELING STEVE DITKO FOR THE SPIDEY FIGURE. HIS POSITIONING OF CYCLOPS IS ALSO SUSPICIOUS. BUT WHO CARED? IT ALL WORKED TO MAKE THIS IMAGE ONE OF THE BEST OF THE MID-RANGE X COVERS.

fans with a break from the off-and-on nature with an installment that was (almost) everything they could have hoped for. Almost, because, hey! Jack Kirby or John Buscema on the art would have made it perfect, but you can't have everything, after all. Anyway, this issue kicks off with a really nice cover by Adkins who managed to channel both Kirby (on the X figures) and Steve Ditko (on the Spider-Man figure). The more than satisfying art continued on the inside where Adkins was joined by Roth for another lead up chapter in the Factor Three sub-plot. (Would it ever mature into the main story-line? Thomas wasn't telling!) In the meantime, our story opens with the re-introduction of the Banshee, who manages to warn the X-Men something about a spider before being captured by Factor Three. Afterwards, the X-Men are led to a deserted mill where they find Spidey and automatically associate him with the Banshee's warning. (Actually, the "spider" is a Factor Three robot which Spidey destroys just prior to the X-Men showing up.) A fight ensues, giving Roth and Adkins a chance to shine. Though Spider-Man himself is handled a bit awkwardly at times, Roth finally manages to break up the cast of characters and avoid crowding them all into every panel, making for more visually pleasing panel-to-panel continuity. If only it could've continued like this, but Roth's work was scheduled to be interrupted with fill-ins over the next several issues (just in time for the climactic Factor Three encounter...rats!). When he finally returned, whatever fire had been lit under him here was extinguished, after which he'd be relegated to an "origins of the X-Men" backup feature wherein whatever appeal he'd once had as a Marvel artist had totally collapsed.

Strange Tales #160

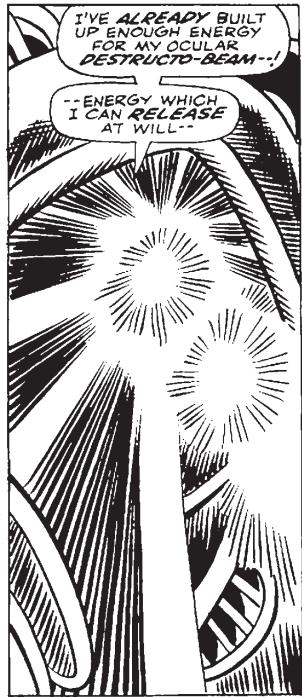
"Project: Blackout Part 1"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)

"If This Planet You Would Save!"; Richard Marais (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

Even though his next story-line would be somewhat more miss than hit (the return of Marvel's fifties Asian bad guy, the Yellow Claw), scripter/penciler/inker Jim Steranko still delivers the visual goods for SHIELD in *Strange Tales* #160 (Sept. 1967). From its opening splash page, that's a mix of collage and drawings to arresting layouts populated with zipatone effects and in-your-face oversized panels (not to mention guest star Captain America), Steranko's fans were surely not disappointed. On the other hand, Dr. Strange fans likely were. There, Marie Severin was still on the pencils for the master of black magic and again inked by Herb Trimpe. In a tale picked up from where Roy Thomas left off, bullpen newcomer Richard Marais tries to make do with what he was given, in which all the world's evil magic is drawn into the body of Baron Mordo as part of a plan to get rid of it all by Strange. But Strange should have known better than to trust the evil baron!

Tales of Suspense #93

"The Golden Gladiator and the Giant!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
 Into the Jaws of...A.I.M.!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils);
 Joe Sinnott (inks)



Which feature to start with? Iron Man or Captain America? It was a tough choice for readers at the time because the creative partnerships of both were simply at the tippytop of the Marvel pyramid in *Tales of Suspense* #93 (Sept. 1967)! Stan Lee and Gene Colan on Iron Man as he faces off with a more powerful than ever Titanium Man while stuck in a madman's castle deep in the jungles of Vietnam or the Stan Lee and Jack Kirby opus that was set to reveal Cap's next classic villain? Which should the discerning fan read first? Well, if they were of an orderly mind, they'd simply start reading after turning over the dramatic Colan designed cover to find out how Iron Man gets out of his latest dilemma. But no sooner than they do, they're hit with a series of magnificent

Colan panels, culminating with the Titanium Man's blockbuster appearance in a full page splash on page 3. Wow! As the action unfolds, readers are filled in on the origin of Half-Face (along the way) and learn his diabolical plan to have Titanium Man slaughter a nearby village so that American bombers can take the blame! But if readers thought nothing could top the wonderfulness of the Lee/Colan Iron Man story that leads off this ish, then they were sorely mistaken! If anything, the Captain America backup was even more scrumptious with Jack Kirby on the art and inked by his FF partner, Joe Sinnott, in a tale that continued from the previous issue where Cap is on a mission to rescue Agent 13 from the clutches of AIM. Here, Kirby opens things up with a spectacular full-page shot of Cap underwater encased in something only the King could have come up with: a "SHIELD long distance mini-cruiser!" Taken prisoner by AIM, Cap revives and goes into an immediate Kirby free-for-all with panel after panel of smashing, athletic action even as other panels

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TALES OF SUSPENSE #93, PAGE 5: YES! IRON MAN BREAKS OUT THE OLE ROLLER SKATES IN THIS KINETIC ACTION PAGE BY GENE "THE DEAN" COLAN AS EMBELLISHED BY FRANK GIACOIA. COMPLEMENTING THE ACTION IS SCRIPTER STAN LEE'S EFFORTLESS DIALOGUING THAT EASILY CAPTURES BOTH THE DRAMA OF THE MOMENT AND IM'S DESPERATE PLIGHT. THE COMBINATION OF BOTH COLAN AND LEE PREVENTED READERS FROM PUTTING THIS STORY DOWN. THEY WERE LITERALLY COMPELLED TO TURN THE PAGE.

are furnished with patented Kirby scientific gadgetry. To top it all off, readers learn that there's a single mastermind behind all the yellow garbed AIM goons, someone even they fear: MODOK! "How much longer can we live like slaves, serving the one we created?" asks one of the renegade scientists. "If only AIM had never been reborn. Eternal defeat was better than the yoke of MODOK!" So the big question readers were left with was: Who's MODOK?" They'd find out soon enough, but not here! This story was most definitely, to be continued!

Tales to Astonish #95

"The Power of the Plunderer!"; Roy Thomas/Richard Marais (script); Bill Everett (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"A World He Never Made!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

Editor Stan Lee must have been feeling his oats (or at least rising sales figures) for the two stars of *Tales to Astonish* #95 (Sept. 1967), because not only did he tweak the masthead (giving the Hulk lead billing), but plastered an over-exuberant "Go, Go, Go Hulk!" blurb on the cover! And truth to tell, although her figure work was as awkward and unsettling as ever, Marie Severin's image (colored by Stan Goldberg) of a red colored High Evolutionary within his bubble-topped evolvo-ray machine against a stark, light yellow to white background does manage to capture the eye. Inside, her teaming with Herb Trimpe on the inks seemed to be slightly more attractive than usual. Was she finally getting the hang of this superhero stuff, or what? Her work was further strengthened by Lee's story in which the Hulk is captured by the High Evolutionary and whisked off into space. Why? The High Evolutionary wants to evolve Bruce Banner "into the type of being that will walk the Earth a million years from now!" And what would that mean for his Hulk persona? Hoo, boy! Meanwhile, Bill Everett was

still on the pencils for the Sub-Mariner lead feature with no visible improvement in his art over previous issues. Even the inks of Vince Colletta didn't seem to do him much good. To be fair, though, the story by Roy Thomas with scripting by the fleeting and little known Richard Marais wasn't anything to inspire the best in an artist. Here, Thomas once again revives the boring Plunderer

from his literary grave where relieved fans left him over in *Daredevil*. Worse, the story was continued with a threat by the creative team to have Subby chase the Plunderer into the Savage Land. Oh, the humanities!

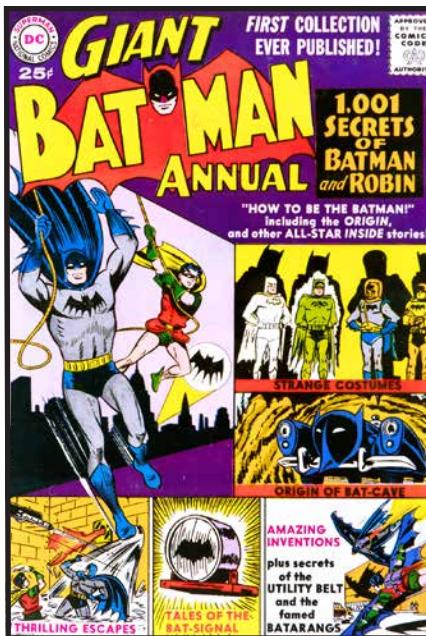
Daredevil Special #1

"Electro, and His Emissaries of Evil!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

It was a return to greatness of sorts, at least in regards to the content of *Daredevil Special* #1 (Sept. 1967). That is, after a couple years in which reprints began to fill up the pages of Marvel's annuals, the annuals this year were filled with new material, a situation trumpeted by editor Stan Lee on the cover here with

a blurb declaring "Not a single reprint!" That made this issue a true gem for eager fans not even counting the fact that not only was regular *DD* script writer Lee on duty here, but also regular penciler Gene "the Dean" Colan. Thus, fans were graced with an expansive, 39-page lead story wherein five of Daredevil's most colorful enemies team up to do him in, including Stilt Man, Matador, Leap Frog, Gladiator, and Electro as the leader of the Emissaries of Evil. (Ya gotta hand it to Marvel for coming up with the jazziest super-villain team names!) It was Lee's usual trick for first-time annuals, the same that he'd done with Spider-Man's first and the upcoming *Avengers Special*. And with 38 pages to play with (and not much in the way of sub-plots or interpersonal characterization used in the regular title), Colan really went to town, frequently using really big panels dotted here and there with full-page splashes to show DD in full-bore athletic action against his colorful foes. Inked by John Tartaglione, Colan's pencils turn out to look what they look best at, dark and shadowy (especially notable in his vertiginous night time shots of the big city). Really, the only complaint anyone might have with this story is that there were so many villains

that not enough time for each one to shine. Storywise, it all hangs together with Lee's script as breezy and witty as fans would expect by now: "You lousy, loud-mouthed creep," shouts a frustrated Leap Frog at DD. "Just wait, I'll shut you up for good." Whereupon he slaps DD with a flippered foot. "There! What do you say to that?" "Well, if I didn't know better, I'd say



RATHER THAN ORIGINAL CONTENT, REPRINTS WERE THE ORDER OF THE DAY AT MARVEL'S DISTINGUISHED COMPETITION DURING THE 1960S. DC USED ITS ANNUALS AND SPECIALS (WHOSE NUMBERING SOMETIMES FOLLOWED THAT OF THE REGULAR MONTHLY TITLES) PRIMARILY TO FEATURE PAST STORIES OR STORIES FROM PREVIOUS DECADES.

you're a very unfriendly person," replies DD, completely unphased by the blow while returning the favor, in spades! But those 39 story pages weren't all! There were also DD fun fact pages including "Inside Daredevil" and "blueprint for an all-purpose billy club; "An Explanation" of DD's identity as Mike Murdock; pin up pages of Foggy and Karen (signed by Karen of course, sigh); and more pin up pages of DD's rogues' gallery. Finally, and perhaps best of all, was another annual tradition, the five page

spoof of how Lee and Colan create Daredevil. This time entitled "At the Stroke of Midnight" by Lee and Colan. All in all, if fans had any complaints about this package, well, they needed to have their heads examined!



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DAREDEVIL SPECIAL #1, PAGE 7: AS IN THE PRECEDENT SET BY ARTIST STEVE DITKO WAY BACK IN THE NOW CLASSIC SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #1 (THAT FEATURED THE SINISTER SIX), NOT ONLY DOES THIS FIRST DD ANNUAL FEATURE A SIMILAR LINE UP OF PAST DAREDEVIL VILLAINS (THE EMISSARIES OF EVIL!), BUT PENCILER GENE COLAN ALSO SPOTLIGHTS THEM IN FULL PAGE SPLASHES SUITABLE FOR FRAMING!

Avengers Special #1

"The Monstrous Master Plan of the Mandarin!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

On the heels of the new *Daredevil Annual* (or *Special* as Marvel was calling their annuals this year) came the *Avengers Special #1* (Sept. 1967). And like its immediate predecessor, it too was hailed as having "not a single reprint" with a lead story that stretched a massive 49 pages and the rest filled with extras such as pin-up pages, a double-page cutaway view of Avengers mansion, and a two column text feature detailing the bios of scripter Roy Thomas and penciler Don Heck. Whew! And Thomas' story did not disappoint, beginning with the fact that it featured the first meeting of the current Avengers and the original Avengers as well as the usual team of past super-villains ganging up to defeat the Assemblers once and for all. This time, the super-villain line up included the Mandarin, Power Man, Living Laser, Swordsman, Enchantress, and the Executioner. One drawback to Thomas' plot was, again, his penchant for dividing the Avengers into separate teams and having them tackle counterpart villains before bringing them all together again for a slam-bang finish. This is the type of plot set up frequently used for DC's *Justice League of America* and pioneered by its precursor, the Justice Society of America of the 1940s, a team and era beloved to Thomas. The problem is that

Ross Andru



Although Ross Andru is most remembered for his long run penciling the *Amazing Spider-Man* for Marvel in the 1970s, he actually began his career back in the 1940s.

But he truly entered the consciousness of fans in the 1950s and early 1960s after he joined DC comics. Though he served primarily as an artist for the company's war comics, he was no stranger to super-heroes becoming the penciler on the *Wonder Woman* comic for nearly a decade. He was also the primary artist on the company's *Metal Men* title as well. But in the late 1960s, Andru began to branch out. He first appeared at Marvel as a potential fill in artist for John Romita on *Spider-Man*, a character he first drew for *Marvel Super-Heroes* #14. It would prove to be an auspicious beginning. Andru also drew a number of issues of the *X-Men* and later *Doc Savage*. But by then, he'd taken over the regular *Spider-Man* book from Romita where he remained for good or ill, for a number of years. But throughout his career, Andru's style was always quirky and unattractive with doubtful

anatomy and cartoony, masklike faces. His work on *Spider-Man* was a definite step down in quality for a strip that was accustomed to the best and would mark a prolonged downturn in the strip's artistic fortunes.



such a plot denies readers the very reason for picking up a team book in the first place, namely seeing their favorite heroes intermingling all in one place. Granted, the number of heroes and villains here are unwieldy but something could have been done to keep them more or less together rather than breaking them up into teams. That said, it was fun seeing the original team members together again and uniting with the newbies. Thomas even remembers to include such inconsequential details as Goliath's name change not being known by his former teammates: "Giant-Man!" gasps Iron Man after first setting eyes on the ten foot figure. "The name's Goliath now, big boy," corrects the Wasp. "But you can still call me the Wasp!" Meanwhile, Heck's artwork was as good as it got without his own inks (George Roussos was on hand for that chore) and the expanded story pages gave him ample room for the occasional splash page and action shots. In particular, his handling of Goliath was still top-notch. Unfortunately, a sour note was struck with the Mandarin's new skin tight costume which made him look like any other mundane super-villain instead of the unique mastermind he was. **Fun Fact:** A strange thing happened on page 48, panel 3. There, someone in the office must have replaced Heck's art with a stat of the Avengers from the Jack Kirby drawn cover of *Avengers* #25 albeit reduced in size. What gave?

X-Men #36

"Mekano Lives!"; Roy Thomas (script); Ross Andru (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

There was one last detour from the ongoing Factor Three sub-plot in *X-Men* #36 (Sept. 1967). This time, it was in order for the team to raise needed funds to finance a trip to Europe to take on Factor Three. But while performing for donations in Greenwich Village, the Beast and Iceman are implicated in a plot by villain Mekano (sporting an exoskeleton) to demolish the local library. Needless to say, the X-Men manage to stop him after which he's revealed to be rich man's son Tom Regal who'd gone into action to grab the attention of a neglectful father. But all's well that ends well when a grateful and chastened Regal Sr. helps finance the X-Men's trip to Europe. The story by scripter Roy Thomas wasn't exactly inspired (why Thomas was hitting all the marks on *The Avengers* and not here, despite keeping the X-Men's private lives and loves interesting, was a mystery). Maybe the overall quality of the art just wasn't doing it for him. Sure, Werner Roth could be good at times, but at other times, not so much. If that was the case, then surely the art in this issue by Ross Andru was even less so. A DC comics veteran, Andru had spent most of his time there penciling war comics such as *Gunner* and *Sarge* and

superhero titles like the *Metal Men* and *Wonder Woman*, none of which were improved by his work. Andru was another one of those industry workhorses whose style never seemed to rise above the mediocre. He got the stuff in on time and that was the most important thing to harried editors. But in Andru's case, his work was worse than merely mediocre, it was just plain ugly. Moreover, so distinctive in its ugliness that even heavy inkers couldn't disguise the fact. Worse yet for Marvel fans, Andru would go on later in the twilight years to take over the art chores on the *Spider-Man* book from John Romita and make for a long, bland, painful run on the title. This ugliness can be seen here right off on the opening splash page with the Beast landing with his feet in a bad guy's face. The stiff figures, unnatural foreshortening, and two-dimensional quality of the work is just tough to look at. And this awful work continues for the following twenty pages. It was for sure, the *X-Men* title would never get out of Marvel's basement this way!

Strange Tales #161

"Project Blackout: Part II: The Second Doom!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/inks)
"And a Scourge Shall Come Upon You!"; Raymond Marais (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

It was Dan Adkins to the rescue in *Strange Tales* #161 (Oct. 1967)! Last month, Adkins seemed to be everywhere, and this month was shaping up to be no different as he took over the penciling chores on Dr. Strange from Marie Severin (who, perhaps, found herself busy with the new *Not Brand Echh* title). It was a lucky break for fans who suffered long enough beneath Severin's unattractive figure work. And right off, the difference told as Adkins immediately launched Strange into a series of over-the-

top, nightmarish sequences climaxed on page 5 with a big panel 4 showing our hero standing while overlooking a body of water with a Saturn-like planet accompanied by its several moons, sinking into it. Meanwhile, the plot by scripter Raymond Marais finds Strange marooned in an unfamiliar dimension along with Victoria Bentley, with whom he defeats a giant ant

"TIME HAD RUN OUT! JUST WASN'T ANY POINT TA STALLIN' AROUND LONGER! IF I WAS GONNA MAKE A MOVE, IT HAD TO BE NOW! I ASSEMBLED A DELAYED-ACTION TIME BOMB..."



STRANGE TALES #161, PAGE 6: ONE OF ARTIST JIM STERANKO'S LESS FLAMBOYANT PAGES FOR THE NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD STRIP! AND DON'T FORGET, BY THIS TIME STERANKO WAS ALSO SCRIPTING HIS SHIELD STORIES CHOOSING THE FIRST PERSON THIS TIME TO HEIGHTEN THE TENSION IN FURY'S BATTLE WITH THE YELLOW CLAW. ALTHOUGH NOT IN KIRBY OR EVEN GIL KANE'S CLASS WHEN IT CAME TO DESIGNING OUT OF THIS WORLD MACHINERY, STERANKO'S SHINIER, MORE ORGANIC LOOK WAS STILL ENOUGH TO DAZZLE THE EYE!

before encountering the entity known as Nebulos! Maybe it was in contrast with Severin's often unimaginative approach that did it, but Adkins' work here is just a delight for the eye: even though panel-by-panel, it might seem pretty straightforward. But Adkins would remain on for the remainder of its *Strange Tales* run (and beyond) and only improved with every installment. While over in the SHIELD lead feature, Jim Steranko needed no improvement. He was still providing all essential services including scripting, penciling, and inking. Here, he continues his tale begun in the previous issue with Nick Fury and Captain American on the trail of the Yellow Claw and throwing in single-page and double-page spreads along the way.

Tales of Suspense #94

"The Tragedy and the Triumph!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)
"If This Be...MODOK!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Oh! Marvel fans must have thought they were living right! After all, how could anyone deserve the sheer joy of *Tales of Suspense* #94 (Oct. 1967) that included art by Gene Colan on Iron Man and Jack "King" Kirby on Captain America, both topped off with scrumptious scripting by "the Man" himself, Stan Lee? The answer is, no one could possibly be good enough to deserve it but Marvel was so magnanimous that it didn't matter! Readers had all the great stuff happening here to themselves and could only shake their heads in pity for the benighted DC, Tower, and/or Gold Key fans who just didn't have the wherewithal to appreciate Marvel comics. How else to explain why the rest of the world hadn't yet been converted? Well, if there was any chance that it could, this issue of *Suspense* was it! Led off with another spectacular cover by Kirby at the height of his grandiose powers (and colored by the great Stan Goldberg) showing Captain America walloping an oversized AIM minion right out of the picture frame, the insignificant figure of MODOK is almost to be overlooked in the background. But not inside! There, MODOK (Mobile Organism Designed Only for Killing...ya gotta hand it to scripter Stan Lee [or was it Kirby himself?]) makes his dramatic first appearance in a big, half-page panel as Cap proceeds to battle his multi-purpose "mind-beam" in a paroxysm of Kirby inspired pandemonium! And the imagery is helped immeasurably here by the sharp, clear inks of Joe Sinnott that seem to keep every little thing in the sharpest of focus. It's hard to believe that so much story and action could be packed within a mere 10 pages, and using mostly quarter-page and half-page panels at that, but Kirby does it...and how! Man, could anything top this? The answer: maybe not, but the Iron Man lead feature came awfully close! There, Lee is still on the scripting as penciler Gene Colan provides the action. Taking a leaf from Kirby's book, Colan lays out the story in a series of large-sized panels for the most part

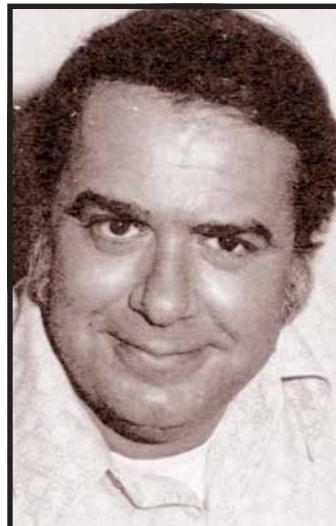
as Iron Man succeeds in stopping the Titanium Man from destroying a Vietnamese village so that it could be blamed on American forces. It was all so good, it didn't even matter that a story element involving the evil Half-Face coming to his senses when he finds out that his family lives in the village turns out to be similar to a plot used a few years before in *Journey Into Mystery* #117. Add to all this excitement the fact that busy Dan Adkins inks Colan's pencils and you've got a near perfect IM installment!

Amazing Spider-Man #53

"Enter: Dr. Octopus!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

What do you do to follow up an instant classic like the three-part story that introduced the Kingpin and killed off Frederick Foswell? You bring back one of the best of Spidey's old time villains in the form of Dr. Octopus, that's what! Ock was a good choice by editor/scripter Stan Lee since not only had fans not seen the good doctor for almost three years, but his last appearance in the Master Planner saga was a doozy! How to top that as well as the Kingpin trilogy would be a tough nut to crack, but Lee and penciler John Romita gave it their best shot in a new four-parter that begins here in *Amazing Spider-Man* #53 (Oct. 1967). Though not quite up to the Kingpin story in overall interest, the new Ock series definitely had its moments, especially for one Peter Parker as would be seen in the next issue. Meanwhile, over here, Ock plots to steal the country's latest defense weapon, the nullifier. Action, as only Romita could deliver it at this time,

follows with big, bold panel work and a disappointing ending for Spidey as Ock slips through his fingers. As usual, Peter's private life doings are easily as interesting as the main event, including Spidey throwing a copy of the Daily Bugle into J. Jonah Jameson's face; a near discovery of Peter's secret ID by Prof. Warren; Flash Thompson returns on leave picking up his teasing ways with Peter where he left off; Aunt May rents



PRIMARILY REMEMBERED BY FANS AS THE INKING PARTNER OF ARTIST ROSS ANDRU AT DC, MIKE ESPOSITO ACTUALLY BEGAN AS A PENCILER FOR MARVEL IN THE 1950S WHEN IT WAS CALLED ATLAS, RETURNING AS AN INKER IN THE 1960S UNDER THE PSEUDONYM OF MICKEY DEMEO. HE CAME CLEAN BY THE TIME HE RETEAMED WITH ANDRU ON SPIDER-MAN IN THE 1970S.

a room; and Peter's first "date" with a voomy Gwen as they're chosen by Warren to accompany him to a news briefing on the nullifier. This last actually represents the earliest installment of Peter and Gwen's long-running romantic relationship, one that Lee and Romita would develop in fits and starts for the rest of their respective stints on the title. One problem with the relationship that would emerge was the fact that the two characters go from zero to fifty pretty quickly with barely no dating in between. Something that could only be seen by a reading of the series without the monthly delay between issues. Here, Gwen is still enigmatic about her interest in Peter. Commenting on Peter's unchanged personality, Flash says: "He'll never change! Once an itch, always an itch. Right, Gwen?" To which Gwen replies: "Don't ask me, gents. I'd rather itch than switch!"

Amazing Spider-Man #54

"The Tentacles and the Trap!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Amazing Spider-Man #54 (Nov. 1967) was the best chapter of the four-part return of Dr. Octopus saga. That was due entirely to a stroke of genius on scripter Stan Lee's part to have Ock rent a room from Aunt May, thus placing Peter Parker/Spider-Man in the awkward and helpless position of having to play nice to the villain when visiting his aunt or simply stay away, so as not to reveal his agitation (the close-up of the look on Peter's face on page 8, panel 5 by penciler John Romita is priceless). It was a preposterous set-up, an impossible situation, a complex conundrum for Spidey as he lingered in the quiet Queens neighborhood hoping to catch Ock outside the house and spare Aunt May's weak heart a fatal shock. That, in turn, sets up the centerpiece of the issue after Ock sics the remainder of his Master Planner goons on Spidey. What follows is as expertly choreographed and drawn donnybrook as ever Jack Kirby or Steve Ditko (when he used to have Spidey fight seemingly hundreds of mobsters at once) ever drew. That fight was totally soul satisfying for any diehard Spidey fan of the time laced as it also was with Lee's expert scripting. But all things must end and so did this fight as Spidey spots Aunt May among the crowd of curious onlookers (apparently, her heart was stronger than anybody thought!) and takes the opportunity to tackle Ock while she was out of the house. Big mistake! After Ock's rented room is totally trashed, Aunt May walks in on the battle and faints dead away, with emphasis on dead! Ock makes his getaway while Spidey holds the limp form of his aunt in his arms (this scene was used as this issue's cover image). Later, after learning she'll miraculously pull through the crisis, a raging Peter shakes his fist at the long gone Dr. Octopus: "No matter where he is, I'll find him. And this time, nothing will stop me from ridding the world forever of the menace of Dr. Octopus!" Think he meant it? Only the following issue would tell and you can bet your sweet bippy that readers would endure the long month wait and be there to find out!



ESCHewing the on again, off again storytelling pattern he'd briefly adopted in the months preceding *Amazing Spider-Man* #54, editor/ scripter Stan Lee fell back on the more linear multi-part story format beginning with the Kingpin Trilogy and then here for a long running Dr. Octopus epic that would take up issues 54-56 and bleed somewhat into #57.

Amazing Spider-Man #55

"Doc Ock Wins!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

The ongoing Dr. Octopus story-line opens with a bang in *Amazing Spider-Man* #55 (Dec. 1967) as an infuriated Spidey goes on a rampage in search of his foe. As enrapt readers were sure to recall, the previous issue ended with Ock smashing his way out of the room he rented from Aunt May. That followed a fight with Spidey that ended when Aunt May stumbled upon it and immediately lost consciousness. That was the last straw for Spider-Man who, after making sure Aunt May was taken care of, goes in search of Dr. Octopus, ripping up a

number of his past hideouts and finding some of the Master Planner's men, but not Ock himself. Ock finally reemerges to once again try and steal the top secret nullifier, this time succeeding and in a final fight with Spidey, turns the machine's ray on him, Spidey loses his memory and Ock convinces him that they're partners in crime! Hoo, boy! There was a lot going on here in a busy script by Stan Lee who seemed to have no problem finding twists and turns that kept a story going into multiple issues. In fact, there was so much going on here that barely a single page is given over to Peter Parker's personal life. This time it was a couple panels to check in on the recovering Aunt May, another showing Peter worrying about the damage caused by Ock, and only a few more featuring

Mary Jane and Gwen. (Here, penciler John Romita seemed to slip up slightly; the dress worn by Mary Jane looks for all the world like a maternity outfit!)

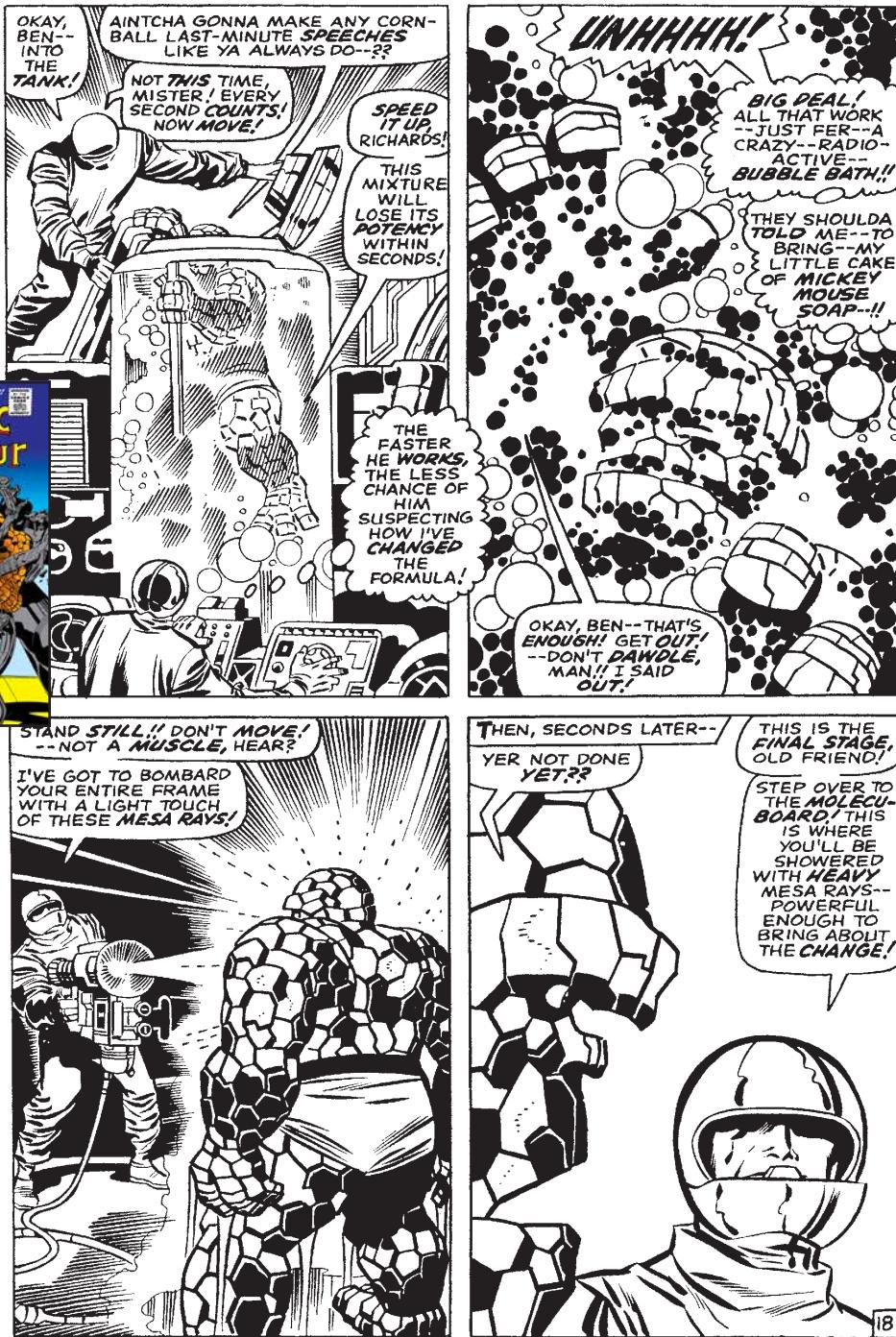
"Hi, people! If I'm breaking anything up, this is my lucky day," says Gwen showing up at Pete's. "Gwendolyn! What a surprise! What brings you here?" asks an astonished Pete. (As he should be, the two haven't even begun dating yet.) "Someone must have just stuck a pin in their little MJ doll," remarks a displeased Mary Jane. The darts between the two girls were lost on the oblivious Peter. All in all, the team of Lee and Romita were keeping the kettle boiling on *Spider-Man* with no sign that things would cool off. That time was coming, but for now, the two were still very much in the creative groove.



Fantastic Four #68

"His Mission: Destroy the Fantastic Four!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

It was time to catch a breather following the harrowing events of the previous two issues' adventure in the Beehive and the introduction of



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FANTASTIC FOUR #68, PAGE 18: MEANWHILE, KING KIRBY WAS STICKING TO HIS TRIED AND TRUE LARGE PANEL FORMAT EVEN WHEN THERE WAS NO ACTION GOING ON. TAKE FOR INSTANCE, THIS RELATIVELY QUIET SCENE DURING A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MR. FANTASTIC AND THE THING AS THE FORMER TRIES ONCE AGAIN TO TURN THE LATTER BACK INTO HIS HUMAN SELF. STILL FUN TO LOOK AT EVEN AS STAN LEE'S SCRIPT REMINDS US THAT JUST THE SAME, THERE'S TROUBLE BREWING FOR OUR HEROES.

Him. Thus, in *Fantastic Four* #68 (Nov. 1967), we find the FF catching up with their regular lives, including a visit with the hospitalized Alicia (recovering from her abduction by the brain trust behind the Beehive), marital hijinks between Reed and Sue (the latter having redesigned her costume into a mini-skirt), and Johnny and Crystal checking in at the local garage to see what's doing among Johnny's friends. But not all is sweetness and light as, somewhere in the city, Dr. Jose Santini is kidnapped and replaced by an unnamed man intent on destroying the FF. To do it, he intends to work with Reed (as the real Santini had been expected to do) in order to sabotage Mr. Fantastic's latest attempt to change the Thing back to his normal self as Ben Grimm. The plot succeeds and when all is said and done, the Thing remains the Thing but now with a vicious personality that blames Reed for his condition. To be continued! Throughout, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby maintain a perfect balance of action and character, building something that by this time, came easily with characters so well established as the Fantastic Four. In fact, only with such fully rounded characters could a day in the life plot work. By this time, readers were just as fascinated by the four themselves as they were with the latest villain; in fact, it might be said that for some fans, the action got in the way of the more interesting personal lives of the FF! But even if it was financially possible to have the whole series given over the team's private lives, who'd really want to go without the King's battle action? For those who couldn't, there'd be plenty of that starting next issue making up for this issue's somewhat slower pace.

Fantastic Four #69

"By Ben Betrayed!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

It was believed in the editorial offices of comic book publishers that the turnover rate among readers came every three years or so as teens dropped out and new, younger readers came in to replace them. Thus, publishers could retool the same stories over and over again at roughly every half dozen years (and often in even less time). Some credit must be given to Marvel that the company managed to avoid repetition through its years of consolidation and grandiose years. In the early years such plots as dimensional kidnappings or alien invasion stories were frequent, but by the time editor Stan Lee had a handle on the humanism that set his characters apart from others, originality in storytelling became more ongoing. Stories seemed almost to write themselves as characters grew and changed. Now and then, however, plots were revisited, including Peter Parker giving up his identity as Spider-Man or a team member such as the Beast over in the X-Men or Goliath over in the Avengers turning against their teammates. Such was the case



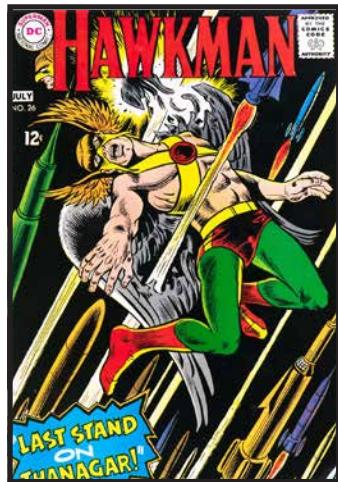
THE FAMILIAR CINEMATIC THEME OF A "MONSTER LOOSE IN THE CITY" WAS MADE EXPLICIT WITH JACK KIRBY'S COVER FOR FF #69 WHERE AN ANGRY THING CLINGS TO THE TOP OF A SKYSCRAPER WHILE HOLDING OFF WAR PLANES AND HIS OWN TEAMMATES MUCH AS THE TITULAR GIANT APE DID IN THE CLIMACTIC SCENES FROM THE CLASSIC KING KONG (1933)

here in *Fantastic Four* #69 (Dec. 1967), as Lee and penciler Jack Kirby have the Thing turn against the rest of the FF. It had happened before back in issues #41-43 but Lee and Kirby manage to make the revisit not only interesting and fresh, but to seem different, especially with the retelling done in the grandiose manner. It's all helped along with Lee's dead serious dialogue and especially with Kirby's dynamic visuals that capture the whole "monster loose in the city" theme of countless Hollywood movies and Marvel's own pre-hero monster comics. But such an epic battle among the four couldn't be contained in a single issue and so, it's continued into the next; this likely disappointed die hard fans already familiar with such betrayal plots, but Lee and Kirby are so good, no one minded at all!

Tales to Astonish #96

"Somewhere Stands Skull Island!"; Raymond Marais (script); Bill Everett/ Werner Roth (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)
"What Have I Created?"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

Well, easy come, easy go! After an impressive performance by artist Dan Adkins a couple issues back and this issue's cover, readers' hopes were dashed in *Tales to Astonish* #96 (Oct. 1967) with Bill Everett still on the pencils. Sure, Werner Roth had been credited on the pencils, as well (very obviously on page 10; the head shot of Namor is a dead giveaway), but the work is mostly Everett whose art here is still wanting. If not



WHO? WHO? WHO IS RAYMOND MARAIS?
MARVEL FANS MAY WELL HAVE WONDERED! HE
WAS APPARENTLY RECRUITED BY EDITOR STAN LEE
FROM DC WHERE MARAIS SCRIPTED FOR A SHORT
WHILE. AND A SHORT WHILE WAS ALSO THE AMOUNT
OF TIME HE APPARENTLY SPENT AT MARVEL BEFORE
PERFORMING A VANISHING ACT.

for Vince Colletta's covering inks, who knows how bad it might've been? As it is, it's barely tolerable but then, scripter Raymond Marais didn't give Everett much to work with—what with its continuing plot involving the dull as dishwater (and costume to match) Plunderer providing the villainous thrills (if you can call them that). Worse yet, the story continues yet again! Argh! Much better, despite Marie Severin's continued presence on the pencils, is the Stan Lee scripted Hulk backup tale in which the High Evolutionary wards off a palace revolt and manages to evolve himself into a godlike form. As she did in the previous issue, Severin's pencils here show some improvement over her past performance here and over on the Dr. Strange feature. As an example, the figure of the High Evolutionary charging into his knights on page 3, panel 5 is actually very good. If the team of Severin and inker Herb Trimpe could maintain the art at this level and push the envelope some, the Hulk feature might actually be something to look forward to again. But fate had other plans and their remaining tenure on the feature was destined to be short-lived.

Mighty Thor #145

"Abandoned on Earth!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Not for the first time, Thor finds himself "Abandoned on Earth" by big daddy Odin. This time it's for refusing to return to Asgard following the defeat of the Enchanters. So Odin strips him of his godly powers and leaves him only with his natural strength (which is not inconsiderable!). Unable to change back to Donald Blake and resume his medical career, Thor decides to

find something else to do and ends up trying out for the strong man position with a local circus. But it's not just any circus! It just so happens to be the Circus of Crime, out to do no good as usual. (You'd think that after all their defeats by local superheroes the circus would have moved its operations out of town to Pittsburgh or something!) In any case, the Ringmaster has big plans and they involve a strong man lifting a huge stone bull. "He almost makes the whole thing look easy," gasps an amazed clown as a hypnotized Thor descends some steps holding the huge object over his head. The story itself was somewhat of a come down following the Enchanters saga (two of whom are handed over to New York's finest after the battle!) and although ordinarily, an Earthbound story with Thor vs. a colorful supervillain was a welcome switch to the pure fantasy of Asgardian adventuring, this time it wouldn't quite work. Perhaps it was because the story was continued and thus made to seem diluted, or maybe it was that the Circus of Crime just didn't offer opportunity for major Jack Kirby blockbusting battle scenes, but something would end up lacking. Stan Lee's scripting of course, was still top-notch and Kirby's art (inked by Vince Colletta) was still exciting to look at but *Mighty Thor* #145 (Oct. 1967) still lacked a real sense of energy. Was there an intimation here that the grandiose years were drawing to a close? Maybe. But the splash page Kirby drew for page 12 presenting a portrait of the key players in the Circus of Crime was pure grandiosity for sure and indicated there was still steam left in this engine. The same might be said for the final chapter in the story of Mogul in the Tales of Asgard serial. If so, it was somewhat fitting as it also marked the end of the long running backup feature. It would be replaced in the next issue with a serial spotlighting the origin of the Inhumans.

Mighty Thor #146

"If the Thunder Be Gone!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

If it hadn't been stretched out over a number of issues, the story that continued in *Mighty Thor* #146 (Nov. 1967), could've been a great single old-time Jack Kirby/Chic Stone tale with its team of colorful villains and interesting central theme. Instead, this second installment of Thor's exile on Earth sees him hypnotized by the Ringmaster after joining the Circus of Crime and ordered to steal a giant golden bull that only someone as strong as himself could lift. Ably scripted as usual by Stan Lee and drawn by Kirby (the opening splash inked by Vince Colletta is wonderful!), it made for a very satisfactory entry in late period grandiosity. But the real attention grabber this issue wasn't the lead story, instead, it was the first entry in a new Inhumans backup feature that replaced Tales of Asgard. The story behind its genesis is still obscure but it has been speculated that the feature actually began as a separate title dedicated to the Inhumans, something fans had been suggesting for

some time. But something went wrong with Marvel's scheduling and the book was canceled. The completed story however, was broken up into chapters and used to replace the Tales of Asgard backup, beginning with this issue. It's also possible that opening splash pages may have been created specifically for the backup series. Anyway, the series itself, which had only seven installments, would concentrate mostly on the origin of the Inhumans, and include events predating the current version of the group known to fans of the Fantastic Four. Here, the story begins with the Inhumans as a completely different race of human beings who have evolved far beyond the cavemen that lurk suspiciously about their futuristic enclave. By story's end, the terragen mists have been invented and Randac becomes the first man to enter them and be transformed into a true Inhuman. Again scripted and drawn by Lee and Kirby, the results (inked by Kirby's FF collaborator Joe Sinnott, more suited to an SF-themed story than a fantasy-based one such as the lead Thor feature) are as solid as any Marvel product of this period. As he did in the Tales of Asgard feature, Kirby confines himself to big, quarter-page and half-page panels: the better to interpret the story in mythic proportions while giving it an air of all around grandiosity. Lee's scripting, naturally, gives the story and its characters a sense of gravitas and removal from the ordinary world of mortals. As a result, for the first time, the backup feature in Mighty Thor became more interesting than the lead!

Avengers #45

"Blitzkrieg in Central Park!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Somewhat of a comedown from the incredible Red Guardian story of issues #43-44, *Avengers* #45 (Oct. 1967) celebrates Avengers Day as the Assemblers gather (immediately following the events of their first annual) to mark New York's recognition of their ongoing battle against evil. And evil in the form of the Super-Adaptoid waits among the crowd to fulfill his programming to kill Captain America. It was an okay story by Roy Thomas with some fine penciled artwork from Don Heck (except maybe for the overlarge Captain America wings on the Adaptoid's head), ably inked by Vince Colletta. Ultimately, however, it served merely as an action donnybrook without much in the way of furthering *Avengers* continuity via sub-plots, characterization, etc that readers of Thomas' scripts had become used to. It was, in fact, a kind of a call back to the old Stan Lee days of single issue stories. And if truth be told, John Buscema's art over the past several issues, especially the last two, spoiled fans for anyone else. As solid as Heck was here, Buscema managed to outshine him. So that when Buscema returned in the following issue, it'd be the first of a long string of impressive classics that would lift the *Avengers* into many a fan's must buy list. There was one not-so surprising development this ish



WHERE'S THE BAXTER BUILDING? NEW YORK CITY'S CENTRAL PARK WAS PROPOSED AND LANDSCAPED IN THE MID NINETEENTH CENTURY BUT IN THE MARVEL AGE BECAME THE SCENE OF MANY A SUPER-HEROIC ENCOUNTER WITH PLENTY OF ROOM TO TUSSE. IT'S USE WAS IN MARKED CONTRAST WITH THAT OF THE DISTINGUISHED COMPETITION THAT USED INVENTED CITIES AND NON-EXISTENT LOCATIONS.

not related to the Adaptoid and that was the induction of Hercules as a regular member of the team, making this the first since issue #16 when the Avengers experienced their first change in lineup (unless you count the brief membership of the Swordsman some issues later).

Daredevil #33

"Behold...the Beetle!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

It was billed as "the greatest chase of all time" by editor Stan Lee and he should have known, he wrote *Daredevil* #33 (Oct. 1967)! The chase in question is Daredevil, out of his urban element and stuck in the middle of a rocky, rugged landscape, as he pursues the Beetle to a small town taken over by the super-villain and a number of his goons. It all begins after the Beetle robs the very same train that Karen, Foggy, and Matt (in his persona of "Mike" Murdock) are riding on the way to Canada's Expo '67. And though it may or may not have been the greatest chase ever, DD's pursuit of the Beetle was fast and furious, covering most of the pages this ish, and filled with oversized panels, full page spreads, waterfalls and cliffhangers in a landscape that looked more like the West than New England (was there a miscommunication between Lee and Colan?). In any case, scripter and artist combine their talents beautifully to create a thoroughly satisfying first chapter in a two-part story. This smooth partnership, even smoother than Lee's work with Jack Kirby, was to be the hallmark of the Lee/Colan association on *Daredevil* till Lee left after issue #49.

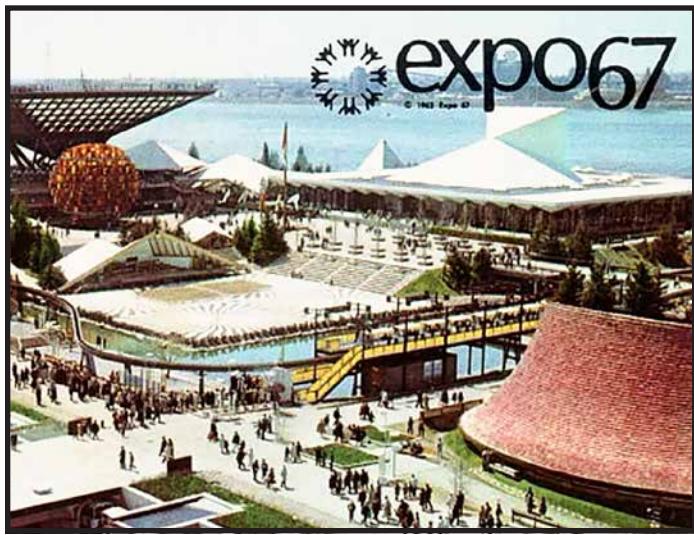


BEEFLE SHOOTS OUT HIS IMPALAC FINGERZ AGAIN BRAKING D. DEVIL AS HE HOPS ABOUT TO ALIGHT ON HIS FEET

CONTINUED AFTER NEXT PAGE

DRAWING HIM DOWN

Gene Colan



EXPO '67 WAS PART OF THE WORLD'S FAIR TRADITION AND HELD TO CELEBRATE CANADA'S CENTENNIAL AND PLAYED HOST TO 62 NATIONS REPRESENTED WITH THEIR OWN OFTEN FUTURISTICALLY DESIGNED PAVILIONS THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE BEING THE US GEODESIC GLOBE AND CANADIAN "INVERTED" PYRAMID.

Daredevil #34

"To Squash a Beetle!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

"The greatest chase of all time" was over by the time *Daredevil* #34 (Nov. 1967) opened on its busy Gene Colan/John Tartaglione splash page. There, DD is where readers left him the issue before, in the midst of fighting the Beetle's hired goons. But since that takes place at the start of the book, readers knew that their hero would likely end up captured and sure enough, he is. Inspired, the Beetle decides to take his captive to Expo '67 and unmask him on live television. On the way, he tells DD of his humble origins and DD takes the time to loosen his bonds. But there's a happy ending as Daredevil frees himself just in time to give the viewing public a show: a Colan provided donnybrook of balletic action as DD puts the kibosh on the Beetle (with a little help from good ole Foggy). The only drawback here is a minor one, as John Tartaglione's inks seem just a tad rough this time around. Was he throwing in too much detail and not enough shadows onto Colan's moody art? Such choice of emphasis did

(OPPOSITE PAGE) DAREDEVIL #34, PAGE 16: WILD DD ACTION COURTESY OF GENE "THE DEAN" COLAN! COMPLETE WITH THE ARTIST'S SIGNATURE AND MARGIN NOTES TO LET SCRIPER STAN LEE KNOW WHAT WAS GOING ON IN EACH PANEL. SUCH NOTES LIKELY SAVED TIME ON THE PHONE IF LEE COULDN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON AND HAD TO CALL THE ARTIST EVERY FIVE MINUTES FOR AN EXPLANATION.

make all the difference where Colan was concerned. Meanwhile, scripter Stan Lee does manage to slip in some characterization in the few panels Colan leaves him at the end when DD ponders the fact that when he's "Mike" Murdock, Karen misses Matt Murdock and when he's Matt, she enthuses about Mike! "Only a guy with my sloppy luck would end up being jealous of himself," muses Matt.

X-Men #37

"We, the Jury!"; Roy Thomas (script); Ross Andru (pencils); Don Heck (inks)

It took a while from the earliest beginnings when Factor Three warranted barely a mention to this issue, the first chapter of the final showdown between the X-Men and their hidden foes, a secretive group with a plan of taking over the world for mutantkind. But realizing the X-Men would never stand for such a plot and would try to stop it any way they could, Factor Three strikes first, capturing our heroes, putting them on trial, and finding them guilty of offenses against homo superior. Following which, the X-Men are condemned to a living death under the effects of the oblivio-ray. Suffice it to say, the team escapes that fate only to confront the Mutant Master via telecom as he informs them that they're too late to stop his plan for world domination. What to do? Well, scripter Roy Thomas could always continue the story into the next issue giving our heroes some time to figure out what to do, which is exactly what he did at the conclusion of *X-Men* #37 (Oct. 1967). The climactic confrontation between the X-Men and Factor Three should have been a thrilling one but somehow fell short due mostly to a combination of a talky story (the trial of the X-Men) and an unattractive art job by Ross Andru. If not for the saving inks of Don Heck (currently on sabbatical from the *Avengers*...that would soon become permanent) that softened Andru's awkward positionings and funny faces, things would have been much worse. The measure of Heck's save can be seen on pages 11-12 where Andru contrived to create a pair of full page illos designed to be seen side by side to complete the image (but sadly, ended up on the flip side of each other). There, drawings of the X-Men look decent, even attractive; something difficult to do with Andru's pencils. (As could be seen in many places throughout the rest of the issue, despite Heck's heroic efforts.) The story itself is merely a set-up for the following issue's main action, but Thomas does a good job retelling the events leading up to the trial and the career of the X-Men. The issue doesn't seem too crowded and Thomas' increasing confidence in his scripting moves things along well. But if only someone else could've been found to do the penciling! Even good ole Werner Roth would've been a welcome sight!

X-Men #38

"The Sinister Shadow of...Doomsday!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Roussos (inks)

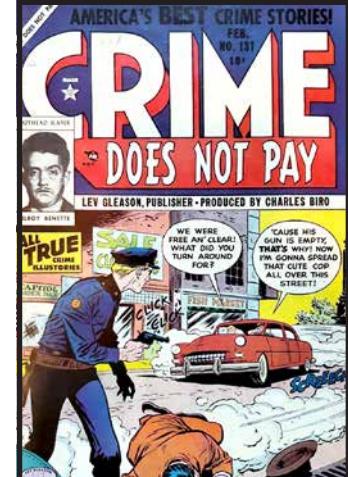
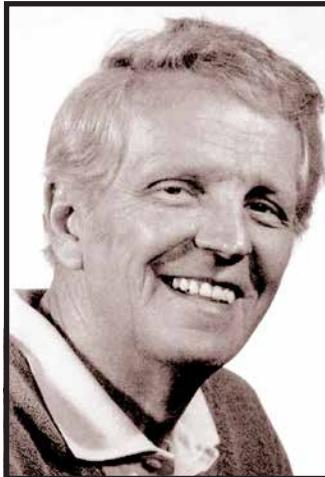
It had all the hallmarks of a last-minute scramble. After a string of issues with Werner Roth as regular penciler, suddenly, just as the long running Factor Three subplot finally comes to fruition, Roth was gone and replacement artists needed to be found in order to make the deadlines. Last issue, the first part of the climactic battle between the X-Men and Factor Three, DC mainstay Ross Andru was dragged into service, severely undercutting a book that was already floundering both in story quality and sales. Andru's stiff, awkward art was only saved from complete ruin by the inks of Don Heck. Now, for *X-Men* #38 (Nov. 1967), Heck had taken over completely. The only problem was that he was being inked by George Roussos whose style didn't prove compatible with Heck's. Thus, it was a better looking issue than many that had immediately preceded it, but hampered by too literal an inking style. This was readily seen on page 11 where Heck uses a near full page illo to heighten the dramatic effect of the X-Men charging into battle but Roussos' bare bones inks turns the art into a stiff, cartoon-like image, as if he were still inking Jack Kirby and not the finer tuned Heck. In other places, it seemed as if there was too much going on to allow Heck the use of large panels to depict the action. Not helping was a loss of page count to just 15 pages for the lead story. That was because the remainder of the issue was given over to a new backup series featuring the origin of the individual X-Men. There, the riddle of the missing Werner Roth was answered. He'd been demoted to these five page backups where his art would suffer and grow increasingly unattractive as the series went on. And the origins of the X-Men themselves would prove somewhat uninteresting, wherein each must include a new supervillain to make their early lives miserable. In the end, the only one that would prove at least a little interesting was that of the Angel who, alone of the X-Men, had a career as a superhero before he joined the team. As for the Factor Three story-line, that would go on for another chapter as the X-Men battle to foil its plot to trigger World War III. Splitting into two teams, they end up fighting a couple of their old enemies and the US Army respectively but fail to prevent the scheme from moving forward. It was okay, but nothing to write home about.

X-Men #39

"The Fateful Finale!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

X-Men #39 (Dec. 1967) features the final chapter in the long running Factor Three story-line but it's overshadowed by the latest development in the lives of our merry mutants; namely, they each get new, colorful, individualized costumes! Was it a gimmick to try and gin up interest in the always flagging

sales of the X title or was it a natural progression in the ongoing development of our heroes? Whichever one it was, it took a bit of getting used to but once the initial shock value was over, the new costumes seemed to fit the team well and they never looked back in all the years since. (Well, actually, they did briefly during the early twilight years; in those missing months between the cancellation of their own title and its revival in 1975, the team inexplicably reverted back to their original costumes. Was the experiment deemed a failure by editorial or was it just forgotten that the change had been made?) According to scripter Roy Thomas, it was he who asked for the change and artist George Tuska who came up with the actual designs which, for the most part, worked out well with Marvel Girl in a green mini skirt and yellow eye mask, the Beast in a skin tight blue and red outfit sans gloves and boots, Iceman with merely trunks and boots, and Cyclops in a blue and yellow outfit that recalled the group's old uniforms. The odd man out was the Angel who was stuck with a multi-colored costume that came with suspenders! Ugh. Unfortunately, he'd be stuck with that design for many moons until artist Neal Adams made the scene and finally gave him a more appropriate look. But the costumes were introduced only on this story's final page, for the balance of the tale, they were in their old uniforms and polishing off Factor Three. Scripter Roy Thomas does a good job winding up all the goings-on in the brief fifteen pages allotted to the main feature while penciler Don Heck, aided by Vince Colletta, does work worthy of his Avengers heyday in depicting the action. Unfortunately, Heck didn't do the cover as well. That



GEORGE TUSKA HADN'T BEEN A STRANGER TO MARVEL BEFORE RETURNING TO THE FOLD IN THE 1960S. NEEDING WORK, TUSKA CONTACTED EDITOR STAN LEE WHO INVITED HIM TO REJOIN THE BULLPEN AND AFTER PROVIDING SOME INKS AND PENCILS HERE AND THERE, THE ARTIST SETTLED IN ON THE IRON MAN STRIP FOR THE LONG HAUL.

was left to the chunky George Tuska who did the insides no justice at all. Meanwhile, artist Werner Roth is still around, only relegated to the new origins of the X-Men backup story where readers learn of the early days before Cyclops was found by Prof. X and became the first X-Man.

Strange Tales #162

"So Evil the Night!" Jim Steranko (script/pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"From the Never-World Comes...Nebulos!" Jim Lawrence (script);
Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)



STRANGE TALES #162, PAGE 1: STERANKO DOES ONE BETTER BY HAVING "THE GAFF" PROVIDE NICK FURY NOT JUST WITH A SOUPED UP ASTIN MARTIN, BUT A FERRARI 330/P4 BERLINETTA THAT CAN NOT ONLY TURN INVISIBLE, BUT CHANGE COLORS TOO! CLEARLY, STERANKO WAS NOT SLOWING DOWN. THE VISUAL INNOVATIONS AND PYROTECHNICS WERE STILL ROLLING OFF HIS ART BOARD IN A STEADY, EYE POPPING TIDE!

Things were chugging along with *Strange Tales* #162 (Nov. 1967) but now it was picking up speed with both of its features finally worth a reader's time. Although *Tales of Suspense* with its one-two punch of Gene Colan on Iron Man and Jack Kirby on Captain America was still indisputably *numero uno* at this time, the two double-feature books were doing very well in the creative team department as both neared the end of their respective runs. The reason for *Strange Tales*' uptick was Dan Adkins, who'd joined the book as regular penciler/inker on the Dr. Strange feature last issue and who now joined the virtuoso Jim Steranko as the book's tag team deluxe. Fans were surely breathing a lot easier after seeing Adkins on two issues in a row after suffering months with art by Marie Severin. He hits the ground running here first with a dynamic cover image introducing the world to Nebulos, who

styles himself "Lord of the Planets Perilous." Needing Dr. Strange to defeat Mordo for his own reasons, Nebulos sends an empowered Strange back to Earth where he stops Mordo (with some nice callbacks by Adkins to both Steve Ditko and Wally Wood). After that, Strange is whisked away again to Stonehenge (with a really nice half-page sized panel by Adkins depicting Strange traveling through space and time). The whole thing ends in a spectacular double-page spread with Strange and Nebulos facing each other across a moon-like landscape with the vast panoply of outer space yawning in the background. Wow! But as good as Adkins was proving to be on Dr. Strange, Steranko was still top dog in *Strange Tales*, as could be seen on the opening splash page of the SHIELD feature wherein the Gaff presents Nick Fury with his new car, a Ferrari 330/P4 Berlinetta made of clear fiberglass that can be changed into a half dozen colors—

including clear so that the automobile was virtually invisible from a few feet away! (How it was justified to the taxpayers is anyone's guess!) Steranko makes the presentation in a panel crammed in detailed work with the car itself zipatoned to suggest invisibility! That eyepopper was followed a few pages later with another full-pager showing SHIELD's revitalized ESP Division with its jazzy new symbol proudly displayed on the floor. The rest of the issue involving Fury's trackdown of the Yellow Claw is action as only Steranko (or maybe Jack Kirby) could present it, placing it back on firm footing following a couple slower than usual installments.

Amazing Spider-Man Special #4

"The Web and the Flame!"; Stan Lee (script); Larry Lieber (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

As of 1967, Spider-Man's annual tradition had certainly come down in the world. From the first two plotted and drawn by co-creator Steve Ditko (the Sinister Six in #1 and a team-up with Dr. Strange in #2), the quality dipped somewhat with #3 which was laid out by John Romita as Spidey tried out for membership with the Avengers. Now, with *Amazing Spider-Man Special* #4 (Nov. 1967), the annual tradition took a big step downward as editor/scripter Stan Lee brought back brother Larry Lieber to perform the art chores. Although Lieber had done well as a scripter during Marvel's early years, he never made it as a penciler with a style that seemed more amateurish than professional, as it was

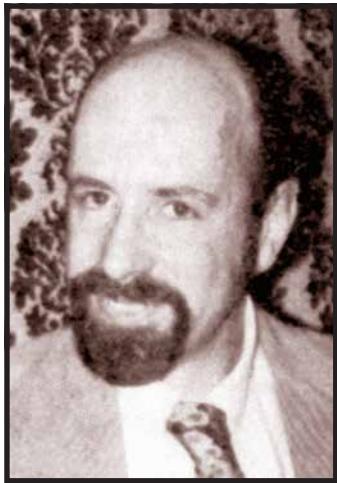
here (except for the saving graces of Mike Esposito's inks). Though the results are blandly acceptable, they're far from what Marvel fans had come to expect with the likes of Jack Kirby, John Buscema, Gene Colan, Dan Adkins, John Romita, and Jim Steranko in the bullpen. Not that Lee's story was much to brag about, either. It revives such familiar tropes as superheroes making a movie that's really a set-up by the villains (the Wizard and Mysterio) to trap them and the two heroes, in this case Spidey and the Human Torch, fighting each other at first due to a misunderstanding and then teaming up against the bad guys. It was okay, but long-time Marvelites had seen it all before. The main attraction for them here was seeing the revival of the old Spidey/Torch friendship from the old Ditko days. The other good thing was that there were no reprints this year with the rest of the issue filled out with extras such as a double-page spread of the Coffee Bean where Peter and his friends hung out after class; an explanation of Spidey's powers for new readers; and pin up pages of Spidey's rogues gallery.

Tales of Suspense #95

"If a Man Be Stone!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

"A Time to Die...a Time to Live!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

No one bats a thousand and certainly editor/scripter Stan Lee didn't always hit the mark. But when he did, he often hit dead center (to mix a metaphor!), which is exactly what he'd been doing for some months now on the Iron Man feature, and the latest installment in *Tales of Suspense* #95 (Nov. 1967) showed no slowdown in the creative juices. This time, Lee pulled what he did over in *Mighty Thor* when he had the thunder god battle the FF's Super-Skrull, he crossed over a Thor villain to face off against Iron Man. And the Grey Gargoyle would prove to be an excellent opponent for the golden Avenger, one who was brought firmly into the grandiose years by the penciling wizardry of Gene Colan. His use of big panels to display the action afforded ample room for his solid, larger than life figure work added oodles of drama to any story—and none more than here as Iron Man squares off against an unfamiliar foe...and loses! And now that the Tony Stark/Pepper Potts/Happy Hogan sub-plot had resolved itself, it was time to add something new to Stark's throughline. That came in the form of new supporting character Jasper Sitwell, whom Lee would have a ball depicting as an eager beaver Boy Scout who incongruously, was also a SHIELD agent! The unraveling of Sitwell's two sides, naive Boy Scout and super efficient secret agent, would be one of the chief delights of the feature's closing months as *Suspense* came to an end. Meanwhile, in the Captain America half of the book, Jack Kirby was proving why he was known as "the King" around the Marvel bullpen! There, our story opens with a literal blast as



ALTHOUGH HE'D BEEN MOVED ON FROM THE SUPER-HEROES HE USED TO SCRIPT IN THE EARLY YEARS, LARRY LIEBER HAD NOT BEEN FORGOTTEN. AT LEAST NOT BY BIG BROTHER STAN LEE. HE RETURNED IN 1967 TO DO UNSPECTACULAR BUT SERVICEABLE WORK DRAWING THE YEAR'S SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL AND WOULD BE HEARD AGAIN WITH THE FOLLOWING YEAR'S AS WELL. BEYOND THAT, HE'D ALSO DRAW A NICE DOCTOR DOOM SOLO TALE IN MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #20.

Cap's shield slices through a door whose shards fly off in every direction, with Joe Sinnott's inks giving an almost 3D effect. Inside the room, some mobsters are waiting in ambush for Cap, who quickly settles their hash (by page 2 to be exact!). The action slows down after that as the rest of the story is mostly dedicated to "day in the life" stuff as Steve Rogers can finally catch a breath and take Agent 13 on a date. (As Rogers admits, he still doesn't even know her real name, despite the fact that he's ready to propose marriage!) But Rogers has made a big assumption. Anachronism that he is, he forgot that by the late 1960s, more and more women considered their careers more important than the responsibilities of motherhood and family life. "I was a fool...to even hope," says a despondent Rogers after being read the riot act. Flash forward to the action that opens this unusual tale: It's Cap's last fight, after which he retires. The news shocks the world and readers are left with a final, full page panel by Kirby featuring a montage of scenes spanning Cap's career. "CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE!" shouts the blurb beneath. You better believe it, but was it *really* the end of Captain America? Only Lee and Kirby knew for sure!

Tales to Astonish #97

"The Sovereign and the Savages!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)
 "The Legion of the Living Lightning!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

The bad news was that Sub-Mariner was still prancing around in the Savage Land tangling with the oh-so dull Plunderer. The good news was that Roy Thomas was back on the scripting while Bill Everett was gone as penciler, replaced by the unexciting but more pleasing to the eye Werner Roth. Roth's work, however, was bolstered by the inks of the more than competent Dan Adkins. With such a creative team on board, the Sub-Mariner feature in *Tales to Astonish* #97 (Nov. 1967) should at least have been more interesting to read and fun to look at than its immediate predecessors (and it was). The only drawback being that the darn story continued yet again! That's right! Readers were doomed to see more of the Plunderer as he headed to Atlantis to attack the city even as its citizenry voted to outlaw Namor, believing that he betrayed them. Hoo, boy! Meanwhile, things continued to look up for the Hulk, as well. There, scripter Stan Lee continued to come up with threats equal to challenge the power of the Hulk. This time it was something called the "Legion of the Living Lightning," an organization Major Glenn Talbot has been assigned to stop. Add to that some character bits like General Ross' wish that daughter Betty would forget about Bruce Banner and attach herself to Talbot (something Talbot also wishes, giving him good motivation for wanting to see the Hulk dead) and Rick Jones using the old Teen Brigade to help locate the Hulk, and you've got a pretty tidy installment. It helped

that Marie Severin was maintaining the quality of her art when the new plateau reached a few issues back. Or was it due to the inks of Herb Trimpe? Surely, separately, the work of both lacked much pizazz but together, the combination seemed to be working out (This issue's cover image, for instance, was pretty good).

Avengers #46

"The Agony and the Anthill!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Now this was more like it! After last issue's downturn from the Red Guardian story in issues #43-44, *Avengers* #46 (Nov. 1967) swung the needle back into positive territory...way back! Scripter Roy Thomas was again firing on all burners and the John Buscema/Vince Colletta penciling/inking team was again turning out simply exquisite work for the best kind of Avengers story, namely one that focused on Goliath! This time, we find that the Wasp has hired a new chauffeur who is actually Giant-Man's old enemy, the Human Top! But seeing as how these were the grandiose years, the Human Top just wouldn't do as a formidable sounding name for a super-villain. Renaming himself the Whirlwind, the former Top then dons a new costume to match (introduced on page 4 and if designed by Buscema, it was, well, tops! A strikingly-shaped helmet that was held on with straps covering a bare-chested torso and tight leggings from the waist down, ending in pirate type boots, the Top definitely looked ready for his grandiose debut!). He attacks Goliath in his lab and succeeds in trapping him in an ant farm without his cybernetic helmet. Well, one thing leads to another and Goliath escapes and the Whirlwind is driven away and (back into hiding as the Wasp's chauffeur), ready to strike again in the future (an interesting and unique set up by Thomas). Though there was a lot going on here other than Goliath and the Wasp's battle with Whirlwind (Hercules and the Scarlet Witch go on a double-date



AFTER RETURNING FROM THE ADVERTISING WORLD, ARTIST JOHN BUSCEMA BARNSTORMED THROUGH MARVEL IN THE LATE SIXTIES TURNING IN INCREDIBLE WORK ON SUCH SERIES AS THE AVENGERS, SILVER SURFER, AND SUB-MARINER. THEN, IN THE NEXT DECADE, TOOK OVER THE FANTASTIC FOUR AND THOR BEFORE SETTLING DOWN FOR YEARS DOING CONAN THE BARBARIAN.

with Hawkeye and the returned Black Widow, as Captain America ponders his relationship with the female SHIELD agent whose real name he doesn't even know), this issue was still essentially a Goliath solo story. Was Thomas capitalizing on the knowledge that Buscema drew an awesome looking Goliath? Maybe, because his art this ish is awesome, especially in depicting Goliath's battle with the ants while trapped at insect size. Or was the real



AVENGERS #46, PAGE 9: WHIRLWIND (NEE HUMAN TOP) MAKES HIS GRANDIOSE DEBUT ON THIS PAGE BY PENCILER JOHN BUSCEMA AND INKER VINCE COLLETTA. SETTING UP AN ACTION PACKED SEQUENCE AS A MINIATURIZED GOLIATH AND WASP BATTLE THEIR WAY OUT OF AN ANT FARM AND BACK TO THE FULL SCALE WORLD. NO MATTER HOW YOU SLICE IT, READERS HIT THE JACKPOT WITH THIS ISH!

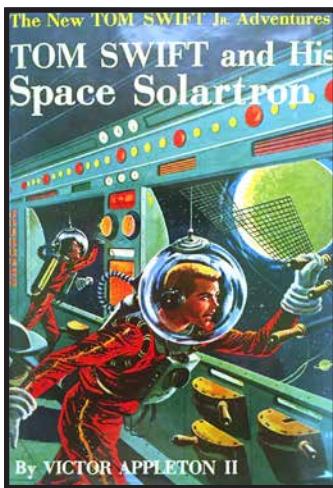
reason because Thomas wanted to provide an excuse to reintroduce Goliath's power as Ant-Man? If so, he does that too by the end of this single issue opus. Lucky readers got all that as well as a set-up for the story-line that'll dominate the book for the next few issues: the return of Magneto and the betrayal of the Scarlet Witch and Quicksilver!

Strange Tales #163

"And the Dragon Cried...Death!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"Three Faces of Doom!"; Jim Lawrence (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

Filled with such overwrought devices as "the ultimate annihilator" and the "psionic revelation eavesdropper," the SHIELD tale that leads off *Strange Tales* #163 (Dec. 1967) is the latest chapter in the ever shifting Yellow Claw story-line. Here, scripter/penciler Jim

Steranko fills the plot with action, twists, and surprises. Chief among the surprises is the introduction of new series supporting player Clay Quartermain, a dead ringer for actor Burt Lancaster or at least a close facsimile thereof! As usual, this story continues yet again. Meanwhile in the Dr. Strange backup feature, scripter Jim Lawrence was still on the job. Lawrence seems to have begun his comics career in Great Britain where he scripted numerous adaptations of Ian Fleming James Bond novels into comics. From there, he somehow ended up at Marvel where his major claim to fame was this Dan Adkins' illustrated run of Dr. Strange stories, before going back to Britain in the next decade to script Marvel UK's *Captain Britain*. But 'twas enough: Lawrence did more than a satisfactory job as he redirected Strange back onto a sensible course that was at least somewhat easy to follow. Here,



JIM LAWRENCE WAS ANOTHER FLEETING WRITER WHO PASSED THROUGH THE HALLS OF MARVEL IN THE LATE SIXTIES. BESIDES PENNING A STRING OF OKAY DR. STRANGE SEQUENCES FOR *STRANGE TALES*, HIS MAIN CLAIM TO FAME IS SCRIPTING ADAPTATIONS OF SUPER SPY JAMES BOND FOR BRITISH COMICS. MORE SURPRISINGLY, UNDER DIFFERENT PSEUDONYMS, LAWRENCE ALSO WROTE MANY VOLUMES OF THE *TOM SWIFT JR.*, *HARDY BOYS*, AND *CHRISTOPHER COOL* SERIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS!

for instance, the plot has climaxed into a near cosmic match up between Nebulos and the Living Tribunal. But if Nebulos loses, Strange may never know where hostage Victoria Bentley has been exiled. What to do? Deciding to short circuit the fight, Strange grabs Nebulos' staff which the Tribunal wants for its stored power and in return, sends Strange after Victoria. But the real attraction here as it was last ish, is the art by Dan Adkins who continued to both pencil and ink. So good is Adkins that he was actually giving Steranko a run for his money artwise. And the beneficiary of the two was the readers who now had two features in *Strange Tales* to glom over. The first time that happened since way back when Jack Kirby was doing SHIELD and Steve Ditko was still on Dr. Strange. And speaking of Ditko, Adkins even gave him a challenge with the last panel of the story depicting Strange in a kind of psychedelic special effect. Nice!

Tales of Suspense #96

"The Deadly Victory!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)
"To Be Reborn!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

A very simple but eye-catching cover design by Jack Kirby (aided by the marvelous textured coloring of Stan Goldberg) would surely have grabbed the attention of anyone browsing their local comics spinner rack when *Tales of Suspense* #96 (Dec. 1967) was released just after the new school year started. Eagerly turning the

pages (if readers dared skip over the Iron Man lead feature), they'd soon discover that the falling figure of Captain America on the cover really wasn't him but one of a number of imitators eager to step into his boots after Steve Rogers announces his retirement from the superhero business. It was a fast-moving tale expertly and economically scripted by Stan Lee and beautifully drawn by penciler Jack Kirby with Joe Sinnott's inks making the King's work look slicker than ever. In the first of several stories over subsequent years where Rogers quits being Cap (and though readers had to know he'd be back in harness sooner or later), the tale still provides suspense because of Rogers' reason for quitting: to set an example for Agent 13 (soon to be revealed as Sharon Carter), the woman he loves who refuses to retire as an agent of SHIELD. By returning to the fold at the end of this story, Cap is also marking the end of whatever hopes he had of marital bliss with Sharon. (At least for the time being!) But this great Cap installment wasn't all readers had to look forward to in this ish of *Suspense*. No sirree! In case anyone had forgotten, the lead story here was the Iron Man feature again scripted by the Man himself, Stan Lee and penciled by the master, Gene Colan! There, if readers recall, IM had just been turned to stone by the Gray Gargoyle and thrown off the roof of the Stark plant. If he hits the parking lot, Iron Man will be shattered into a million pieces! But enter the quick thinking Jasper Sitwell who manages to drive a dump truck filled with sand beneath IM, saving his life. Whew! In round two, it's Iron Man who comes out on top but at the cost of a heart attack as the power in his chest plate runs low. Our tale ends with a cliffhanger: Jasper must remove IM's helmet in order to provide first aid!

Tales to Astonish #98

"...To Destroy the Realm Eternal!"; Roy Thomas (script); Werner Roth (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)
"The Puppet and the Power!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Herb Trimpe (inks)

Exiled from the X-Men, penciler Werner Roth takes over the art chores on the Sub-Mariner feature in *Tales to Astonish* #98 (Dec. 1967). He began by touching up Bill Everett's work in #96 before taking over completely from the last issue; and though Roth never could really bring much imagination to his Marvel work in the form of dazzling layouts or exciting visuals, his work was at least serviceable and on occasion pretty good. Here, in this Roy Thomas scripted story, both sides of Roth can be seen with his rougher edges smoothed over by the inks of Dan Adkins (who also supplied this issue's arresting cover image of Atlantis under attack that was made even more eye-catching by Stan Goldberg's decision [and editor Lee's?] to color it all in blue). The only real drawback is that Thomas' script (besides what appears to be yet another attack on the surface world by Atlantis) allows the Plunderer to escape guaranteeing

that he'll make another appearance elsewhere in the Marvel universe. Argh! Surprisingly, much better is the Hulk co-feature scripted by Stan Lee and penciled by Marie Severin. There, the Hulk has been tricked into attacking an Air Force base by the Lords of the Living Lightning. And while the military deals with him by knocking him out with gas, the Lords kidnap Betty Ross and use her to force General Thunderbolt Ross into surrender. Our tale ends with the usual cliffhanger: Betty is held in the same cell as the unconscious Hulk. Should the monster wake, anything could happen! It was another solid entry by Lee while the art team of Severin and inker Herb Trimpe continue to surprise. Severin even stretched herself a bit this time with an inventive panel 5 on page 4, showing a cutaway view of a room holding Betty but seen from above with guards outside the walls. Unfortunately, the faces of her characters still suffer as does her strange, stiff poses for the Hulk. But overall, if readers took a birds eye view of *Astonish*, the outlines of a genuinely entertaining comic might be discerned...



MIGHTY THOR #147
"The Wrath of Odin!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Now, this was more like it! After stretching out the interesting but not worth two-and-a-half issues plot involving the Circus of Crime, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby not only wind up that story in the first few pages of *Mighty Thor* #147 (Dec. 1967), but immediately plunge our hero into his next adventure. And though that adventure involves Loki (again?!), unlike the unimpressive return of the Plunderer over in the Sub-Mariner feature, Lee and Kirby make his reappearance here an exciting one, really perking

MIGHTY THOR #147, PAGE 15: IT WAS BACK TO BASICS FOR THE MIGHTY THOR WHEN LOKI ATTACKS FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME, EXCEPT THAT THIS TIME, HE TACKLES THE GOD OF THUNDER DIRECTLY FOR SOME OLD FASHIONED, DOWN HOME, KIRBY STYLE ACTION HELPED OF COURSE, BY INKER VINCE COLLETTA!

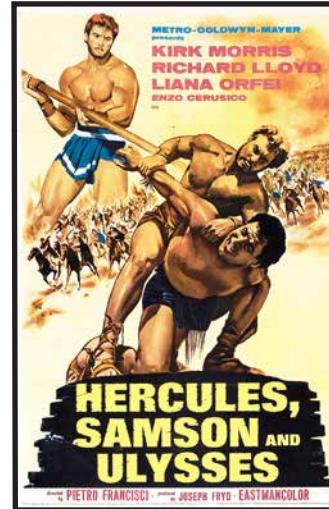
Thor is placed in a cell with another prisoner. Soon, however, he's released when a stranger posts bail. That stranger turns out to be Loki, looking to take advantage of the fact that Thor has been stripped of his godly power by Odin. What follows is page after page of pulse-pounding action as Kirby takes it to town. A depowered Thor is no match for even Loki's natural strength and gets thrown around until beaten unconscious. Just then, however, Odin gets wind of the encounter and loses his cool. What next? As usual, Kirby is embellished here by Vince Colletta who continued to give the artist's work that grandiose veneer especially here in the big, quarter-page panels used for the fight sequences as the outsized figures of Thor and Loki pound away at each other. Great stuff! The same could definitely be said about the art team of Kirby and Joe Sinnott on the Inhumans backup. There, the Kree Sentry who will battle the Fantastic Four ages in the future, shows up to inform the Inhumans of their Kree origins (another interesting universe building development of the kind that excited Marvel fans) even as Randac emerges from the terrigen mists with strange new powers. With a warning from the Sentry that the Kree may prove enemies more than benefactors, Randac decides that all of his people should take turns entering the mists and thus gain different super-powers. So far, the origin of the Inhumans was proving to be extremely satisfying, tying together and strengthening the bonds of the still growing Marvel universe. It would only be mildly disappointing that ancient history would be left behind so soon to move the story almost to the present for the origins of the individual Inhumans that readers were already familiar with.

Avengers #47

"Magneto Walks the Earth!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

The return of the "most powerful of the evil mutants" under an impressive title such as "Magneto Walks the Earth" should've had an equally impressive *Avengers* #47 (Dec. 1967) to go along with it. And though it had a good story by Roy Thomas and penciling by John Buscema, what could have been was nearly ruined by the inking of old pro George Tuska who'd returned to the House of Ideas since some earlier work on the Captain America feature in *Tales of Suspense*. This time, Tuska would stick around for the long haul, taking over as the main Iron Man artist a few months hence when IM finally received his own book. But that didn't necessarily mean that Tuska fit in. He may have been a better artist back in the Golden Age but his style had since atrophied, as would be seen in countless Marvel comics he drew through the twilight years. Here, he drains Buscema's work of much of its vitality (doing a particularly bad job on Goliath). With evidence here (pages 10, 15, 17) of Buscema's growing confidence and the widescreen look he'd soon make a hallmark of his style, it can only be conjectured what this issue would have looked like under the more sympathetic

THE WAVE OF ITALIAN SWORD AND SANDAL FILMS OF THE 1960S MAY HAVE BEEN PRETTY MUCH OVER BY THE END OF THE DECADE, BUT SOME, SUCH AS THE ULTIMATE SUPER-HERO TEAM OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, HERCULES, SAMSON, AND ULYSSES (1963) MIGHT STILL BE FOUND IN SECOND RUN THEATERS (WHERE THE AUTHOR CAUGHT IT ONE SATURDAY AFTERNOON!) BUT WAS IT MERE COINCIDENCE THAT HERCULES WAS EASED OUT OF THE AVENGERS JUST WHEN THESE FILMS BEGAN TO WANE?



hand of Vince Colletta, let alone later inkers George Klein or Tom Palmer. Instead, Tuska's too literal inkline reduces Buscema's work from spectacular to merely good. Thankfully, Thomas' story at least is worthy of Buscema's efforts covering as it does Magneto's escape from the Stranger, the introduction of Dane Whitman (soon to become the new heroic Black Knight), and a battle between Magneto and Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch when the

pair refuse to join a new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. All that and Captain America quits the team (this comes in conjunction with the plot over in *Suspense* where Cap quits being Cap), Hawkeye loses his cool, Goliath and the Wasp leave on vacation (driven by the Wasp's chauffeur who's really the Whirlwind!), and Hercules heads for Greece hoping to find a way back to Olympus. All in all, despite the inks, this was still a solidly entertaining entry in the Thomas/Buscema run.

Daredevil #35

"Daredevil Dies First!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

The breezy Lee/Colan creative team continued to move forward effortlessly on *Daredevil* as Fantastic Four enemy and Frightful Four member, the Trapster (formerly Paste-Pot-Pete) breaks into the offices of Nelson and Murdock threatening to kill Daredevil. And that's how easy it is in *Daredevil* #35 (Dec. 1967) for scripter Stan Lee and penciler Gene Colan to get the ball rolling! Except for some Matt Murdock/Mike Murdock hijinks after the Trapster makes his exit, the issue is pedal to the metal, all the way action, something that Lee needed to be careful about as the comic threatened to become a vessel solely for empty fight sequences. As it was, for the past several issues, character development was moving at a glacial pace and limited to a couple

pages per issue dealing with the Matt/Mike Murdock conundrum. But be that as it may, *DD* couldn't be accused of not being entertaining because it sure was! Here, *DD* is defeated by the Trapster who then takes his identity to infiltrate the FF's headquarters. There, he takes the Invisible Girl by surprise and plants a bomb for her returning teammates. Can *DD* somehow save the day? Stay tuned!



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STRANGE TALES #164, PAGE 4: ARTIST DAN ADKINS STRETCHES HIS IMAGINATION ON THIS PAGE WHERE DR. STRANGE IS FORCED INTO SOME UNACCUSTOMED PHYSICAL ACTION. IT WAS A NICE CHANGE OF PACE PROVIDED BY SCRIPER JIM LAWRENCE WHO, PERHAPS NOT COINCIDENTALLY FOR THE AUTHOR OF MANY A TOM SWIFT ADVENTURE, PITTS THE MASTER OF BLACK MAGIC AGAINST THE MAD SCIENCE OF THE VILLAINOUS YANDROTH.

Strange Tales #164

"Nightmare!"; Jim Lawrence (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks); "When Comes...the Black Noon!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils); Bill Everett (inks)

The wonders continue in *Strange Tales* #164 (Jan. 1968) as scripter Jim Lawrence and penciler/inker Dan Adkins give readers a guided tour of one of the most offbeat worlds that Dr. Strange had ever visited. In fact, the strangeness begins right off with a switch in the placement of the book's two features: for the first time in the book's history, Dr. Strange went from being only the backup to the lead feature. In addition, it also grew from its accustomed 10 pages to 11 (with the SHIELD feature likewise losing a page to make up for it). Why the changes? What could they portend? Nothing was mentioned about them on the letters page or the Bullpen Bulletins page. Whatever the reason, fans were merely thankful that they had one more page of Adkins' art to slaver over (though admittedly, it meant one less page of Steranko's incredible work). Anyway, Dr.

Strange finds himself in a new dimension ruled by scientific wizard Yandroth who declares his intention of keeping Victoria Bentley for his queen (in anticipation of ruling the universe, natch). Strange, of course, doesn't buy it and fights his way to Yandroth through an assortment of beasties and landscapes. Most noteworthy is his near cinematic battle with a giant slug and a winged bat thing. There's also a way-cool half-page sized panel on page 6 of Strange wandering through an alien junglescape that seems half fauna and half flora. Truly, Adkins was really outdoing himself. Not that Steranko was taking it easy! There, artist Bill Everett appeared on the inks giving Steranko's work

substantiality and the kind of detail the inker had once lavished on Kirby's Hulk. Unfortunately, Nick Fury is still fighting to prevent the Yellow Claw from using his ultimate nullifier (presumably more powerful than the ordinary nullifier that Doctor Octopus had his hands on over in the Spidey book!). There's another cliffhanger ending, of course, that sees Fury captured and the Claw on the brink of victory. How does the SHIELD ramrod get out of this one? Only Steranko knew and he wasn't telling!



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TALES OF SUSPENSE #97, PAGE 1: PENCILER JACK KIRBY OPENS THIS ISSUE'S CAP STORY WITH A BLAST (LITERALLY)! BUT AS SATISFYING AS JOE SINNOTT WAS ON THE INKS, HIS STYLE HERE, AS OPPOSED TO HIS TAKE ON THE FF, SEEMS JUST A TAD TOO CLEAN, TOO FORMAL, EVEN TOO PRECISE, ROBBING KIRBY'S PENCILS OF A VISCERAL QUALITY THAT SOMEHOW DEFINED THE ARTIST'S STATE OF MIND. THAT SAID, THERE'D BE JUST NO WAY TO CALL THE RESULTS DISAPPOINTING! SUBSEQUENT PAGES WITH CAP IN BATTLE WITH A GANG OF HOODLUMS WHILE THE PANTHER ALSO RUNS INTO TROUBLE WOULD BE TOO EXQUISITE FOR WORDS!

Tales of Suspense #97

"The Coming of Whiplash!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks) "And So It Begins...!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

At last! After who knows how long and a string of average type bad guys such as Cuban communists and the Mole Man, Iron Man finally gets himself a new, colorful super-villain to tackle! The man's name is Whiplash and though when you come right down to it, was really no match for Iron Man with just a steel slicing whip as a weapon, could still dish it out if IM was too weak to fight back.

(And penciler Gene Colan was just the man to draw him in such a way as to make anyone believe he could be a real menace to ole Shellhead.) And that's just the set up by the end of this Stan Lee scripted tale. As readers recalled, Iron Man was

weakened and unconscious at the end of the previous issue. He's still in that state when he's picked up by Tony Stark's conniving cousin Morgan (not seen in many moons) for delivery to the Maggia, but Iron Man manages a recharge through the car's cigarette lighter (ask mom and dad about that, kids!). It's enough to toss around some Maggia hoods but not enough to handle Whiplash... Meanwhile, over in the Captain America backup, we have one of those transition stories that take place between multi-part epics, the kind that fans loved to see penciler Jack Kirby doing because they usually called on him to depict different kinds of goings-on in the same story. In this case, opening up with Cap in explosive action versus a bunch of gangsters before moving over to Wakanda for a couple pages where the Black Panther

is in combat with some strangely garbed soldiers (whom readers would learn soon enough were in the employ of Baron Zemo!). Things shift again back to Cap at the local police station where he considers taking a vacation and wonders about Agent 13, whom we know as Sharon Carter. As for Sharon, she's on another dangerous mission going undercover as spy Irma Kruhl (Cruel, get it?) to infiltrate the same costumed gang that the Panther was seen fighting. Hmm... Our economical, 10-page story ends with Cap being picked up remotely by the Panther who invites him to Wakanda to help in the fight against the strangely garbed soldiers. Here, Kirby's art, with the help of inker Joe Sinnott, is as slick and attractive as it has been for the past several issues and with Lee's flawless dialogue, easily matches the quality of previous stories since Kirby's return. Overall, there was hardly a better 12-cent buy in the entire Marvel lineup than *Tales of Suspense* #97 (Jan. 1968).

Fun Fact: At a time in American history when policemen were often denigrated as "pigs," Lee's words in their defense have proven timeless, even in a later era when many advocate for their "defunding" as enemies of the public rather than its servants. "They're underpaid, overworked, and unappreciated," muses Cap about the police whose headquarters he just left. "No one calls them superheroes, or makes any fuss over them. And yet, it's men like that, the thousands of unsung cops on the beat, who keep our streets from turning into jungles and who make our cities safe, even for the unthinking cop-haters themselves!" Amen!



NEW YORK CITY'S FINEST, FREQUENTLY DEPICTED BY ARTIST JACK KIRBY IN THEIR DISTINCTIVE UNIFORMS WITH THE DOUBLE BREASTED BUTTON SCHEME THAT WAS SEEN MOST OFTEN IN MOVIES AND ON TV, WERE THE REAL LIFE SUPER-HEROES THAT OFTEN COURAGEOUSLY STOOD UP TO SUPER-VILLAINS, HOLDING THE FORT UNTIL THE LIKES OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR COULD MAKE THE SCENE. LATER, THEY HAD THE THANKLESS TASK OF RESTORING ORDER AFTER A BATTLE. SO, HAT'S OFF TO OUR MEN IN BLUE!

Amazing Spider-Man #56

"Disaster!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

The Doctor Octopus multi-parter may have ended in *Amazing Spider-Man* #56 (Jan. 1968), but so did an era in the title's history. When the first era of the book's history ended back in 1966, it was pretty recognizable: Steve Ditko, the co-creator and driving force on both art and plotting left and was replaced by the radically different John Romita on the art. At that point, editor/scripter Stan Lee ended many plot points championed by Ditko to update the series according to his own lights. That transition was pretty obvious, but the new one that occurred following this issue was not to be so clear cut. For instance, though John Romita would remain on the pencils, his work would become looser with more of it left to inkers such as Mike Esposito and especially Don Heck. The results, though more than satisfying, were less substantial than when Romita had given the art his undivided attention. Similarly, Lee's plotting became looser for a somewhat less than satisfying crossover with the boring Ka-Zar next issue and then a multi-parter featuring the less than stellar return of the Kingpin as "the Brainwisher." Perhaps the reason was that during this period, other things than comics were demanding more of Lee's time including interviews (as noted in this issue's bullpen page), merchandising, and otherwise hobnobbing with celebrity directors and musicians. Meanwhile, Romita was taking on duties that would eventually lead to his becoming Marvel's art director. Be that as it may, however, this issue still has Romita's full concentration as Lee's exciting story comes to a conclusion with an amnesiac Spidey turning on Dr. Octopus even as the army assaults the villain's hideout. The only drawback is the fact that the story ends with Spidey still suffering from the tired amnesia bit, so readers were stuck with the often dull circumstance for at least one more issue.

Fantastic Four #70

"When Fall the Mighty!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Unlike the current issue of *Spider-Man*, there was no hint of a creative slowdown in *Fantastic Four* #70 (Jan. 1968). Here, the seemingly predictable situation of a mind-altered Thing now dead set against his own partners is sidetracked for a new battle that spotlights the Human Torch and Mr. Fantastic (although it's Mr. Fantastic that gets the lion's share of the action...and how!). As an angry and resentful Thing makes his way across the city to the Mad Thinker's hideout, the Torch and Mr. Fantastic, in company with a squad of New York's finest, are already there, making their way through one barrier after another until Reed's climactic confrontation with the Thinker. There, with dramatic, power-packed visuals by Jack Kirby, scripter Stan Lee more than earns his half of the credits with another of his inspirational dialogues then

found nowhere else in comics (and for that matter, nowhere since): "All right murderer, you've had your say," says Reed as he pummels the Thinker into submission. "But again, you've made one fatal mistake. You didn't take into account a man's fighting spirit. The spirit that makes a man go on even though his body can take no more. The spirit that makes a man willing to die for what he believes in. The spirit that no computer, no electronic thinking machine, will ever be able to measure, or to predict!" You tell 'em, Reed! With the conclusion of this sub-plot, the Thing attacks the Baxter Building but the Torch and Mr. Fantastic manage to lure him in front of Reed's mental-wave unit that zaps him good. But was it enough to alter his personality or simply kill him? Readers wouldn't know that

until the next issue. Meanwhile, the jailed Thinker activates his most destructive android yet, siccing him onto the FF. And wouldn't you know it? It shows up just when all the male members of the team are out of action and only the pregnant Invisible Girl is available to stop him! The whole issue proved that both Lee and Kirby were still at the top of their game, still the leaders of the Marvel revolution showing no signs of slowing down at all. Great stuff!

Fantastic Four #71

"...and so it Ends..."; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

How to describe such an incredible issue in a mere handful of words? Suffice it to say that between Stan Lee's scripting and Jack Kirby's penciling, the two managed to produce one of the most soul satisfying issues of the FF ever. You thought that "the battle of the Baxter Building" back in issue #40 was something? Think again! In

the wind up to the multi-part Mad Thinker story-line (and for those who thought the Thinker never amounted to much, Lee and Kirby showed just what could be done with any character as interpreted through the grandiose years!) the FF must battle a nearly invincible android, the Thinker's ultimate



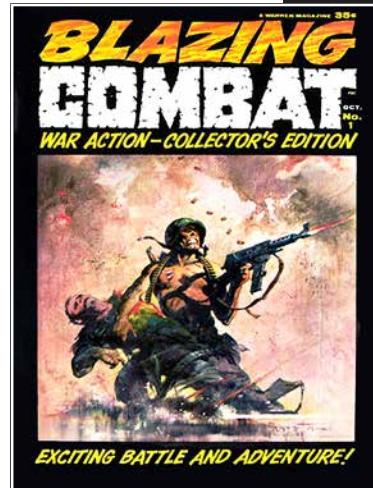
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FANTASTIC FOUR #70, PAGE 4: JOE SINNOTT'S CLEAN INK LINES WORK BETTER HERE OVER JACK KIRBY'S PENCILS ESPECIALLY WHEN DEPICTING THE TEXTURE OF THE THING'S ROCKY EXTERIOR. IT'S ALSO MORE USEFUL ON CROWDED STREET SCENES WITH THEIR VARIOUS PASSERSBY WHERE FACES AND ATTITUDES ARE IMPORTANT IN CONVEYING THE ANXIETY ENGENDERED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF AN OUT OF CONTROL THING. MEANWHILE, THE CLOSE UP OF THE THING'S FACE IN PANEL 4 COMMUNICATES AN AIR OF IMPENDING MENACE. ONE FURTHER EXPRESSED IN PANEL 5 WITH HIS FRUSTRATION AT NOT BEING ABLE TO FLAG A CAB. NOT GOOD!

Archie Goodwin

Like his contemporary, Roy Thomas (and a number of other mostly Marvel writers), Archie Goodwin hailed from Missouri and broke into comics in a big way: his first published work was drawn by EC comics greats Al Williamson and Roy Krenkel. With some editorial experience in his background, he became the main script writer for Warren Publications' *Creepy*, an EC wannabe. From there, he became its editor and more famously, the editor/writer for the company's *Blazing Combat* title.

By the late 1960s, Goodwin found himself at Marvel. There, he took over the Iron Man feature from writer Stan Lee in *Tales of Suspense*. He succeeded in emulating Lee's style making the transition an easy one for readers and continued on into the first couple years of the title. Goodwin would go on to write much more for the company including early issues of *Tomb of Dracula* and *Hero for Hire* but as time went on and he moved away from Stan Lee's writing style, his output became less interesting until he finally found himself in an editorial position again, namely editor-in-chief of Marvel. Two years later, he was out and freelancing again, then back to Marvel as editor of *Epic Illustrated*. After that, it was off to DC where he acted primarily as a Batman editor while handing in the occasional script. He was still on duty when he passed in 1998.



creation. *Fantastic Four* #71 (Feb. 1968) opens where the previous issue left off, with the Invisible Girl left alone to face the Android after both the Human Torch and Mr. Fantastic had fallen. But just as things seem the most hopeless, the Thing, his mind now restored to normal, wades in and what follows is nothing short of Kirby at his all time best, culminating in a blockbuster panel 1 on page 7 as the Android is knocked through a wall outside the Baxter Building to plunge to its destruction far below. In the meantime, the Torch and Mr. Fantastic have revived and attack the Thing unaware that he's back to normal. But convinced by the Invisible Girl, the partners relent just in time to tackle the Android again (it managed to survive its fall... natcherly!). However, it's defeated after being lured into the Negative Zone, never to be seen again...maybe! But back on Earth, Reed realizes that the deadly dangers faced by the FF pose too great a threat to Sue, now pregnant with the couple's child. Thus, Reed's dramatic announcement at the conclusion of this ish: "Sue and I are cutting out! I won't be responsible for any more lives!" "That means..." replies Johnny, "the end of the FF!" Even after all these years, it was still amazing how much the smoothly integrated team of Lee and Kirby could cram into a single 20 page story. Here, there was tons of action but at the same time, mostly through Lee's

dialogue, there was plenty of room for characterization, drama, and emotion too. Everything was here that made the FF still "the world's greatest comic magazine." The sense of comradeship, family, and a clear, unambiguous moral foundation that gave its legitimacy as the pride of the Marvel Group!

Tales to Astonish #99

"When the Monster Wakes!"; Stan Lee (script);
Marie Severin (pencils) John Tartaglione (inks)
"When Falls the Holocaust!"; Archie Goodwin (script);
Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

Like *Strange Tales* before it, *Tales to Astonish* #99 (Jan. 1968) reversed the traditional order of its two features (which seemed to match the solo cover illustration; i.e. if the image spotlighted the Hulk as this issue does, then the Hulk feature would lead off). That, and each feature now boasted 11 page stories instead of 12 pages for Sub-Mariner and only 10 for the Hulk. Unbelievable as it may sound, however, the art on this issue's Hulk feature was a step down from those issues immediately preceding it. Herb Trimpe was gone from the inks and replaced by John Tartaglione. And though Tartaglione wasn't bad, with Trimpe's departure, it now

seemed clear that Severin's oddball art style needed someone who was more *sympatico* than Tartaglione. Over the months he'd been inking her, Trimpe had learned Severin's strengths and weaknesses, adapted, and managed to make her work slightly more than merely acceptable for a dramatic comic book. It'd been almost decent. But that veneer was gone this issue, robbing the climactic chapter of Stan Lee's story of the Lords of the Living Lightning of some of its impact. On the other hand, the art on the Sub-Mariner feature had improved again with Dan Adkins once more on both pencils and inks. The story, scripted by Marvel newcomer Archie Goodwin, finishes plot elements begun by Roy Thomas a number of issues back. The good thing here is that the Plunderer is nowhere to be seen as the Atlanteans attack a US submarine and Namor races to stop the use of a "hurricane inducer." Although Goodwin, a former writer and editor for such Warren Publications as *Eerie* and *Creepy*, does a good job aping the Lee/Thomas scripting styles, it's Adkins' art that's the star. While not as wild and inventive as his work on Dr. Strange, it nevertheless shines here with its clean lines and excitement-inducing layouts. From this point on, the Sub-Mariner feature would enjoy top-notch art even as it transitioned into its own solo title. The good luck would last for over a year before a tag team of John Buscema and Gene Colan stepped down to be replaced by Marie Severin as regular artist followed later by Sal Buscema.

Mighty Thor #148

"Let There Be...Chaos!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby were still riding high in *Mighty Thor* #148 (Jan. 1968) with Thor trapped on Earth with the possibility open for more encounters with earthbound supervillains. And that possibility becomes a certainty with the introduction of a new super-villain called the Wrecker, destined to become one of Thor's most exciting foes with a couple never to be forgotten encounters while Kirby was still drawing the book. The Wrecker is actually a second story man wanted by the police for a number of robberies. What distinguishes him from other thieves is his use of a crowbar in his thefts. Well, this time he breaks into rooms occupied by Loki (depowered by Odin thus short-circuiting his one sided battle with Thor begun last ish) just as Karnilla, the Norn Queen, grants god of mischief his request for extra powers to defeat Thor. Mistaking the Wrecker for Loki, she gives him the powers instead. His first act is to banish Loki back to Asgard and when he and Thor finally meet, he does the same for Sif and Balder. At that point, Kirby has only a couple pages remaining for the Wrecker and Thor's initial confrontation, but he makes the most of them by first delighting readers with a full page splash of the pair going at it and then a second page



BY THE EARLY SIXTIES, THE McDONALD'S "FAST FOOD" FRANCHISE HAD SPREAD ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, QUICKLY EMBEDDING ITSELF INTO THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE. BY THAT TIME, CO-OWNER RAY KROC HAD BOUGHT OUT THE ORIGINAL McDONALD BROTHERS AND THEN HIS OWN PARTNER, HARRY J. SONNEBORN. VERY QUICKLY AFTER THAT, IN 1967, KROC EXPANDED OUTSIDE THE US OPENING ITS FIRST FOREIGN McDONALD'S FRANCHISE IN CANADA BEFORE GOING ON TO CONQUER THE REST OF THE WORLD.

of the two tussling over some rooftops. Earlier, to catch Thor's attention, Kirby had the Wrecker destroy a bunch of buildings using his now enchanted crowbar in a paroxysm of shattering brick and tumbling cornices. At the same time, Lee and Kirby continue to have some fun by contrasting the uptight nature of Thor and his friends with everyday life on Earth. This time, feasting on take-out burgers: "Ahhh! Whether in the Elysian fields of Asgard or the halcyon halls of Earth, how good it is to quell the pangs of hunger," muses Balder as he contemplates the McFeast. "How will I make 'em believe this in the Java Joint? How?" asks the stunned delivery boy after getting a tip from Thor. "They will look in thine eyes and believe," the thunder god assures him. Later, Thor entertains his guests by showing them the Spider-Man cartoon show on TV! Ya gotta love it! And though Kirby's art is as power packed as ever, it was obvious here that Vince Colletta's inks were slipping. Backgrounds are missing and faces are simplified. However, in many other places, the inker continued to do Kirby proud with more than a few powerfully dramatic panels. What Kirby would look like under a slightly more dedicated inker could be seen at the back of the book with the Inhumans backup feature. There, under the slick inks of Joe Sinnott, readers are introduced to the infant Black Bolt, whose first cries nearly destroy the city of Attilan! "Never did man born of woman have such a son," declares the fearful father, Agon. **Fun Fact:** Kirby's cover spotlighting the Wrecker was slightly altered by John Romita who, for some reason known only to editor Lee, redrew the figure of Thor!

Mighty Thor #149

"When Falls a Hero!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

As he was in the concurrent issue of *The Fantastic Four*, penciler Jack Kirby was at the top of his game for *Mighty Thor* #149 (Feb. 1968)! Need proof? Then look no farther than this issue's incredible cover image: Divided into three panels with two of the smaller at the top setting up the dramatic scene in the largest panel set in the bottom half, the cover displays a triumphant Wrecker looming in the close foreground and a defeated Thor lying prone amid the rubble of a shattered building, and all colored in the amazing gradations that only Stan Goldberg seemed able to capture. Wow! But that was only the appetizer for this action packed extravaganza. Inside, the art team of Kirby and Vince Colletta knock 'em dead with page after page of outsized, grandiose action culminating in a three-quarter sized panel on page 15 as the Wrecker drops an entire apartment building on Thor, leaving readers to wonder if this might actually be the end of the thunder god. Add on top of all that, Stan Lee's script that captures perfectly the Wrecker's low IQ bravado vs. the inspirational Thor: "Still am I the son of Odin," says Thor as he's pressed hard by the Wrecker. "Still doth the proud blood of Asgard flow through my veins. Still shall I fight, and still endure. A victory expected is triumph without meaning. But, a victory snatched from the ashen ruins of defeat...ah, there be a victory of which minstrels shall sing!" All that wonderfulness was backed up by a new origins of the Inhumans feature this time featuring the boyhood of Black Bolt, his cruel teasing at the hands of brother Maximus, and the realization by Black Bolt that he'd have to remain silent for the rest of his life. It was okay with solid Kirby/Joe Sinnott art, but the virility of the early chapters of this series was already gone. The subject in the installment here was already familiar to regular readers of the *Fantastic Four* with the usual Inhuman faces of Karnak, Gorgon, and Medusa hanging about as Maximus does them dirty, ending with his usual comeuppance. The Inhumans stories would have to do better than this to maintain any level of enthusiasm from fans.

Avengers #48

"The Black Knight Lives Again!"; Roy Thomas (script); George Tuska (pencils/inks)

Judging from John Buscema's interpretation of the new Black Knight from the cover of *Marvel Superheroes* #17, his depiction of the character would have been incredible here in *Avengers* #48 (Jan. 1968) if he'd been given the chance. Instead, readers' enthusiasm was dampened when they opened this issue and found Buscema nowhere to be seen. What they wound up with was the art of George Tuska, which proved wholly inadequate for this key building block of the still



THROUGH THE 1960S, MANY CITIES IN THE UNITED STATES SUFFERED UNDER THE MISGUIDED INTENTIONS OF LARGE SCALE URBAN RENEWAL PROGRAMS SPONSORED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, THEY RESULTED IN SHATTERED COMMUNITIES AND GOVERNMENT HOUSING THAT WAS OFTEN NEGLECTED AND RIDDEN BY CRIME. THE ONE GOOD THING ABOUT URBAN RENEWAL WAS THAT ITS CONDEMNED NEIGHBORHOODS PROVED TO BE PERFECT PLACES FOR SUPER-HERO BATTLES WHERE NO ONE COULD BE HURT AND BUILDINGS COULD BE DAMAGED THAT WERE ALREADY SCHEDULED FOR DEMOLITION!

growing Marvel Universe. From his so-so cover (with its perfectly awful depiction of Goliath) to the by-the-numbers illos on the inside, Tuska was a pale substitute for Buscema, whose dynamic penciling was on the cusp of breaking out into something truly awesome. Tuska's work here at least serves the purposes of Roy Thomas' script which presents the origin of the new Black Knight and his first foray as a hero (which is canceled when the Avengers refuse to believe he's a good guy). The editorial decision to give the new Black Knight such a colorful costume may have been a wrong move, as well. Far from being a "black" knight, the Dane Whitman version is a garish mix of blue, yellow, and red. Too much. On the other hand, in later issues, when Buscema was drawing him, colorist Stan Goldberg did manage to turn the Black Knight into something really eye-catching. It all depended on how the character was drawn, as well as inked. That said, the new Black Knight would later become one of the Avengers' most interesting co-stars as well as later members of the team. Thomas has admitted that the Knight was one of his own favorites so it was only to be regretted that he never found a way to star him on a more regular basis. Meanwhile, back here in *Avengers* #48, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch remain captives of Magneto and Hercules searches a strangely deserted Olympus. At best, this issue acts as a speedbump in the ongoing story-line.

Avengers #49

"Mine is the Power!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils/inks)

In an unusual circumstance, *Avengers* #49 (Feb. 1968) was both penciled and inked by John Buscema. (In a blurb on this issue's opening page, scripter



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AVENGERS #49, PAGE 7: ARTIST JOHN BUSCEMA ENTERS THE JACK KIRBY FULL PAGE SPLASH/HEAVY MACHINERY SWEEPSTAKES WITH A BANG ON THIS PAGE WITH THE HUMAN CHARACTERS DWARFED BY MAGNETO'S "MAGNETICALLY-INDUCED PERPETUAL MOTION" COMPLEX. SURE, THE ENTIRE CONTRAPTION SEEMS HAZY AND NON-FUNCTIONAL AROUND THE EDGES. BUT BUSCEMA WOULD CLEAR UP SUCH INADEQUACIES AS THE YEARS WENT ON. IN THE MEANTIME, FANS COULD ENJOY THIS RARE INSTANCE OF THE ARTIST INKING HIS OWN PENCILS.

Roy Thomas and editor Stan Lee state that when they saw the pencils for this story, they decided that no other inker "could do justice" to them but Buscema himself.) The artist inking his own pencils would prove an extremely rare occurrence in his tenure at Marvel so this example is to be cherished. (The artist would prove too valuable to waste his energies on inking, a circumstance that would only become more acute after Jack Kirby left Marvel in 1970.) That said, there are aspects of his inking that aren't totally satisfying. Not that there was anything bad about the results, only that perhaps Buscema's realistic style needed flashier inkers



to really bring out its innate appeal. In this issue for instance, Buscema's emerging attempts at looser layouts was balanced by inks that seemed to soften his work with overreliance on cross-hatching rather than full blacks. Notice the inks on the figure of Quicksilver in panel 2, page 15 for instance. Not so hot. His work over facial features was also less than stellar. In other instances however, his inks worked well, such as the impressive full page splash on page 7 depicting Magneto's lab. Miles better than George Tuska's inks in the previous issue, Buscema's inking here, nevertheless, would not be missed once the likes of George Klein or Tom Palmer took over. Scriptwise, Buscema couldn't have had a better partner to pair up with his powerhouse art than Roy Thomas who divides the plot into two tracks: one following the return of Magneto and the other Hercules' return to Olympus, with most of the action being contributed by the latter's battle with Typhon. A key element to the plot involves Magneto steering a bullet fired by a policeman so that it grazes the Scarlet Witch's head and so enrages Quicksilver that he finally joins Magneto in his war on the human race.

Avengers #50

"To Tame a Titan!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils/inks)

John Buscema again provides both the pencils and the inks for *Avengers* with #50 (Mar. 1968). Perhaps enthused by a Roy Thomas plot that emphasized fantasy over super heroics, Buscema decided to do the whole thing himself. Whatever the case, the results tell with page after page of bludgeoning action as Hercules goes full-tilt versus the Olympian deity called Typhon. But before he does, Thomas provides Buscema with the chance to illustrate Olympus itself as Hercules fights his way to the home of the gods, only to be told by Zeus that all their hopes of rescue from the land of shadows lie in him. Buscema's subsequent layouts and exaggerated figure work through the course of Hercules' battle with Typhon displays an evolution of his style from the rather traditional five and six panel grids per page. Now, his panels started to open up and figures sprawled across pages in dynamic, heroic postures. This new style would come to full fruition on early issues of the new *Sub-Mariner* title and a later stint on *The Avengers*. Meanwhile, Thomas doesn't forget the rest of the Avengers team as various issues from Goliath's leadership qualities and inability to grow in size (Hank even considers quitting the team, settling down and getting married) to the need to confront Magneto and settle the issue of lost teammates Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. But the team would have to address that question with only three active members (Hawkeye, Goliath, and the Wasp) because Hercules quits at the end of this issue! Which was too bad as Thomas had managed to come up with plots that not only gave Hercules adequate challenges but that also made for stronger Avengers stories.

Daredevil #36

"The Name of the Game is Mayhem!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

As readers were sure to recall, last issue, the Trapster had left the Invisible Girl pasted to the floor of FF HQ with a bomb about to explode! Here, in *Daredevil* #36 (Jan. 1968), DD arrived just in time to hear the telltale ticking and save the situation. But that's only the beginning of this fast-moving tale by scripter Stan Lee and penciler Gene Colan as our hero then tracks down the Trapster and in a series of high flying, large-sized panels (including a vertiginous full pager of DD aboard the Trapster's flying platform high among the canyons of New York), manages to defeat him just before being thrown into a new story-line featuring Dr. Doom! But the real attention grabber this is the return of Debbie Harris from way back in issue #10 when she was part of a plot involving the evil Organizer. Now out of jail, she makes contact again with Foggy Nelson just as he's asked to run for district attorney. Suspicious? You bet it was! Did it add up to an intriguing new direction for Lee's penchant for sub-plots? Right the first time!

X-Men #40

"The Mark of the Monster!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

Unfortunately, the less said about *X-Men* #40 (Jan. 1968), the better. Inarguably, the low point of the entire series (following as it did on the heels of the underwhelming Factor Three denouement) it asks readers to believe that Prof X can read the mind of an artificial creature to learn that the Frankenstein monster is actually an android sent to Earth 150 years before as an ambassador of an alien race! The professor dispatches the X-Men to the arctic to stop the creature from being thawed from the ice where it's been imprisoned but they get there too late. A fight ensues with the monster outclassing the X-Men (it's not good when a whole team of superheroes can't even stand up to a nineteenth century Frankenstein...even if he *is* an android) until Iceman freezes him up again. Art by Don Heck is good at times, but its effect is mitigated with too literal inks by George Tuska (who was doing the same disservice to John Buscema over on the *Avengers*...why couldn't Heck be allowed to ink his own work? It wasn't as if he was being kept too busy in these months). Tuska's worst performance comes in trying to ink the face of the Frankenstein monster which comes off looking like Dick Briefer's comical version done for Prize Comics in the 1940s. Ugh. Tuska's cover effort for this ish didn't help any either with the X-Men looking more like the Keystone Kops than a formidable fighting group. For the X-Men's first full issue in their new costumes, this disappointing effort by Roy Thomas (did he run out



COULD MARY SHELLEY'S FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER BE DEPICTED ANY WORSE THAN FRED Gwynne's IN MUNSTER, GO HOME! (1966)? DON'T ANSWER THAT UNTIL YOU'VE READ X-MEN #40 WHICH OFFERS THE EXPLANATION THAT FRANKENSTEIN WAS ACTUALLY AN ALIEN ANDROID DISPATCHED AS AN AMBASSADOR TO THE EARTH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY BEFORE IT MALFUNCTIONED. HOO BOY! STORIES LIKE THIS SHOWED THAT EVEN MIGHTY MARVEL WASN'T PERFECT!

of ideas or was this just an idea that didn't pan out?) was certainly a dud. The lead story here did have one consolation: it made the latest entry in the origins of the X-Men backup feature look good in comparison. There, Thomas is still teamed with Werner Roth (inked unflatteringly by John Verpoorten) as they continue to unfold the origin of Cyclops who falls in with bad company and then meets Prof. X for the first time.

Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos #51

"The Assassin!"; Gary Friedrich (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); John Severin (inks)

By *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* #51 (Feb. 1968), Dick Ayers had returned to the penciling chores (after asking editor Stan Lee for a break from his long stint on the title). Ayers had been spelled by artist John Severin in the meantime, who'd brought the quality up a few notches. But now that Ayers had returned, Severin would be relegated to the inks, a chore that would prove serendipitous in that he'd bring more solidity and realism to Ayers' often stiff drawing style. (Take for instance, page 4, panel 1... why is Hitler dancing a jig?) Although Ayers did come alive somewhat when he was called upon to draw machines of war, his action scenes were hampered by a habit of presenting it with head shots and off panel obscurantism. Be that as it may, the team of Ayers and Severin was a successful one, keeping sales of the *Sgt. Fury* book strong. (Despite eventually switching to reprints in later years, Lee maintained that sales remained unchanged between reprints and original tales, something that was not likely lost on Marvel publisher Martin Goodman.) In the meantime, stories were provided by Gary Friedrich, who hit the ground running after taking over from Roy Thomas. Scripts were just as wordy, but emphasis of the plots soon began to shift to subjects that could be equally applied to the ongoing Vietnam War as World War II. Eventually, these stories would be recognized by readers as landmarks including "The War Lover," "The Informer," and "They Also Serve." This issue's tale, "The Assassin," was among those. And though Lee himself had explored such realistic topics as gung ho superior officers, racism, and concentration camps in the series' earliest issues, Friedrich was able to bring a greater sense of immediacy to his own, including this issue's tale of loyalty, betrayal, and ultimate disenchantment seen from the enemy's perspective. Here, Jorgen Kline, a German munitions manufacturer who has always been loyal to the Nazis, is compelled to undertake a mission to assassinate the leaders of the United States, England, and Russia at the Tehran conference. His wife and child are to be held hostage against his fulfilling the mission, but Kline is suffering a crisis of conscience, torn between his duty to the Reich and fear for his family. Ultimately, he chooses



EVEN BEFORE THE NAZI'S CAME TO POWER, ITS LEADERSHIP, EXEMPLIFIED BY ADOLF HITLER HIMSELF, INCLUDED A BUILT IN PARANOIAC NATURE THAT TOOK THE FORM NOT ONLY OF OCCASIONAL PURGES, BUT OPPRESSION OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE IN THE FORM OF SECRET POLICE AND CONCENTRATION CAMPS. ON THE LEAST INTRUSIVE LEVEL, PARANOIA WOULD TAKE THE FORM OF STREET PROPAGANDA SUCH AS THIS WALL ART WARNING THE CITIZENS OF AACHEN THAT "THE ENEMY MAY BE LISTENING." WHILE SUCH PARANOIA WAS PROMOTED BY THE NAZIS TO SET CITIZEN AGAINST CITIZEN IT ALSO PROVIDED SCRIPTER GARY FRIEDRICH WITH AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR AND THE NAZIS ON THE GERMAN PEOPLE THEMSELVES INCLUDING THE KLINE FAMILY IN *SGT. FURY* #51.

to end his own life instead of murdering the three leaders, an act that contributes to the story's unhappy end: the execution of his wife and the consignment of his infant son to a reeducation camp. In one of the few times in the series' run, a story ended with more than a hint of the brutality of the Nazi menace to the ordinary German. Overall, it was an example of how Friedrich was bringing a mature perspective to a series that in its early incarnation treated war more as an adolescent romp than serious business.

Strange Tales #165

"Behold the Savage Sky!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils);

Frank Giacoia (inks)

"The Mystic and the Machine!"; Jim Lawrence (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

Hoo, boy! Things go from crazy to wild as scripter/penciler Jim Steranko opens the latest chapter in the Yellow Claw/SHIELD epic with an incredible double-page spread as an army of SHIELD agents (wearing some of the most elaborate getups ever conceived) launch themselves from the helicarrier to the Claw's own Sky Dragon flying ship! (And dig that last breathless sentence...right out of the Steranko scripting playbook!) Inside the Sky Dragon, Nick Fury breaks loose just as

Steranko's layouts do and into furious action mode, utilizing everything from "hyper-psionic brain-wave emanations" to a "magnetic pelfrag shooter." It all results in a body-armored Claw turning on Fury in a full page physical encounter before ending in yet another cliffhanger. Whew! It was Steranko still at the near peak of his literary/artistic powers, held in check only by the fact that he wasn't inking his own work. For that, Frank Giacoia was on hand. Giacoia did a decent job on everything except faces which fell flat.



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STRANGE TALES #165, PAGE 5: IN A PAGE DEVOID OF HIS USUAL SPECIAL EFFECTS, PENCILER/SCRIPTER JIM STERANKO DOES IT STRAIGHT, INCLUDING JACK KIRBY STYLE IN YOUR FACE ACTION...LITERALLY, AS FURY'S FIST SEEMS TO REACH OUT TO SMACK THE READER WHERE HE LIVES! THAT SAID, THIS IS LIKE A REST PERIOD COMPARED TO THE REMAINDER OF THE STORY!

Otherwise, this was an entry sure to satisfy the monthly cravings of SHIELD fans everywhere! But that wasn't all there was to like about *Strange Tales* #165 (Feb. 1968)! No sir! There was also the Dr. Strange second feature which was still sporting the artwork of Dan Adkins. Finally, there was an artist who came close to capturing the wonder that Steve Ditko had once given the feature. And lucky for readers, Adkins would be sticking around for a while. It seemed that finding someone who could capture just the right atmosphere for Dr. Strange was hard to come by as the long dry spell between Ditko and Adkins had proven, but believe it or not, there was another artist in the wings. One that would be so good, he'd even threaten to topple the great Ditko from his throne. But his debut was still down the line a bit so for now, fans had the opportunity to drool over Adkins work here as Strange continues

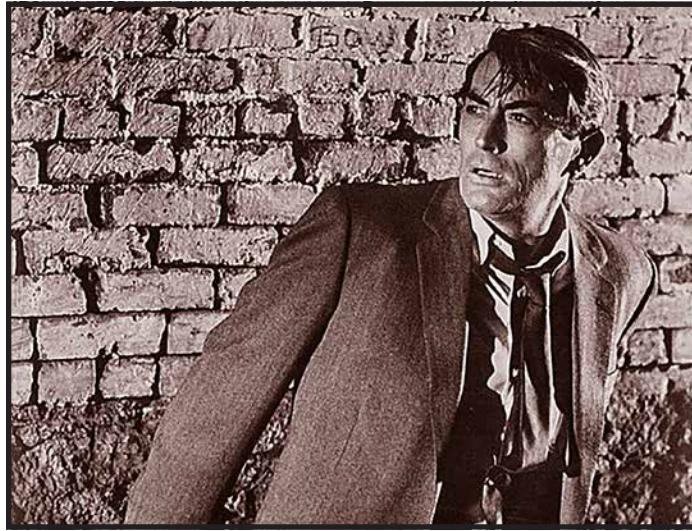
his quest to rescue Victoria Bentley from the mad clutches of alien scientist Yandro. And though Strange manages to confront the villain, the chapter ends with the release of Voltorg, a giant robot so retroactively designed as to be laughable but somehow, here in this alien 'verse, it works!

Amazing Spider-Man #57

"The Coming of Ka-Zar!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

It had to happen sooner or later. Penciler John Romita couldn't keep up doing full pencils every month on *The Amazing Spider-Man* while also working on the black and white *Spectacular Spider-Man* magazines, as well as other odd jobs around the Marvel offices. He wasn't Jack Kirby, after all, who could dash out full pages of artwork at the

drop of a hat. And so, with the conclusion of the Dr. Octopus story-line last issue, Romita acquired some help to meet deadlines. Luckily it was talented help who'd end up aiding him to produce some of the most visually memorable issues of *Spider-Man* ever. That person was Don Heck, who arrived to finish Romita's layouts beginning here in *Amazing Spider-Man* #57 (Feb. 1968). Having been permanently replaced on the *Avengers*, Heck had been bouncing around the bullpen looking for a regular assignment. He picked one up with the *X-Men* but with extra time on his hands, he was given the assignment of finishing Romita's pencils here. As had been the case for some time, Mike Esposito was on hand to do the inks. The results here were pleasing but not perfect. Perfection would take a couple issues, but it'd come. That left the story. Stan Lee's script still had Spider-Man suffering from the amnesia induced by Doc Ock in past issues until he encounters Ka-Zar, in town visiting. Now, outside of the jungle, Ka-Zar was a pretty uninteresting character and he doesn't do anything here to alter that estimation but he did make for a crossover of Marvel heroes, something that had proven popular with readers. Also helping the story was having Spidey, all forgetful, bumping into the book's cast of supporting players including Gwen and J. Jonah Jameson. But amnesia was usually a twist that writers fell back upon when they ran out of ideas. Was that the case here with Lee? Maybe. (Lee himself may have sensed he'd fallen short this time as indicated by a cover blurb: "You may like this yarn or loathe it, but we promise you this, you'll never forget it!") In any case, readers got lucky in that Spidey would lose both the amnesia and Ka-Zar next issue.



IF IT WAS GOOD ENOUGH FOR HITCHCOCK... JUST AS OUR HERO SUFFERS FROM MEMORY LOSS IN AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #57, SO DOES GREGORY PECK'S CHARACTER IN ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S CLASSIC FILM MIRAGE (1965). AS A PLOT DEVICE HOWEVER, AMNESIA WORKED MORE INTERESTINGLY FOR THE MASTER OF SUSPENSE THAN IT DID FOR OLE SPIDEY.

Tales to Astonish #100

"Let There Be Battle!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

In the penultimate issue of *Astonish*, editor and scripter Stan Lee crosses over the title's feature characters creating "an epic-length 22-page battle" wherein the Sub-Mariner and Hulk mostly go toe to wingtip with the Puppet Master pulling the strings. Unfortunately, though Lee is up to his usual standards scripting wise, the Marie Severin art that had begun to look half way decent over the past several issues likely due to the increasingly *sympatico* inks of Herb Trimpe, was considerably loosened here in *Tales to Astonish* #100 (Feb. 1968) by the inking of Dan Adkins. The mostly negative results come as a surprise in light of Adkins' success inking others and doing his own penciling and inking on the Dr. Strange feature. What exactly happened here is anyone's guess: Was Adkins adhering too closely to Severin's pencils? Had he been in a rush? Whatever the case, the overall results are quite disappointing for a story that should have been a slam-dunk, over-the-top success. As it is, readers had to slog through panel after panel of oddball posturings, comic facial expressions, and lack of detail. (At least Severin managed to deliver a decent looking cover with our two protagonists charging each other high over a crowded beachfront; the largely white background served well to highlight the foreground figures, another good decision by colorist Stan Goldberg.) Luckily, Lee was on hand to provide some drama and soap operatic elements in Rick Jones being injured by a possessed Hulk and Major Glen Talbot who might have to kill the Hulk (who is really Bruce Banner, of course) and risk the love of Betty Ross as a result. Oh, what a tangled web we weave!

Daredevil #37

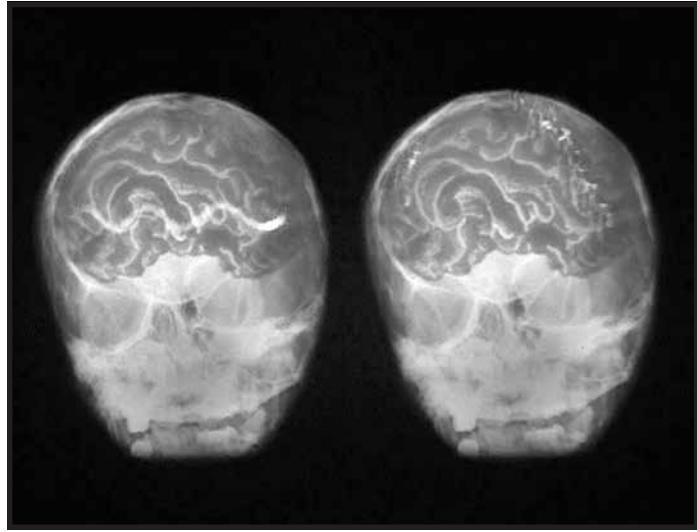
"Don't Look Now...But It's Dr. Doom!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Following a similarly styled cover for this month's *X-Men* book, *Daredevil* #37 (Feb. 1968) also sports an all-black background with the foreground figures of DD and Doc Doom spotlighted in a circle of yellow. A very simple design but one with its snazzy Gene Colan art that's definitely eye-catching! Inside, scripter Stan Lee tells a simple tale in which our hero is captured by Dr. Doom and after a couple attempts at escape, is finally placed in a glass cylinder, all the better to switch bodies with the Lord of Latveria. Seems Doom's latest plan to defeat the Fantastic Four is to get into the Baxter Building in the form of a trusted superheroic colleague, leaving the mind of DD trapped in Doom's body. Get all that? You'd better, because it'll be the basis of a complicated followup chapter next ish, all culminating in a massive mistaken identity story set for *Fantastic Four* #73!

Daredevil #38

"The Living Prison!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Beneath a rare but incredible symbolic cover by penciler Gene Colan, *Daredevil* #38 (Mar. 1968) continues where the last issue left off, namely with Dr. Doom having traded bodies with Daredevil the better to sneak into the Baxter Building and take the FF unawares. The story by scripter Stan Lee is filled with twists and turns, including an imprisoned DD (in Doom's body) convincing the guards that he's actually Doom and escaping. An attempt to stop Doom (in DD's body) from attacking the Fantastic Four goes awry but another in which DD (as Doom) orders Latveria's army to attack all of its neighbors at once, forces Doom (in DD's body) to return to his embassy and reverse the body transferal. Back in his own body, Daredevil then destroys the transferal machine and a defeated Doom allows him to leave. But as DD makes his way to the Baxter Building to tell the FF that the emergency is over, Doom radios ahead and, impersonating the voice of Daredevil, warns the FF that Doom is about to attack them in DD's body. Hoo, boy! Confused yet? Well, the FF will be too as they not only fight Daredevil, but Spider-Man and Thor in *Fantastic Four* #73. Plus, adding to the complications, after Doom (in DD's body) gives the reformed Debbie Harris the brush off, Foggy doesn't like it setting up misunderstandings and problems for Mike/Matt Murdock (another confusing situation) in upcoming issues.



THE PLOT DEVICE OF MIND TRANSFERAL WAS NOTHING NEW, EVEN BEFORE DAREDEVIL #38 ETC! IT WAS USED, FOR INSTANCE, TO GOOD EFFECT NOT LONG BEFORE IN THE SOON TO BE CLASSIC OUTER LIMITS EPISODE "THE HUMAN FACTOR" WHICH ALSO INCLUDED SIMILAR COMPLICATIONS FOR THE TRANSFERRED INVOLVING IDENTITY CONFUSION, MADNESS, AND EVEN ROMANTIC ISSUES.

X-Men #41

"Now Strikes...the Sub-Human!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

Oh, no! Not another subterranean civilization story! But that's what readers got from scripter Roy Thomas and penciler Don Heck as the X-Men face off against some ugly that the Beast names Grotesk. His real name is Gor-Tok (not much of an improvement) and, of course, he hates the human race—blaming them for the radiation that has altered his form from one that wasn't much to look at in the first place. Anyway, Professor X sends the team off to find and defeat Grotesk while keeping Marvel Girl with him for some secret purpose. But despite the disappointing nature of the story, Thomas does manage some interesting wrinkles in the X-Men's private lives including new suspicion from Cyclops that Professor X has romantic feelings for Marvel Girl (something that had once been hinted at in the old Stan Lee/Jack Kirby days) and growing suspicion of Iceman and Beast by their girlfriends Vera and Zelda. At least *X-Men* #41 (Feb. 1968) did sport some Heck artwork. The downside was that he was inked by the cumbersome George Tuska who seemed to have little empathy with Heck's style. As a result of all the preceding, for the first time, the latest chapter in the origins of the X-Men backup series with its Werner Roth artwork was actually more interesting than the lead tale. There, Scott Summers is contacted by Professor X. He agrees to work with him to stop bad guy Jack Winters who has just turned himself into a being composed completely of diamond thus, his new sobriquet: the Living Diamond!

Strange Tales #166

"Nothing Can Stop...Voltorg!"; Jim Lawrence (script); George Tuska (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)
"If Death Be My Destiny!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Oh, the humanity! Just when the Dr. Strange feature was on an artistic roll, the carpet was yanked out from beneath discerning fans' feet! We speak of the fact that for some reason, Dan Adkins was removed from penciling the Strange lead feature in *Strange Tales* #166 (Mar. 1968) and replaced by George Tuska. Luckily, however, what could've been a total disaster artwise (since his arrival at Marvel, Tuska, a veteran of the Golden Age of comics, had produced less than stellar work, especially as an inker) was saved because none other than Adkins inked the pencils. Adkins had been doing great work on the feature, the best since Steve Ditko's tenure, and to lose his services at this point was extremely disappointing. But it seemed he was not intimidated working over the older man's pencils because the overall results looked almost as if Adkins himself had done the art. So, while the layouts were still basic and nowhere near as eye-catching as those Adkins had done in earlier issues, the final look here was more than acceptable. Storywise,

Jim Lawrence was still providing a slick product with interesting developments, re: the evil Yandroth and his dishonorable plans for Victoria Bentley. Meanwhile, SHIELD, under the auspices of Jim Steranko continued to stun, beginning with an incredible, in-your-face splash page featuring Nick Fury all got up in something called a H.A.W.K. harness complete with lit stogie! (Readers were conveniently informed in a blurb that H.A.W.K. stood for High Altitude Wing Kite. Natcherly!) Still on the trail of the elusive Yellow Claw, Fury is spotlighted by scripter/penciler Steranko in a handful of since-universally acclaimed classic pages of artwork beginning with page 6 that's designed like a jigsaw puzzle. Using a "spy ray lens," Fury finds his way through the maze onto page 7 where various traps are laid out in the form of a pinwheel. The whole thing is topped off by a full-length shot of Fury on page 10 that would form the identifier image in the upper left corner box on the covers of his soon-to-be released solo title!

X-Men #42

"If I Should Die...!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

As if its jarringly new design wasn't enough to catch the eye of long time X fans (or the new readers it was intended to attract), then the cover image for *X-Men* #42 (March, 1968) drawn by John Buscema certainly was! With sales on the title still lagging, editor Stan Lee (with publisher Martin Goodman's input?) decided to go radical by eliminating the book's main title and relegating it to a modest "the X-Men Featuring" line above the main logo which would now broadcast some aspect of the issue's story instead of simply declaring who the stars of the book were. In this case, it was a large box screaming "The Death of Professor X!" The cover's visual design was then enhanced by John Buscema drawn head shots of angst-ridden X-Men looking on as a silhouette of Professor X tumbles from his wheelchair. In addition, the cover itself was given an all-black background with the figure of Professor X spotlighted in a circle of yellow. The whole new approach was at once sad and exciting looking. Sad in that it signified the ill fortunes of the X title (whose page count for the lead story was cut back in order to fit chapters of an origins of the X-Men feature) but exciting in that the new cover layout was kind of cool and represented some out of the box thinking. In addition to



"NOT A HOAX! NOT A DREAM! NOT AN IMAGINARY TALE!" MARVEL WOULD USE THE LATTER PHRASE NOW AND THEN TO HIGHLIGHT SEEMINGLY UNBELIEVABLE EVENTS IN THEIR COMICS THAT, AS OPPOSED TO RIVAL DC, WERE MEANT TO BE TRUE. MEANWHILE, AT THE DISTINGUISHED COMPETITION, IMAGINARY TALES HAD BECOME A POPULAR STAPLE ESPECIALLY AMONG THE SUPERMAN TITLES.

the cover revamp and the origins backup series, scripter Roy Thomas also offered a real shakeup storywise, as Professor X dies in this issue. "Not a hoax! Not a dream! Not an imaginary tale!" shouted a cover blurb obviously poking fun at rival DC's penchant for such tales. "This is for real!" And for the time being, it was. Whether or not the Professor's death was intended to be permanent, at the time, it felt that way. (He'd return alive and kicking with issue #65.) In the meantime, artist Don Heck was still on the pencils but it was impossible to tell how good a job he did beneath the crude inks of George Tuska, who displays here little sensitivity for Heck's distinctive style. But there's plenty of action, culminating in a full page splash of the stunned X-Men bearing their fallen mentor from the rubble. The origin of Cyclops concludes in the backup series with the Professor getting his idea for a school and using it to build a team around its first recruit, Scott Summers, who also dons the familiar blue and yellow costume the X-Men wore until recently. Thomas made it a satisfying conclusion albeit the Werner Roth/Herb Trimpe art team was less than stellar.

Amazing Spider-Man #58

"To Kill a Spider-Man!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)

Sure, long time readers had seen this before way back in *Spidey* #25 but these were the grandiose years now, and the return of Prof. Smythe and his spider slayer robot (with J. Jonah Jameson's familiar puss again prominently displayed in its faceplate) was commensurately bigger, bulkier, and far more powerful looking. That attitude was broadcast loud and clear on the cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #58 (Mar. 1968) as the new, anthropologically shaped model smashes its way through a corrugated iron barrier with a blurb declaring: "Wow! Look who's back!" But

before fans could sink their collective teeth into this new jazzed-up revisit, they had to contend with a few more pages featuring Ka-Zar, who was left over from the previous issue when he managed to cure Spidey's amnesia (whew!). Luckily for readers, Ka-Zar makes a quick exit (but not before another page or two dedicated to his roaming the streets of New York along with pet pal, Zabu), allowing the action to move quickly to the offices of the Daily Bugle where they can reacquaint themselves with John Jameson and Captain Stacy, and later with



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ARTIST JOHN ROMITA OUTDID HIMSELF ON THIS COVER TO AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #58, CHOOSING TO HIGHLIGHT THE SPIDER-SLAYER ROBOT GIGANTICALLY, FRONT AND CENTER, IN THE BEST GRANDIOSE TRADITION! SO MUCH SO, THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR OUR HERO! SPIDEY'S REPRESENTATION WOULD HAVE TO SETTLE FOR THE SPIDER SIGNAL BLURB DESIGN AT BOTTOM LEFT AND THE VERY COOL, AND DRAMATIC "DESULTORY" SPIDER-MAN IMAGE IN THE CORNER ID BOX. MARVEL'S OVERALL COVER DESIGNS FOR THIS PERIOD IN THEMSELVES WERE CLEAR AND SIMPLE AND LEFT PLENTY OF ROOM TO SHOW OFF THE ACTION ART NOW WITH A MINIMUM OF STAN LEE BLURBS.

Harry Osborn and Gwen Stacy at the hospital where Aunt May lay ill. Meanwhile, scripter Stan Lee's breathless yarn also visits the lab of Prof. Smythe where, in a dramatic half-page illo by John Romita (who again only does the layouts with Don Heck adding the finishes), the new and improved Spider Slayer is introduced. J. Jonah Jameson is sold on the new model and immediately takes it out for a spin, nearly catching Peter Parker in the act of getting out of his Spidey suit! What follows is page after page of pulse-pounding action as a gloating Jameson chases Spidey across Manhattan, culminating in a very cool panel on page 17 where the Spider Slayer smashes a phone booth (remember those?), with Spidey escaping by the skin of his teeth. Suffice it to say that Spidey eventually finds a way to defeat the robot and Smythe is thrown out of Jameson's office in disgrace. It was an issue that set the series on firm ground again, following the amnesia issues, but one where the Romita/Heck/Mike Esposito team had yet to find their own firm footing. Artwise, the ish was good but a little shaky. It would pass, however, with the team set to produce some nice books down the line.

Fantastic Four #72

"Where Soars the Silver Surfer!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

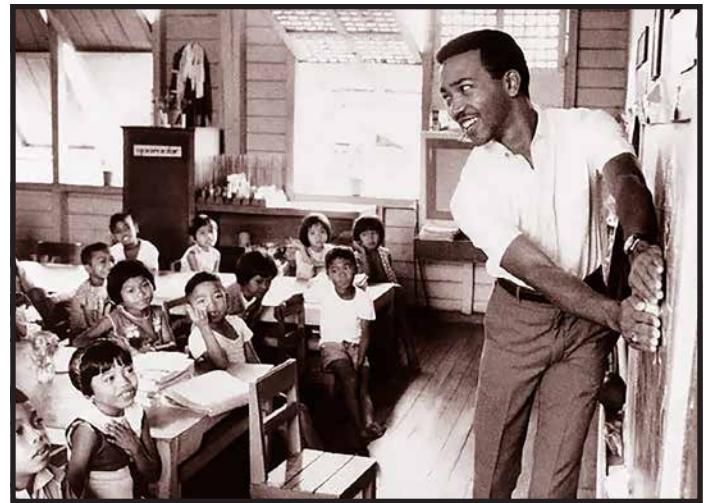
In a foretaste of his own solo book that would be launched in 1969, the Silver Surfer is reintroduced to fans in *Fantastic Four* #72 (Mar. 1968). There, disgusted with human beings who always seem to be at war with one another, the Surfer decides to give them a common enemy: himself. Obviously, the Surfer isn't thinking straight but with his cosmic power, he presents a real threat to humanity, so dangerous that the Watcher is prompted to once again break his vow of noninterference to warn the FF. He does it by stopping a train upon which Reed and Sue Richards are riding in the wake of Reed's announcement the issue before that

he and Sue were quitting the team. Well, in the shortest resignation on record, Reed agrees with the Watcher that the threat is dire enough to reverse his decision and he's immediately whisked back to the Baxter Building. Left behind is Sue, who wonders what can Reed or anyone do against "the all powerful Silver Surfer?" to which the Watcher can have only one reply: "All powerful? There is only one who deserves that name. And his only weapon... is love!" Credit editor and scripter Stan Lee for invoking the Deity here. God, and religion for that matter, had always been a taboo subject in comics, and superhero comics in particular. Presumably it was never mentioned in order to avoid offending readers of different faiths... or no faith, so this was another gutsy move but Lee. But Lee was used to gutsy moves. In another departure from standard practice, he addressed the touchy subject of race in *Sgt. Fury* #6 and didn't shy away from having his characters spout philosophy or morality when occasion demanded. Meanwhile, on a more basic level, penciler Jack Kirby doesn't stint on the action as the Human Torch and the Thing try unsuccessfully to stop the Surfer's rampage. But after saving the Surfer's life from the danger of the Sonic Shark (a missile in the US arsenal), the sentinel of the spaceways learns his lesson about mankind. "Just remember," Reed reminds him, "mankind is not as lost, not as hopeless, as it may seem." "Truly, there is a spark of divinity in all who live, and think, and strive," admits the chastened Surfer. But though there'd be an interruption in the next issue, this issue's story merely serves as prologue for the FF's last great extended story arc beginning in issue #74. Sure, the later Dr. Doom sequence would be good but obviously derived as it was from the *Prisoner* TV show, it lacked that certain *je ne sais quoi* of earlier, more original issues of the title. It was also produced just as Kirby's enthusiasm for the work cooled and he began to actively consider leaving Marvel for other pastures. Thus, the upcoming "worlds within worlds" multi-parter would be the last flourish for the team of Lee and Kirby on the Fantastic Four.

Fantastic Four #73

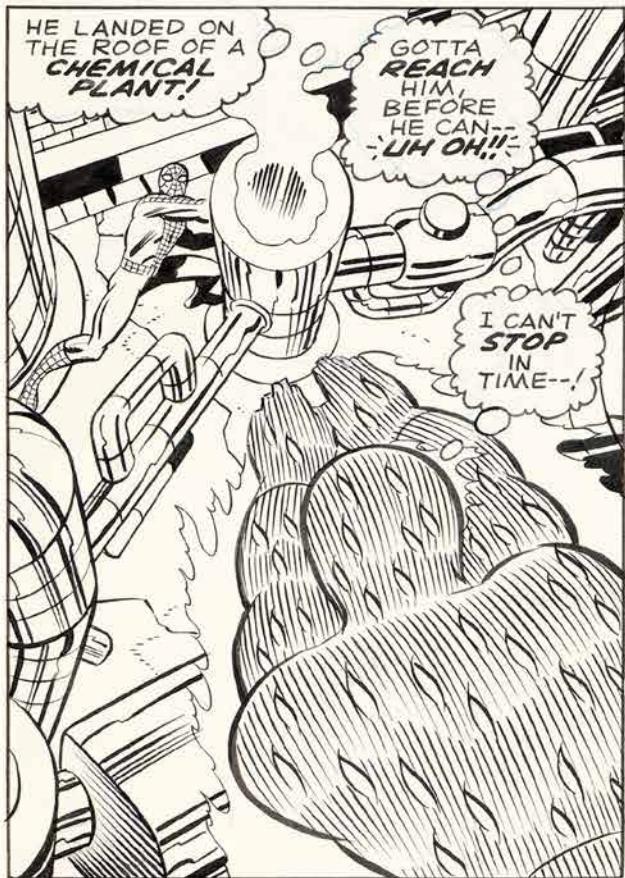
"The Flames of Battle..."; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Can you say fantastic, incredible, or delightful? If you can, then choose one or all of these superlatives to describe *Fantastic Four* #73 (April, 1968) as Stan Lee's by now finely-honed skills at editing and scripting and Jack Kirby's art now at the peak of its full grandiosity combine to create a near perfect issue of "the world's greatest comic magazine!" So spectacular, so downright special, it should've been saved for an annual but such was Marvel's largesse in these years that they had more wonderfulness than they could spare. And so, we have a standalone issue of the *FF* (falling sort of in between issues of a new Silver Surfer multi-parter) that continues directly out of events in the latest issues of *Daredevil*. Dovetailing nicely here, the *DD* book lately featured



"TRULY, THERE IS A SPARK OF DIVINITY IN ALL WHO LIVE, AND THINK, AND STRIVE..." ESTABLISHED IN 1961 UNDER PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY, THE PEACE CORPS WAS STILL GOING STRONG IN THE LATE SIXTIES, EXTENDING A HELPING HAND TO THOSE LESS FORTUNATE BY WAY OF YOUTHFUL VOLUNTEERS SUCH AS LOUIS JENKINS, HERE, TEACHING ENGLISH TO STUDENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES.

a story-line in which Dr. Doom switches bodies with Daredevil to infiltrate the Baxter Building and kill our heroes. But before that happened, DD managed to get Doom to switch back. Now, DD is on his way to let the FF know all's well that ends well except that unbeknownst to him, Doom has called ahead, impersonating DD, to warn the FF that the real DD was still occupied by Doom. Got that? So the first thing that happens is that DD is attacked by a scouting Human Torch. Then picks up Spider-Man as an ally who then picks up Thor just after his defeat by the Wrecker back in his own title. Together, the three heroes end up tackling the FF in a grand mistaken identity mixup perfectly encapsulated on the cover faceoff by Kirby against a stark white background. Inside, the artist pulls out all the stops aided by Joe Sinnott who, with the abdication of Vince Colletta in faithfully inking Kirby's pencils on *Thor*, had emerged by this time as the King's undisputed best inker. With page after page of bludgeoning action climaxed in a full page illo of Thor and the Thing going hammer to rocky fist, this issue was a visual feast. Finally, however, things get straightened out, but not before Lee has a chance to come up with some of his cleverest dialogue and character moments. It'd be hard to come up with a more soul-satisfying comic than this one but Lee and Kirby would come close a few more times before the gas began to run out of the grandiose years. Luckily for fans though, they still had the microverse multi-parter in upcoming issues of the *FF*, the return of the Red Skull in the new *Captain America* title, and the Mangog story in *Thor*. And that didn't even count classics in the making over in *Daredevil*, *Spider-Man*, *SHIELD*, *Dr. Strange*, and *The Avengers*! Whew!



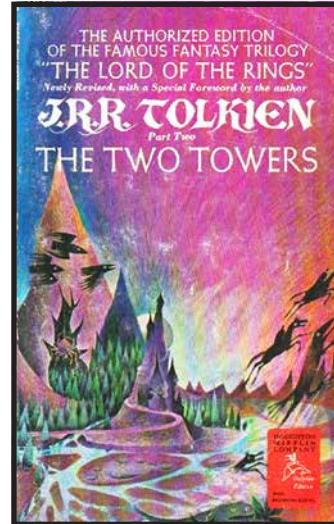
Marvel Superheroes #13

"Where Stalks the Sentry!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Paul Reinman (inks)

With the switchover in scripting chores from Stan Lee to Roy Thomas for *Marvel Superheroes* #13 (Mar. 1968), things begin to heat up for Mar-Vell, secret agent and advance scout for the Kree Empire. Not only does Thomas give Mar-Vell an Earthbound secret identity (in the form of Dr. Walter Lawson, who was to be the chief scientist at the missile base under investigation by Mar-Vell; Lawson is killed when his jet is shot down by the conniving Yon-Rogg in an attempt to murder Mar-Vell) but he also creates a sub-plot involving Mar-Vell's landlord, who becomes suspicious of his new tenant. In addition, Thomas goes against expectations and creates the persona of Carole Danvers. She was an unlikely choice for head of security for a missile base in 1968 but the decision to make the character a woman instead of a man becomes clear when one considers the plotting advantages of giving Mar-Vell a possible romantic entanglement. Anyway, Yon-Rogg figures in the action again when he revives a dormant Sentry, hoping it will succeed in killing Mar-Vell where the beam that hit Lawson's plane failed. Gene Colan's pencils could have looked much better (as they would in coming issues of Captain Marvel's own solo title) under the inks of anyone but Paul Reinman, especially as rushed as Colan's work looks here. Frequent use of full page illos seem to confirm the hurry up nature of the assignment. (Colan was also doing *Daredevil* and twelve pages of *Iron Man* at the same time). Reinman's use of cross-hatching instead of fluid blacks did nothing for the finished look of Colan's work, especially when the story called for quiet moments when the hero is out of costume. Still, the new wrinkles in this issue and the overall concept of a Kree soldier turning his back on his own race to defend Earth had lots of dramatic potential and Thomas was just the person to exploit the set up. Hopefully, he'd be able to continue on the writing when Captain Marvel soon graduated to his own book. Beyond the 20 page lead Cap feature, the rest of *Marvel Superheroes* #13 is filled out with reprints spanning Marvel's past publishing history from the Golden Age to the pre-hero era. Dull stuff compared to the new, super-charged Marvel Age of Comics!

(OPPOSITE PAGE) FANTASTIC FOUR #73, PAGE 13: PENCILER JACK KIRBY'S QUARTER PAGE PANEL LAYOUT AND JOE SINNOTT'S CLEAN INK LINES MAKE THIS ACTION PAGE EASY TO FOLLOW IN A JAM PACKED, SINGLE ISSUE TALE PITTING THREE MEMBERS OF THE FF AGAINST THOR, SPIDER-MAN, AND DAREDEVIL. NOTICE HOW KIRBY DOESN'T STINT ON THE DETAILS OF THE BUILDINGS WITH EVERY BRICK AND PIECE OF MORTAR CLEARLY DETAILED! THIS WAS WHY SINNOTT HAD DEFINITELY CLAIMED THE TITLE OF KIRBY'S BEST INKER AT THE TIME.

ALTHOUGH J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* TRILOGY WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE MID-1950S, TEN YEARS LATER, BALLANTINE BOOKS HAD ISSUED THE PAPERBACK VERSIONS THAT MARVEL READERS WERE LIKELY MOST FAMILIAR WITH, THE ONES WITH THE COLORFUL AND STRIKING PAINTED COVERS BY BARBARA REMMINGTON.



Tales to Astonish #101

"Where Walk the Immortals!"; Stan Lee (script); Marie Severin (pencils/colors); Frank Giacoia (inks) "...and Evil Shall Beckon!"; Archie Goodwin (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Tales to Astonish #101

(Mar. 1968) marked a milestone in Marvel's history as the first of its venerable double-feature

books ended with this issue. From here, both the Hulk and Sub-Mariner would go their separate ways, Hulk into his own book with numbering continuing from this issue and Sub-Mariner to a shared title with Iron Man (pending both getting their own titles the following month). Whether either character was popular enough to support their own books was another question, and one that only time would tell. In the meantime, Sub-Mariner readers were delighted to discover that Gene Colan, the feature's original artist, had returned after a long absence to chronicle the start of a new plot line scripted by Archie Goodwin. From its eye-grabbing opening splash page to its subsequent pages showing off Namor's muscle beach physique, Colan didn't disappoint. Subby is tormented by a new villain named Destiny who'd stick around through the first issues of his solo title. More significantly, we find Atlanteans returning to their city after it was destroyed by the Plunderer. That sequence would become the basis for an interesting interlude later to be explored by Roy Thomas that suggested an epic underwater fantasy saga along the lines of the *Lord of the Rings* and other adult fantasies that had grown in popularity at the time. Over on the Hulk's side of things, Marie Severin was still on the pencils somewhat disappointingly inked by Frank Giacoia (Colan had been inked by Adkins in a much more satisfying manner). Stan Lee's story shatters the wall between realism and fantasy as the Hulk invades Asgard and battles Thor's buddies, the Warriors Three. This ends in a cliffhanger as the Hulk, now changed to Bruce Banner, is flung into a bottomless chasm. Like Thor's own adventures among the gods, the Asgardian

setting is inferior to an Earthly one with endless hordes of knightly warriors a poor substitute for a single good super-villain. Where were the Chameleon, the Leader, or the Abomination when you needed them? The cover for this issue seems to make the case with Odin leading a passel of warriors as drawn in rushed fashion by Jack Kirby, confronting a looming Hulk figure drawn by Severin. ho-hum.

Mighty Thor #150

“Even in Death...”; Stan Lee (script);
Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

The Wrecker is barely an afterthought in *Mighty Thor* #150 (Mar. 1968) as most of the action moves off-planet and back to Asgard, but (surprisingly) it isn't Thor who's in the spotlight, but Balder and Sif. As readers no doubt recalled, a depowered Thor was defeated in the previous issue by the Wrecker, who left him for dead. And technically, he was! In a fabulous full page Jack Kirby illo, Thor's spirit is coaxed from his lifeless body by Hela, the goddess of death. Meanwhile, back in Asgard, Balder and Sif seek to help Thor by retrieving a magic crystal globe that can prove to Odin that Thor needs his help. But to do it, they have to fight their way through the realm of the Norn Queen, Karnilla. And that's where Kirby really lets it rip! In perhaps Balder's finest hour in the *Mighty Thor* book, he battles solo over a number of pulse-pounding pages with a giant Barbaric led off by a huge, half-page sized panel as said Barbaric launches an oversized double-pronged arrow at Balder. After defeating the Barbaric in decisive fashion, our hero is basely taken down by gas and captured. Meanwhile, taken before Karnilla, Sif pleads for Thor's life. Karnilla then offers a chance to do that by having her inhabit the body of the Destroyer. Sif agrees and after she's whisked off to Earth, Loki and Karnilla have a laugh over the thought that in the Destroyer's body, Sif is more likely to kill Thor than to save him. The only drawback to this story is the inking of Vince Colletta over Kirby: by this time, the inker was beginning to take far too many shortcuts of the kind that would later ruin his reputation among



DESPITE THE EASE IN WHICH THE HULK MANAGED TO INVADE ASGARD, MAN'S EFFORTS TO REACH FOR THE HEAVENS EXPERIENCED A PAIR OF MAJOR SETBACKS IN 1967 INCLUDING THE TRAGIC DEATH OF ASTRONAUTS GUS GRISSOM, ED WHITE, AND ROGER CHAFFEE IN A CAPSULE FIRE DURING A PRE-FLIGHT TEST FOR APOLLO 1 AND THE DEATH OF RUSSIAN COSMONAUT VLADIMIR KOMAROV WHEN A PARACHUTE FAILED TO OPEN AND HIS OWN CAPSULE FELL TO EARTH.

fans. Backgrounds were dropped, details eliminated, and art simplified. To be sure, in places like the intro of the Barbaric and Hela, Colletta still ruled, but it was disappointing to see his work backsliding elsewhere in the issue. On the other hand, Kirby himself may have been slipping, as well. His portrait of a laughing Karnilla on page 14, panel 5 reeks of his later, inferior work at DC rather than his earlier pencils of the grandiose era. Kirby comes off much better under the inking of Joe Sinnott in this issue's Inhumans backup tale that spotlights Triton. There, detail and backgrounds have all been firmed up under Sinnott's slick style. The only problem was with the series in general which continued to move away from the origins and culture of the Inhumans to more straight-ahead adventures of the current day members of the royal family. This story, for instance, begins an extended Triton story as he decides to explore “what lies beyond the Hidden Land.”

Incredible Hulk #102

“...This World Not His Own!”; Gary Friedrich (script), Marie Severin (pencils), Herb Trimpe (inks)

Penciler Marie Severin reteamed with inker Herb Trimpe in time for the Hulk's brand spanking new solo title in *Incredible Hulk* #102 (April 1968). Inheriting the numbering from the now-canceled *Tales to Astonish*, the duo's blended art styles seemed to be a step down from their earlier efforts together. Set in Asgard, the home of grandiose Jack Kirby gods, any artist would have difficulty capturing the setting's monumental style, so it's no surprise that Severin here fails to do so. In fact, many of Severin's figures seem to have stepped directly out of her work on the concurrent *Not Brand Echh*. As an example, check out the decidedly ungodly (?) looking Thor figure on page 9, panel 3. And her depiction of Odin in the story's final panels

is equally underwhelming. Severin's most successful pages were those dedicated to the mandatory recap of the Hulk's origin but that's quickly over and it's back to awkward (even ugly) work over the rest of the issue. Meanwhile, Trimpe's inks, as opposed to his previous efforts in *Astonish*, wholly fail to save the book. After an outing like this, it's a wonder that the *Hulk* title would not only survive, but go on to a long and happy

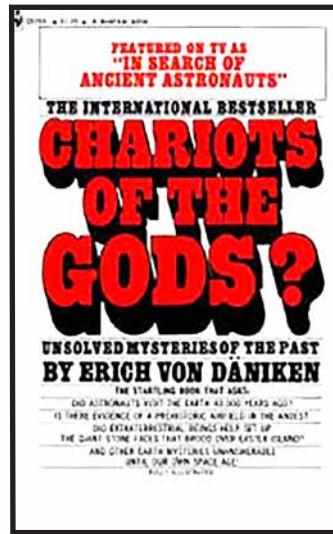
shelf life! Storywise, newcomer Gary Friedrich was stuck with Stan Lee's inappropriate transplanting of the mortal Hulk to Asgard and manages to run out the clock with a last minute save by big daddy Odin (despite misnaming Fandral the Dashing for Balder the Brave on the final page!). Next ish it'll be back to normal, or as normal as it gets for the green goliath as he faces "the Space Parasite!"

Mighty Thor #151

"To Rise Again!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Though this month's *Fantastic Four* put it somewhat in the shade in the department of sheer satisfaction, *Mighty Thor* #151 (April, 1968) still packed an incredible wallop! Filled as it was with instances where those in the know could see where inker Vince Colletta was cutting corners over Jack Kirby's pencils, still, those panels where he applied himself were just stunning in their imagery. They start with the opening splash page spotlighting Thor as he rushes toward some new menace. There, Colletta's choice to ink Kirby's blocky figure mostly with cross hatching and fine lines (the better to enhance its musculature) work like a charm. He doesn't skimp on the full pager of Odin later in the book either, doing Kirby proud. Finally, his half-page intro of Ulik is just plain stunning. Oh, there was enough here to forgive Colletta for much, that's for sure, which is why fans at the time were ga ga over his inks on Thor. As readers recalled, some time back, Odin had stripped Thor of his godly powers and now, with the Wrecker disposed of, he faces the return of the even more powerful Destroyer. But unknown to him, the life force that animates the magic robot is that of Sif who is gradually losing control over the Destroyer and becomes a bystander as the machine proceeds to kill her beloved! The Destroyer was one of Thor's less arresting adversaries but was made slightly more interesting here due to Sif's involvement. Meanwhile, back in Asgard, Balder has been captured by Karnilla who is forced to free him so that he can defend her against another old Thor adversary, Ulik, the giant troll. Interestingly, this Balder sub-plot was proving to be more interesting than the main Thor story! Anyway, all that drama was done in an economic fifteen pages. The rest of the ish is given over to the continuing origins of the Inhumans backup wherein we pick up Triton who's been captured by a group of movie makers (!). He breaks loose and begins swimming in the direction of shore, hoping to continue his mission of scouting out the human race for his people. Here, it's Joe Sinnott's turn to ink over Kirby and he doesn't fail to excite showing why by this time, he was the King's preeminent inker, seeming to adapt himself to whatever atmosphere any story required. Although he might not have been able to capture the old world feel needed by *Thor* the way Colletta could, there was no doubt that his version would be equally as delightful to the eye.

ALTHOUGH ERICH VON DANIKEN'S BESTSELLING *CHARIOT OF THE GODS?* WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE US IN 1968, CONTROVERSY REGARDING ITS CONTENTS ABOUT THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION SURELY PRECEDED IT. WAS THE SUBJECT ALREADY IN THE AIR BY THE TIME LEE AND KIRBY PRESENTED READERS WITH THE ORIGINS OF THE INHUMANS OR WERE THEY ONE STEP AHEAD OF VON DANIKEN?



Mighty Thor #152

"The Dilemma of Dr. Blake!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Wow! The King did it again! What did he do? Why, come up with another wing doozy of a cover image that leaves no doubt that these were still Marvel's grandiose years! Here, on the cover of *Mighty Thor* #152 (May, 1968), we have massive figures of Thor and Ulik the troll tussling

in the foreground, taking up most of the cover space with fabulous inks by Vince Colletta that preserved the sense of Kirby's original pencils without obscuring it in gobs of ink as later embellishers would do. The background figures of Sif, Balder, Karnilla, and Loki are all reduced to near insignificance next to those in the foreground. The only criticism of the image is a teeny tiny one: Colletta should have inked in just a little more hair on Ulik's head as the resulting gap makes it look like his face is just a mask. But that's a small quibble compared to the immense satisfaction any Kirby fan got from this incredible visual. Inside, however, Kirby's art seems looser, likely the result of Colletta beginning to slack off on anything but the central figures in each panel (Or maybe Kirby had rushed a bit, having more pages to draw starting this month than usual). Much has been simplified, including backgrounds and even the bulky feel of the Destroyer. On the other hand, the fight scenes between Thor and Ulik are as bombastic as ever. And our script by Stan Lee is solid as Thor moves from Earth back to Asgard where he loses his hammer to Loki. Lee though, is at his best with humor which he employs when Odin is misidentified by the police as an employee of a museum come to collect the inert form of the Destroyer. Lee, of course, is also on hand for this issue's installment of the origin of the Inhumans backup feature in which Triton roams the streets of New York before reporting back to Black Bolt. Here, Kirby's art is again solidly bolstered by Joe Sinnott's inks. Every detail is captured and preserved, every

panel seemingly filled up with cityscapes, force lines, or supporting characters, making for a very satisfying visual experience. However, with this chapter, the series comes to an end. Perhaps begun as an Inhumans solo series that never came to be, the series started off keenly interesting but rapidly lost its initial energy when it left ancient history and moved the action into the present. The Inhumans would get another shot at solo action albeit not in their own book and not for some months. But when it did, Kirby would not only be drawing it, but scripting it as well.

Mighty Thor #153

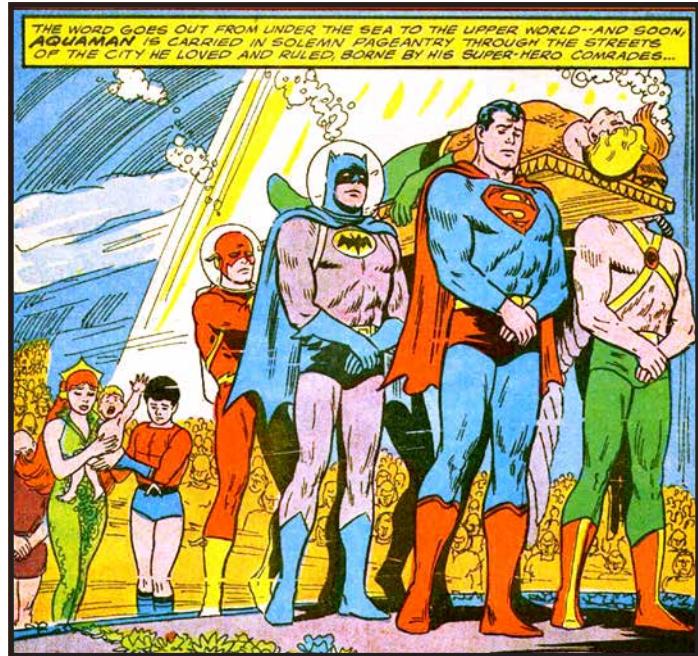
"But Dr. Blake Can Die!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

A couple of continuity errors mar an otherwise exciting *Mighty Thor* #153 (June, 1968). In an example of how editor/scripter Stan Lee had loosened his control, penciler and primary plotter Jack Kirby was allowed to make a pair of major mistakes with long standing elements of *Thor*. For example: Loki has absconded with Thor's hammer leaving him bereft of his weapon while still in Asgard. In the past, it had been established that while in Asgard, and unlike on Earth, even if he was separated from his hammer, Thor would remain Thor. Here, as he begs the Norn queen Karnilla to transport him back to Earth before he changes to Dr. Blake, it's clear that is exactly what's going to happen if he isn't removed immediately. Meanwhile, on Earth, Loki carries around Thor's hammer with no problem when in past issues, he, like everyone else, couldn't pick up the hammer due to its enchantment. In addition, there's doubtless a rushed look to the art which was likely due more to inker Vince Colletta's efforts than Kirby's (whose original pencil pages invariably look complete). Still, even a slacking inker can't hold back the power of Kirby's art as readers are treated to page after page of very cool battle between Thor and Loki, something rarely seen despite the frequency with which the two appeared together over the series' long history. Not only that, but hand-to-hand battle with Loki displaying some of his own godly strength. He was no pantywaist! The twist here is that Thor's girlfriend Sif is injured by Loki and Thor must operate as Dr. Blake. Then, at the most crucial point, Loki interferes and Blake has to find a way to hold him off while Sif is rushed to safety. Unfortunately, once again, big daddy Odin steps in and whisks Loki back to Asgard where a new threat is looming. Clearly, with the major continuity errors cited above, Lee was ceding some of his oversight duties to Kirby and giving the artist's work less of his attention. Was it evidence of a growing rift between the two? Or was it Lee's own slacking off here that might have triggered resentment on the part of Kirby? Whatever the case, it boded ill for the future of one of the most fruitful partnerships in the history of comics.

X-Men #43

"The Torch is Passed!"; Roy Thomas (script); George Tuska (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

After reaching the nadir of the series with the Frankenstein story a couple issues back and the death of Professor X in the previous issue, the X title seemingly had nowhere else to go but up. That climb should have begun solidly here in a nicely scripted story by Roy Thomas that touched all the bases including action, intrigue, rising menace, and emotional moments involving the X-Men's grief over their fallen mentor. The problem was that artist George Tuska had graduated from inking in the last issue to penciler here, in *X-Men* #43 (April, 1968). He just wasn't up to the task. Readers' hopes about the art, raised quickly with this issue's nice symbolic cover by John Buscema, were immediately dashed when they opened the book to discover Tuska's credit as penciler. Almost immediately, readers were treated to what would become the artist's trademark in the years ahead: giving his characters severe overbites. To be fair, Tuska does try to come clean laying out some of the story in big, quarter-size panels, but they just don't satisfy due to the awkward nature of his figurework and oddball contrasts, such as the ornate throne Magneto is sitting on in the opening splash page while surrounded by high tech machinery or the ram's head battering ram employed by the Toad on page 15, panel 1. Ugh. That, and just getting Magneto's unique Jack Kirby helmet design wrong and revealing too much



SUPER-HERO FUNERALS WERE AN UNCOMMON OCCURRENCE IN COMICS BUT WHEN THEY DID HAPPEN THEY WERE USUALLY COLORFUL, COSTUMED AFFAIRS AS IN THIS SCENE FROM AQUAMAN #30 (1966). IN CONTRAST, THE FUNERAL OF PROF. X IN X-MEN #43 WAS A MORE DIGNIFIED AFFAIR OR, AT LEAST, AS DIGNIFIED AS PENCILER GEORGE TUSKA COULD MANAGE.

of the villain's face. Aside from the funeral of Professor X though, Thomas does supply readers with a development that would prove significant as the years went on: Marvel Girl's telekinetic powers are enhanced by Professor X so that now she shares some of his telepathic powers, as well. The other important element coming out of this issue is the fact that its story will dovetail with ongoing events in the current *Avengers* books with chapters due to go back and forth for the next few months. A benefit of having a continuity freak like Thomas as writer on both titles. (Then again, editor Stan Lee was doing something similar in the *Daredevil* and *Fantastic Four* books.) This issue's backup feature spotlights Cyclops. With the conclusion of his origin last-ish, this chapter takes its cue from similar features in Marvel's annuals explaining a character's powers and abilities. Thus, we learn how Cyke's eye beams work, how they're powered and controlled by his ruby quartz visor, etc. Werner Roth (with inks by John Verpoorten) comes through this time with some decent visuals (much better than Tuska's on the lead story), especially the action shot of Cyclops on the splash page.

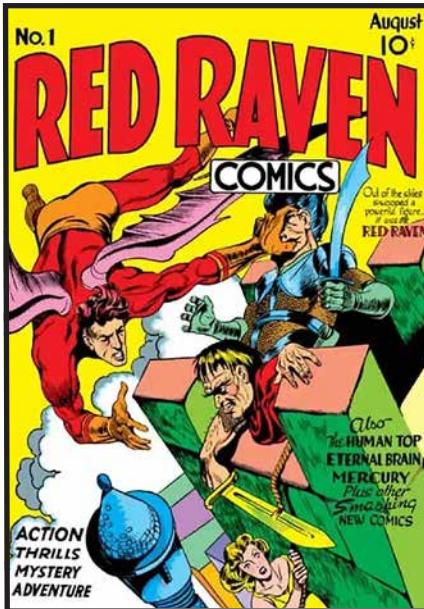
X-Men #44

"Red Raven, Red Raven!";
Roy Thomas (story); Gary Friedrich (script); Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

In a story devised by Roy Thomas (and scripted by newcomer Gary Friedrich), the *X-Men* scribe misses a golden opportunity to tell a slam-bang solo tale spotlighting the team's second most interesting character, the Angel (the other being Cyclops). Instead, readers found themselves stuck with another lost race type story as the Angel escapes the clutches of Magneto (after getting hold of a convenient disintegrator gun that he uses to escape his bonds; when he goes to use it on the other X-Men, Cyclops makes the unlikely guess that their bonds might be booby-trapped and orders the Angel to make his escape instead; (was this an example of miscommunication between artist and writer resulting from the Marvel Method of script writing?) and finds himself on an uncharted island filled with sleeping birdmen and warded over by a revival of the 1940s Red Raven. Granted, Thomas had a love for Golden Age characters, but in this attempt to introduce one into the Marvel Age, he stumbled. What's more, Angel's

battle with the Raven was too short and just plain ole uninteresting. Perhaps the problem was the art. For *X-Men* #44 (May, 1968), Don Heck only laid out the story with Werner Roth returning to pencil; so right off, there was much dilution of Heck's work. With much of the dynamism gone, John Tartaglione's by-the-numbers inks further buried any surviving nuances until they were completely invisible. Overall, there wasn't much going on in this abbreviated 15-page story as it ends where it began, with the Angel on his way to find succor with the *Avengers*. And with Roth on the main story, George Tuska was brought in to pencil the origins of the X-Men backup feature, this time spotlighting Iceman. Written here completely by Friedrich, who'd been recruited to write for Marvel by pal and fellow Missourian Thomas, the tale moves along quickly but somewhat uninterestingly until ending with the appearance of Prof. X and Cyclops. Clearly, this chapter of the series was going to move along at a much faster clip than the lengthier Cyclops origin opener. Tuska's art, meanwhile, had not improved over the months he'd been at Marvel. It was still awkward, boring, and filled with annoying overbites. So between the lead and backup features this issue, the *X-Men* continued to limp along, bringing up the rear of the Marvel parade with each issue threatening to be the final nail in its coffin.

Obviously, the continued decline of the *X* title was not as obvious to many fans as it was to editorial. Witness a missive on this issue's letters' page by future penciling great Keith Giffen pleading for an *X-Men* annual. Not likely!



RED RAVEN #1 (AND ONLY)
MAY NOT HAVE BEEN MUCH
OF A CHARACTER EVEN BACK
IN 1940, BUT HE MUST
HAVE BEEN AT LEAST A TAD
MORE INTERESTING THAN
THE PALE VERSION FEATURED
IN X-MEN #44. THAT,
HOWEVER, DIDN'T PREVENT
SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS FROM
BRINGING HIM BACK AS A
MEMBER OF HIS RETRO-
WWII TEAM, THE LIBERTY
LEGION, LATER IN THE 1970S.

Avengers #53

"In Battle Joined!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

The long simmering sub-plot involving Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch going over to the new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants led by Magneto finally comes to a head in *Avengers* #53 (June, 1968). Readers were signaled in no uncertain terms that this was so by the striking John Buscema produced cover image featuring what would become a familiar layout involving the members of one team of heroes charging from one side of the illo toward another group on the other. In this case, The X-Men vs. the *Avengers* with the Angel stuck in the middle. Against a blank white background, the array of wildly colorful costumes makes this one of Buscema's best. In

fact, Buscema's work was showing up on covers across Marvel's lineup at this time, and all of them looked darn sharp. His depiction of the X-Men on the inside of this book showed how exciting that team's own book could've been if Buscema was the regular artist. Could he have saved the X book from low sales and eventual cancellation? It was very likely. Unfortunately, the idea would never be tested as Buscema's services (which only grew more valuable after the departure of Jack Kirby) would be judged by editorial to be of better use elsewhere. And one of those elsewhere was right here with the Avengers,



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AVENGERS #53, PAGE 18: EVEN THE INKS OF GEORGE TUSKA COULDN'T RUIN THIS BEAUTIFUL PAGE PENCILED BY JOHN BUSCEMA! AND HELPING TO KEEP THE CONFUSION TO A MINIMUM, ROY THOMAS PROVIDES THE LONG Winded EXPLANATION OF THE GOINGS ON IN PANEL 3 WITH NARY A PAUSE FOR BREATH BY OUR HARD CHARGING HEROES!

wherein the artist was on the cusp of producing some of his most spectacular work ever. And though still saddled with the heavy handed inks of George Tuska, that gentleman seemed to finally be getting the hang of inking Marvel style action (Tuska's work on the new *Iron Man* solo title would also show marked improvement in his approach... relatively speaking). That, and coloring by Stan Goldberg, combined to produce one of the month's most visually appealing books as the Avengers in their purples, reds, yellows, violets, etc battled with the X-Men in their own greens,

yellows, purples, and crimsons. Meanwhile, Roy Thomas' script kept what could have been a confusing mash-up from being just that. After being apprised by the Angel of Magneto's plans and the capture of the rest of the X-Men, the Avengers charge off to do battle and end up fighting the

heroes they came to rescue. Buscema did Kirby proud in his depiction of the fight between the two teams, particularly on page 16, panel 5, a donnybrook that he dedicated two thirds of the page to. But it was all a set up to trick Magneto allowing the Angel to get in his last licks. However, as great as this ish was, it was only a lead into bigger and better things just over the horizon as the Avengers team supreme of Thomas and Buscema really hit their stride!

X-Men #45

"When Mutants Clash!";
Gary Friedrich (script); Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes); John Tartaglione (inks)

One really gets an idea of how exciting the *X-Men* title could have been under more expert artistic hands than it had been since the departure of Jack Kirby by the cover of *X-Men* #45 (June, 1968). There, John Buscema does the honors in a

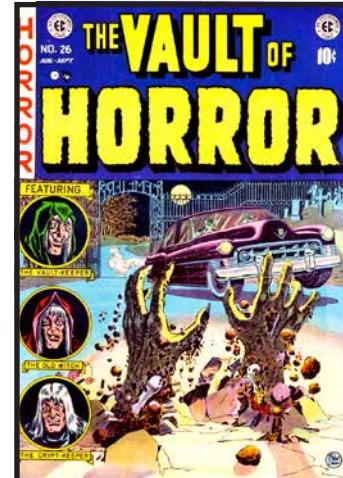
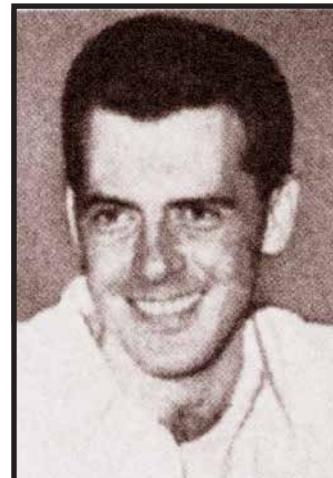
powerful illustration featuring Cyclops vs. Quicksilver! (All that, and under a big logo screaming “the senses-shattering Cyclops!” too. The sub logos beneath the smaller “X-Men featuring” lead-in were still in effect and truth be told, they did provide a distinct look to the book that promised fun and excitement.) The combination of Cyclops’ purple and yellow costume with that of Quicksilver’s green was a great combo, set off by the red of Cyke’s optic blast as it rips through a bank of machinery. Just Buscema’s use of physiognomy and musculature in the figure of Cyclops, his determined, aggressive posturing, is enough to convey to the viewer the raw power of the imagery. It might even be said that for the first time, readers could sense just why Cyclops was the most powerful of the X-Men and its natural leader. Oh, if Buscema could only draw two books at the time, why couldn’t they have been the *Avengers* and *X-Men* instead of *Sub-Mariner*? (Not that Buscema’s work on Subby’s title was a waste!) Inside, the battle between the two adversaries is somewhat less exciting due to too many cooks in the kitchen. By this time, penciler Don Heck had long since proven his bona fides as a quintessential Marvel artist, but here he was only doing the layouts with Werner Roth the finishes. Add to that John Tartaglione’s inks, and you’ve got an end product that was decent but hardly world shatteringly exciting. Storywise, Roy Thomas had relinquished the scripting duties in favor of newcomer Gary Friedrich who manages a serviceable job here without overwriting. But Thomas wasn’t completely absent, having plotted out this chapter in the ongoing *Avengers/X-Men* multi-issue crossover with this installment ending in a cliffhanger as the *Avengers* burst in on Cyclops with their teammate Quicksilver unconscious at his feet. To be continued in *Avengers* #53! Unfortunately, George Tuska is still on hand for the origins of the X-Men backup as the story of Iceman’s recruitment to the X-Men continues. Iceman and Cyclops, though, end up fighting each other more than the homo sapiens who threaten them both. Again, Friedrich does the scripting honors.

Iron Man and Sub-Mariner #1

“The Torrent Without...the Torment Within!”;
Archie Goodwin (script); Gene Colan (pencils);
Johnny Craig (inks)
“Call Him Destiny...or Call Him Death!”; Roy Thomas
(script); Gene Colan (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

It was a double-dose of Gene Colan in the one-shot *Iron Man and Sub-Mariner* #1 (April, 1968), a placeholder issue pending the launch of the new *Iron Man* and *Sub-Mariner* solo titles due out the following month. It was probably coincidence that Colan had been called back to take over the Sub-Mariner in *Tales to Astonish*, just as that book was being canceled to make way for the new *Hulk* solo title that began this month and continuing the numbering from *Astonish*. Likewise, Captain America would also continue the numbering from *Tales*

of *Suspense* leaving IM and Subby temporary orphans pending the debut of their respective number one issues. But whatever the case, fans were the beneficiaries of this special, once-in-a-lifetime issue that featured spectacular Colan artwork throughout; and no matter who inked him, whether Johnny Craig on Iron Man or Frank Giacoia on Subby, Colan’s pencils seemed to be inker proof as he looked good no matter who inked him. In particular, Craig, a veteran artist who’d made his mark working for the late EC comics in the 1950s, had recently returned to comics beginning at Warren Publications. It was perhaps Archie Goodwin, who formerly edited the Warren books, who suggested him for work at Marvel. Whatever the case, though Craig was assigned a few scattered issues of the new *Iron Man* title, he didn’t seem to work out. Not really a superhero artist, he failed to capture the action-oriented Marvel style and was relegated mostly to inking assignments until dropping out of the field for good. He did, however, seem to do a good job over Colan’s pencils in the lead Iron Man story beginning with a nice opening splash page. The comic was still being scribed by Goodwin in a *faux* Stan Lee style as the action continues from *Suspense* #99. Here, our hero escapes a deathtrap and then has to fight the Maggia, AIM, and Whiplash aboard a sinking gambling ship (with Jasper Sitwell also caught on board!). Next door, Roy Thomas returns to the scripting chores on Sub-Mariner (a duty he’d continue to perform for years to come) as the king of Atlantis continues his battle with Destiny. If either of these installments weren’t enough to get any dyed in the wool Marvelite to pick up each hero’s new solo titles, then editor Lee might as well have just packed it in! **Fun fact:** This issue’s once in a lifetime letters column was a combination of both *Tales of Suspense* and *Tales to Astonish*: “Astonishing Mails of Suspense!”



IT WAS LUCKY THAT EC COMICS ALUMNUS JOHNNY CRAIG STAYED ON FIRST AS PENCILER, THEN AS THE INKER FOR THE NEW IRON MAN SOLO TITLE AS HIS WORK WENT A LONG WAY TO EASE THE PAINFUL TRANSITION FROM GENE COLAN TO GEORGE TUSKA AS REGULAR ARTIST ON THE SERIES.

Strange Tales #167

"Armageddon!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)
"This Dream...This Doom!";
Denny O'Neil (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

With only another issue left in its run, *Strange Tales* #167 (April, 1968) featured the end of the long running Yellow Claw story-line. Scripter/penciler Jim Steranko pulled out all the stops this time in bringing his epic to a close including an array of way out super scientific sixties spy paraphernalia including a psuedo-elliptoid wrist tracer and a "mind amplifying gizmo!" Besides all that, plus a truly iconic cover image of Nick Fury and his agents of SHIELD charging away from a flag-draped background, Steranko also gives readers a first for comics: a giant image of the final conflict between SHIELD and the Claw spread over four full-page illos! To fully take in all the action, dedicated readers would need to buy two copies of the issue in order to lay the pages out correctly and see them all at once! On top of all that, the artist also provides some of his old razzle dazzle special effects, most notably the last panel on page 8 and the first on page 9 depicting the battle of minds between Fury and the Claw. But when the Claw loses, we discover that he was only a robot all along and even more, that the whole story was just a fabrication resulting from a chess game

between Dr. Doom and something called the Prime Mover! Bummer! It was a real letdown after the emotion readers no doubt put into reading and following such an otherwise sprawling Steranko produced epic. But some relief at least was to be had on the Dr. Strange feature that backed up this issue. It came in the form of the return of Dan Adkins to both pencils and inks after a hiatus with George Tuska filling in last time. Gone however, was Jim Lawrence

from the scripting. Lawrence (whoever he really was or came from) did a more than satisfactory job over the past several installments so it was somewhat of a letdown to see the name of Denny O'Neil back in the credits. O'Neil keeps the plot involving extra-dimensional scientist Yandroth's kidnapping of Victoria Bentley going, providing along the way the return of the Ancient One (did anyone really believe he was dead?) Adkins once again delights with eye-catching visuals and layouts that anticipated those that Gene Colan would later



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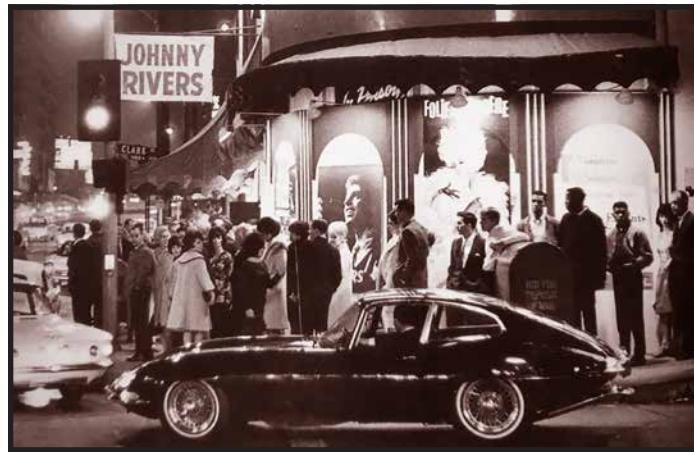
STRANGE TALES #167, PAGE 8: DAN ADKINS WAS BACK ON THE JOB FOR THE DR. STRANGE STRIP DOING BOTH PENCILS AND INKS. HOW LUCKY COULD STRANGE FANS GET? LIKEWISE, DENNY O'NEIL (NO STRANGER TO THE STRANGE STRIP) REPLACED JIM LAWRENCE ON SCRIPTING BRINGING PERHAPS, A MORE STAN LEE-ish POLISH TO THE PROCEEDINGS.

make his trademark on the feature. But even as the good doctor fends off magical menaces, the climax comes as he's threatened with death by an ordinary pistol.

Amazing Spider-Man #59

"The Brand of the Brainwisher!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee picks up the pace in *Amazing Spider-Man* #59 (April, 1968) with the start of a new multi-part story-line this time involving another hidden crime lord calling himself "the Brainwisher." Cleverly mixing the cast of supporting players with the action, Lee has Mary Jane pick up a dancing gig at a new club called the Gloom Room a Go-Go. In between numbers, she's also required to go around taking pics of the guests. But this is just subterfuge. Actually, her camera is hypnotizing them into returning to the club after hours to be formally brainwashed by one Dr. Gerhard Winkler. Thus, one by one, the city's most influential movers and shakers are coming under the control of Winkler's boss, the Brainwisher. One of the victims is Captain Stacy. When he acts strangely following a night at the club, Spidey decides to keep tabs on him, which leads to a confrontation with thugs in the employ of the Brainwisher. Lee doesn't bother stretching out the suspense. Instead, he reveals the Brainwisher's identity in the final panel of the story. Though this issue's cover was pure John Romita magic, the interiors were much



LIKELY WHAT STAN LEE HAD IN MIND WHEN HE HAD MARY JANE DANCING AT THE GLOOM ROOM A GO GO. THE WHISKEY A GO GO WAS THE REAL LIFE HAPPENING PLACE IN THE 1960S! LOCATED IN WEST HOLLYWOOD ON THE SUNSET STRIP, IT WAS IDEALLY SITUATED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE BURGEONING LOS ANGELES POP MUSIC SCENE WITH MANY OF THE BIGGEST BANDS ON HAND TO KEEP THE CLUB HOPPING AND ITS FAMOUS GO GO DANCERS GYRATING. ROYALTY OF THE FILM AND MUSIC INDUSTRIES CONVERGED THERE MAKING IT A HOTBED OF CREATIVE TALENT AND PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

less so as the penciler confined himself to layouts only with Don Heck doing the finishes. The results are less satisfying than the purer form of Romita readers had grown used to in earlier issues. With Mike Esposito on the inks, something ended up lacking in the final results. A certain flatness that failed to excite. Even the figure of Spider-Man seemed less defined, particularly his masked head, which lacked Romita's distinctive profile. The art would improve in future issues, but for now it seemed as though Heck and Esposito were still getting their sea legs. Of interest to soap opera fans though, is some forward progress in the Peter Parker/Gwen Stacy relationship as Gwen lays one on Peter in her joy at finding him alive after he disappeared while amnesiac in previous issues. This bold move by Gwen would jump start her relationship with Peter from a mere "first date" (which actually wasn't; they were both invited by Prof. Warren to attend a lecture on the nullifier back in ish #53) to official boyfriend/girlfriend status.

Avengers #51

"In the Clutches of...the Collector!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

It was only to be regretted that George Tuska once again inked over penciler John Buscema in *Avengers* #51 (April, 1968) as its Roy Thomas scripted story is a humdinger! Not only did it spotlight Goliath in his and the Collector's attempts to restore his growing powers, but it also featured the return of two of the team's founding members: Thor and Iron Man. (Three, if you count Captain America, who only makes a cameo appearance at the very end to recommend the Black Panther for membership.) That said, this issue's opening splash page is nice, featuring as it does Goliath's new, super colorful costume (one that was not sported on the cover; there, a communications mix-up likely resulted in his costume being colored by Stan Goldberg in its previous blue and yellow combo). For the rest of the ish, Buscema sticks mostly with the standard five and six panel grid layout format, something that would soon change, with Tuska taking his leave just in time for the return of Vince Colletta to the book and later, George Klein. Thomas returned old Avenger baddie the Collector as the vehicle for getting Thor and Iron Man back on the team if only on a temporary, guest star basis. It was true that he'd been given instructions by editor Stan Lee to leave the big guns off the title so as not to complicate continuity among their respective books, as well as to avoid overshadowing other team members, but Thomas brought them back, anyway. It'd always been the scribe's desire to have a star-studded roster for the Avengers and he was finally able to do it. Lee, this time, would have no objections. (After all, Lee himself had just guest starred Thor, Spider-Man, and Daredevil in *Fantastic Four* #73 with little confusion.) As a result, Iron Man, Thor, and Captain America would all return to the Avengers from time to time. Meanwhile, Thomas increased the total membership by one with the inclusion

of the Black Panther. No word on whether Lee had any input with that as well, but though Thomas made the character work as a member of the team, it was always an uncertain fit. The Panther, after all, was the ruler of a foreign country (on another continent yet) and it always begged the question of how he could govern effectively while serving with the Avengers (and later, teaching school on the side). Regardless, he'd become an essential part of the team at a time when its roster would suddenly shrink to only a handful of members.

BUT, SO STARTLINGLY SWIFT IS THE SIGHTLESS SWASHBUCKLER'S ATTACK, THAT HIS THREE FOES ARE SCATTERED LIKE TENPINS BEFORE THEY CAN MAKE ANOTHER MOVE--!



Daredevil #39

"The Exterminator and the Super-Powered Unholy Three!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

They're back! And most likely not because anyone in particular demanded it. Still, scripter Stan Lee, for whatever reason, decided to bring back those wild and crazy villains from way back in *Daredevil* #10: Birdman, Apeman, and Catman!

But now, in the midst of Marvel's grandiose years, they were better than ever, and far more formidable-looking under the exciting pencils and way-out layouts of Gentleman Gene Colan. Back in the day, they

were working for the Organizer, this time the Unholy Three (love that name!) are in the employ of new villain the Exterminator. One of those villainous types with a secret ID that kept readers guessing for a few issues before finally being revealed. Anyway, Colan really goes to town on the artwork for *Daredevil* #39 (April, 1968). And though with his track record at Marvel so far, you'd think the inks of George Tuska would hold back Colan's pencils, but for the most part, they don't. Maybe Colan's style was so strong, it could resist any attempt to sabotage them (although to be fair, that certainly had never been Tuska's intention).

Well, except for maybe those quiet scenes with Matt Murdock out on the town with Karen, Foggy, and Debbie Harris. But Lee and Colan don't waste too many panels on that stuff because the Exterminator has armed the Unholy Three with a gun that can displace people in time. Something they proceed to do to Debbie, the better for the Exterminator to have something to hold over Foggy should he win election for district attorney. Hoo, boy! No evidence here the series was slowing down at all. Lee and Colan were still unquestionably at the top of their respective games!



DAREDEVIL #39, PAGE 3: EVEN INKS BY GEORGE TUSKA COULDN'T RUIN THIS EXCITING SPLASH PAGE BY PENCILER GENE COLAN! BY THIS POINT IN THE GRANDIOSE YEARS, STAN LEE WAS LEARNING TO BE MORE ECONOMICAL IN HIS SCRIPTING, CUTTING CAPTIONS TO A MINIMUM AND ALLOWING THE DIALOGUE TO DO THE TALKING FOR HIM SO TO SPEAK. AND HERE, EVEN HIS DIALOGUE IS PRETTY MINIMALIST!

Daredevil #40

"The Fallen Hero!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

The fun continues in *Daredevil* #40 (May. 1968) as DD goes on to tackle the Unholy Three (Catman, Birdman, and Apeman, natch) who eventually turn their T-gun on the hero, consigning him to a timeless limbo along with a number of previous victims including Foggy's girlfriend, Debby Harris. It's all part of a long range scheme by a new mystery villain, the Exterminator. Meanwhile, back in the real world, Foggy tracks down clues to Debbie's disappearance while continuing to campaign for the position of district attorney. Lots of stuff goin' on here and all covered in hurtling fashion both by Stan Lee's near caption-less script and Gene Colan's art, that especially dominates in the first half of the book as DD foils a robbery by the Unholy Three. There, aided by the heavy but clean inks of John Tartaglione, Colan uses big, widescreen panels (including a pair of full page illos) to choreograph Daredevil's battle with the Three. This is grand stuff, fer sher! So smooth is the combined storytelling that readers find themselves on page 19 before they know it, just as DD finds himself in the limbo he's been thrown into by the Three's T-Gun. What next? **Fun Fact:** Future Marvel editor Mark Gruenwald has a letter in this issue's letters' column. He, at least, concurs in the greatness of the DD book: "I consider *Daredevil* to be Marvel's best publication." He wasn't far wrong!

Daredevil #41

"The Death of Mike Murdock!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee hits two birds with one stone in *Daredevil* #41 (June. 1968) as Daredevil finds a way to escape the limbo where he'd been consigned by the Unholy Three and later, kills off his invented persona of Mike Murdock. DD escapes limbo just in time to rescue Foggy from the clutches of the Exterminator, only to have the villain killed in an explosion. That same explosion, coincidentally, also seems to kill Daredevil, as well. "This is all that's left of him," says Foggy as he clutches a piece of DD's uniform. "Mike Murdock gave his life, to save mine!" Of course, nothing of the sort happened. Mike Murdock had only been an impersonation conducted by Daredevil in order to take the heat off his real ID of Matt Murdock. (Lee had likely decided that the sub-plot had outlived its usefulness and had been strung it out as far as it would go.) This only opened the door to yet another conundrum: now that the persona of Mike was gone, and the obvious need for the *DD* book to continue, what explanation would Lee come up with next to cover the

ALTHOUGH IN REAL LIFE, FRANK S. HOGAN ("MR. INTEGRITY") SERVED AS DISTRICT ATTORNEY FOR MANHATTAN FROM 1941 TO 1973. THE EXIGENCIES OF NEW YORK STATE COUNTY BASED DISTRICT ATTORNEY REPRESENTATION WERE SUCH THAT DD'S FOGGY NELSON COULD HAVE BEEN ELECTED FOR SOME SUCH POSITION IN THE NYC AREA...



continuing existence of a Daredevil swinging about town? Stay tuned because it would all lead to even more complications, courtesy of the writer. In the meantime, readers could enjoy the rapid-fire artwork by the combo of Gene Colan, penciler, and John Tartaglione, inker. There, Colan continues to break down the story into big, open panels with characters stretched almost impossibly across the

picture plane. No human being, for instance, ever stood the way the Exterminator stands on page 19, panel 3! And were there ever more perfectly suited sparring partners for DD than the Unholy Three? Not quite super powered and not quite normally strong men, the Catman, Apeman, and Birdman offered just enough of a challenge to keep the jokes flying and give DD a decent workout. They were fun villains who deserved a rematch at some future date, but first, DD was destined to enter on a string of totally classic issues over the next few months leading right into and just past his fiftieth anniversary issue. Yee, ha!

Strange Tales #168

"Today Earth Died!"; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/colors); Joe Sinnott (inks)

"Exile!"; Denny O'Neil (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

Things get tied up in a neat bow in both features for *Strange Tales* #168 (May. 1968). It was the final issue of the title as both Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD and Dr. Strange moved on to their respective solo titles. As readers recalled, Jim Steranko's Yellow Claw epic ended on a disappointing note in the previous issue. Well, the stand-alone tale that succeeded it this ish was hardly better with what amounted to a dream by Fury about an alien who destroys the Earth. The twist? In something perhaps inspired by the 1950s film *Invaders From Mars*, Fury wakes up only to discover



THE CONCEIT OF USING A CIRCULAR ENDING MAY HAVE WORKED FOR THE CLASSIC SF/FANTASY FILM *INVADERS FROM MARS* (1953) BUT BY THE TIME OF THE NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD FEATURE IN *STRANGE TALES* #168, IT WAS A HOARY ENOUGH CONCEPT TO PROMOTE GROANS IN THE AUDIENCE.

that the events of his dream are coming true. But while the story may have been disappointing, not so the art. There, Steranko seems to have taken the dreamlike qualities of the plot as an excuse to fill it with special FX imagery, beginning with an opening splash page with some neat zipatone title work before going on to page 2 with a photo-imposed likeness of the Countess Valentina. That's followed by a San Francisco rock art poster-like effect on page 3, then a full-length shot of the Contessa in the most unlikely spy gear since Mrs. Peel joined the Hellfire Club! Throughout, Steranko experiments in creative layouts using cinema techniques, climaxing in a full page collage depicting the end of the world! The conclusion of the story may have been less than satisfying but for pure eye candy, Steranko's effort here could hardly be beaten. Meanwhile, at the front of the book, Dan Adkins was still on pencils and inks for the Dr. Strange feature where scripter Denny O'Neil brings the long running Yandroth serial to its conclusion. There, Strange defeats Yandroth, foiling his dastardly plan to wed Victoria Bentley against her will. Adkins helps make Yandroth's fixation with Victoria a bit more understandable on page 3 wherein he provides a full-length shot of the lovely heroine being menaced by a T-rex. Again, the artist comes through like a champion with imaginative layouts that also keep the story from becoming confusing. O'Neil manages to tidy up everything just in time for Dr. Strange's next appearance in his very own mag. There, Roy Thomas returns to the feature, remaining on the series till its demise and along the way, will create some of the good doctor's best remembered adventures.

Amazing Spider-Man #60

"Oh, Bitter Victory!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Well, there goes maybe the shortest courtship on record! No sooner does a spontaneous kiss from Gwen seal the fact that she and Peter Parker are indeed a couple than she turns on him in *Amazing Spider-Man* #60 (May. 1968), angrily telling him she doesn't want to see him anymore. What happened? The typical Peter Parker luck, that's what. Or rather, Stan Lee's scripting! See, after Peter confronts Captain Stacy in his home about his involvement with the Brainwisher, Stacy tries to strike him with his cane. Pete wards off the impending blow but Stacy is knocked to the floor. That's when Gwen comes through the door and her father blames Peter for hitting him. Refusing to listen to any of Peter's explanations, Gwen orders him away. "Get out, Peter!" she tells him. "Get out and never come back! I never want to see you again...ever!" Well, easy come, easy go! Meanwhile, Lee's plot drives on with thugs trashing Peter's apartment. Forced into a corner, Peter gives the Daily Bugle pix that show Stacy breaking into police files. Now, Peter is in real hot water with Gwen! With the plot thickening fast, and with readers now thoroughly hooked more by Peter Parker's personal trials than Spidey's exploits, *Amazing Spider-Man* #61 couldn't arrive fast enough!

Amazing Spider-Man #61

"What a Tangled Web We Weave...!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)

The art team that had been providing the visuals for the *Spider-Man* book over the past few months finally came together here in *Amazing Spider-Man* #61 (June. 1968). With John Romita on layouts, Don Heck on finishes, and Mike Esposito inking, the quality of the art was at last looking sharp and more Romita-like than washed-out Heck. With obvious spots like the opening splash page (a nice symbolic illo of the supporting cast caught up in a spider's web), big set piece action shots, and especially quieter scenes of Mary Jane finding out she was out of a job with the Gloom Room a Go-Go being suddenly closed, or Gwen Stacy realizing that there was indeed something wrong with her father, or the possibility that Norman Osborn's memory of being the Green Goblin was returning, it appeared that Romita had applied himself a bit more this time. And just in time, too, as the series was set to springboard into a run of absolute classic issues. Meanwhile, the chief architect of that impending run, scripter Stan Lee, concluded the current Brainwisher story-line with plenty of old time Spidey vs. gangsters action in the Steve Ditko tradition before our hero faces off with the Kingpin. Lee wraps it all up in classic Spidey style: with Spider-Man ending up the hero of the hour while Peter Parker still finds himself the goat in Gwen's eyes.

Fantastic Four #74

"When Calls Galactus!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

It was back to epic cosmicism again in *Fantastic Four* #74 (May, 1968) following the single issue interruption in the previous number when the team was called upon to fight Thor, Spider-Man, and Daredevil in a case of mistaken identity brought on by the scheming Dr. Doom. Anyway, this time, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's story picks up sort of where issue #72 had left off with the re-introduction of the Silver Surfer. This time, the team has been warned that a starving Galactus is returning to Earth, desperately seeking the Surfer to help him find a tasty planet to consume. And if the Surfer can't help him, then he'll just have to satisfy himself with the Earth! Other than the exception of a scene with the Torch supervising repairs to the Baxter Building and Mr. and Mrs. Richards discussing the need for Sue to take time away from her duties as a member of the team due to her pregnancy, Kirby could barely hold himself back. All the remaining pages of the story are given over to slam-bang action as the three remaining members of the FF fight off the Punisher, a robot sent by Galactus to round up the Surfer. Kirby's art in places looks a little rushed (especially compared to the much more solid looking #73; of course, Kirby was stretched out a bit this month having to pencil *Thor*, a new full-sized *Captain America* title, as well as the *FF*) but he saved his best efforts for those scenes featuring the big G himself, particularly a full page, suitable for framing, portrait of Galactus as he soliloquizes over his "hunger of ages." Otherwise, this ish wasn't too impressive in story or art (relatively speaking of course; this was still a Lee/Kirby production, after all) but that would all change starting next issue when the team follows the missing Surfer into "worlds within worlds!"

Fantastic Four #75

"Worlds Within Worlds!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Fantastic Four #75 (June, 1968) continues the latest Silver Surfer multi-parter ostensibly begun back in issue #72. Although the Surfer himself actually has only a small part here, it looms large in the overall plot as Mr. Fantastic, Thing, and the Human Torch face off against Galactus, who's starved for nourishment and desperate to find the Silver Surfer. Removing themselves to a desert island off the Manhattan shore, the three heroes are besieged by the big G in a number of ways including capsizing the island (!), transporting them into space where they nearly freeze to death, and attacking them with emotionless doppelgangers of themselves. None of it works to get the FF to reveal the whereabouts of the Surfer. Finally, Galactus threatens the Earth with a giant asteroid. That does it. Reed tells Galactus that they'll find the Surfer if he'll only give them enough



INNER SPACE MAY HAVE BEEN ON THE MINDS OF SCRIPTER STAN LEE AND PENCILER JACK KIRBY WHEN THEY DECIDED TO HAVE THE FF TRAVEL TO "WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS" IN SEARCH OF THE SILVER SURFER COURTESY OF THE RECENTLY RELEASED FILM FANTASTIC VOYAGE (1966) WHEREIN A MEDICAL TEAM (ALONG WITH THEIR VERY OWN "REDUCTA CRAFT") IS REDUCED IN SIZE ALLOWING IT TO TRAVEL THROUGH THE HUMAN BODY ULTIMATELY TO CONDUCT A BRAIN OPERATION... FROM THE INSIDE!

time. He agrees and through some chance deduction, Reed guesses that the Surfer has shrunk himself down and entered the micro world held on a microscope slide in his laboratory! As luck would have it, Reed had already been prepared to explore the micro world via reducto-craft. And wouldn't you know it? The vehicle in question is in his lab and ready to go! As things would work out, all this was but a prologue. The Surfer will be found fairly quickly in the next issue, leaving the FF to proceed on to their next amazing adventure courtesy of scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby. An adventure that would not only prove to be one of their most incredible, but the last great inventive offering from the pencil of artist Jack Kirby. It was an eventuality that some readers were beginning to suspect. Readers such as long time fan Bruce Coville whose long missive in this issue's letters' page expresses this suspicion and begs editor Lee to "use the magnificent imagination you have displayed so often before to its full extent...Recapture the flowing fantasy and daring emotion that you have so skillfully portrayed before, and all will be well." Coville would have that return to greatness over the next several issues but beyond that, irreversible decline would begin to set in.

Captain Marvel #1

"Out of the Holocaust...a Hero!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Sales for the Captain Marvel feature in *Marvel Superheroes* must have shown promise, because no sooner had the restrictions on the number of titles the

company could publish been removed, than editor Stan Lee unleashed *Captain Marvel* #1 (May, 1968). The title joined two other debut issues that very same month: *Sub-Mariner* #1 and *Iron Man* #1. Yesiree, Marvel was on the move and so was artist Gene Colan, who illustrated two of the three plus his regular *Daredevil* gig! This could explain why his work here still looked below his usual par as it had since the Captain Marvel feature debuted. This time, however, he was aided and abetted by an inker who had done him great service in the recent past over on *Daredevil*, Vince Colletta. The inker does a great job adding power and weight to Colan's figures, particularly with Cap's battle with the Sentinel. Meantime, having taken over the scripting from Lee, Roy Thomas sets up and further develops the soap operatic elements including the love triangle occupied by Mar-Vell; medic Una, his romantic interest; and the vengeful Col. Yon-Rogg, who lusts after Una himself. It was Yon-Rogg who secretly revived the Sentinel hoping that it would kill Captain Marvel leaving the field open for him to make his own advances on Una. At the same time, back on Earth, the hotel clerk where Mar-Vell is rooming becomes suspicious of him and begins poking through his tenant's effects while Air Force base security chief Carol Danvers is trapped within the Sentry's "wall of sub-atomic particles!" (Both of whom only know Mar-Vell as unassuming scientist Walt Lawson). Anyway, it all adds up to some fun goings on designed to keep readers coming back for more. This issue barely succeeds at that but with a promise to improve on the slow start Lee had provided in Cap's earlier appearances. Stay tuned.

Avengers #52

"Death Calls for the Arch-Heroes!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

With Hercules and Goliath's growth problems now in the rear view mirror, *Avengers* #52 (May, 1968) marked a fresh start for the team. Whether scripter Roy Thomas had such a thing in mind when he wrote the story, it nevertheless felt that way. Maybe it was due to penciler John Buscema's evolving artistic style (enhanced by the inks of Vince Colletta, who really came through like a champ here) that lent itself to a widescreen presentation of the action. Or maybe it was the latest mix of heroes whose individual costuming made for the most colorful combination of team members yet. Or maybe even it was the introduction of the Black Panther as a full-fledged member of the team. Maybe it was all that, plus Thomas' penchant for continuity, as he ties in events from way back in *Avengers* #9 and its introduction of Wonder Man. It seems new villain the Grim Reaper (himself as colorful as he can be in a sort of buccaneering outfit of greens, reds, purples, and violets) is out for revenge on the Avengers whom he blames for the death of his brother, the aforementioned



FLYING SAUCERS OVER SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS:
INTEREST IN ALIEN VISITATIONS IN THE FORM OF
UFOs (UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS) GREW IN THE
EARLY SIXTIES SO THAT BY THE END OF THE DECADE,
IT WAS FIRMLY EMBEDDED IN THE POPULAR CULTURE.
IN TRUTH, BETWEEN OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT REPORTS
CONCLUDING THERE WAS NOTHING TO THEM AND
PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS INSISTING THERE WAS, MOST
AMERICANS DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO MAKE OF THEM.
THERE WAS, HOWEVER, ENOUGH HEAT THERE TO MAKE
CAPTAIN MARVEL'S BACKGROUND AS AN ALIEN SPY
MORE THAN ACCEPTABLE.

Wonder Man. He apparently succeeds but the dead Avengers aren't really dead, they're only in a coma. So it's up to the Panther to fight the Reaper solo in order to retrieve the antidote that will revive his new teammates. Along the way, the Panther is accused of being the murderer himself and must escape the police in order to set things right. Readers were signaled that something was up as soon as they set their peepers on the in-your-face cover design by Buscema that spotlights the Reaper as he tears through the cover, crossing out the Avengers logo all spotlighted by a brilliant yellow background. Inside, the opening splash page is a moody night scene of the Panther posing all pantherish as he arrives atop Avengers mansion, only to be arrested for illegal entry and suspicion of murder by none other than SHIELD boy scout Jasper Sitwell! Yeah, this ish had it all, but mostly it was a colorful romp chock-full of heroes and a snazzy new super-villain. **Fun Fact:** The Panther here sports a different face mask than he's had in the past. As late as his team up with Captain America in the last issues of *Tales of Suspense*, he wore a mask that covered his entire face that readers before and since have come to recognize. But for some reason, this issue, he sports a Captain America/Daredevil style mask that leaves the bottom half of his face uncovered. It was not a good look for him but luckily, this version wouldn't last long. Was the change in couture due to some miscommunication with Buscema?

Sub-Mariner #2

"Cry...Triton!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Penciler John Buscema had finally and completely broken out of his cage, the one that kept him mostly within comics' traditional five and six panel grid format. Suddenly, his work just exploded! Readers could see that right off on the opening splash page of *Sub-Mariner* #2 (June. 1968) as an enraged Sub-Mariner rips apart machinery in villain Destiny's abandoned headquarters. From there, it's almost all big quarter and half-page panels for the rest of the story and inside those panels was figure work rippling with muscles that strained and stretched in furious action as Subby and the Inhuman Triton (fresh from his starring role over in Thor's backup origins of the Inhumans feature) tussle beneath the waves. Even the formerly unimpressive Plantman is revived by scripter Roy Thomas and bulked up unbelievably by Buscema's Michaelangeloesque physiognomies. This was the grandiose years writ large, perfectly captured by an unleashed Buscema. Add to that scenes of Atlanteans returning to their devastated homes again with Buscema's sense of costume design that throws the whole thing with Lady Dorma and Lords Vashti and Seth into the realm of pure fantasy. Was Buscema's new approach something he was forced into because of his increased workload? He'd only been doing *The Avengers* before picking up the monthly Subby assignment. Did the bigger panels and looser layouts allow him to work faster? Whatever the reason, fans were the beneficiaries. In fact, the only discordant note is sounded by those scenes featuring the rest of the Inhuman clan. It was becoming increasingly clear that the more they were given the spotlight, the less interesting the core group became. That would change some when the team was finally awarded its own feature but even then, it worked mostly due to Thomas' choice to spotlight its most fascinating member: Black Bolt. Still, for now, right here, the new *Sub-Mariner* solo book was off to a rollicking good start!

Incredible Hulk #104

"Ring Around the Rhino!"; Gary Friedrich (script), Marie Severin (pencils), Frank Giacoia (inks)

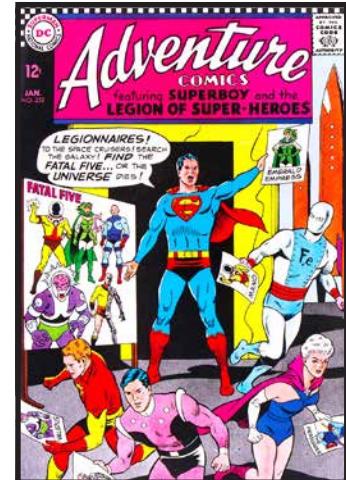
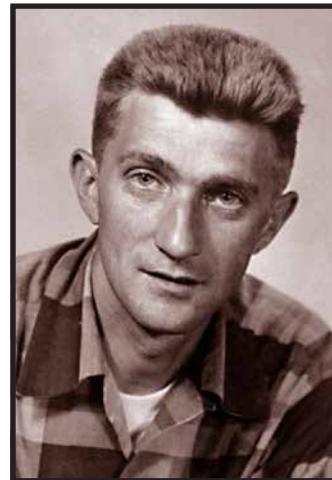
Marie Severin delivered a slightly better than usual penciling job for *Incredible Hulk* #104 (June. 1968). Maybe it was the inking, this time by Frank Giacoia instead of Herb Trimpe. Or maybe it was the more down-to-earth story that featured super anti-hero vs. super-villain by scripter Gary Friedrich. Whatever it was, the result was a much more satisfying tale than the disappointing debut issue. Back on Earth, the Hulk faces off with Spider-Man bad guy the Rhino, who's been re-outfitted in his rhino hide costume by his former employers in return for his helping them to kidnap Bruce Banner. The two meet at the airport where Banner is due to be flown to a high security prison, but then mayhem

erupts as Banner becomes the Hulk and he and Rhino go at it. As to be expected, the Hulk knocks the Rhino around until he eventually collapses from sheer exhaustion. Retaining the serial format begun in *Tales to Astonish*, Friedrich has the story continue directly into the next issue with the Hulk leaving the scene with Betty Ross in hand. Although the book still suffers from Severin's often awkward figure work, she does seem to come alive during the Hulk's battle with the Rhino (although most of the time, her art still seems to border on the style she was using for her *Not Brand Echh* work). Likely adding to Severin's near acceptability this time are Giacoia's inks. If this minimum level of artistic quality could be maintained, the title might be considered as barely acceptable. Unfortunately, even that standard couldn't be maintained. With the sudden expansion of Marvel's line of comics, more of its books would have to be produced by lesser lights than Jack Kirby, John Romita, Gene Colan, or John Buscema. Such would eventually be the fates of Iron Man, Sub-Mariner, SHIELD...and the Hulk as Severin would soon depart leaving to chug along under Trimpe's clumsy art for the next seven years!

Daredevil #53

"As It Was in the Beginning"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); George Klein (inks)

Well, it's been over fifty issues since DD's first appearance and so it must be time for a recap of his origin, right? Right! And along comes *Daredevil* #53 (June. 1969) with apparently an attempt by scripter Roy Thomas to maintain continuity with that first halcyon ish by retaining some of the original dialogue written by Stan Lee. We know that because there's a notice among the credits reading



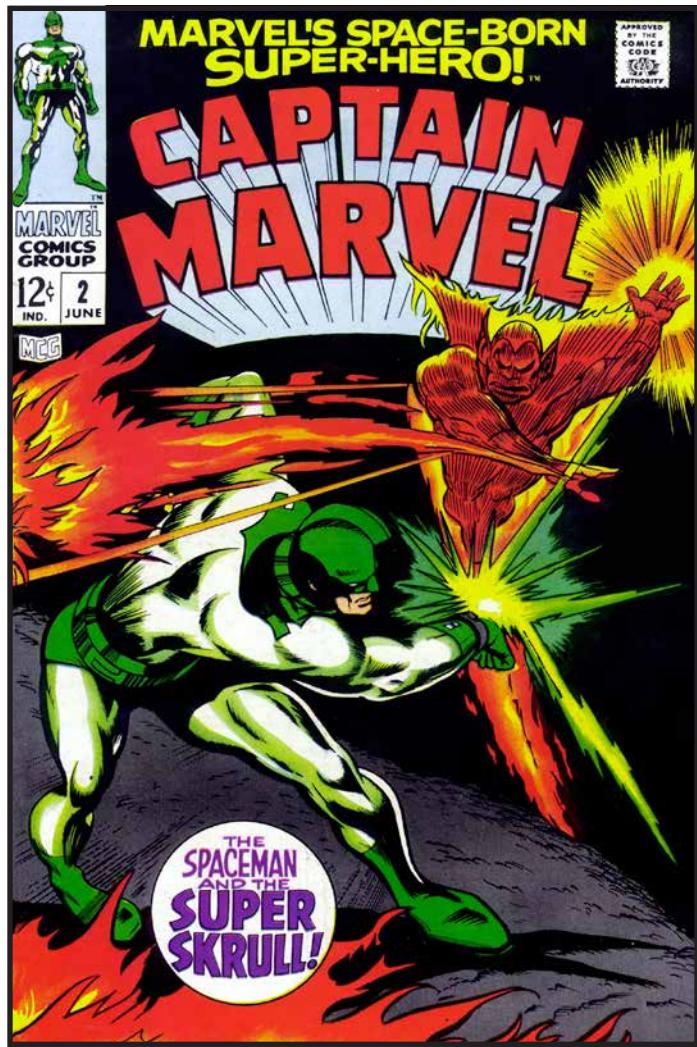
GEORGE KLEIN DID MUCH UNHERALDED WORK AT DC COMICS BEFORE MIGRATING TO MARVEL. BUT WHEREAS HIS WORK OVER SUCH ARTISTS AS CURT SWAN WAS PRO FORMA, IT WAS AT MARVEL INKING PENCILERS LIKE JOHN BUSCEMA AND GENE COLAN, THAT HIS STYLE WAS FINALLY ALLOWED TO FLOWER.

“new dialogue by Roy Thomas.” This was the secret of how Marvel would keep periodic retelling of origins interesting over the years: writers would add new details but without changing the basic tale of how it all began. Here, however, Thomas sticks pretty close to the original story of how Matt Murdock was blinded (and gained his heightened senses) after being struck in the face by a container holding radioactive material, how his father was killed by mobsters after refusing to throw a fight, and how Matt creates a costume and goes into action as Daredevil to bring his father's killers to justice. And though artist Bill Everett did a fine job on that first issue, Gene Colan's interpretation of the events listed above is exciting and fast-moving. The only thing really to complain about here is George Klein's inking. It's not bad, really, but there still seems to be something missing from it. Maybe it's too literal in going over Colan's fluid pencils which, in these years, were full and rich, certainly not as empty seeming as Klein's inks would indicate on panel 3, page 14. Altogether, if long time fans had to sit through a retelling of DD's origin (or worse yet, spend 12 cents on a reprint and/or have to skip a whole month before the next all new ish came out), they couldn't have been better served than having it completely redone by this creative team. Moreover, Thomas manages to tie it into the ongoing Starr Saxon story-line. Opening on a snow covered rooftop, the opening page has DD trying to figure out what to do about Saxon who knows his secret ID. By the last page, after reviewing how he became Daredevil, Matt somehow deduces that the only thing he can do is make sure Matt Murdock ceases to exist! **Fun Fact:** Gene Colan both penciled and inked this issue's iconic cover showing Daredevil holding the scales of justice with his past self in original yellow costume on one platter and the Fixer's men on the other. One of Marvel's fortés in these years was the symbolic cover and this one was classic!

Captain Marvel #2

“From the Void of Space Comes...the Super Skrull!”; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Captain Marvel #2 (June, 1968) arrived with a bang in the form of an exciting cover image by artist Gene Colan—made all the more striking by its deep black background, with a foreground dominated by the bright yellows and reds of the Super Skrull as he bears down on our hero. And the insides are no less arresting as the team of Colan and Colletta let out the stops with a story laid out in big, bold panels, including not one, not two, but *three* full page splashes! Once again, scripter Roy Thomas is on hand to provide a fast-moving story that really bodes well to propel the once slow-moving story into high gear. He does that by adding the Skrulls to the alien Kree mix (in a foreshadowing of the more famous Kree-Skrull War story Thomas would later write over in the *Avengers*). Here, the Skrull Emperor is curious to know what the Kree find interesting on a backwater such as Earth, curious enough



CAPTAIN MARVEL #2: THIS EXCITING COVER IMAGE WITH ITS BATTLING GENE COLAN FIGURES, SEEMS ALL MOVEMENT AND ENERGY AS THE PROTAGONISTS TWIST AND SWOOP, TOSSING SPEEDING BOLTS IN ALL DIRECTIONS. THEY'RE ONLY ENHANCED AND MADE THE MORE STRIKING BY THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE ORANGE/RED SUPER-SKRULL AND THE GREEN AND WHITE CAPTAIN MARVEL AGAINST A PITCH BLACK BACKGROUND. OH! IF ONLY COLAN (AND SCRIPER ROY THOMAS) HAD REMAINED ON THE STRIP LONGER THAN A FEW ISSUES!

to send Captain Mar-Vell, their greatest warrior. To find out, he dispatches the Super Skrull. Meanwhile, back on Earth, Mar-Vell discovers that his carry-all container has been stolen (by the hotel clerk, but he doesn't know that). The catch is, it's booby trapped with a “miniature nuclear bomb!” (The Kree never do things by half it seems!) Things are made more complicated when the night clerk with the case is intercepted by the Super Skrull, who seizes the case and begins trying to open it. But then, it's Cap to the rescue and that's when Colan and Colletta really go to town! The desperate situation aside, things were really looking up for *Captain Marvel*. Could Thomas keep it up? Find out next ish!

TAKING HIS CUE FROM EDITOR STAN LEE, WHO BEGAN USING QUOTES FROM THE BIBLE OR SHAKESPEARE AS STORY TITLES, ROY THOMAS DID HIM ONE BETTER, JUMPING INTO THE NAME GAME WITH BOTH FEET. FREQUENTLY RESORTING TO LITERARY SOURCES FOR HIS STORY TITLES, AS WAS FITTING FOR A FORMER ENGLISH TEACHER, THOMAS ALSO DIPPED FREQUENTLY INTO POP CULTURE FOR INSPIRATION INCLUDING "ON A CLEAR DAY, YOU CAN SEE FOREVER," THE TITLE OF AN OFF BROADWAY MUSICAL THAT WAS PLAYING AT THE MARK HELLINGER THEATER IN 1966. IT WAS FAMOUSLY TURNED INTO A MOVIE STARRING BARBARA STREISAND IN 1970.

Sub-Mariner #3

"On a Clear Day You Can See... the Leviathan!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

John Buscema may have slipped up with the somewhat dull cover of *Sub-Mariner* #3 (July, 1968), but the penciler didn't disappoint on the inside. There, the Sub-Mariner and Inhuman ally Triton battle their way through a series of menaces provided by the new, juiced-up Plantman (bulked up Buscema style, muscles rippling, and accompanied by an unbelievable array of sci-fi equipment). When they were through with all of that, it was time to tackle the leviathan of the issue's title, a giant seaweed creature, created courtesy of the Plantman. Throughout this breezily scripted tale by Roy

Thomas, Buscema (inked by Frank Giacoia) lays out the story almost entirely in quarter and half-page panels that keep the action rolling along at a furious clip. Of the six new solo titles created from the demise of *Tales to Astonish*, *Strange Tales*, and *Tales of Suspense*, only four (so far) were truly worthy of most readers' attention and *Sub-Mariner* was surely one of those!

Doctor Strange #170

"To Dream, Perchance to Die!"; Roy Thomas (script); Dan Adkins (pencils/inks)

Editor Stan Lee may have had the cream of the Marvel art stable working on the books that he scripted, artists like Jack Kirby, John Romita, and Gene Colan, but that didn't mean editorial assistant Roy Thomas was stuck with inferior pencilers. Far from it! He had John Buscema with him on *The Avengers* and *Sub-Mariner* and for *Doctor Strange* #170 (July, 1968), he had Dan Adkins! As he did in the character's first solo issue,

Adkins both pencils and inks his own work here, coming up with another dazzling job featuring page after page of eye-grabbing visuals. It was only to be regretted that he'd be demoted to inker next issue over pencils provided by newcomer Tom Palmer. After which, Adkins would more or less disappear from the scene as Gene Colan became the penciler on *Doctor Strange* with Palmer pushed back to inker. But for the time being, fans had a full twenty pages of Adkins artwork to glom on including a double-page spread composed of four vertical panels, some without borders and melding into others the way Colan would eventually do it. Adkins then does Steve Ditko proud with his depiction of the dream dimension that's followed quickly with another double-page spread spotlighting Nightmare astride his black demon mount! All serviced by a neat, compact single issue tale by Thomas with plenty of sorcerous action that yet culminates in the restoration of a loss of confidence by Strange. The only detriment to the story is the presence of the Ancient One who, by this time, had become a drag on the feature. Luckily, however, Thomas would keep him mostly in the deep background as the series progressed into some of the best and wildest stories ever told about the good doctor!

Daredevil #54

"Call Him...Fear!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); George Klein (inks)

In an offbeat opening, *Daredevil* #54 (July, 1969) begins with the news that Matt Murdock has been killed in a plane crash! Could it have something to do with DD's decision at the end of the last issue that his alter ego must cease to exist? Answer: it does. So our tale dutifully begins with a grieving Karen Page and a sombre Foggy Nelson. In the meantime, a still very much alive Matt Murdock, in the guise of Daredevil, drops in on Karen to try and retrieve his lost billy club (that looks like an ordinary walking stick, natch). But Karen has other ideas, deciding to keep it as a memento of the man she loved. In a Spider-Man like circumstance, DD is forced to use a common rope to swing around town until he can slip into Karen's apartment and swipe his cane back. "Sure, it's easy," thinks DD as he breaks into Karen's home. "If you're a callous bum with a steel pump for a heart." Then comes the handy flashback as DD recalls how he fixed his own death. Hiring a plane, impersonating a pilot, and packing in a dummy dressed in Matt's clothes, he took off from an airfield and then jumped from the plane after fixing it so that it blew up behind him. After denying



bad guy Starr Saxon the threat of revealing his secret ID, Daredevil turns the town upside-down looking for him with no luck. Then, out of the blue, old arch enemy Mr. Fear challenges him to a fight. DD accepts and they tangle, until Daredevil is struck by unaccountable fear and loses. All very intriguing with more evidence of how smoothly scripter Roy Thomas could step into Stan Lee's shoes and take over without missing a beat. In addition, Gene Colan's art is top-notch with inker George Klein suddenly coming alive. Compared to his weaker effort in issue #53, his work here is more compatible with Colan's style. Lots of shadows and deep blacks and a full page action shot of DD vs. Mr Fear on page 16 is almost worth the price of admission! Yesiree bob, it looked as if *Daredevil* was going to lose none of its vitality with the transition from long time writer Lee to newbie Roy Thomas!

Captain Marvel #3

“From the Ashes of Defeat!”; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Captain Marvel #3 (July, 1968) was another solid effort by scripter Roy Thomas as he continued to bring the book from outlier status into the regular Marvel groove. It was kicked off by another stunning cover by artist Gene Colan and inker Vince Colletta, made all the more eye-catching by its mostly green tint. At the time, editor Stan Lee liked the use of single color covers now and then and by using them sparingly, managed to heighten the dramatic impact of certain key books. For instance, the return of Magneto for the all red cover of *X-Men* #17, the introduction of the Vision for *Avengers* #57, or Spidey quitting in *Spider-Man* #50. It was a device only Marvel seemed to dare to use. Anyway, it worked here, and how! With its yellow highlights and gradations in the green coloration, this book must have stuck out on the newsstand like a beacon to unsuspecting comics fans. Inside, continuing from the previous ish, our hero is captured by the Super Skrull. Then he escapes with the aid of a couple beautiful half-page panels by Colan and Colletta (who uses some stipple effect...or is it zip-a-tone...as background in one of them) and reaches the safety of the Kree mother ship in orbit above Earth. There, Cap plunged directly into Col. Yon-Rogg's ongoing machinations over the affections of medic Una. Going over Yon-Rogg's head to the Kree imperial minister, Mar-Vell receives permission to return to Earth to try and prevent his stolen carryall case from blowing up in a nuclear explosion. Throughout the ish, Colan's work is more assured, likely because by this time he dropped one of the three books he was doing the month before. The casualty was *Iron Man* but Colan wouldn't have much time to catch his breath as he'd soon pick up the art chores on *Doctor Strange* instead. Picking up whatever slack there might be, Colletta makes Colan look good, proving why he was a fan favorite at this time.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #2

“So Shall Ye Reap Death!”; Jim Steranko (script/pencils/colors); Frank Giacoia (inks)

While not quite as stunning as the title's debut issue, *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #2 (July, 1968) was still another triumph for scripter/penciler Jim Steranko, who also colored the book. Storywise, Steranko covers a lot of ground here while using the Biblical story of Noah's ark as its metaphoric framework. Seems Nobel laureate Noah Black (calling himself Centurion), whose evolutionary theories had been spurned by the scientific community, has sequestered himself on an uncharted island where he's been conducting experiments—the results of which appear as both monsters and revived prehistoric, creatures many of whom he's been storing into his Automated Rebirth Colonizer or ARC for short (get it?). Capturing Nick Fury (and Jimmy Woo, now an official agent of SHIELD), Black explains his plan to preserve his creations on the ARC while he destroys all life on Earth in a forty-day radiation bath, after which his creations will be used to repopulate the planet. Fury objects and with the help of a movie crew filming on the island, stops Centurion, ending his dream and his life in the process. While Steranko's usual special effects were absent this issue, his art, layouts, and over-rendered, super detailed set pieces are jaw dropping. Add to that the groundbreaking precedent of having the story's supervillain be a Black man (of which nothing special is made) and readers had another winner on their hands! **Fun Fact:** Steranko ran into trouble with the Comics Code



THE BIBLE PROVIDED AN ENDLESS SOURCE OF INSPIRATION FOR MARVEL COMICS NOT ONLY FOR STORY TITLES, BUT STORY THEMES AS WELL. THE STORY OF NOAH'S ARK FOR INSTANCE, FORMED THE BASIS FOR STERANKO'S MODERN TAKE AS A MAD SCIENTIST INTENDS TO GATHER HIS GENETICALLY ENGINEERED BROOD ON AN ARC OF HIS OWN AFTER WHICH, HE PLANS TO DESTROY ALL LIFE ON EARTH ALLOWING HIS CREATIONS TO REPLACE IT. HOO BOY!

Authority for his work on page 5, wherein Fury entertains fellow agent, the Contessa Valentina in his upscale digs. There, in a wordless sequence, the artist suggests in the most subtle way that the two might have had conjugal relations: a phonograph playing, a smoking cigar left in an ashtray, and a phone with its receiver left off the hook. It was this last item that the Code reviewers found too suggestive. Instead, the final panel was redrawn by John Romita (at the behest of assistant editor Roy Thomas) to show Fury's



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NICK FURY, AGENT OF S.H.I.E.L.D. #2, PAGE 5: APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE...NOT! WHEN A TELEPHONE RECEIVER LEFT OFF ITS CRADLE SEEMED TOO SUGGESTIVE FOR THE GOOD FOLKS AT THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY. IT WAS REPLACED. A FINAL PANEL SHOWING THE COUPLE IN AN EMBRACE WAS ALSO CHANGED. THIS TIME TO A HOLSTERED GUN. IF ANYTHING, THE RESULTING SYMBOLISM WAS EVEN MORE POTENT. FREUD WOULD HAVE APPROVED.

holstered gun which, if anything was even *more* suggestive than the phone, something that was apparently lost on the Code reviewers!

Amazing Spider-Man #62

"Make Way For...Medusa!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)

What was it with the Inhumans, all of a sudden? No sooner does their backup series in *Mighty Thor* conclude than family members

begin guest-starring everywhere. Or, at least, here and there. First. Triton shows up for a two-part story in early issues of Sub-Mariner's new solo title, and now Medusa crosses over into *Amazing Spider-Man* #62 (July 1968), announcing her appearance with an eye-grabbing

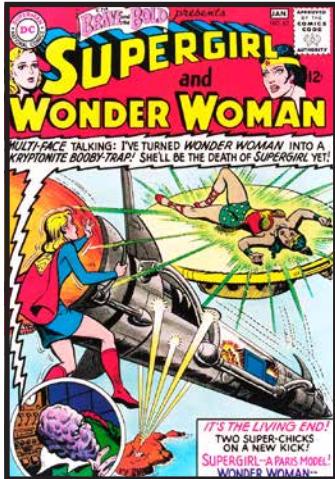
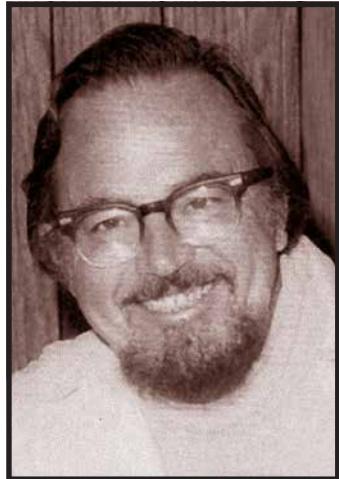
cover image by penciler John Romita. Against a stark white background, Medusa towers dominantly over a prostrate Spider-Man entangled in her crimson tresses. Nothing against Inhumans originator Jack Kirby, who always did a good job depicting Medusa, but former romance artist Romita *really* takes the character to the next level. On the cover, and throughout the issue, he portrays her as a seven-foot tall Amazonian figure in a skin-tight outfit that leaves almost nothing to the imagination. Rarely has any superheroine appeared as sexy as Medusa does here. Don't believe it? Then just take a gander at page 7, panel 1, wherein Romita depicts Medusa in a three quarter mid-size closeup. The body language he gives her, her facial expression, and her tidal wave of cascading hair exudes Emma Peel levels of sultriness! No wonder Heavenly Hair Spray president Montgomery G. Bliss instantly recognized her as his perfect "Breck girl!" Add to all this wonderment the fact that the art team of Romita on layouts, Don Heck on

finishes, and Mike Esposito on inks was finally working as a well-oiled machine and you've got an instant classic on your hands. In fact, scripter Stan Lee, taking a breather between multi-part story-lines, made this a stand-alone tale that more effectively spotlighted its female guest star. If Romita had had the time, he could've made a Medusa solo book a hit. But alas, it was not to be. However, there was to be a Medusa solo adventure, this very month in fact, in the latest issue of *Marvel Superheroes*. In that tale, Medusa was rendered by Marvel's other resident former romance artist, Gene Colan. Unfortunately, even with that talent at the helm, failed to catch on and Medusa was relegated back to the Inhumans group to return only as a supporting cast member when that team finally received its own feature in *Amazing Adventures* some months down the road. Sigh.

Spectacular Spider-Man #1

"Lo, This Monster!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Jim Mooney (finishes/inks)

With a new distribution deal that had allowed its line of split books to morph into six new solo titles, Marvel was feeling its oats in 1968. Possibilities abounded for the burgeoning and popular line of superhero books. One of those possibilities came to pass quickly with a radical departure from the regular color line of comics. To be called *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #1 (July 1968), this 52-page black and white magazine would take a more mature approach to story telling than the



UNLIKE HIS DC COLLEAGUE, GEORGE KLEIN, JIM MOONEY'S WORK AT MARVEL, MOSTLY FINISHING JOHN ROMITA'S LAYOUTS ON THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, ENDED UP LESS THAN SATISFACTORY. AT DC, HIS MAIN FEATURE WAS PENCILING THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERGIRL WHERE HIS SIMPLE, SOMETIMES CARTOONY STYLE WAS APPROPRIATE TO A FEATURE AIMED PRIMARILY AT YOUNG GIRLS. BUT ON MORE DRAMATIC FEATURES HIS STYLE OFTEN CLASHED AND MADE THE WORK OF SUCH PENCILERS AS ROMITA AND JOHN BUSCEMA LOOK WATERED DOWN.

regular comics and with a price point of 35 cents, was expected to be displayed among such titles as *Newsweek* or *Vogue* rather than on a comics spinner rack. Penciled by regular *Spider-Man* artist John Romita, it would be inked by DC alumnus Jim Mooney (who was destined to become the steady inker on the regular *Spider-Man* comic). Scripted by Stan Lee, the focus of the first issue's story, although still with its portion of superheroic action to be sure, was on politics as Peter Parker and his friends join in the campaign to elect Richard Raleigh as the city's new mayor. But Raleigh's law and order campaign is attacked by a giant calling himself the Man-Monster who, in turn, is taking orders from the masked Disruptor. The ending is somewhat predictable and the art murky due to the printing process. Adding to the story's visual unattractiveness, are Mooney's inks that wash out Romita's sharp images and make them almost boring to look at; a far cry from the quality work the artist was then doing with Don Heck and Mike Esposito on the regular color title. The book also featured a 10-page backup that filled in new readers on Spider-Man's origin. Drawn by Larry Leiber it was not an improvement over the art on the main story. Nevertheless, this first issue was deemed successful enough to warrant a followup which was upgraded to include color. It wasn't enough to save the project, though. Publisher Martin Goodman, always nervous about upsetting the people in the Comics Code office by seeming to get around their rules via the black and white magazine route, pulled the plug on the *Spectacular Spider-Man*. That wasn't the last to be heard of the title, though. This issue's story about Richard Raleigh was recycled in 1973 and reprinted as a three-part story in the *Amazing Spider-Man* #116-118. For those issues, Romita and scripter Gerry Conway created some new scenes to keep the reprinted material within then-current continuity. Unfortunately, the effort didn't help much. The story was still on the uninteresting side and the old art still murky.

Avengers #54

"...and Deliver Us From...the Masters of Evil!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

Wowee! Now we enter the Golden Age of the Avengers as scripter Roy Thomas reaches the height of his handling of the characters, the action, the flow of stories from one issue to the next, and the all-important dialogue. Now captions grew smaller and their content more terse as dialogue took precedence, moving stories along at a breakneck pace. In tandem with Thomas was artist John Buscema, also now at the peak of his powers as panels grew bigger, figures sprawled across the picture plane (check out this issue's page 4, panel 3, with its three quarter-page portrait of the new Masters of Evil—who don't just stand around but are captured charging toward the reader), and body language was all agony and ecstasy. And yes, George Tuska was still on the inks but, gosh!

Was he actually getting the hang of Buscema's art? Yes, he was! (Well, for the most part; there were still embarrassing slips such as his inking of Goliath's head on page 19, panel 2...yech!) Anyway, all the above finally came to an amazing head in *Avengers* #54 (July, 1968) as Thomas launched into a series of stories that would result in a number of epochal events for the title, including the re-introduction front and center of the new Black Knight and the twin introductions of the Vision and ultimate Avengers villain, Ultron! Although that's not quite clear at the conclusion of this issue's story as the Crimson Cowl is revealed to be only a robot resembling Ultron and the real villain being none other than Avengers butler Jarvis! Did

Thomas intend on this revelation being a red herring, or did he change his mind between this ish and future issues? For the moment, it didn't matter with a story filled with twists and turns and starring a bevy of yesteryear's colorful super-villains—including Klaw, Whirlwind, Melter, and Radioactive Man! With all those characters plus those of the Avengers themselves, this ish was also a veritable playground for colorist Stan Goldberg, who really went to town here topping off a near perfect issue of *The Avengers*.

Avengers #55

"Mayhem Over Manhattan!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Klein (inks)

The spectacularity continues in *Avengers* #55 (Aug. 1968) as penciler John Buscema belies his oft-claimed position that he hated having to draw superheroes. In fact, with his work here, he demonstrates that he was truly among the very best superhero artists of all time. No one this side of Jack Kirby could have choreographed so many heroes

fighting so many villains across so many pages as well as Buscema. Here, in page after page of action, Buscema gives each hero his turn in the spotlight, aided and abetted by two of the top pros in the business: Stan Goldberg on the coloring and George Klein on the inks. Goldberg, of course, had been the



AVENGERS #55, PAGE 14: PENCILER JOHN BUSCEMA AND INKER GEORGE KLEIN LET IT LOOSE ON THIS ACTION PACKED PAGE AS OUR HEROES MIX IT UP WITH THE NEW MASTERS OF EVIL! HERE, KLEIN'S INKS PERFECTLY CONFORM TO BUSCEMA'S PENCILS GIVING THEM A RICH, TONAL QUALITY THAT WOULDN'T BE MATCHED UNTIL TOM PALMER ARRIVED ON THE SCENE IN LATER ISSUES. IN THE MEANTIME, WRITER ROY THOMAS, LIKE STAN LEE, HAS LEARNED TO SLIM DOWN HIS SCRIPTING SO THAT THIS PAGE IS ALMOST COMPLETELY DEVOID OF CAPTIONS AND IS CARRIED ALONG PURELY ON THE STRENGTH OF ITS DIALOGUE.

mainstay colorist at Marvel almost from the beginning and here he goes to town with an assemblage of characters that really tested the palette of his color wheel. As for Klein, he'd been working in the industry since the 1940s and except for a brief stint where many believe he inked Kirby on *Fantastic Four* #1, spent most of his time before now doing inks for DC's *Superman* titles. After a shakeup at DC in 1968, Klein was cut loose, allowing him to come to Marvel on a permanent basis—and it was lucky for fans that he did! Pencilers at DC had never given him much to work with or the opportunity to shine, but once at Marvel and inking over the likes of Buscema and Gene Colan, his skill as an inker became immediately apparent to anyone paying attention. His initial work here over Buscema was a revelation when compared to the often inept inking of George Tuska in the last few issues. Right off, the opening splash page is a spectacular shot of the villains' air cruiser as it seems to fly right off the panel. This was smack in the middle of Buscema's most fecund and inventive period and Klein makes the artist's work even more arresting here with use of a zipatone background and a rich, slick ink line over the ship. Subsequent pages are an amazing assortment of super detailed machinery, panels that combine cross-hatching and zipatone to create more depth of space, and up-close emotional facial expressions as only Buscema could render them. All that, plus that Goldberg coloring, as well as a corker of a tale by Roy Thomas, where the Avengers are rescued by the new Black Knight, Jarvis explains the reasons for his betraying them, and the robot he unveiled last issue turns out to be the real villain—Ultron-5! What's more, Thomas makes sure to keep reader interest at a boil by having Ultron escape with no explanation of his motives. Everything this issue just came together perfectly with the end product being one of the most successful comic magazines ever produced. And what's more, there would be many more over the next few years with this Thomas/Buscema/Klein team staying together for a satisfying string of instant classics!

Marvel Superheroes #15

"Let the Silence Shatter!"; Archie Goodwin (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Having been transformed into a semi-original material platform for trying out new concepts and characters, *Marvel Superheroes* #15 (July 1968) took a step up in quality over the previous issue, although it still fell short of issues #12-13 that introduced Captain Marvel. However, like those issues, #15 at least featured the art of Gene Colan (inked by Vince Colletta, who was due to provide some incredible work over Colan on the artist's regular *Daredevil* title). But unlike the Captain Marvel and Spider-Man efforts of previous numbers, this issue's tale spotlighting Medusa of the Inhumans (who was also being pushed in this month's regular *Amazing Spider-Man*) was scripted by Archie Goodwin rather than Stan Lee (or Roy Thomas). But then, Goodwin had been doing



THE BEATLES WERE STILL A MAJOR FORCE ON THE POP MUSIC SCENE IN 1968 PROVEN BY THE RELEASE IN JANUARY OF THEIR MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR ALBUM. NATURALLY, IT IMMEDIATELY SHOT TO BILLBOARD'S NUMBER ONE SPOT AND STAYED THERE FOR EIGHT WEEKS. LATER THAT SUMMER, THE GROUP'S YELLOW SUBMARINE ANIMATED FILM IS RELEASED TO POSITIVE REVIEWS AND THE SINGLE, HEY JUDE FOLLOWED IN AUGUST.

a decent job aping Lee's scripting style over on the Iron Man feature so his taking over here was unsurprising. Unfortunately, the story itself is rather slight with Medusa rejoining her Frightful Four partners in return for the Wizard's help in curing Black Bolt's inability to speak. When she learns that she was lied to, she turns on her teammates, and sends them into space with a deus ex machina ending involving a last minute rescue by Black Bolt who'd been hanging around observing the whole time. As for Colan's art, its somewhat half-hearted and layouts suggested a rush job. Colan, after all, was busy with *Daredevil* and *Captain Marvel* (who'd since been promoted to his own book) and gearing up for taking over on *Dr. Strange*. Another contrast was the coloring of Medusa's ensemble here compared with what she was given to wear by John Romita over in the aforementioned *Spider-Man* title. No contest! The blue and white combo here didn't hold a candle to the sleek, green and black outfit she sported for her appearance in *Amazing*. The Medusa entry however, still looked a lot better than the various reprints from the 1940s and 50s that fill out the rest of this 25 cent, extra-sized book.

Sub-Mariner #4

"Who Strikes For Atlantis?"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Artist John Buscema was at the very peak of his craft when he penciled *Sub-Mariner* #4 (Aug. 1968), an achievement that was all the more amazing when one considers that he was also pencilning *The Avengers* and

The *Silver Surfer* at the same time! And in each case, his layout style was at its most inventive, lavish, and (dare we say it?) grandiose! Take this issue's climactic battle with the villainous Attuma as Buscema lays out the story almost completely in big quarter and half-page sized panels. Even while there were signs that fellow artist Jack Kirby's own pace setting style had begun to wane, the rise of Buscema in these months would set the stage for his eventual

assumption of Kirby's mantle as lead Marvel artist. Buscema, who seemed to be everywhere in the following decade, would take over as regular artist on former Kirby titles such as *Thor* and the *Fantastic Four*, become synonymous with sword and sorcery, put out numerous artistic brush fires doing fill-ins, help to launch new titles, and embark on special projects. But perhaps it was because of that ubiquitousness that he'd be forced to put aside the elaborate layouts on display this issue for the more utilitarian, but less exciting five and six panel grid format

of later years. For now, however, readers could exult in Buscema's sprawling figure work, his expressive close-ups, and bludgeoning action. Not coincidentally, scripter Roy Thomas was also approaching his peak at this time. Having shed his initial verbosity, his style was now sleeker and to the point, one that would continue to sharpen climaxing with his later work on the *Conan the Barbarian* feature. Meanwhile, he provides another fine effort here in high fantasy mode as homeless Atlanteans (including supporting players Lady Dorma, Lord Seth, and counselor Vashti) pine after the missing Namor. Our hero, however, has been captured by Attuma's savage hordes and led to believe that his beloved Dorma is dead. Stay tuned!

Doctor Strange #171

"In the Shadow of...Death!";
Roy Thomas (script); Tom Palmer
(pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

In an important transition issue, *Doctor Strange* #171 (Aug. 1968), fans were shaken to learn that artist Dan Adkins had been relieved of the book's penciling duties and replaced by a newcomer named Tom Palmer. Behind the scenes, Adkins' downgrade from penciler to inker



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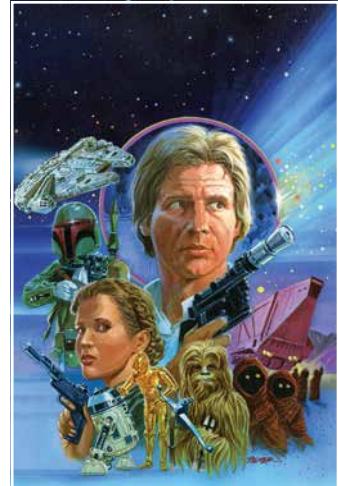
SUB-MARINER #4, PAGE 7: SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS ACCENTUATES THE FANTASY APPROACH TO THE SUB-MARINER FEATURE WITH THIS SCENE INVOLVING THE EXODUS AND QUEST FOR A NEW HOME BY THE POPULATION OF ATLANTIS. IN THE MEANTIME, ARTIST JOHN BUSCEMA PRESENTS THE DRAMATIC GOINGS ON IN A HANDFUL OF GIANT SIZED PANELS FILLED WITH INDIVIDUALIZED CHARACTERS WHILE SPOTLIGHTING WHAT HE DOES BEST: PORTRAYING BEAUTIFUL, EXOTIC WOMEN.

Tom Palmer

One of the top embellishers in comics history, whose brush often turned anything it touched into gold, Tom Palmer never intended to be an inker, he expected to be a penciler.

In fact, his first professional assignment was for *Dr. Strange* #171 for which he did an adequate job...but not good enough. When the next issue rolled around, he'd been replaced by Gene Colan...who needed an inker. He was asked to do that instead of the pencils. Palmer agreed, and the rest was history! His inking over Colan's often difficult to handle pencils, was a revelation. Colan's work flowed and ebbed among shadows and light and on *Dr. Strange*, he also altered his layout style to make the strip one of the most inventive, and hallucinogenic in the field. In short, it was no mean trick to get Colan right and Palmer managed to do it first time out and with virtually no experience in inking at all.

Whatever it was between them, the penciler and inker clicked and in subsequent years would produce some of the most memorable images in the history of comics. But Palmer didn't stop there. He went on to provide the same magic over John Buscema's *Avengers* and Neal Adams' *X-Men*. But along with the top tier, classic titles and artists, there was a lot of dross that someone of Palmer's calibre should not have wasted his talents on (he inked innumerable issues of *Star Wars* for instance) but when he did, he invariably made whoever he worked over look so much better.



across the Marvel line was due to a controversy in fan circles that accused him of plagiarizing the work of other artists, a practice called "swiping." Adkins had picked up the habit from working under the tutelage of Wally Wood and perhaps had been *too* vigorous in its use once he went solo for Marvel. To be sure, his own undoubtedly superior style was far more than good enough under any other circumstances, but some of the swipes were just too blatant for Marvel editorial to ignore. And so, to reduce the company's exposure to embarrassment, Adkins was removed from penciling duties and relegated to inking only. He was replaced on the pencils by Tom Palmer who, in his own words, had simply walked in the door at Marvel one day looking for work. He was immediately assigned this issue of *Dr. Strange* and though his work here is okay, it wasn't going to set the world on fire. Something the artist himself has admitted. His figure work is stiff and layouts artificial with little warmth despite helpful inks by Adkins. Although the work showed some promise, Palmer was not to get an immediate chance to prove himself; or at least, not here. By the time the next issue rolled around, he was replaced by Gene Colan and became its inker instead. It was a gamble both on Marvel and Palmer's part as Palmer had never inked before. But what emerged would be pure magic, instantly making the team of Colan and Palmer one to be reckoned with. In the

meantime, the story this ish by Roy Thomas merely sets the stage, promising more than it delivered. Thomas has said that he never cared for the Strange feature and that shows in this early, clunky effort. But he soon warmed up to it. In the meantime, Thomas gets off on the wrong foot by bringing back Victoria Bentley before immediately removing her from the action. There was an opportunity to do more with Victoria, who'd proven herself to be a more interesting potential romantic interest for Strange than the other-dimensional Clea, but Thomas would eventually opt for the latter over the former. Too bad. Meanwhile, this issue's story is merely a set-up for next issue's showdown with a revived Dormammu.

Doctor Strange #172

"I...Dormammu!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

Like the Roy Thomas/John Buscema/George Klein creative team that was making *The Avengers* the example of the perfect comic book, so too would the Thomas/Gene Colan/Tom Palmer team on *Dr. Strange*. And one needed no more proof than to look through *Dr. Strange* #172 (Sept. 1968)! Palmer had come aboard ostensibly as penciler in the previous issue, but was quickly replaced

by Colan. By his own admission, Palmer has claimed he knew nothing about the craft of inking but if that was true, readers couldn't tell by the stunning job he does here, turning Colan's pencils into something to behold! It starts right off with the issue's opening splash page and continues on and on with each of the story's twenty pages its own little revelation. And dare we say it? Sure! Why not? Even with this first issue, Colan proved himself an even better delineator of the strange worlds of Dr. Strange than their originator, Steve Ditko. That was saying some. At the very least, despite a noble stand by Dan Adkins, Colan was the first artist to truly capture the awe and wonder inherent since the aforementioned Ditko who left the feature years before. But now, under Colan and Palmer, the alien dimensions traversed

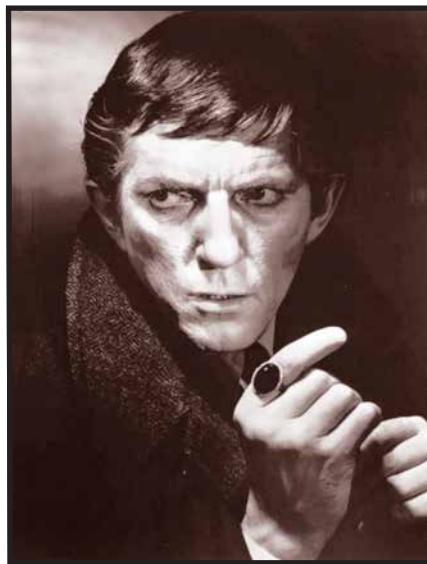
by Strange had real substance and their denizens three dimensionality. Who knows where Colan had dredged up his inspiration for his work on *Dr. Strange*, because for sure, there was no real hint of it anywhere in his previous work. For sure, his style had been evolving but no one saw this coming; maybe not even the artist himself! But art for art's sake would never equal a great, never mind a perfect comic book. For that one needs a good story and scripter Roy Thomas really came through this time. After a shaky start in the previous issue, he really showed a solid grasp, explaining how Dormammu survived his previous encounter with Eternity and his plan to invade Earth's dimension with an army of demons. And then, taking it from the cosmic to the personal, Thomas doesn't forget to toss in some soap opera as Strange shows affection for the alien Clea, even as Victoria Bentley suffers in silence from a broken heart. Yes, sir. With this creative team in place, the *Dr. Strange* book was due to rank among the top successes of the six new titles created from Marvel's former split book titles.

Captain Marvel #4

“The Alien and the Amphibian!”; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Behind another attention grabbing-cover by artist Gene Colan for *Captain Marvel* #4 (August, 1968) there lurks perhaps the best issue yet where everyone concerned, scripter Roy Thomas, penciler Colan, and inker Vince Colletta, firing on all burners, give readers a slam-bang actioner where every page, (nay!) every panel holds delights both visionary and literary. Unfortunately it would also spell the climax of the team's run on the book as all would be gone by next issue. And though veteran artist Don Heck would hold his end up, DC veteran writer Arnold Drake would not be able to control the elements

IN THE LATE SIXTIES, THE VENERABLE AFTERNOON TRADITION OF THE SOAP OPERA WAS STILL RUNNING STRONG ON TELEVISION WITH SUCH STANDARDS AS *DAYS OF OUR LIVES* AND *AS THE WORLD TURNS*. THE ONE THAT MADE THE BIGGEST SPLASH HOWEVER, WAS THE GROUNDBREAKING *DARK SHADOWS* (1966-1971) WITH ITS GOTHIC ATMOSPHERE AND, YES, MONSTERS! MORE TO THE POINT, THE SOAP OPERATIC TRICK OF STORY ARCS THAT NEVER REALLY RESOLVED THEMSELVES AND KEPT PEOPLE WATCHING BECAME THE KEY TO THE POPULARIZATION OF MARVEL COMICS IN THE SILVER AGE. HEROES WITH PROBLEMS THAT CONSTANTLY MORPHED INTO OTHERS. MORE THAN THE LATEST HERO/VILLAIN BATTLE, HELD READERS' ATTENTION.



inserted by Thomas. They would get away from him and eventually spin out of control until *Captain Marvel* would simply run out of gas., which was too bad, as Thomas had given it such strong impetus. By all rights, the series should have been another win for Marvel but its momentum couldn't be maintained. Eventually, Thomas did return, taking drastic measures to save the series but it would be too little too late. In the meantime, though all unknowing at the time, readers had this great ish to enjoy as Captain Marvel goes toe to fin with the Sub-Mariner (everyone in the Marvel universe eventually tangled with Subby so Cap might as well have got it out of the way). The story is filled with one

wonderful illo after another by Colan and Colletta that hit readers where they lived, beginning right at the start with a quiet but beautifully rendered opening splash showing Cap sitting in his hotel room mulling over the contradictions of his role on Earth—both as a spy for the Kree and as a hero to Terrans. That crisis of conscience is tested later as he's ordered by his superior to let a sunken missile filled with deadly bacteria proceed as an experiment to see how the population of New York conducts itself after it's released. In accordance with his orders, Cap confronts the Sub-Mariner who's entered the restricted area. What follows are an incredible series of action panels topped by a full-page splash of Cap socking Subby. The story ends with Cap again seeming the hero for stopping the Sub-Mariner, as well as obeying orders as an obedient Kree in at least appearing to have tried to prevent Subby from interfering with the release of the bacteria. An interesting set-up in conflicting loyalties, right? Well, succeeding issues would mostly miss that angle as Drake would try to get cosmic without really pulling it off. This ish kind of marked the end of the title's grandiose heritage and its entrance into the twilight years proper. It would have its ups and downs, mostly downs, before cancellation further down the road with a strange and unexpected epilogue in the form of Marvel's first graphic novel.

Daredevil #43

"In Combat With Captain America!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

With *Daredevil* #43 (Aug. 1968), scripter Stan Lee took a break between the introduction of the Jester last issue and the continuance of his epic return next ish. Not that he forgot about the green-clad former thespian. Here, DD decides to try and hunt the villain down but gets sidetracked when he stops a crook from stealing a batch of radium-based medical supplies. Exposure to the radium effects Daredevil's mind and, while swinging about town, he comes across Captain America giving another of his demonstrations on fighting skill at Madison Square Garden. With the radium clouding his mind and making him more aggressive, DD decides to show Cap how it's really done and attacks him. It was one of Lee's simplest tricks ever to get two heroes to fight but it works long enough for penciler Gene Colan to really show his stuff, providing page after page of action between the two acrobatic heroes. Colan does the same at the beginning of the issue as DD practices in his private gym with page 2's pair of eye-catching half-page sized panels. Those panels are made even more arresting with Vince Colletta's inking that leaves DD spotlighted against a solid black background in the first and coming in to land on a zip-a-toned trampoline in the second. In fact, Colletta's inks over Colan, although seeming suspiciously sparse in places, is wonderful and would only get better as the next few issues featuring the Jester get under way. (In an aside, Jack Kirby returns to DD, spelling Colan on the cover image that features our two heroes in full grandiose mode!) Meanwhile, Lee manages to infuse the action with some soap opera, contriving to keep the Matt Murdock/Karen Page relationship moving forward; this

time with Karen deciding to quit her job with Nelson and Murdock. Karen feels she needs to leave because Matt doesn't want to commit, but Matt feels he can't due to his dangerous life as a superhero. He pushes her away but becomes angst-ridden at his decision. His battle with Cap took his mind off his feelings for a while, but how will he live with them in his down time? **Fun Fact:** Don't miss a quick glimpse of an unnamed Peter Parker taking pix during the fight on page 18, panel 3!

X-Men #47

"The Warlock Wears Three Faces!"; Gary Friedrich/Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes); John Tartaglione (inks)

The series of spotlight issues that had featured Angel and Cyclops in past numbers of the title continues here with *X-Men* #47 (Aug. 1968), starring Iceman and the Beast. However, there was a change at the title's helm: namely Roy Thomas. After guiding the X-Men since issue #21, Thomas was absent from the scripting this issue and replaced by the team of Gary Friedrich and Arnold Drake. It did not bode well for the future. Although Gary Friedrich helped

out here, DC veteran Arnold Drake would soon fly solo beginning with the next issue. Drake had been a mainstay at DC scripting such duds as *Doom Patrol* and *Deadman*. He'd been cognizant enough, however, to recognize the threat Marvel presented to DC but the company's management poo-pooed his warnings. Thus, when the opportunity presented itself, he jumped ship and landed an assignment on Marvel's *Captain Savage* title. He eventually wound up on *The X-Men* which, somewhat ironically, resembled his old *Doom Patrol*. Still, that didn't prevent Drake from having no idea how to script for the X-book in particular or Marvel in general. As would be seen in later issues, his style was inept and his attempts to capture realistic dialogue reflective of the late sixties were embarrassingly off putting. Nevertheless, editor Stan Lee was in need of writers and for the time being, Drake filled the bill. For this ish, with Friedrich's help with scenes involving Iceman and the Beast at the Coffee a Go-Go, Drake managed to keep from going off the deep end. Also of help was the art by Don Heck (who had time only to do the layouts) and Werner Roth on

finishes. With John Tartaglione on inks, the results were presentable but not necessarily memorable. This issue's backup feature detailing the Iceman's powers was scripted solo by Drake and was also forgettable. None of it augured well for a book that had been limping along with one foot in the grave for a long time. (To mix a metaphor.) And though Drake would have his isolated moments, it would take the return of Thomas along with a genuine superstar artist for fans to even hope seeing the book take a turn for the better.



DESPITE SCRIPTING THE DOOM PATROL AT DC, A TITLE WITH SIMILARITIES TO THE X-MEN, ARNOLD DRAKE FOUND IT NEAR IMPOSSIBLE TO TRANSITION FROM THE SILLINESS THAT PREDOMINATED THE PATROL TO THE MORE SERIOUS MARVEL APPROACH. LUCKILY, HE LASTED ONLY A HALF DOZEN ISSUES BEFORE BEING REPLACED BY ROY THOMAS.

Arnold Drake



Marvel's success proved to be a double edged sword after it permitted the company to expand its list of titles in the late 1960s. On the one hand, it allowed editor Stan Lee to give popular characters caught in the double feature bind of such titles as *Tales of Suspense*, to move into their own titles at last plus the creation of whole new ones such as *Not Brand Echh*, *Silver Surfer*, and *Capt. Savage*, but on the other, required him to hire new writers and artists who may not have been as ready for prime time as he and assistant editor Roy Thomas were.

Among the new writers hired in this period were Gary Friedrich and Archie Goodwin who at least had some mastery of the spoken word and varying degrees of creative storytelling. A third, unfortunately, had neither of these qualities. Arnold Drake, though a professional writer of long standing (he wrote the first of what would later be called "graphic novels" as early as 1950 and tried his hand at film writing) most of his experience was with DC comics on titles deliberately aimed at young children. And though at some point, he recognized that Marvel was appealing to older readers with a more sophisticated approach, that realization didn't help him in his own efforts once he moved to Marvel.

For his part, Lee had been hiring away people from DC for some years with great success primarily artists whose work could be more easily assessed. Not so writers. Drake's work on the *X-Men* and *Captain Marvel* featured painful to read pseudo hip dialogue and stories and situations more akin to DC's *Doom Patrol* than Marvel's *Avengers*.



Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #4

"And Now It Begins!"; Roy Thomas (script); Frank Springer (pencils/inks)

Despite Roy Thomas doing the scripting, *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #4 (Sept. 1968) still had to have been a big disappointment to fans of Jim Steranko. With the upgrade from 11 or so pages of story every month when the feature shared half of *Strange Tales* with Dr. Strange to a full 20 pages a month, scripting and penciling (and sometimes coloring) full-length issues of the new *SHIELD* book finally proved to be too much for Steranko. The comic was just too labor intensive, especially if Steranko insisted on continuing to load it up with the special visual FX fans had come to expect from him. By the time this issue rolled around, it had all finally caught up to him and Steranko had to skip an issue to catch a breather from the remorseless deadlines. He'd be back next issue with one of his all time best *SHIELD* yarns, but it would prove to be his final appearance as regular artist. Oh, he'd keep his hand in doing covers for a while (as he did this issue with a cool black and white montage set against a stark white background) and occasional appearances elsewhere in the Marvel lineup,

most notably on *X-Men* and *Captain America* but, for the most part, he would abandon regular monthly comics. Meanwhile, back here, Thomas was tapped to fill in on the writing, opting to use the occasion to retell the origin of how Fury had come to be director of SHIELD. Aiding him, and stepping into Steranko's mile-wide shoes, was artist Frank Springer. It must be said that Springer gave his effort the old college try and wound up creating an issue that, while not up to Steranko's standards, could stand alone as a more than decent attempt that transcended the typical comics presentation style. Fans could be forgiven for not seeing it coming as Springer's past experience working for Dell Comics and then DC gave no real clue to such inventiveness. Here, he employs some radical panel layouts (page 9 with its circular near full page panel topped with a number of smaller panels around its upper edge; page 12's full page montage; page 14's crazy quilt layout) and free use of zippatone that works to visually separate the *SHIELD* book from any other in the Marvel lineup (with the possible exception of *Dr. Strange*). When he eventually received the assignment on a permanent basis after Steranko's departure, fans were likely more ready to accept the change due to Springer's performance here.

Fantastic Four #78

"The Thing No More!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Every once in a while, some member of the Fantastic Four announced that they were going to quit the team. And more often than not, that member was the Thing. It happened again in *Fantastic Four* #78 (Sept. 1968) but this time with a twist. After the latest attempt by Mr. Fantastic to change the Thing back to his human form of Ben Grimm, the process worked. Unfortunately, the evil Wizard chose that moment to attack and, following the battle, Ben realizes that he's now useless to the team. As a result, he asks Mr. Fantastic if he could fix it so that he could transform from his normal form back into the Thing at will, but he's told that the transformation was a one-way ticket. If he turned back into the Thing, it would be permanent. Meanwhile, across town, a pregnant Sue Richards is convalescing at the hospital where doctors have determined that the cosmic rays that gave her the power of invisibility are also threatening her life as well as her unborn baby's. Thus, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby continued the kind of human drama that for years kept readers coming back for more. But where Lee's scripting was still sharp and on point, Kirby's art was getting softer. Following the high point of the previous issues and their sub-atomica story-line, a definite loosening of Kirby's style had set in. Layouts were still masterful as he choreographed the outsized action (the team's battle with the Wizard was still as exciting as ever) but figures seemed to acquire certain tropes that would become repetitive, backgrounds a little too sparse,



BY THE 1960S, DEBATE OVER ABORTION HAD COMBINED WITH A RISING FEMINIST MOVEMENT TO CREATE MOMENTUM FOR ITS LEGALIZATION WHICH EVENTUALLY HAPPENED IN 1973 WITH THE SUPREME COURT'S DECISION IN *ROE VS WADE*. SINCE THEN, AN ESTIMATED 63 MILLION ABORTIONS HAVE BEEN PERFORMED IN THE UNITED STATES. IT WAS A TREND THAT THE LATE 1960S SUB PLOT IN ONGOING ISSUES OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR INVOLVING SUE STORM'S PREGNANCY, SEEMED TO CONTRADICT.

bodies too bulked up. Also, though Joe Sinnott's inks were as slick as ever, he didn't seem to be making enough of an effort to add detail to Kirby's work. Objects and machinery were getting chunkier, squiggles were allowed to remain as substitutes for musculature. On the other hand, Kirby himself was penciling three full-length titles a month including *Captain America* and *Thor* in addition to the *FF*, so some slippage was understandable. The danger was that it might become a habit...

Fantastic Four #79

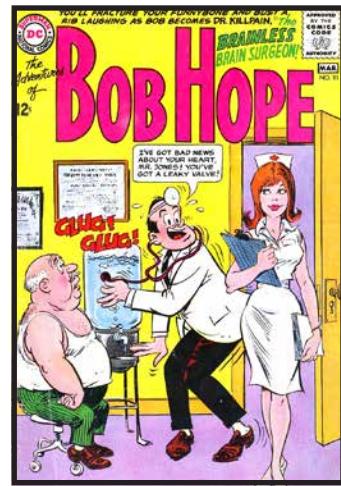
"A Monster Forever?"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

As *Fantastic Four* #79 (Oct. 1968) opens, Ben Grimm is still wrestling with the conundrum of whether he should remain as an ordinary human being or revert back to the Thing...forever. Structured by scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby as a "day in the life" type story, the plot does what Marvel fans had come to expect by now: weave continuity beats in with progress on the soap opera front. This time, the main story hearkens back to the last Mad Thinker arc concluded almost a year before (in real time) wherein police are still going through the Thinker's lab that had been messed up when he and the FF fought. In the process, the police accidentally release a super android who homes in on a signal emitted from the Wizard's wonder gloves currently in Ben's possession (a tie-in to the previous issue). Sure, Lee and Kirby offered a pretty flimsy excuse for why Ben took the gloves with him on a date with Alicia, but they were crucial in turning Ben back into the Thing. Meanwhile, Reed Richards and readers are given more bad news regarding Sue Richards' pregnancy: at the hospital, Reed learns that the cosmic rays that gave Sue her powers are now threatening her life and the life of their unborn baby (in events that lead directly into this year's *FF Annual*). The sequence ends in one of Kirby's patented full-page illos. The only difference this time is that instead of some bombastic action scene, it's a close-up of Mr. and Mrs. Richards that's not only suitable for framing but as wonderful to look at as any other full-pagers Kirby had ever done. "No matter what fate has in store, I'll love her till the end of my days," thinks Reed. "Nothing will ever change that." "All that has happened in our lives before, is just a prologue to the unknown future that lies ahead," thinks Sue with Lee's written dialogue that perfectly matches the facial expressions Kirby rendered for each character. At the moment, their thoughts seemed ominous but no less so than those of the Thing as, in the final panels of the story, he walks off by himself after being transformed: "It's just the way I planned it," he claims unconvincingly to Johnny and Alicia. "Why should I be a nowhere nobody, like plain Ben Grimm, when I can be...the Thing...forever..." It was all emotion and drama of characters that now, after so many years of effort by Lee and Kirby, seemed as real as any living person. And the reason why readers kept coming back for more.

Captain Marvel #5

"The Mark of the Metazoid!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

The switch in scripters from Roy Thomas to Arnold Drake in *Captain Marvel* #5 (Sept. 1968) didn't turn out to be as traumatic as it could have been, as the DC veteran managed to pick up the pieces where Thomas left them last ish. It came as somewhat of a surprise since Drake's career at DC wasn't exactly stellar compared to what Marvel fans were used to. There, the assumption was that comics were read only by pre-teens, an audience that it was believed changed over every few years. Thus, scripting standards there, as everywhere else, were pretty low. Sure, stories were filled with imagination and whimsy, just the sort of things that would capture the attention of the 6 to 11 year-old crowd but not more sophisticated readers, let alone adults. With the need for continuity virtually non-existent and characterization absent (save for a few cliched tropes that were then written in stone), DC's comics, even in the late 1960s, still had a ways to go to catch up with what Marvel was putting out. Thus, on the face of it, not much could be expected from Arnold, who spent much of his time at DC writing books such as *My Greatest Adventure*, *Doom Patrol*, and *Bob Hope* and *Jerry Lewis*. So, if there were any readers at the time who considered such things, it was not with very high expectations that Drake arrived at Marvel (his concurrent scripting on *The X-Men* was unimpressive). The only question here is, how much input did either editor Stan Lee or Thomas himself have in overseeing this initial effort on *Captain Marvel*? For sure, Drake's scripting on the book didn't improve as the series went on. In fact, it declined. Be that as it may, he was at least aided by Marvel veteran Don Heck. Heck, of course, was one of the three founding artists who were there at the beginning of the Marvel age along with Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko. Heck left an indelible stamp on comics such as *Iron Man* and *The Avengers*, garnering a legion of fans along the way. Admittedly, Heck had slowed down some since being relieved of his *Avengers* gig but there was no doubt he still had it, as can be seen here with his use of widescreen panels and dramatic layouts. The fly in the ointment, however, is inker John Tartaglione. Ordinarily a dependable artist, Tartaglione's work over Heck doesn't work as well as it did over Dick Ayers on *Sgt. Fury* or even Gene Colan on *Daredevil*. His style is too literal when Heck's work needed a more sensitive touch, one that he was best able to provide himself. But that was the problem with much of Heck's work at Marvel, he was most often inked by others because Lee wanted the valuable artist to spend more time penciling. Still, Heck did a bang up job on this issue's cover with a big, full figure shot of Cap in the clutches of the Metazoid!



WRITER ARNOLD DRAKE SPENT MUCH OF HIS TIME AT DC SCRIPTING SUCH TITLES AS JERRY LEWIS AND BOB HOPE. NOT EXACTLY THE KIND OF EXPERIENCE THAT WOULD PREPARE HIM FOR MARVEL'S OLDER READERSHIP.

Avengers #56

"Death, Be Not Proud!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Klein (inks)

Scripter Roy Thomas, penciler John Buscema, and inker George Klein continue their lesson plan on "How to produce the perfect comic book" in *Avengers* #56 (Sept. 1968) as the team takes the most colorful group of Avengers yet into the past to observe the events leading up to the death of Bucky, Captain America's World War II partner. To do so, they travel to Dr. Doom's castle in upstate New York and use his time machine to go back to that fateful day in 1945. When they get there, they find they're kept from interfering because they exist only in spirit form. But when the Wasp, who stayed behind to operate the time machine, literally falls asleep at the switch, her teammates become temporarily solid, allowing Cap to sever the bonds that hold his past self in bondage. The move gives the past Cap and Bucky the opportunity to try and stop the V2 from taking off. But in the end, nothing changes: Cap falls into the freezing Atlantic waters to go into suspended animation and Bucky is killed when the rocket explodes. There's small comfort for the present day Cap: now he can be sure that Bucky died in the explosion and didn't somehow survive. It was another solid yarn by Thomas as he continued to handle the group dynamics in flawless fashion. It also featured more peak Buscema artwork that most especially hits the reader between the eyes on the book's opening splash page. There, the Avengers are dwarfed as they stand on a stone bridge beneath the battlements of Doom's castle. It was a dynamic enough image on its own but add to it those gorgeous inks by Klein, combining zipatone skies and crosshatching shadows, and it became simply wow!

Marvel Superheroes #16

"The Phantom Eagle!"; Gary Friedrich (script);
Herb Trimpe (pencils/inks)

Penciler/inker Herb Trimpe, who was also an amateur pilot who loved planes and flight, received his dream assignment in the new Phantom Eagle feature in *Marvel Superheroes* #16 (Sept. 1968). A slight effort created and scripted by Gary Friedrich, one of Marvel's newer writers who had yet to make a permanent impression on fans, the tale is a rather trite one about Karl Kaufman, who decides to stay out of the Great War. Eventually, he decided to join the allies but feared that his parents would suffer reprisal from the German government as a result. But when Germany threatens the USA, he dons the disguise of the Phantom Eagle to take to the skies and stop a planned invasion of the country. He succeeds but at the cost of best friend Rex Griffin and as a result, vows to keep on fighting in his Phantom Eagle identity. Needless to say, if the once super-popular westerns were on the way out by 1968, WWI fighter ace stories were even more unlikely to catch the attention of modern readers. Thus, the Phantom Eagle was virtually never heard of again following his appearance here. Friedrich had approached Trimpe about drawing the story because he knew of the artist's interest in planes. However, though he agreed to draw the feature, Trimpe dismissed it somewhat as a "Hollywoodized" version of real World War I aerial combat. In that regard, he didn't bother trying to keep the Eagle's plane from being historically accurate. Trimpe's art is otherwise stiff but okay which was to be expected as it was his first full pencil job for Marvel. Bottom line, Trimpe's art was nothing to write home about (as would prove to be the case through most of his career) as was the story. Would Marvel ever strike a home run with these tryouts in *Marvel Superheroes*?



WAS THE FILM, THE BLUE MAX (1966) THE "HOLLYWOODIZED" VERSION OF REAL WORLD WAR I AERIAL COMBAT WHAT ARTIST HERB TRIMPE HAD IN MIND WHEN HE DISSED HIS OWN WORK ON MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #16'S PHANTOM EAGLE FEATURE?

Only time would tell because with the exception of Captain Marvel, the rest had so far all been duds.

Avengers Special #2

"...and Time, the Rushing River!"; Roy Thomas (script);
Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes);
Vince Colletta (inks)

Beneath one of the most eye-grabbing comic book covers ever (a John Buscema beauty featuring "the new Avengers vs. the old Avengers" charging toward each other set against a solid black background), *Avengers Special* (1968) featured a Don Heck/Werner Roth collaboration that proved a disappointment for Heck purists. Fans knew what heights Heck was capable of, especially if he both penciled and inked his own work. With a unique style that was difficult for other inkers to capture, it was doubly unfortunate for Heck when he was asked to only do layouts with someone less talented than he left to finish what he started. In this case, it was his frequent collaborator on many past issues of *The X-Men*, Werner Roth, himself not the most glamorous of pencilers. Overall, inking by Vince Colletta no doubt kept the final results from being too disappointing. The restrictions placed on Heck were only to be regretted for a long, exciting tale by Roy Thomas that as its centerpiece had the clash between the aforesaid new Avengers (Goliath and the Wasp, Captain America, Hawkeye, and the Black Panther) vs. the old (or original) Avengers (Giant-Man, Thor, Iron Man, and the Hulk). The 44-page story is divided into two parts: in the first, the current day Avengers make a wrong turn as they travel from the past, following the events in *Avengers* #56 and wind up in an alternate world where the original Avengers, with the aid of a mysterious being called the Scarlet Centurion, have defeated all other heroes and set up a dictatorship with themselves as its enforcers. (This theme would be picked up again in 1985 by scripter Mark Gruenwald for his *Squadron Supreme* maxi-series.) Here, Thomas unfortunately falls back on the old DC plot device of dividing his heroes into teams and sending them on different missions only to reunite afterwards. At least the teamings resulted in some fun confrontations between old and new Avengers (especially Goliath vs. Giant-Man!). Anyway, the long and short of it is that the current Avengers eventually win out and send themselves back to their proper time while exiling the Centurion into the far future. In a denouement explained by the Watcher, readers learn that the Centurion was really Rama Tut (from *Fantastic Four* #19) and by sending him into the future, he becomes their old enemy, Kang the Conqueror! Readers certainly got their 25 cents' worth with this annual. Plus, they also had a bonus feature titled "Avenjerks Assemble" which amounted to the traditional Marvel annual featurette on how the creators create their respective titles. In this case, how Thomas, Heck, and Buscema come up with all

those wonderful Avengers plot lines. Drawn in the *Not Brand Echh* humorous style, it's unusual in that Buscema tackles the art, a type of work he was not noted for. Scripted by Thomas, it pretty much covers its subject with plenty of caricatures of Marvel stalwarts, including editor Stan Lee appearing in the final panel to tell the others they're already late on their deadlines.

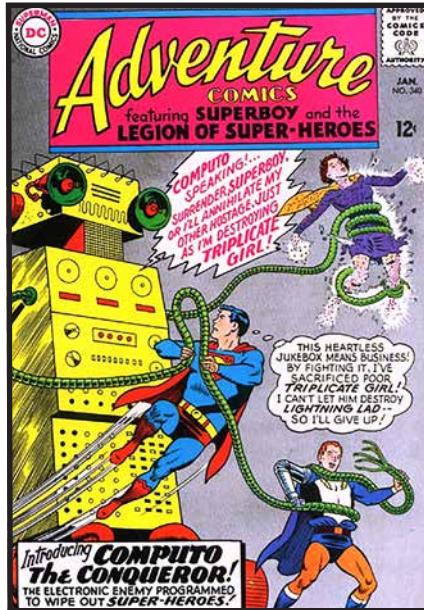
X-Men #48

"Beware Computo, Commander of the Robot Hive!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes); John Verpoorten (inks)

Combined for the past several issues, layout artist Don Heck and finisher Werner Roth did not, for the most part, impress the discerning reader; and overall, they don't do so in *X-Men* #48 (Sept. 1968) either. But for a few pages at the start of this issue, they do manage to generate some heat in the form of an out of costume Marvel Girl. Editor Stan Lee has expressed his admiration for Heck's ability to draw women, calling him one of the best in that regard and Roth, of course, had been a romance artist of long standing at DC before arriving at Marvel. So it's perhaps not too much of a surprise that the two manage to inject some sexiness into Marvel Girl that up to this point had been lacking. As readers turned to this issue's opening splash page, it was left in no doubt what Scott Summers saw in Jean Grey (besides her brains and personality, that is). Still sporting individualized logos, this ish of *The X-Men* featured "Cyclops and Marvel Girl" as the headliners, so we pick up the two as Scott shows up at the studio where Jean has a job as a fashion model. With a judicious economy of line, Heck and Roth hit readers with a full-length shot of Jean sporting a tiger pattern bikini that shows off her figure to best advantage. The following pages are occupied with the rest of the shoot and some on-set shenanigans fit more for a romance comic than a superhero strip. Unfortunately, Jean's shoot is interrupted by the good deal less interesting threat of the moment: "Computo: commander of the robot hive!" It had the kernel of an interesting idea as depicted on this issue's cool cover by Sal Buscema and John Romita (involving a sentient computer growing a hive full of cybernetic robots)

but scripter Arnold Drake failed to take it in the more interesting direction. He could have emulated an idea that Roy Thomas was just then toying with over on *The Avengers* but instead, opts for having Quasimodo, the computer turned humanoid by the Silver Surfer, be the hidden force behind the hive. (And did DC alumnus Drake get the villainous name "Computo" from his former employer's far future *Legion of Superheroes* feature?) But despite the short circuit in originality, the teaming of Cyclops and Marvel Girl proved that the pair were strong enough in personality and interesting enough in their combination of powers not only to star

on their own but to have supported their own feature. Alas, rather than starring them in an issue of *Marvel Superheroes*, the two were soon reunited with their teammates under the old *X-Men* banner. **Fun fact:** A blurb at the conclusion of this issue's main story announced that next time Iceman and the Beast would tackle someone called Metoxo the Lava Man. It never happened. Apparently an editorial decision was made to change course. Instead, the team would be reunited and artist Jim Steranko brought in for issue #50, both perhaps, in another attempt to reignite interest in the book.



THE NAME "COMPUTO." WAS IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFIABLE AS A DC TYPE NAME WITH ITS DISTINCTIVE "O" AT THE END (I THINK STARRO, BIZARRO, ETC) WHEREAS MARVEL'S PENCHANT WAS FOR DRAMATIC SOUNDING LATINIZED NOMENCLATURE WHICH MIGHT HAVE SPELLED IT SOMETHING LIKE "COMPUTUS. (IMAGINE GALACTUS SPELLED "GALACTO!") AND WAS IT ANY COINCIDENCE THAT COMPUTO HAPPENED TO BE THE SAME NAME AS THE GOOFY LOOKING OUT OF CONTROL ROBOT FEATURED IN ADVENTURE COMICS #340 PUBLISHED ONLY A COUPLE YEARS BEFORE X-MEN #48?

Captain Marvel #6

"In the Path of Solam!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Yet another striking Don Heck cover adorns *Captain Marvel* #6 (Oct. 1968), calling to mind those pre-hero giant monsters that Marvel featured so often in its Atlas days. Inside, Heck is still held back by the inks of John Tartaglione with a story still scripted by writer Arnold Drake, who manages to not embarrass himself. But what's with the sound effect sized groans and whines coming from the characters? This would become an annoying tick of Drake's, particularly marring his *X-Men* work, and appears here early on his tenure at Marvel. Take a squint at page 2 where Mar-Vell is in combat with a simulated monster. Sure, there's a perfectly acceptable "crack!"

sound effect for when he blasts the creature with his wrist u-beam but what to make of panels 2 and 5 where the creature or something screams a "Eeyowrrrr" and a "Nnnnnnnngarr"? What was a reader to make of these supposed sounds? The second (which will not be repeated

here!) is even lettered both right-side up and upside down, making it virtually impossible to figure out. After that, it's almost a relief to get to page 3, panel 1 with its simple "whirrrrrr," "beep beeps," "bzzz," and "click." (All used in a single panel!) The readers are given a break for a few pages before Cap's big battle with the Solam creature of the title before again being assaulted by "eyaaaas," "reeeee," "eyahoooos," and "crzzzzs." And those don't even count the usual kwooms, thwaaaks, and booms. By the time readers made it to the end of this one, they were likely begging editor Stan Lee to put his figurative foot down and bring an end to the madness! Otherwise, this issue was an entertaining romp with a few more wrinkles added regarding Mar-Vell's conflict with Col. Yon-Rogg and Carol Danvers' continuing suspicion of Dr. Lawson.

Captain America #105

"Cap Goes Wild!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

After a really strong start to the new Captain America solo feature, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby stumbled a bit with *Captain America* #105 (Oct. 1968). In an eerie projection of the current rise of Chinese influence in Hollywood, the communist country has found a willing accomplice in Cyril Lucas, owner of Infinity Studios, that has already produced a film that compromises Captain America's reputation. Again echoing today's world, the Chinese have stolen SHIELD's LMD technology and built themselves a replica of Cap. Their plan is to send it to Infinity Studios to use in the production of more compromising films. But when the real Cap arrives at the studio to get to the bottom of the falsified filming, he ends up in a fight with the LMD. The trite part of the tale comes in when Willie, Cyril's brother, refuses to cooperate in his brother's treason and in trying to help Cap is killed by the LMD. With the death of his brother, Cyril has a change of heart. But it's too late, his communist masters have arrived to kill him for his failure.

Lee and Kirby had already riffed on this subject before, that is, the rat who balks in the end due to some event that triggers his basic decency or patriotism, but it's still a good theme for a story and to a certain extent, works here again. Again, too, Lee manages to write dialogue that rises above the familiarity of the plot: "No matter what inhuman powers you may possess, no mere human replica can ever have a fighting spirit,"



MAO ZEDONG, OR MAO-TSE-TUNG AS HE WAS KNOWN IN THE SIXTIES, WAS THE HEAD OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY AND ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST MASS MURDERERS. A CULT OF PERSONALITY GREW UP AROUND HIM WHILE THE "LITTLE RED BOOK" CONTAINING HIS THOUGHTS AND APHORISMS BECAME THE BASIS FOR THE 1966 CULTURAL REVOLUTION THAT RESULTED IN ALMOST TWO MILLION DEATHS.

says Cap as he gets his second wind and whales into the LMD. Artwise, Kirby was in peak form, but under the more literal inks of Frank Giacoia rather than those of Joe Sinnott or Syd Shores, the creeping weakness in his work can more easily be observed. The repetitive postures, the increasing use of squiggles and rippling shadows instead of lines that might suggest real musculature and actual shadows, the basic facial features of his characters. Those weaknesses were readily apparent right on the cover itself, one that seemed like a rush job by Kirby standards (which didn't stop Marvel from issuing it as a poster). On the other hand, pages 7-8 are vintage stuff! First we get a close-up on page 7, panel 1, of none other than Chairman Mao as he oversees the creation of the LMD. That's followed by a full page illo crammed with pure indescribable Kirby mechanization! In a bit of understatement, Lee's caption for the panel might be speaking of the reader as well as the Red guards: "... if the baffled guards could peer into the incredible chamber within, it is just barely possible that they would remain as mystified as ever!" All that said, there were still some better days ahead for Kirby as he finished up his last great run on the character he helped to create back in the dark days of World War II.

Amazing Spider-Man #65

"The Impossible Escape!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)

There was a definite step down in the quality of the art for *Amazing Spider-Man* #65 (Oct. 1968). Just when the Romita/Heck/Esposito team had finally got it all together and were producing some of the best looking issues of Spidey since the days when Romita inked himself, they were broken up and DC veteran Jim Mooney brought in to ink John Romita's pencils. And though Romita's pencils were strong enough to survive Mooney's shadowy inks, unfortunately, as the series went on, the artist would apply himself less to the pencils and leave more for Mooney to do with the effect of washing out the whole look of the strip and reducing

its visuals to a near boring lump. Here, though, Romita was still giving the work his full attention so Mooney's inks merely seemed to help in the darkened prison scenes. The story by Stan Lee is a simple but effective one. A fun turn on the old 1930s Hollywood prison movies that harken back to the days of James Cagney and George Raft. Here, Spidey must escape the prison he's been taken



OLD FASHIONED GANGSTERS AND EX-CONS LITTERED THE LANDSCAPE BACK IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. NOT SO MUCH AFTERWARDS BUT EVERY NOW AND THEN, SCRIPTER STAN LEE HEARKENED BACK TO THE OLD DAYS AND SUCH HOLLYWOOD PRISON BREAK FILMS AS *EACH DAWN I DIE* (1939) THAT STARRED THE LIKES OF JAMES CAGNEY AND GEORGE RAFT. FANS COULD STILL CATCH SUCH MOVIES ON TV'S LATE SHOW OR IN LOCAL ART HOUSE THEATERS.

to following his battle with the Vulture while preventing a breakout by the inmates. Not forgotten was the strip's cast of supporting characters with Mary Jane sporting a new 'do that made the character unrecognizable; Gwen relieved to find that Peter had not been killed during the fight between Spidey and the Vulture; J. Jonah Jameson looking for Peter's scalp; and Norman Osborn struggling with memories of being the Green Goblin.

Silver Surfer #2

"When Lands the Saucer!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Silver Surfer #2 (Oct. 1968) is another mammoth 40-page opus by scripter Stan Lee but, despite its greater scope for storytelling, the plot is a familiar one. Familiar to older readers who remembered all those 5-page morality tales from Marvel's pre-hero days (stories, ironically, that were recalled in the form of backup tales that occupied the rear of each issue of the new *Silver Surfer*). Like countless numbers of those old yarns, an alien race comes to Earth bent on conquest only to have some slight hitch in their plans fool them into giving up and leaving. In this case, the Badoon arrive to conquer Earth in their invisible ship, an advantage they lose when they're struck by an Earth missile. Mistakenly believing that their ship has been revealed, the Badoon abandon their plans of conquest. Meanwhile, because the Surfer has been fighting an enemy no one else can

see, he's mistakenly believed to have gone berserk and attacked mankind. It was a classic Lee set-up familiar to any reader of the *Amazing Spider-Man* who, over the years, found himself in the same kinds of Catch-22 situations. And even with the expanded page count, Lee never did supply the Surfer with a regular cast of supporting players, something that robbed it of continuity, drama, and the ability to really hook regular readers. Besides those issues where Lee's moral lessons really hit home, the only saving grace of the *Surfer* was the art by John Buscema who was just reaching the peak of his style at this point in his career. Large, bold panels with sprawling figures and vistas were his hallmark and all were represented here, making this issue of the *Silver Surfer* a must read even with its storytelling drawbacks. And if big, sprawling panel layouts is your bag, then don't miss this issue's backup story by Lee and artist Gene Colan; a retelling of one of those pre-hero fantasy tales of yesteryear!

X-Men #49

"Who Dares Defy...the Demi-Men?"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes); John Tartaglione (inks)

By *X-Men* #49 (Oct. 1968), the feel of the book had taken a very strange turn. As scripted by Arnold Drake, the book had a completely different vibe than it had under either Stan Lee or Roy Thomas, one that further alienated what fans remained. In addition, the art was neither fish nor fowl. Don Heck was one of Marvel's founding fathers with many a classic issue of *Iron Man* and *Avengers* under his belt. And yet, though the rudiments of that old time magic could be sensed here, it was submerged beneath the finishes of Werner Roth, who completed Heck's rough pencils. Add to that, the adequate but nothing special inks of John Tartaglione and you have one strange-feeling issue. More, Drake's tale of yet another nest of baddies (last issue it was a hive of androids) is a veritable army of mutants being gathered by one Mesmero (who's actually working for Magneto). Top it all off with the introduction of the green-tressed Lorna Dane who was destined to be both "daughter" of Magneto and an unenthusiastic girlfriend to Bobby Drake/Iceman, and you have the beginnings of another off-trail X yarn. The main drawback to the story is the concept of there being enough mutants out there to form an army large enough to conquer the world. One of the main points of interest of the X strip was the sense that the X-Men were fighting an underground war against evil mutants. That sense of apartness, of specialness, suggested the fact that mutants were few and far between. That feeling of separateness is wiped out when it appears that there are more mutants in the world than ordinary homo sapiens. Luckily this notion was quietly dropped in future issues after Roy Thomas returned to writing (later in the twilight years, it would be injudiciously revived again by writer Chris Claremont). In retrospect, the best thing about this issue

(other than the fact that Thomas would some day make something of the otherwise non-descript Lorna Dane) was the cover, a preview of hopefully, better things to come: a great symbolic illo of the X-Men running across the face of a Demi-Man by Jim Steranko! The artist had just relinquished his duties on *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*. Could it be that he was preparing to land on the X book? Fans could only dream... Meanwhile, if readers were vaguely disturbed by events happening in the main story, they could always turn back the clock to a more traditional approach with the continuation of the origins of the X-Men: this time featuring the first installment of the origin of the Beast.

Captain Marvel #7

“Die, Town, Die!”; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

A surprise cover by John Romita starts off *Captain Marvel* #7 (Nov. 1968), quickly identified by the way the artist poses the figure of Cap with his left arm reaching out and that signature five-fingered stretch! Inside, penciler Don Heck and inker John Tartaglione deliver another visual delight as Arnold Drake's story continues to further now familiar plot devices such as the Mar-Vell, Una, Yon-Rogg triangle. This time, Yon-Rogg arranges things so that Mar-Vell has to rush to the defense of air base security chief Carol Danvers, thus triggering a jealous response on Una's part. Meanwhile, after being ordered to unleash a deadly germ on a small town, Captain Marvel again manages to make it appear as if he's following orders, but really not. In this case, he looses the germ on an amusement park display of animatronic mannequins all while beating off the attack of Quasimodo, who now seemed to have acquired a power over all machinery. **Fun Fact:** A blurb on the Bullpen Bulletins page informs readers that Marvel was dropping its replies to letters used on all of its books' letters pages because “we thought you yourselves might enjoy answering each other.” Since complete addresses were used with letters, it was assumed readers would write and debate each other on the QT but that would be a lot less satisfying than addressing Marveldom assembled in the form of having the reply printed in a letters page. In any case, the real reason for the change in policy, stated in a parenthetical remark, was that by not replying to letters, the bullpen could save time better devoted to writing the books themselves. Was it the right decision? Well, the policy only lasted a few months when, in response to growing demand, the previous one was restored. Did Stan Lee underestimate the personal touch he had created between Marvel and its fans, a relationship forged from the very beginning by encouraging readers to address their letters to Stan, Jack, Steve, or Don and his chummy, joking replies to their letters? Whatever the case, a lesson was obviously learned. Never again would Marvel fool with its policy of answering letters printed on its letters pages.

Captain Savage and His Leatherneck Raiders #8

“Mission: Foul Ball!”; Gary Friedrich (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Another solid entry in this series as Captain Savage leads his squad of Marine raiders in an operation involving attacking a Japanese military conference to kidnap two high-ranking generals. No problem, right? Not! No sooner than the squad splits up than Savage's unit is captured, throwing responsibility of completing the mission on the others. But there's a fly in the ointment scriptwise in *Captain Savage and His Leatherneck Raiders* #8 (Nov. 1968): led to believe that the mission is the real thing, the Raiders find out it was all just a training exercise to prepare them for the real thing. Only problem with Gary Friedrich's script is that the fights between the Raiders and the Japanese (who are actually Japanese-Americans) and the faux Japanese soldiers toward their Marine captives, is way too vicious. Would a training exercise really call for such extreme realism without the danger of causing actual animosities between the two groups? It all just didn't sit right. That said, though penciler Dick Ayers art is too restricted, too stiff, Syd Shores' inking goes a long way to make it more than palatable. The opening splash page with an intra unit wrestling match alone is worth the price of entry! Even Ayers' penchant for talking heads works with the close-ups of the two battlers in the first pair of panels on page 2 being pretty good. Overall, *Captain Savage* continued to be a welcome companion title to the more venerable *Sgt. Fury* that ought to have made fans of war books more than happy.



AS AN INKER, SYD SHORES WAS REALLY COMING INTO HIS OWN IN THE LATE SIXTIES, ADDING MUCH TO THE WORK OF SUCH PENCILERS AS DICK AYERS WHILE ENHANCING THAT OF GENE COLAN AND JACK KIRBY. WORKING IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY SINCE THE GOLDEN AGE, SHORES WAS STILL GOING STRONG IN THE MARVEL AGE AND WOULD LIKELY HAVE CONTINUED TO DO SO IF NOT FOR HIS UNTIMELY DEATH IN 1973.

Captain America #107

"If the Past Be Not Dead!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Whew! With only three issues remaining in artist Jack Kirby's final run on the title, his work on *Captain America* #107 (Nov. 1968) is returned to full classic mode by the inking of Syd Shores. Where last issue's inks by Frank Giacoia were too literal, Shores' inks here fill out Kirby's loosening pencils with more detail, judicious use of blacks,



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CAPTAIN AMERICA #107, PAGE 1: JUST WHEN PENCILER JACK KIRBY'S WORK HAD STARTED TO SLACKEN, IN STEPPED SYD SHORES TO TIGHTEN IT UP! NO STRANGER TO INKING KIRBY'S CAPTAIN AMERICA (HE PERFORMED THE SAME DUTY WAY BACK IN THE 1940S!) SHORES BOLDLY SPOTS BLACKS AND SOFTENS SOME OF KIRBY'S LESS ATTRACTIVE AFFECTATIONS, TRANSFORMING THESE EARLY ISSUES OF CAP'S SOLO TITLE INTO THINGS OF BEAUTY.

filled-out figure work, and better, more expressive faces. (Just take a gander at this issue's opening splash page with Cap running toward the reader and almost right off the panel!) Also, as opposed to the previous issue's familiar plot, here scripter Stan Lee and Kirby combine to give readers something a bit more off trail. (Okay, okay. Lee and Steve Ditko had already done this years before in *Spider-Man* #13.) Unlike most of Cap's foes, Dr. Faustus intends on defeating him by driving him insane. He secretly drugs Cap, engendering various nightmares involving Bucky and the war. (A shot of the Red Skull on page 8

is one of the best ever...how in the world did it get past the Comics Code?) Finally, Faustus declares victory but Cap was on to him and faked his last hallucination. One would think that with a story based on psychology that there wouldn't be much excuse

for slam-bang action, but Kirby manages with plenty of scenes of Cap launching himself into apparent Nazis and runaway robots. Top it all off with a spectacular Kirby/Shores half-page panel on page 16, featuring a close-up of Steve Rogers as an old man and you've got pure delight for long time fans. The only fly in the ointment is how Cap knew that the effect of the final drug given him by Faustus was intended to make him look old, not to mention the fact that the drugs were supposed to induce hallucinations and not physical changes, so why wasn't Faustus tipped off to Cap's subterfuge when he saw the aged Steve Rogers? Be that caveat as it may, this issue was a strong outing for Lee and Kirby. Not up to the recent Red Skull multi-parter but as one among a number of single issue stands, it was a whole lot of fun!



Doctor Strange #174

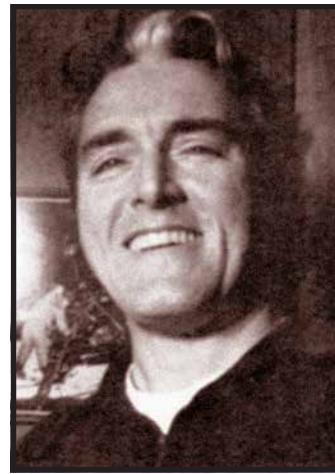
"The Power and the Pendulum!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

It didn't take penciler Gene Colan long to adapt to the kind of visuals needed to capture the spirit of *Dr. Strange*. Not long, at all! Now teamed with inker Tom Palmer, Colan's art really took off in any number of directions including layouts using panels of every shape and size that perfectly captured the hallucinatory nature of the stories. For his part, it didn't take long for scripter Roy Thomas to adapt either. To be sure, he'd had some experience (albeit limited) by having written a few past installments when Dr. Strange had been the back half of the old *Strange Tales* book. But since then, he's said that he never felt any particular affinity for the character. Well, not so anyone could notice here! Quickly adapting the strip to full-length stories, Thomas launched into a number of stand-alone tales that have since not only achieved classic status, but like his concurrent *Avengers* work, resulted in examples of what the perfect comic book should be. The action in *Doctor Strange* #174 (Nov. 1968) begins after Strange receives an invitation from one Lord Nekron (with a name like that, Strange should have been on his guard!). Nekron has sold his soul to Satannish in exchange for power. Now he seeks to offer the soul of Dr. Strange as a substitute for his own. But Strange proves too much for him. Nekron loses his gambit and is taken by Satannish. Throughout, Thomas' scripting flows along flawlessly while accompanied by some of Colan's most striking imagery (beginning with a knockout cover design). When Nekron makes his move, so does Colan, who pulls out all the stops beginning on page 12 and then back to back splashes on pages 13-14 with an amazing design sense. Never mind Ditko, what drugs was Colan taking to come up with stuff like this?! And Colan proved he could handle the down-to-earth elements of the story as easily as the otherworldly when he begins the issue with Strange working to acclimatize the now exiled Clea to life on Earth. Inevitably, their day ends in a kiss. But Thomas doesn't stop there: when Strange travels to England to meet Nekron, he's accompanied by Victoria Bentley, who still secretly pines for him. Unfortunately, Thomas chose to end this potentially complicating factor in favor of Strange settling firmly for Clea. But, overall...man! Comics fans couldn't do much better than this issue of *Dr. Strange*...unless it was *The Avengers* or *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*, or *Fantastic Four*, or *Captain America*...or...!

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #6

"Doom Must Fall!"; Roy Thomas (plot); Archie Goodwin (script); Frank Springer (pencils/inks)

Beneath a spectacular cover image by Jim Steranko that surely had fans' hearts beating faster, *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #6 (Nov. 1968) ultimately disappointed in



ALTHOUGH IT WAS FRANK SPRINGER'S ILL LUCK BEING DRAFTED TO FOLLOW JIM STERANKO ON THE SHIELD SOLO SERIES, HE WASN'T COMPLETELY INEXPERIENCED IN THE ESPIONAGE GAME HAVING PENCILED THE FIRST TWO ISSUES OF DC COMICS' SECRET SIX. ULTIMATELY, HE WAS TO BE COMMENDED FOR GIVING IT THE OLD COLLEGE TRY BY KEEPING THE VISUALS FOR THE STRIP AS STRIKING AND UNUSUAL AS HE COULD.

that the cover was all the Steranko there'd be for this ish. Inside, Frank Springer was again on the pencils and inks and Archie Goodwin was scripting. It was Roy Thomas, however, who came up with the plot involving another attempt by aliens to destroy the Earth. The twist, this time, is that their plans are not to conquer the planet, but to escape it. Seems they need a big explosion, like an asteroid destroying the Earth, to open a gateway leading them back to their own world, thus placing an asteroid on a collision course with Earth. Fury and fellow agent Cliff Randall attempt to destroy the asteroid, but at the last minute, Randall's memory of being one of the aliens himself returns! It was a fun (if unspectacular) single-issue tale made memorable mostly for Springer's noble attempt to maintain the strip's reputation for visual pyrotechnics. Not that he comes anywhere close to Steranko's work, but he does manage to use interesting layouts to tell the story, while at the same time throwing in some eye-grabbers such as the double-page spread depicting the aliens' escape rocket and a cool half-page sized panel on page 16 showing the telepathic amplifier of SHIELD's ESP division. All in all, if stories could be held to this level of quality, the loss of Steranko might have been easier to take for disappointed fans.

Sub-Mariner #7

"For President...the Man Called Destiny!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Scripter Roy Thomas brings the long running Destiny sub-plot to a boil in *Sub-Mariner* #7 (Nov. 1968) as the villain turns rabble rouser with the intention of making himself ruler of the world. (He even has a uniform

tailor made for himself in anticipation of assuming his autocratic powers!) Luckily for the surface world however, Namor is on hand to foil his plan. Intertwined with the main story-line is a sub-plot that bears an uncanny parallel with what Thomas was doing over in *Dr. Strange*. There, Strange has two women pining over him: the otherworldly Clea and magical dabbler Victoria Bentley. In this month's very issue of *Strange*, the hero makes his decision and opts for the otherworldly Clea over the home grown Victoria. Now, here, Thomas presents readers with the same kind of set-up where Namor is the object of two women's desires: the Atlantean Lady Dorma and the surface dwelling Diane Arliss, sister of the villainous Tiger Shark. But as could be seen in this issue's final panel, Namor's obvious attentions are focused more on Dorma than Diane. Another choice has been made and another potential romantic complication cut short. That said, the events of this issue were illustrated once again by the team of penciler John Buscema and inker Dan Adkins and, once again, the two deliver a bang-up job both in dramatic excitement and in emotional turmoil as expressed in the facial expressions of the story's many characters. Buscema's knack for delivering emotional punch through facial expressions was a strong plus factor in his art style (a skill also shared most notably by fellow artist Gene Colan) and one that added immeasurably to any story's human content. **Fun Fact:** It was rare for Buscema to travel outside the bounds of straight penciling, but this issue's cover was adorned by the striking image of the figure of Sub-Mariner as drawn by Buscema set against a photo background of New York City in the midst of a ticker tape parade. A combination that may or may not have been Buscema's idea but rather the result of deadline pressures.

Amazing Spider-Man #66

"The Madness of Mysterio!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); Mike Esposito (inks)

Stan Lee was on a roll. Following the excellent Vulture sequence in issues 63-64 and the prison escape interlude last ish, he immediately launched into a new two-parter starring old Spidey sparring partner Mysterio beginning in *Amazing Spider-Man* #66 (Nov. 1968). Although the basic plot twist seemed familiar to anyone who used to read Marvel's old pre-hero horror books of the 1950s, enough time had gone by since then to take one of those old plots and dust it off for representation here. And it works beautifully! Add to that the art team of John Romita doing layouts, Don Heck on finishes, and Mike Esposito on inks (who were just humming along like a well oiled machine by this time) and you have one of the most memorable mid-range Spidey yarns of all. The inevitable dip in quality would come soon enough when Heck and Esposito departed and Jim Mooney was brought on board, but for now, fans had this issue

and the next to glom as Spidey is tricked by special FX wizard Mysterio into thinking he's been shrunk down to Ant-Man size! But even as readers could thrill to Spidey's latest adventure, Lee doesn't forget to keep the saga of Peter Parker moving forward (by taking at least one step back in the form of Peter being forced to sell his "wheels" for much needed cash). There, our hero's hard luck continues in traditional fashion: Pete's face is still bruised following his fight with the Vulture, he's thrown out of J. Jonah Jameson's office for his failure to take good pix of the Vulture/Spider-Man fight, and he worries whether Norman Osborn will remember that he's the Green Goblin (he does!). But then the effect is all spoiled by having Gwen reenter the picture to give Peter a psychological boost. Phooey! Meanwhile, Captain Stacy and Joe Robertson are still comparing notes on Spider-Man's identity. All in all, if there was any need for a return to greatness for the *Amazing Spider-Man*, then this ish would've filled the bill!

Amazing Spider-Man #67

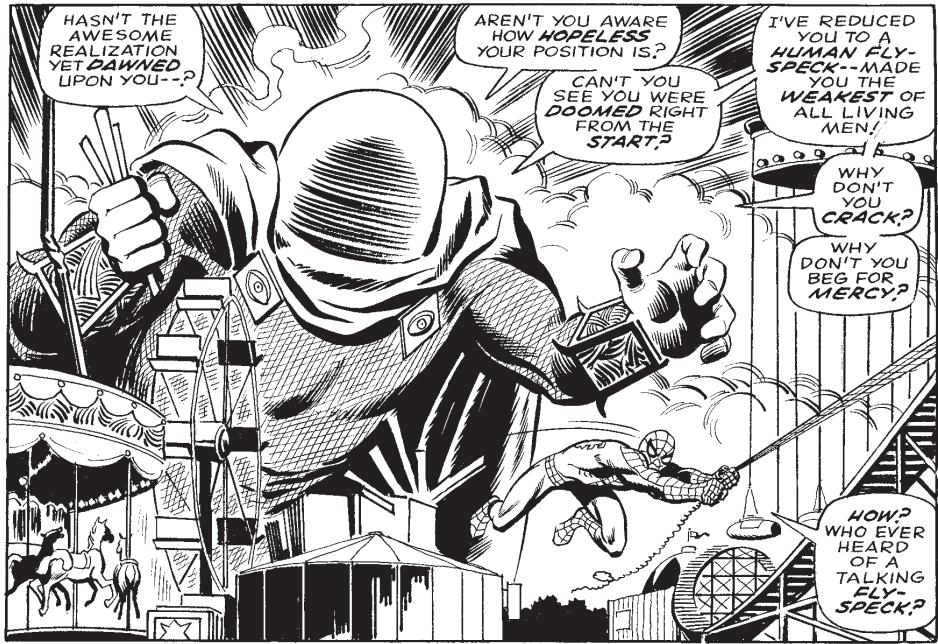
"To Squash a Spider!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)

Amazing Spider-Man #67 (Dec. 1968) would be the last truly great issue of the title for some time to come. After this would come the overly-extended petrified tablet storyline, a plot that scripter Stan Lee would milk over most of 1969. Likewise, penciler John Romita would step back from doing full pencils on the book with the lackluster Jim Mooney stepping up to finish the artist's layouts and ink the final work. Not a recipe for a beautiful looking book as had been the case over most of the issues since Romita had been joined by Don



FOR THE TWO PART STORY IN AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #66 AND 67, SCRIPTER STAN LEE MIGHT HAVE BEEN REMINDED OF OLDER STORIES BACK IN MARVEL'S PRE-HERO ATLAS COMICS DAYS BY THE LAND OF THE GIANTS. THE LAST OF THE CLASSIC IRWIN ALLEN TV SHOWS THAT DEBUTED FOR THE 1968 SEASON?

Heck and Mike Esposito. Meanwhile, though, Lee and Romita were still in top form delivering the second part of the return of classic Spidey bad guy Mysterio to the strip. The last issue ended in the unusual circumstance where Spider-Man finds himself apparently shrunken in size and placed within a tabletop model of a carnival full of booby traps. And so, as a full sized



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AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #67, PAGE 15: EVEN BENEATH JIM MOONEY'S DULL INKS, JOHN ROMITA'S ART MANAGES TO SHINE IN THIS CONCLUDING CHAPTER IN THE MYSTERO TWO PARTER IN WHICH OUR HERO FINDS HIMSELF SHRUNK TO THE SIZE OF A REAL BUG...OR IS HE? THOUGH MOONEY'S INKS ARE PREVENTED FROM RUINING ROMITA'S PENCILS IN THE LARGER ACTION PANELS, THEIR INADEQUACY IS QUITE GLARING IN PANEL 4 WHERE FACES ARE RENDERED IN A FLAT, CARTOONY FASHION MORE SUITABLE TO ARCHIE COMICS THAN MARVEL'S.

Mysterio gloats, our hero must find a way to save himself from being, what else? Squashed like a spider! But Mysterio has reckoned without Spidey's will to resist, something that Lee puts into words reminiscent of the great dialogue he used to place in the mouth of Captain America: "No matter how small I am, no matter how hopeless everything seems, I mustn't give up," declares Spider-Man. "My size doesn't matter, even my life doesn't matter. No one can win every battle. But no man should fall without a struggle!" Here, here! But even amidst the action, Lee doesn't forget the book's real strong suit, namely its cast of supporting characters to whom he makes a new addition in the person of Randy Robertson, college-aged son of Daily Bugle city editor Robby Robertson. Randy would allow Lee to address the subject of race relations from time to time as well as a peek into Robbie's home life—two things that would crop up almost immediately in the next issue.

Amazing Spider-Man Special #5

"The Parents of Peter Parker!"; Stan Lee (script); Larry Lieber (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

It was that time of year again and, as fans had come to expect, a new round of annuals was due from mighty Marvel. Among them was *Amazing Spider-Man Special #5* (Nov. 1968). Unfortunately, being already spread too thin working on both the regular *Spider-Man* book as

well as *Spectacular Spider-Man* #2, John Romita was unable to pencil the special. (At least he had time to do the cover.) So, as happened the year before, Larry Lieber was tapped for the job. And though Lieber could manage to capture somewhat the feel of the Romita version (with the help of regular Spidey inker Mike

Esposito), his style was still pretty flat and uninteresting. Add to that, the story from scripter Stan Lee that was somewhat unsatisfying. Sure, it was intriguing to find out more about Peter Parker's parents who'd been missing since before readers were introduced to Peter in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, but was it really necessary to blow the strip's basis in realism by having them be secret agents killed by the Red Skull? How likely was it that an ordinary person's parents could be spies? Not very. Lee—and especially co-creator Steve Ditko—had worked hard to establish Peter in a realistic setting and to portray him as a typical teenager. Yes, when Peter became Spider-Man, that effectively ended his being ordinary, but everything else about him was normal so that his spider abilities could contrast with the normalcy making it difficult for Peter to reconcile the two. But that semblance of the normal world is blasted when everyone a character is related to has something to do with the fantasy world of super-powered personages. Thus, his parents occupying an unusual job that placed them in conflict with a super-villain ruined the carefully crafted realism of the Spider-Man comic. What was going to be next? Aunt May marrying Doctor Octopus? All that said, it can't be denied that not only did Lee manage to deliver a well scripted, exciting 40-page extravaganza, but that brother Larry had managed to capture much of Romita's dash to make this a not unappealing project. In fact, his depictions of Peter Parker and the non-superheroic elements of the story are quite good. Was it his work here that won Lieber the job of drawing Spidey's newspaper comic strip later in the 1980s? Quite likely! Finally, as if a 40-page lead story wasn't enough, the *Special* was rounded out with a number of extras including a pin-up of life inside the offices of the Daily Bugle, Peter fantasizing being a sports star, a street map of Manhattan indicating where the various locales from the Spidey comic were situated (kinda), and a three-page satire of how Stan, Larry, and Johnny Romita dream up story ideas for *Spider-Man*. (Although a note for the story states that no one wanted to take the blame for drawing it, the style is a clear giveaway that Mirthful Marie Severin was behind it!) All in all, this issue was well worth its 25-cent cover price! **Fun Fact:** Decades after the release of *Special* #5, Romita returned to the subject of Peter's parents with *Untold Tales of Spider-Man* #1 (1997) in a Roger Stern scripted tale detailing one of their secret missions as spies for the United States, wherein they end up meeting the future Wolverine. Ugh!

Fantastic Four #80

“Where Treads the Living Totem!”; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

By *Fantastic Four* #80 (Nov. 1968), the title had definitely turned a corner, moreso with penciler Jack Kirby than with scripter Stan Lee. By this time, Lee had turned over much of the responsibility for



BY THE TIME OF *FANTASTIC FOUR* #80, PLOT ELEMENTS INVOLVING OIL ON INDIAN LAND OR RAILROAD OR MINING RIGHTS BEING SOUGHT BY UNSCRUPULOUS WHITE MEN HAD ALREADY BEEN A CLICHÉ FOR SOME TIME WITH BOOKS, MAGAZINE STORIES, AND HOLLYWOOD MOVIES SUCH AS *IN OLD OKLAHOMA* (1943) ALL ADDRESSING THE ISSUE WHILE AT THE SAME TIME SHOWING SYMPATHY TOWARD THE NATIVE AMERICANS.

plotting the stories to Kirby. Likely, there was only a brief telephone conversation between the two on what should happen next and then Kirby was left to his own devices. With the conclusion last issue of the final strands of the Mad Thinker story-line that had begun earlier in the year, it was time for a breather and to catch up on elements of the title that had been neglected of late. One of those included Wyatt Wingfoot, who is seen traveling out west in the spherical gyro-cruiser given to him and Johnny by the Black Panther. Up to this point in the story, page 5, (after a couple of pages depicting the home life of the FF giving news that “it would be at least a week before the baby arrives”) the Kirby and Joe Sinnott (on inks as usual) art is as sharp as ever, but with the full page intro of Tomazooma, it begins to slack off. The rest of the tale involving an evil corporation cheating Indians out of their oil rights and of how Tomazooma, the living totem of Indian myth intervenes, is tiresome in its familiarity. (Even the Rawhide Kid had once faced off with a living totem... also a Lee/Kirby production.) Kirby's art still packs a wallop action-wise, but it seems that his heart just wasn't in it. A move to California was in the offing and it would be almost two more years before the artist made his departure from Marvel, but some kind of disenchantment with his situation seemed to be setting in around this time. Indeed, with the exception of an extended Dr. Doom story set for a few issues hence, Kirby's performance on the *FF* would be below his own standards of excellence.

Marvel Superheroes #17

"The Black Knight Reborn!"; Roy Thomas (script); Howard Purcell (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Wow! What a come on the cover image of *Marvel Superheroes* #17 (Nov. 1968) must have been to potential buyers back in the day! Executed by Howard Purcell and John Romita (as some sources note), it still manages to capture a real John Buscema vibe, one that had reached its peak in these months. A superb, eye-catching layout, the cover features a rampant Black Knight surrounded by a bevy of threatening demons—capturing the excitement inherent in the “new” Black Knight character as fans had come to view him in recent



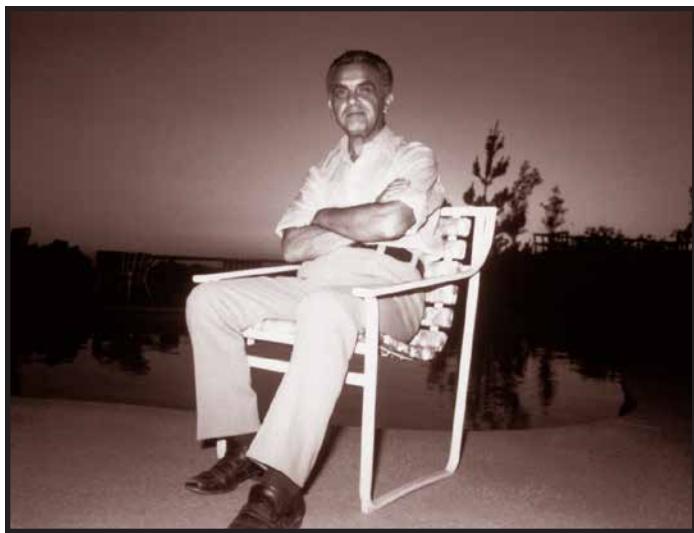
ARTISTS HOWARD PURCELL AND JOHN ROMITA KNOCKED IT OUT OF THE PARK WITH THIS RENDITION OF THE NEW BLACK KNIGHT ON THE COVER OF MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #17! IT WAS DONE IN AN UNRESTRAINED, SWASHBUCKLING STYLE THAT PROMISED ACTION AND EXCITEMENT NOT UNLIKE THAT OF FELLOW ARTIST JOHN BUSCEMA WHO'D CAPTURE ITS VERVE FOR MARVEL'S CONAN THE BARBARIAN LATER IN THE NEXT DECADE.

issues of the *Avengers*. Of course, as Roy Thomas' story inside tells, the Dane Whitman Knight had his antecedent not only in the version that had first made its appearance as a super-villain matched up against Giant-Man back in the years of consolidation, but farther back into the 1950s when Marvel featured a *Black Knight* series written and drawn by Stan Lee and Joe Maneely set in medieval times. That Maneely version shows up here to encourage Whitman in his role as the new Knight. He also points out that his old villain Modred is still active and has imbued another man called Le Sabre with enchanted power the better to defeat the new Black Knight. Now armed with a magic ebony blade, the Black Knight does battle with Le Sabre in a spectacular contest featuring the Knight's winged horse and Le Sabre's demonic mount. It was all illustrated in fast-moving style by penciler Howard Purcell (inked by Dan Adkins), who managed nicely to capture some of what Buscema could have brought to the strip and would have made a more than satisfactory substitute if the Knight had ever been awarded his own strip. Imaginative layouts and some widescreen panel work were encouraging and made up for lapses in quieter moments where facial expressions were pretty basic. Surprisingly, Purcell was a veteran of both the Golden Age of comics and DC but, unlike some of his peers who tried to adapt to Marvel's style, succeeded pretty well. It was likely that more experience would have seen him improve further. As for the issue's story, it was jam-packed with elements that both straightened out the Knight's history and at the time provided an action sequence that set the character in the present with a firm basis for future stories hinted at in the final panel: “the end...or the most macabre beginning of all?” After such a smart send-off here, fans could only hope the Knight would soon appear in his own feature. Unfortunately, it would never happen, despite more solid guest appearances in *Dr. Strange* and a long, celebrated guest starring role in the *Avengers* late in the twilight years. As usual for the title, the rest of the 25-cent book was given over to Golden Age reprints that only served to show how vastly Marvel had improved comics since those earlier, more primitive days.

Mighty Thor #158

"The Way It Was!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Essentially a reprint issue, *Mighty Thor* #158 (Nov. 1968) still had a generous number of original pages drawn by penciler Jack Kirby to bookend the issue. There's no editorial comment or explanation on the opening splash page nor on the letters' column (for some reason, during this period, the traditional replies to letters were dropped; a situation that was quickly corrected when the complaints from fans began to come in) on why a reprint of Thor's first appearance in *Journey Into Mystery* #83 was included instead of a new story. The handful of original pages seen here,



IN AN ERA WHEN MOST COMIC BOOK PEOPLE, WRITERS AND ARTISTS, NEEDED TO LIVE AND WORK IN THE NEW YORK CITY AREA IN ORDER TO BE CLOSE TO THE PUBLISHERS, MARVEL'S STAR ARTIST, JACK KIRBY, BROKE WITH TRADITION AND EARLY IN 1969, MOVED TO CALIFORNIA FROM WHERE HE'D WORK THE REST OF HIS CAREER.

including a full page illo of Odin, at least presented fans the opportunity to compare the artist's current style to his work from Marvel's early years. Was it an improvement? In some ways it was, in others not as much. Or perhaps it was simply the inking of Colletta whose work over Kirby in these latter months wasn't nearly as satisfying as it had been in previous years. Be that as it may, scripter Stan Lee took advantage of the re-presentation of Thor's origin as a lead into next month's story. There, he and Kirby would attempt to explain a conundrum that had puzzled fans for years: namely, was Dr. Donald Blake simply a mortal who found a walking stick that then transformed him into the incarnation of Thor or was he really Thor all along?

Doctor Strange #175

"Unto Us...the Sons of Satannish!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

The series that was turning out to be a showcase of what Marvel could do at its best continued with *Doctor Strange* #175 (Dec. 1968). Again, despite his lack of enthusiasm for the character, scripter Roy Thomas does it again, turning in the first of a fine two-part tale that moves along in the smoothest of manners to a cliffhanger ending that leaves readers hungering for more, more, more! Along the way, Thomas manages to further the budding Dr. Strange/Clea relationship with Clea now ensconced in her own New York apartment and learning how to navigate life in an alien dimension. But danger is never far away when a Marvel hero is involved and so, Strange finds himself

attacked by followers of the villainous Asmodeus, leader of the cult of Satannish. As he does on this issue's cover image, penciler Gene Colan presents a battle on the astral plane, using a kind of film negative technique that only adds to his overall artistic approach to the issue wherein he really lets himself go! Aided by virtual co-artist but credited as mere inker, Tom Palmer, Colan again presents a cornucopia of layout and imagery that's just astonishing. Like nothing that was happening anywhere else in comics. (With the possible exceptions of Jim Steranko on SHIELD and Neal Adams at DC—and even they would be hard pressed to match what Colan was doing here.) Virtually every page is an eye-grabbing layout using a combination of diagonal panels, circular pattern panels with radiating images, montages, overlapping imagery some with borders and some without, and full-page splashes. On the face of it, it all strikes one as done on a subconscious, instinctual level as some of the layouts don't seem to have any intrinsic value in terms of moving the narrative along, but on the other hand, they evoke a sense of strangeness or a skewed vision of an environment where multiple dimensions meet and crash together—just the sort of reality that readers would expect a dimension hopping Dr. Strange to occupy. It was just all too cool, too fantastic to dismiss as just another comic book. This was comics at their most rarified heights!

Dr. Strange #176

"O Grave, Where Is Thy Victory?"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

In a storytelling *tour de force*, the team of scripter Roy Thomas, penciler Gene Colan, and inker Tom Palmer, produce yet another perfect comic book. That is to say, a perfect melding of flawless script and dazzling artwork with Colan once more going far beyond what anyone else was doing in the way of panel layouts. In fact, the first ten pages of *Dr. Strange* #176 (Jan. 1968) is one eye-catcher after another, beginning right off the bat with an opening splash page that integrates the story's title directly into a storm lashed setting. (Thomas, as he was increasingly wont to do, uses a quote from literature as the title; in this case, from St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians in the Bible's New Testament: "O Grave, Where Is Thy Victory?" 1 Corinthians 15: 55-57 to be exact!) From there, the rhythm of the story never lets up as Colan breaks the plot down into ever wilder panel layouts. And yet, for all their seeming randomness, they work! In fact, they enhance Thomas' continuation of last issue's tale in which Strange battles the minions of Sattanish only to be banished to an unknown dimension. At last, (dare we say it?) a creative team had met and even surpassed the legendary Steve Ditko in the presentation of Dr. Strange and the character's full potential can finally be seen for what it always was. It doesn't get better than this folks!

Dr. Strange #177

"The Cult and the Curse!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)



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DOCTOR STRANGE #177, PAGE 13: A HALF DOZEN ISSUES INTO THE CHARACTER'S SOLO RUN AND THE ART TEAM OF PENCILER GENE COLAN AND INKER TOM PALMER HAD REVOLUTIONIZED THE STRIP WITH PANEL BORDERS BEING TOTALLY IGNORED IN FAVOR OF A MORE FLUID, FREE WHEELING LAYOUT THAT INCLUDED MULTIPLE PANEL IMAGES ALL MERGED INTO A SINGLE IMAGE AS DEMONSTRATED IN "PANEL 1" HERE. FOR SURE, THE STRANGE STRIP WAS AS FAR OUT LOOKING AS THE STORIES, SO PERHAPS MAKING DOC RESEMBLE A SUPER-HERO, AS COOL AS THE RESULT WAS, WAS A WAY OF MAKING HIM AND THE STRIP MORE ACCESSABLE TO RANK AND FILE READERS.

In a sign that sales on the new *Dr. Strange* weren't what they should have been, scripter Roy Thomas, no doubt with the acquiescence of editor Stan Lee, tried to shake things up some in *Dr. Strange* #177 (Feb. 1968). Perhaps assuming the title character was not recognizable enough as a superhero for Marvel's younger readers, it was decided to gussy him up a bit, giving him more the look of a masked crime fighter than an ordinary man with an offbeat sense of haberdashery. Thomas makes the switch by integrating it into the fabric of his story (no pun intended!), the conclusion of the Sons of Satannish story-line. There, Strange and Clea find themselves banished to an alien dimension. But Strange finds that he can't escape back to Earth due to the fact that Asmodeus, leader of the Sons, has assumed his form. Thus, Strange is forced to change his appearance to get around the spell that binds him to the alien dimension. That form is one that turns his face into a featureless "mask" while altering his loose fitting tunic into a more form fitting superhero-ish look. The results are darker but very cool-looking, especially under the (respective) pencil and pen wizardry of Gene Colan and Tom Palmer, as the new outfit is introduced in a stark, full-page illo. And speaking of the art team supreme, they once again go

to town illustrating Thomas' tale of mystical happenings with Colan, breaking down the story into a set of wild and woolly panel layouts that totally capture the spirit of the comic. More interestingly, the story ends on a cliffhanger with the looming threat of Norse demons Ymir the frost giant and Surtur the fire demon having been loosed on Earth. Stay Tuned!

Captain Marvel #8

"And Fear Shall Follow!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Penciler Don Heck is still on the job for *Captain Marvel* #8 (Dec. 1968), but this time aided by the inks of Vince Colletta taking over from John Tartaglione. A more complementary inker to Heck's style than Tartaglione, Colletta provides the softer tones and delicate brushwork needed to make the artist's work look the best it can (short of Heck inking his own work that is). A particularly nice panel is panel 1, page 2, showing an alien space cruiser passing by the moon with Earth in the background. Playing to his strengths, Heck later gives readers a tour of Walt Lawson's deserted home, a futuristic, retro-'50s, Frank Lloyd Wright dwelling that was one of the artist's specialties. Equally impressive is a three quarter-page shot of Lawson's secret lab beneath his home, filled with classic Heckian machinery: all curvy surfaces that suggest less a technological basis for the equipment than a biological one. And let's not forget Heck and Colletta's depiction of Carol Danvers this ish. Here, she appears more attractive than ever as she steals a kiss from Mar-Vell in uniform as Captain Marvel. Of course, editor Stan Lee always regarded Heck's women as the most beautiful in comics and Colletta had no less a reputation so the two combined do Carol proud. No wonder Una, spying on them from the Kree mother ship, reacts with dismay at the sight! Meanwhile, Drake's story has Captain Marvel investigating the background of Prof. Lawson, the dead scientist whose identity he's taken on for himself. As mentioned, he finds a lab below his home and is attacked by members of the Organization who in turn, hired Lawson to build them a robot to be a perfect assassin. But that robot is now on the loose and programmed by Lawson to kill Lawson! That, of course, means Captain Marvel and the robot are on a collision course. And fight they do with the issue ending in a soft cliffhanger...



ARCHITECT FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND HIS PHILOSOPHY OF "ORGANIC ARCHITECTURE" WAS A GREAT INFLUENCE ON HOME DESIGNS OF THE 1950S WITH MANY SLEEK, SINGLE FLOOR HOMES SPORTING LOW LYING ROOF LINES, CAR PORTS, AND EXPANSIVE WINDOWS. ELEMENTS THAT ARTIST DON HECK WAS OFTEN INSPIRED BY IN DESIGNING HIS OWN SUBURBAN HOMES FOR MANY OF HIS COMICS CHARACTERS.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #7

"Hours of Madness, Day of Death!"; Archie Goodwin (script); Frank Springer (pencils/inks)

Jim Steranko makes his final appearance on the comic that made him a living legend in the comics industry. Namely, he executed the Dali-esque cover image to *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #7 (Dec. 1968) in which the indomitable SHIELD agent runs along a featureless plain dominated by clocks and dim figures holding wilting wagon wheels before a background with parts of a newspaper with the words "secret" and "nowhere" prominent. It was nothing short of another visual masterpiece by the coolest guy in comics! (Sorry, Stan!) Inside, we discover that the cover illustrates scripter Archie Goodwin's story of a drugged and hallucinating Fury rather well with penciler/inker Frank Springer still doing his best to match the whirligig, pop-art style that Steranko had made a hallmark of the strip. From its split vision of Fury in the flesh and as a skull on the opening splash page to page 4's full page attempt at capturing the pop-art mood of the swinging sixties, Springer continues to do a serviceable job preserving the flavor of Steranko (including an interesting full page layout on page 11). There, Fury is shown running at the viewer while over him are pictured real life images of what's going on outside his fevered brain. Page 13 is another full-pager, this time featuring a monochrome montage of Fury being aided by Sister Angela of the All-Faith Mission, a dead ringer for Fury's WWII love, Pamela Hawley! Springer continues to impress with the remainder of the pages until SHIELD is able to cure Fury of his drug poisoning. If Goodwin and especially Springer kept up this level of quality, fans at the time might surely have reconciled themselves to Steranko's absence!

Sub-Mariner #8

"In the Rage of Battle!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

John Buscema's art style had many fine attributes, but one of them sure wasn't his ability to draw the Thing... or was it inker Dan Adkins' fault? Readers discovered that weakness in Buscema's pencils with *Sub-Mariner* #8 (Dec. 1968) when scripter Roy Thomas called for a one-on-one battle between the sea prince and the Fantastic Four's strong man. Thomas creates a circular plot that begins with Namor telling Lady Dorma and Diane Arliss about the time he met another surface woman by the name of Betty Dean during World War II and how she convinced him to resist the Axis powers. The story here then ends in a huge coincidence: an older Dean suddenly appears to break up the fight between Namor and the Thing! In between, the Sub-Mariner ends up tangling with the Thing in order to retrieve the serpent crown that Namor believes is too temptingly powerful to leave in the hands of the US government. Luckily for readers, Thomas makes the wise decision to leave out

the Thing's frequent partner, the Human Torch. So this story also becomes one of the earliest, if not the earliest, solo outing for the Thing who, late in the twilight years, would be awarded his own title. Artwise, despite his unappealing interpretation of the Thing on the inside of the book, Buscema's startling cover with the two heroes squaring off against a stark black background features a more conventionally appearing Thing. What gave? Did Adkins cut corners while inking the Thing on the inside pages? Because all the shading used to give shape and texture to the Thing's rocky hide was almost completely absent, making for a visually unappealing look. That, however, was made up by page after page of Buscema action still being done in his full-blooded, expansionist style. Why, he even threw in a cool panel on page 9 that gave readers a glimpse of Goliath and the Vision. Neat! It was only to be regretted that this issue would be Buscema's last of the opening run of the title. (Too bad Thomas didn't get around to a Goliath/Sub-Mariner match up before Buscema left.) By the time he returned for a fill-in issue or two, the exciting art style on display here would be gone, morphed and restricted within a more prosaic five and six panel format that made his work far less exciting to peruse.

Mighty Thor #159

"The Answer At Last!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

In a major piece of retro-continuity, editor/scripter Stan Lee joins penciler co-plotter Jack Kirby to finally explain the contradictions and/or paradoxes that had been inherent in the Thor character almost from the very beginning. Over time, fans had begun to question which was the genuine personality: Thor or his mortal identity of Donald Blake. When Blake first discovered the walking stick that changed him into Thor in *Journey Into Mystery* #83 it immediately set up a problem: as Thor, Blake was way too familiar and comfortable in his persona of Thor and, as Blake, he always seemed more out of step than when he was Thor. Even his relationship with Jane Foster seemed forced. Over time, the contrast between Thor and Blake became even more acute as Thor began to spend more time as Thor than as Blake. Well, Lee and Kirby finally decided to tackle the issue here, in *Mighty Thor* #159 (Dec. 1968). In a visually spectacular opening, Kirby resorts to a full-page illo depicting Blake's mind reaching out to Asgard in the form of Thor. There, he meets with Odin in yet another full-pager. Big Daddy Odin then shows Blake a vision of Thor deep in the fabled past. But this Thor is brash, overconfident, and rowdy. In short, he'd grown too arrogant. To teach his son humility, Odin sends him to Earth, transformed into a mortal: the lame Dr. Donald Blake. When he'd learned his lesson in humility, it was arranged that Blake should find the walking stick and transform back into Thor. "Thou didst treat the sick, and the afflicted," explains Odin. "Thor didst walk amongst



HELD BETWEEN 1961 AND 1965 BY THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, VATICAN II FOSTERED CHURCH RENEWAL AND PROMOTED MODERNIZATION OF CHURCH PRACTICES SUCH AS DROPPING LATIN FROM THE ORDER OF THE MASS IN FAVOR OF USING THE VERNACULAR WHILE ALLOWING THE SUNDAY SERVICE OBLIGATION TO INCLUDE SATURDAY WORSHIP AS WELL. DID DON BLAKE DWELL ON ANY OF THIS, OR HARBOR ANY OTHER THEOLOGICAL THOUGHTS THAT MIGHT CONFLICT WITH HIS CLAIM TO GODHOOD? READERS WOULD NEVER KNOW AS CREATORS STAN LEE AND JACK KIRBY MANAGED TO AVOID THE SUBJECT.

the weak, and give them strength." The story's ending however, is a bit too pat. Thor embraces his Asgardian heritage a little too quickly with no second thoughts or doubts. Didn't Thor learn anything else while on Earth? He lived in a Judeo/Christian culture, let alone a democratic one. Did none of that enter his consciousness so that just maybe, he might suffer internal conflict at realizing he was from an alien culture that pretended to be gods themselves? But then, that may have been a step too far at this point in Lee and Kirby's approach to storytelling. Such serious delvings into the minds and souls of characters would only arrive in the twilight years when new strips and concepts somewhat removed from straightforward superheroes would come along. In the meantime, a major attempt to explain a glitch in Marvel continuity (something that heretofore had been the province mostly of scripter Roy Thomas) was attempted by Lee and Kirby that set a standard for such stories in the future.

Fantastic Four #81

"Enter...the Exquisite Elemental!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

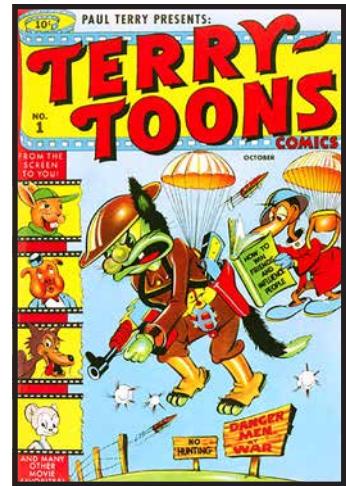
The creative team of scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby were back on track with *Fantastic Four* #81 (Dec. 1968), following the disappointing *FF* #80 featuring Tomazooma the Living Totem. Whew! Not only do Lee and Kirby present readers with a rollicking good single-ish action yarn, but getting back to basics,

they also move the book's soap operatic character elements forward. To wit: not only do we learn that Sue Richards has given birth (for that story, check out the groundbreaking events of last month's *FF Special*) but will be on maternity leave for a bit. Replacing her on the team will be Johnny's long time girlfriend, Crystal. Indeed, she appears right off on the opening splash page in uniform (with a slight change involving removing the team's iconic numeral "4" from her chest to her waist): "Since your sister Sue has a brand new baby to take care of, someone has to take her place on your team," says Crystal to a surprised Johnny. But to become a formal member of the team, Crystal must gain the approval of a cautious Reed Richards. Luckily, she gets the chance to prove herself after the Wizard returns with a new pair of wonder gloves. He attacks the FF but doesn't take into account the presence of Crystal, whose elemental powers prove too much for him. Although Kirby rushes through the book saving time by using a lot of big, quarter-page panels including three splash pages, the results (with Joe Sinnott's inks) are impressive, ending with a fun panel with Crystal arm-in-arm in a chain with the three male members of the team: "Man," observes the Thing, "from now on, the superhero biz is gonna be a blast!" By this time in the strip's history, Crystal was a natural to replace the Invisible Girl having been on the scene and part of the family since *FF* #45. In fact, readers had been asking for her to formally join the team for months, and suggesting a name change to the "Fantastic Five." Although that never happened, it was only to be regretted that later writers would choose to break up Crystal's relationship with Johnny and shunt her back to the Inhumans (only to be paired off in an unlikely match with Quicksilver). But for now at least, all was hunky dory and the future of the FF book still seemed bright. Little did anyone know however, storm clouds were on the horizon...

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #8

"Thus Speaks Supremus!"; Ernie Hart (script); Frank Springer, Herb Trimpe (pencils); John Tartaglione (inks)

Despite some flourishes from penciler Frank Springer (including a somewhat different cover design), *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #9 (Jan. 1969) was a long fall from the oh-so recent glory days when renaissance man Jim Steranko held forth as the strip's guiding genius. It started right from the beginning with a warning note from editor Stan Lee on the issue's splash page, informing readers that Springer fell behind on the art and had to have Herb Trimpe help in its completion. Add John Targlione's inks on top of that, and right away, you're starting off on the wrong foot. Furthermore, Archie Goodwin, who'd been assigned the writing chores, "got snowed under with work" so that Golden Age stalwart Ernie Hart was drafted in the



IN MARVEL'S EARLY YEARS, ERNIE HART CAME TO EDITOR STAN LEE'S RESCUE, SCRIPTING SUCH FEATURES AS THE HUMAN TORCH AND ANT-MAN AND DOING A PRETTY GOOD JOB OF IT TOO. HE SOON MOVED ON HOWEVER, BUT NOT BEFORE PERFORMING THE THANKLESS TASK OF FOLLOWING FAN FAVORITE JIM STERANKO AND FILLING IN ON SHIELD #8.

pinch. Starting out as an artist, Hart drifted into editing when Marvel was known as Timely Comics in the 1940s then Atlas in the 1950s. From there he dropped out of sight for a while before reemerging in the 1960s when he returned to Marvel and, under a number of pseudonyms, scripted some early Human Torch and Ant-Man stories. Hart manages to knock out a tale here of one Supremus who, after being mocked by others for his physical deformity and having his genius questioned, determines to conquer the world and turn everyone into his genetically altered slaves. Nothing new there. Also not new was the trusted insider who betrays him: this time it's his half-sister. Ultimately, it's not material that couldn't have been shaped into something more interesting, but the cobbled together nature of this ish prevented that from happening. Will the rocky start for this post-Steranko era of *SHIELD* be set right in time for the next issue? Stay tuned!

Captain Marvel #9

"Between Hammer and Anvil!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Gene Colan is back! Well, not really, but he did do the catchy cover for *Captain Marvel* #9 (Jan. 1969). Inside, penciler Don Heck and inker Vince Colletta are still on the regular art chores and, in addition to their usual good work, Heck provides some interesting layouts (including one on page 8, panel 3 showing a scene with Col. Yon-Rogg and Una in a kind of multiple image radar wave pattern—or is it ripples in a pond effect? Whatever it was, it's pretty neat). For that matter, so is the full page illo on page 10. Drake's story isn't bad

as the Cyberex robot created by Prof. Lawson kidnaps Carol Danvers to lure Captain Marvel to his doom. Of course, Mar-Vell defeats the robot (as well as a group of Aakon aliens) and discovers at the end that robot and aliens were destroyed and killed over Lawson's notebook that Mar-Vell had carried with him. The irony being that the notebook didn't contain scientific secrets or whatnot, but only the phone numbers of Lawson's girlfriends! And speaking of girlfriends, Mar-Vell sweetheart, Una, remains broken-hearted over seeing the developing relationship between her boyfriend and Carol Danvers. "Yes, medic Una, back to your duty, like a good woman of the Kree," writes Drake in the story's concluding panel. "Emotion is out of place among so perfect a people. And a heart is not too vital...in a world that conquered plastic organ transplants long ago!" Sometimes, in instances like this, even Drake could manage an interesting turn of phrase when he wanted to!

Marvel Superheroes #18

"Earth Shall Overcome!"; Arnold Drake (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Where did this come from? Likely to the surprise and consternation of many a Marvelite, *Marvel Superheroes* #18 (Jan. 1969) featured a new concept called Guardians of the Galaxy and starred a team of the goofiest, most unlikely looking heroes. Hailing from different planets with abilities somewhat related to their native environments, the Guardians had teamed up to battle an alien race of invading beings called the Badoon (first encountered in *Silver Surfer* #2). Located in the 31st century, there was little likelihood that these new heroes would do much interacting with Marvel's more established characters. So where did this half-baked concept originate? In a way, the idea first came from editorial assistant Roy Thomas. Originally, Thomas envisioned a group of super characters in some alternate world conducting a guerrilla campaign against Red invaders. But when Lee subsequently met with Arnold Drake (oh, no!), the writer emerged from the meeting with a new twist on the idea: the new team would now be fighting an alien invasion in the future with the group to be called the Guardians of the Galaxy (despite the fact that their activities would be confined to our solar system). It was only to be regretted that ace penciler Gene Colan was asked to waste his time on this turkey by drawing it (with Mike Esposito on inks). Not much happens in this first story that depicts little more than the heroes joining together. Clearly, there was some hope of continuing the series but that never happened. Whew! A close shave for suffering Marvel fans! On the other hand, Thomas did revisit the concept years later with his War of the Worlds series in *Amazing Adventures*. More interestingly, it turned out, that strip had escaped gladiator Killraven and some compatriots battling against Martian invaders of Earth.



ALTHOUGH A CHANCE CONVERSATION BETWEEN ROY THOMAS AND ARNOLD DRAKE JUST BEFORE THE LATTER'S MEETING WITH EDITOR STAN LEE TO DISCUSS PROJECTS THAT THE DC VETERAN MIGHT DEVELOP INADVERTENTLY RESULTED IN GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY, THE CONCEPT OF TERRAN RESISTANCE FIGHTERS VS ALIEN INVADERS HAD ANOTHER GENESIS. ACCORDING TO ROY THOMAS, HIS INSPIRATION FOR MARVEL'S LATER WAR OF THE WORLDS FEATURE CAME FROM THE "LOST WORLD" SERIAL THAT HAD RUN IN OLD ISSUES OF PLANET COMICS IN THE 1940S AND 1950S...AND OF COURSE, H.G. WELLS' ORIGINAL NOVEL AND THE GEORGE PAL FILM VERSION OF 1953!

Mighty Thor #160

"And Now...Galactus!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

It had to happen! It was just inevitable given Marvel's history of crossovers and ever tighter continuity that its most cosmic menace would meet its most cosmically traveled hero (not counting the Silver Surfer who was Earthbound and the FF who'd been mostly Earthbound for some time). We speak of the epochal meeting of Galactus and the thunder god in *Mighty Thor* #160 (Jan. 1969) or at least their *near* meeting with the official face to face contact being made in the following issue. Here, though, scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby set the stage in grandiose style with a slow buildup involving Thor being asked by Tana Nile to help defend Rigel against an unknown menace. Thor agrees and, in deep space, the two eventually encounter the fleeing remnants of worlds shattered by the approaching menace (a scene spectacularly captured by Kirby in a full-page illo). In fact, Kirby laces this story with four splash pages. And that's not even counting the opening splash that's followed quickly by a full pager featuring a close up of a swooping Recorder. (That's right; it seemed like old home week this ish as characters from Thor's first real multi-part space opera that took place over issues #131-133 were reintroduced). Kirby then hit readers with a double-page whammy: page 12 gives us the dramatic

AS FAR BACK AS THE EARLY YEARS OF MARVEL, ARTIST JACK KIRBY HAD EXPERIMENTED IN THE USE OF PHOTOS OR COLLAGE FOR BACKGROUNDS IN PANELS OR ON COVERS. OFTEN THEIR IMPACT WAS LESSENED DUE TO INFERIOR REPRODUCTION ON NEWSPRINT USED IN COMIC BOOK PRODUCTION AT THE TIME. BUT AS THE YEARS PASSED THEIR PRESENTATION GOT BETTER, ESPECIALLY ON COVERS. AND FOR A WHILE AFTER LEAVING MARVEL FOR DC, THE PRACTICE CONTINUED WITH THIS COVER OF NEW GODS #3 BEING A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE PHOTO BACKGROUND TYPE.

approach of Galactus while page 13 hits readers where the live with a full-sized dramatic, suitable for framing, close-up portrait of the space god... and as inked by Vince Colletta, there was only one word that could describe it: Wow! Then, the best of all: a full-page collage featuring the introduction of Ego, the Living Planet! One of Kirby's best efforts in collage, it more than compensates for the somewhat uninteresting subplot featuring the alien Wanderers. In terms of grandiose cosmicability, you could hardly beat this issue's tale and its set-up of one of the most potentially epic confrontations in the entire history of the Marvel-verse. Still, there were hints here as there were over in the FF, that Kirby was rushing things. The use of large panels to tell the story saved time but then, Colletta's inks, though likely cutting corners in places, yet delivered that massive, finished look that fans of Thor in the late grandiose years had come to expect. If Kirby was setting things up for a finale to his tenure on the book, this multi-parter could well have fit the bill.

Mighty Thor #161

"Shall a God Prevail?"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Not with a bang, but with a whimper. That was the somewhat disappointing ending to the story in *Mighty Thor* #161 (Feb. 1969) in which Ego the Living Planet battles Galactus. Yes, the visuals by penciler Jack Kirby (titanically inked by Vince Colletta) are at his usual awesome peak (pages 2-3, done as a double-page spread in collage format, is an eye-grabber and page 5's splash showing Ego blasting Galactus' ship is patented Kirby grandiosity) and scripter Stan Lee's dialogue suitably stentorian and fit to come from the mouth of godlike beings. The problem for Lee and Kirby, however, was this: how in the world could even Thor possibly be anything but a nuisance to a pair of such powerful cosmic forces? Answer: he couldn't. Thus, the rather



disappointing ending in which Ego channels his planetary energies through Thor's magic hammer, striking Galactus with a beam that threatens to kill him if he remained on the scene. Ultimately, he's forced to retreat, but that wasn't the point. How could even Thor's hammer, even augmented by Ego's energies, overcome a natural force of the universe? If anything, it certainly diminished the space god's aura of awesome cosmicism. Anyway, it just didn't seem to add up although Ego's magnanimous offer to allow the alien Wanderers to make their new home on his surface was a nice final touch. But this issue's story wouldn't be the last readers saw of Galactus. In fact, he'd be back in the very next issue where, as a blurb on the letters' page revealed, his origin was to be told. Unfortunately, after this issue, that too suggested a further diminishing of Galactus' position. Turns out, his very mysteriousness was a big part of what made him such an interesting facet of the Marvel universe.

Mighty Thor #162

"Galactus is Born!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Following Thor's intervention in the battle between Galactus and Ego, he returns to Asgard in *Mighty Thor* #162 (Mar. 1969), only to meet with Odin who has become concerned about the space god. Using his power, Odin shows Thor the origin of Galactus, who seems to have begun as a new life form occupying an Incuba-cell orbiting some distant planet. His incubation is interrupted by an invading armada and when Galactus emerges, he's hungry. Very hungry! Using his cosmic powers for the first time, he destroys the fleet as well as the planet above which his cell had been orbiting. But questions remain that will have to wait for future issues of *Thor*. That said, questions also remained for scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby, who seemed to be working at cross purposes when it came to Galactus. As a result, the origin presented here is incomplete as well as unsatisfying. Not only is the question of how Galactus ended up in the incuba-cell left outstanding, but could such a powerful being have seemingly been created by mere mortals? In later years, this question would be addressed in a much more satisfying way by having Galactus described as a force of nature and not a mortal at all, a survivor of the previous universe before that universe collapsed and our universe was created in the big bang. But in the meantime, whether or not Lee and Kirby had a clear idea of the origin of Galactus, the story presented here was far from the full story. That said, Lee's grandiose scripting sure lived up to the

imagery supplied by Kirby (inked by Vince Colletta) of colossal scenes of inter-galactic warfare and cosmic events far beyond the ken of mere Earthlings. Nobody could convey that sense of awesome majesty as good as Kirby could and he starts by a liberal use of splash pages, including a panoramic double-page spread on pages 1-2 featuring another magnificent collage filled with oddball imagery that's supposed to stand in for the civilization of the Rigelians. Next we have a pair of close-ups first featuring the "High Commissioner and Imperial Colonizer Emeritus" for Rigel and the second spotlighting big daddy Odin in a spectacularly detailed outfit that only the Kirby/Colletta team could produce! That's followed by starfaring vistas of galactic war and another full page shot of a massive, ruined city. All topped with a shot of "Galactus A'Broning" as was proclaimed on this issue's cover. Yeah, Kirby really delivered this time. Too bad readers didn't get the origin of Galactus but only a fragment of it; and a fragment that just didn't measure up to expectations at that. Despite the galaxy wide vistas of incredible warfare and destruction, were Lee and Kirby just not thinking big enough? For the first time, could it be that their imaginations had faltered? Only time would tell.

X-Men #52

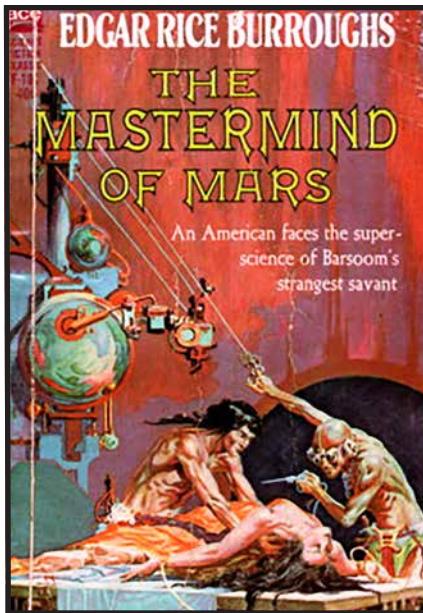
"Twilight of the Mutants!"; Arnold Drake (script); Werner Roth (layouts); Don Heck (finishes); John Tartaglione (inks)

Nothing lasts forever, especially the oh so brief appearance of Jim Steranko on the art chores for issues #50-51. For *X-Men* #52 (Jan. 1969), the team of Werner Roth and Don Heck are back but unfortunately, the combination of their talents doesn't add up to much. (Maybe if their responsibilities had been reversed with Heck on layouts, things might have been different.) Add to that Arnold Drake's wild conclusion to the otherwise uninteresting story of Magneto's secret city filled with undifferentiated mutants and his plan for world domination, and you've got a recipe for disappointment. It would take Roy Thomas to do something interesting with Lorna Dane (who turns out not to be Magneto's daughter) and her relationship with Iceman and (later) Havok. That said, there was definitely an air of strangeness to the whole X-book at this point. It just didn't feel at all like a Marvel book with its slipshod attention to continuity and credulity. (How, for instance, did Cyclops come up

with that Eric the Red outfit so quickly? And why does Lorna feel she has to obey Magneto's evil dictums even if she were his long lost daughter?) In the meantime, chalk this one up to anti-climax as the book's last remaining fans waited for the day when Drake would be taken off the scripting. Likewise his work over in the origins of the X-Men backup now featured the continuing origin of the Beast. ho-hum.

Sub-Mariner #9

"The Spell of the Serpent!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)



EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS' MARS NOVELS ENJOYED A RESURGENCE OF POPULARITY IN THE 1960S THAT CONTINUED ON INTO THE 1970S. THEIR DEPICTIONS OF WEIRD CIVILIZATIONS AMID THE EVOCATIVE MARTIAN LANDSCAPES WERE KIND OF A DRY VERSION OF SUB-MARINERS' UNDERSEA KINGDOMS.

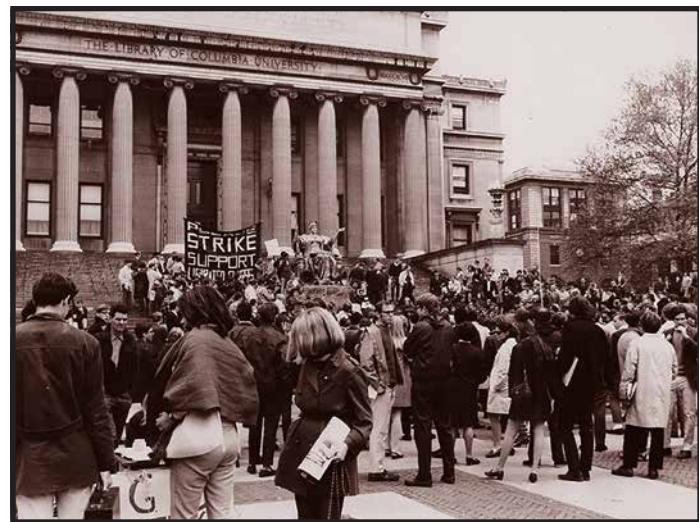
as it could have been. Severin's work inside is much improved over her earlier pencils on Dr. Strange as she resorts to big, quarter-page panels for action sequences and even uses the occasional full-page splash—with the one on page 18 being almost stunning. Meanwhile, Roy Thomas continued on the scripting which picked up the story of Destiny's "helmet of power" which is really the legendary Serpent Crown. The crown extends its evil influence over Lady Dorma, turning Namor's subjects against him. Overcoming these obstacles, Namor places the crown on his own head and learns the origins of Atlantis. Here, Thomas has chosen to continue

exploring the undersea world as a landscape much in the manner of such then popular fantasies as *The Lord of the Rings* or the *Mars* books of Edgar Rice Burroughs; an excellent way to approach *Sub-Mariner* that opened it up to a more diverse range of stories.

Amazing Spider-Man #68

"Crisis on Campus!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Jim Mooney (finishes/inks)

With unrest on college campuses exploding across the country and with the popularity of both Marvel Comics and Stan Lee as a speaker on many of those same campuses, it was inevitable that Lee would choose to spotlight the protest movement somewhere in his line of comic books. And what more suitable place than in the *Spider-Man* book where Peter Parker and his friends attended classes at Empire State University? For his first foray into the protest movement, Lee could have chosen to cover subjects such as the anti-war or free speech movements but chose instead to address the relatively benign subject of student dormitory housing on the campus of ESU. (Young people at the time were by no means united on the protest movement and Marvel readers, in particular, were a diversified lot; something soon to be exhibited on the letters pages of *Captain America*, where such issues as patriotism and dissent would get heatedly debated.) Anyway, Peter is asked by a student named Josh where he stood on the issue of the school's science hall. Plans by the administration call for it to be converted into alumni housing but students disagreed, preferring to see it used as a low-rent dorm for needy students. But due to his temper and desire to understand both sides of the issue, Peter decides not to participate in the protest and as a result, would soon develop a reputation among campus radicals as a square. Meanwhile, Lee hasn't forgotten that *Amazing Spider-Man* #68 (Jan. 1969) was a superhero comic. To cover that end of things, he brings in the Kingpin who plans to steal an ancient tablet from the science hall and...you guessed it! protesters and the Kingpin are set on a collision course with Spidey caught in the middle. When the dust clears, the Kingpin gets away with the tablet and the student protesters are blamed for the theft and damage to the hall. The issue ends with the protesters placed under arrest and Bugle city editor Robbie Robertson promising to get them off the hook. The only downside to this jam-packed issue was in the art department with John Romita once again doing only the layouts and Jim Mooney everything else. The combination was not a satisfactory one with Mooney's inks too shadowy and indistinct. There was enough of Romita showing through however to keep the art from being a total washout but still, fans craved for Romita's full attention. Unfortunately, the art situation on the book would not improve for some time to come marking the start of an extended fallow period for *The Amazing Spider-Man*.



UNREST ON THE NATION'S COLLEGE CAMPUSES SUCH AS COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, WERE STILL ONGOING BY THE LATE 1960S WITH THE LIST OF GRIEVANCES SEEMINGLY GROWING LONGER AS THE MONTHS AND YEARS PASSED.

Fantastic Four #82

"The Mark of...the Madman!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

After what turned out to be a brief return to form with the previous issue's encounter with the Wizard, it was back to the uninspired grind of the Tomazooma variety for scripter Stan Lee and penciler Jack Kirby with *Fantastic Four* #82 (Jan. 1969). Perhaps taking their cue from the addition of Crystal as a member of the team, Lee and Kirby launched a two-part story in which the FF reencounter the Inhumans as they once again struggle against an attempt by Maximus the Mad to seize the crown from brother Black Bolt and then subjugate the rest of the world via some new nefarious invention. ho-hum. This plot line was dull the first couple times it was presented (the FF's first meeting with the Inhumans and later the long running sub-plot with the Inhumans trapped behind an impenetrable dome of Maximus' making). Anyway, the usual shenanigans follow, including the FF being defeated by a simple robot and the scientifically advanced Inhumans' embracement of dynastic rule. Then, after slogging through this tediousness, readers were disappointed to discover that the darn story continued into the next issue. Phooey! At least Kirby's art was still dynamic in presentation, even if it was obviously beginning to soften around the edges into simplified forms and figure work. As a result, Joe Sinnott's slick inking, which once had been a strength, now only seemed to reinforce Kirby's artistic decline. This is not to say Kirby was not good. On the contrary, he was as visually entertaining as ever, but he was clearly losing his edge so that his work was not up to the standard of earlier phases of his Marvel career.

He'd enjoy a brief resurgence after leaving Marvel for DC, no doubt enthused at starting on a new project there in which he'd have complete control. But soon enough, his enthusiasm would die down and his work would continue its decline. In the meantime, there was no clear diminution in the quality of Lee's scripting except in its now almost complete lack of captions. Anticipating the future trend in comics scripting, his stories would now come to depend almost solely on dialogue to provide the details and keep the plot moving forward. This would not be a good trend for comics, overall. But Lee's dialogue here is still light and snappy, capturing the personalities of the various characters well. At this point, he was also leaving much of the plotting responsibility to Kirby which might explain the drop in cohesiveness in the story telling, the simpler, more stretched out plots, and frankly, the less interesting stories.

Fantastic Four #83

"Shall Man Survive?"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

The boring Inhumans story continues in *Fantastic Four* #83 (February 1969). Luckily for fans, it was the second and final chapter of the latest tale of Inhuman shenanigans in which Maximus the Mad once again tries to seize the throne from brother Black Bolt. Why don't the Inhumans just do away with this tiresome monarchy and switch to a democratic form of rule? Then they could at least stop these endless sibling rivalries. Anyway, scripter Stan Lee makes the best of the dull proceedings with his usual smooth writing that moves things along minus captions (whose absence eliminated much of the subtlety, shading, and mood that used to be standard in a complete a comics script) As a result, Jack Kirby's art ends up doing the heavy lifting entertainment wise with readers walking away remembering his imagery more than they do Lee's scripting. But even there, Kirby's art was noticeably slipping. Just take a look at the full page portrait of Maximus on page 5 with its seeming desultory delineation, lack of detail, and rigid two dimensionality. Kirby's art had never stopped evolving from the early years through the grandiose years and it continued to do so but now past its peak of perfection. Or was it the inking? Was Joe Sinnott exerting himself as much as he used to? After all, only a few months ago, Syd Shores had transformed Kirby's art into eye arresting wonders. As would Bill Everett a few months hence when he



MUSIC TO READ COMICS BY:
THE BEATLES WERE STILL GOING STRONG IN 1969 WITH THE RELEASE OF THE BAND'S ABBEY ROAD ALBUM. UNKNOWN TO THE PUBLIC AT LARGE HOWEVER, FAULT LINES WERE DEVELOPING AMONG BAND MEMBERS AND FOLLOWING THEIR NEXT ALBUM, LET IT BE, BEATLEMANIA WOULD BE OVER.

took over from Vince Colletta inking Kirby on Thor. Regardless, Kirby had reached a point where he really needed inkers who were artists as well; artists who were not afraid to put as much of themselves into the finished product as possible. Kirby and Sinnott however, were due for one final flourish when they embarked on a last multi-parter together beginning in the following issue.

Sub-Mariner #10

"Never Bother a Barracuda!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Gene Colan was back! That's right, the original Sub-Mariner artist who helped launch him back in *Tales to Astonish* #60 was back, taking over the penciling work with *Sub-Mariner* #10 (Feb. 1969). But the question uppermost in the minds of fans was, how long would he stay? Sure, readers had loved John Buscema's run on the book but if they couldn't have Buscema back, then Colan was certainly a solid replacement—not just because of his earlier work on Subby, but for his latest art on *Daredevil* and *Dr. Strange*, which was some of the best in the industry. What visual marvels could be in the offing? As things turned out, though not as wildly paced as his concurrent work on *DD* and *Strange*, Colan's layouts here are looser than his past efforts on Subby with many over large panels with liberal use of full-pagers such as the dramatic final panel of the story. And speaking of the story, scripter Roy Thomas delivers another exciting chapter in his Serpent Crown arc that begins with a bang, namely Namor's one-on-one with the blue skinned Karthon, the Questor (don't ask, just dig it!). Defeated, Karthon fills Namor in on more Serpent Crown backstory before new villain Barracuda shows up. Unfortunately, this is where Thomas stumbles a bit with Barracuda being just another garden variety sub-sea pirate *a la* the Plunderer. Actually, Barracuda was an old Torch villain from way back in *Strange Tales* #120 where he appeared as a low-grade river pirate; here, he graduated to being captain of his own submarine, complete with atomic torpedoes with which he immediately threatens Atlantis. It all leaves our hero with a choice: save Atlantis or chase after Karthon who's made off with the Crown! All in all, Thomas (along with Buscema first and now Colan) was managing to keep the excitement level in *Sub-Mariner* with an engaging through line adorned with fun standalone stories and characters. Now, if he could just keep doing it...

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #9

"The Name of the Game is...Hate!"; Gary Friedrich (script); Frank Springer (pencils/inks)

In what was becoming a pattern, *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #9 (Feb. 1969) was another single issue, stand-alone story involving the return of the Hate Monger (which long time readers would recall from *Fantastic Four* #21). This time, Gary Friedrich, who'd become the strip's regular writer (along with Fury's WWII adventures in the *Sgt. Fury* title) is at the typewriter in a tale that has the Hate Monger stage a seemingly failed assassination attempt on Fury. But the object was to lure the SHIELD ramrod into a trap, the better to witness as the Hate Monger proceeds with his latest plan for world conquest. A surprise twist and the return of a character from the past rounds out this fast-moving yarn. Meanwhile, artist Frank Springer continues to surprise with his attempts to match Steranko's in-your-face visuals beginning with the splash page that's split between an arresting montage and the issue's outsized title. That's followed by a series of full and half-page images involving dropped holding lines; photo collages; violation of border frames with wild aerial action; a double-page spread combining dinosaurs and psychedelic patterns; and Bondian secret military bases. Whew! The only thing that was really holding back the art was Springer's inferior work on the book's human cast which continued to be somewhat crude. Still, it all added up to a noble attempt to capture the spirit of the departed Steranko and proof that this title could produce a modicum of heat if only the creators set their minds to it. But could they do it before cancellation loomed? Only time would tell. **Fun Fact:** Did you know that the character of Nick Fury made his first appearance in current Marvel continuity in *Fantastic Four* #21 when, as an agent of the CIA, he helped the FF defeat the Hate Monger in that villain's first appearance?

Amazing Spider-Man #69

"Mission: Crush the Kingpin!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Jim Mooney (finishes/inks)

The slow descent in quality continued in *Amazing Spider-Man* #69 (Feb. 1969). Sure, Stan Lee was still scripting. Sure, John Romita was still on the art. And sure, the sub-plot dealing with the ancient tablet that would extend over half a dozen issues and involve different villains at different times was still intriguing. But the very fact that the story would be so stretched out along with Lee's increasingly barebones scripting style worked to undermine all those seeming positives. Worse was the state of Romita's art. By now, the penciler was only doing layouts and leaving the rest, including inks, to Jim Mooney. As a result, the finished art continued to look washed out and unfinished. Romita's layouts however, succeed in holding Mooney in check, providing the framework for some good Spidey vs. gangsters action that ends with the Kingpin's defeat and arrest. However,



WAS HE OR WASN'T HE? ALTHOUGH THE HATE MONGER MAY OR MAY NOT HAVE BEEN THE REAL HITLER, A POPULAR CONSPIRACY THEORY, AS A LATER GENERATION WOULD DESCRIBE IT, HAD IT THAT HITLER HAD SURVIVED WORLD WAR II AND WAS ALIVE AND WELL SOMEWHERE IN SOUTH AMERICA. IN FACT, MANY ACTUAL NAZIS, INCLUDING ADOLPH EICHMANN, FLED THERE. EICHMANN WAS LATER FOUND IN ARGENTINA, TRIED IN 1961, AND EXECUTED IN 1962.

Lee manages to throw a wrench in the works by not only leaving Spidey in possession of the tablet, but framed by the Kingpin as his accomplice. Meanwhile, Lee doesn't forget the mini-drama that arose out of last issue's campus protests. There, students have been arraigned at police headquarters with Peter Parker accused of cowardice for not taking part. Top it all off with the revelation that the bald, roly poly Kingpin actually has a wife, and you have a Spidey book that continues to intrigue. Thus, the Lee/Romita team continued to stoke reader interest even with some obvious flagging in the overall quality of the book.

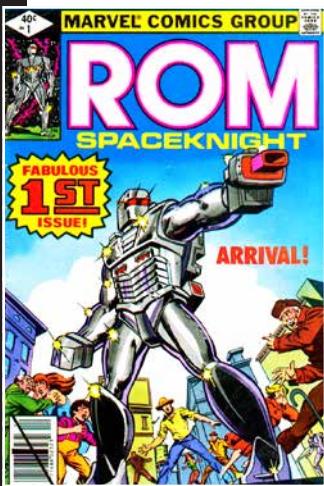
Captain Marvel #10

"Die, Traitor!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Captain Marvel #10 (Feb. 1969) leads off with an admittedly attention-grabbing cover by artist Marie Severin and inker John Verpoorten. Severin does a good job with the big Captain Marvel figure in the foreground but it's the coloring job that really sets this work apart. The yellow background overlaid with red set in concentric circles surely caught the eye of the casual browser of the spinner racks...or even the veteran fan! Not to be outdone, penciler Don Heck is on the job, getting into the grandiose swing of things with looser layouts and imaginative panel construction. Just check out pages 6, 10, 16, 17, and 18! Inside, writer Arnold Drake's story opens with our hero about to be shot by a firing squad of Kree soldiers. What goes on here? Well, the rest of the ish is framed as a

Sal Buscema

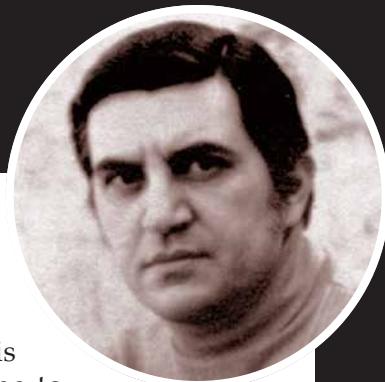
Sal Buscema worked for Marvel Comics as a penciler for decades and would become not only one of its most ubiquitous artists but also one of its most instantly recognizable.



Buscema began his artistic career in the advertising world after being recruited by his older brother John. When John left advertising to go back to work for Marvel, he recommended brother Sal to editor Stan Lee. Not satisfied with the inking he received on the first few issues of the *Silver Surfer*, John asked Lee to give Sal the assignment and history was made as the siblings proceeded to produce some of the most stunning super-hero art of the late 1960s.

And though Sal began as an inker, he soon received the penciling assignment for the *Avengers*, filling in for brother John. He began there with a strong approach to the material that favored John's style, but over the years as he branched out to other features including long runs on the *Defenders*, *Captain America*, *Spider-Man*, *Rom*, and many others, he spread himself too thin so that his style began to erode and fell into a

simplistic pattern that fulfilled Marvel's requirement for fast pacing and action, but at the cost of artistic finesse.



gigantic flashback as readers learn that Captain Marvel, tasked by Ronan the Accuser with contacting the criminal group called simply the Organization (the one that tried to kill Mar-Vell in earlier issues) to try and set up an alliance between it and the Kree. The Organization, you see, could be useful idiots for Kree plans to take over Earth. But things go wrong in the form of Carol Danvers once again being held captive, forcing the good Captain to fight and destroy the Organization. Ooops. Naturally, Ronan is furious when he learns of the result and orders Cap's execution. Will Una, despite her disappointment in Mar-Vell's apparent interest in Carol Danvers, get to the scene in time to save Mar-Vell? Stay tuned!

Silver Surfer #4

"The Good, the Bad, and the Uncanny!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Sal Buscema (inks)

By *Silver Surfer* #4 (Feb. 1969) it was becoming clear that the strip was a showcase for both editor/scripter Stan Lee and penciler John Buscema as both creators stretched themselves to the limit, inspired by the material as well as a generous 39 pages for storytelling. As writer, Lee had the freedom to explore issues and questions at length that he was often prevented from doing in Marvel's regular

titles. The higher cover price and page count presumably put the book out of reach for the average youthful buyer but not necessarily Marvel's older clientele composed of high schoolers and college students. Meanwhile, more pages allowed Buscema to become more expansive in his layouts, challenging the Jack Kirby based action formula that dominated the rest of the company's line of books. This had both its pluses and minuses as Lee would later criticize Buscema for being too loose but here, complimenting him by once telling the artist that this issue was the best thing the two of them ever did together. But despite Buscema's growing individualist style, this issue more than any other likely served as an eye-opener for Lee when it came time to find a replacement for Kirby on *Thor* after the artist quit Marvel in the following year. For surely, no one else had handled Thor and his Asgardian environs as Buscema did in this issue. That's apparent with the opening splash page of a reclined Loki contemplating his next scheme to bring down Thor. Buscema is no less convincing in subsequent pages as he presents the reader with his versions of Hercules and the FF and finally the Warriors Three. And a shadowed half-page panel on page 34 is intensely evocative. (As is his iconic cover image of the Surfer facing off against Thor standing on the rainbow bridge with only outer space as a backdrop.) Of course, his depiction of the Surfer himself

(as rendered by brother Sal) is a perfect vision of Michaelangelo-esque grace and style. One suspects that Buscema's preference for fantasy rather than superheroics formed the inspiration for his top-notch performance here with a number of scenes that wouldn't be out of place in the *Conan* comic he'd later spend years drawing. It was only too bad that this peak of creativity, this seamless collaboration between Lee and Buscema, was doomed not to last. In a couple more issues, the title would be reduced to a normal 20-page book and with its reduction, so too went the enthusiasm of its creators.

Avengers #61

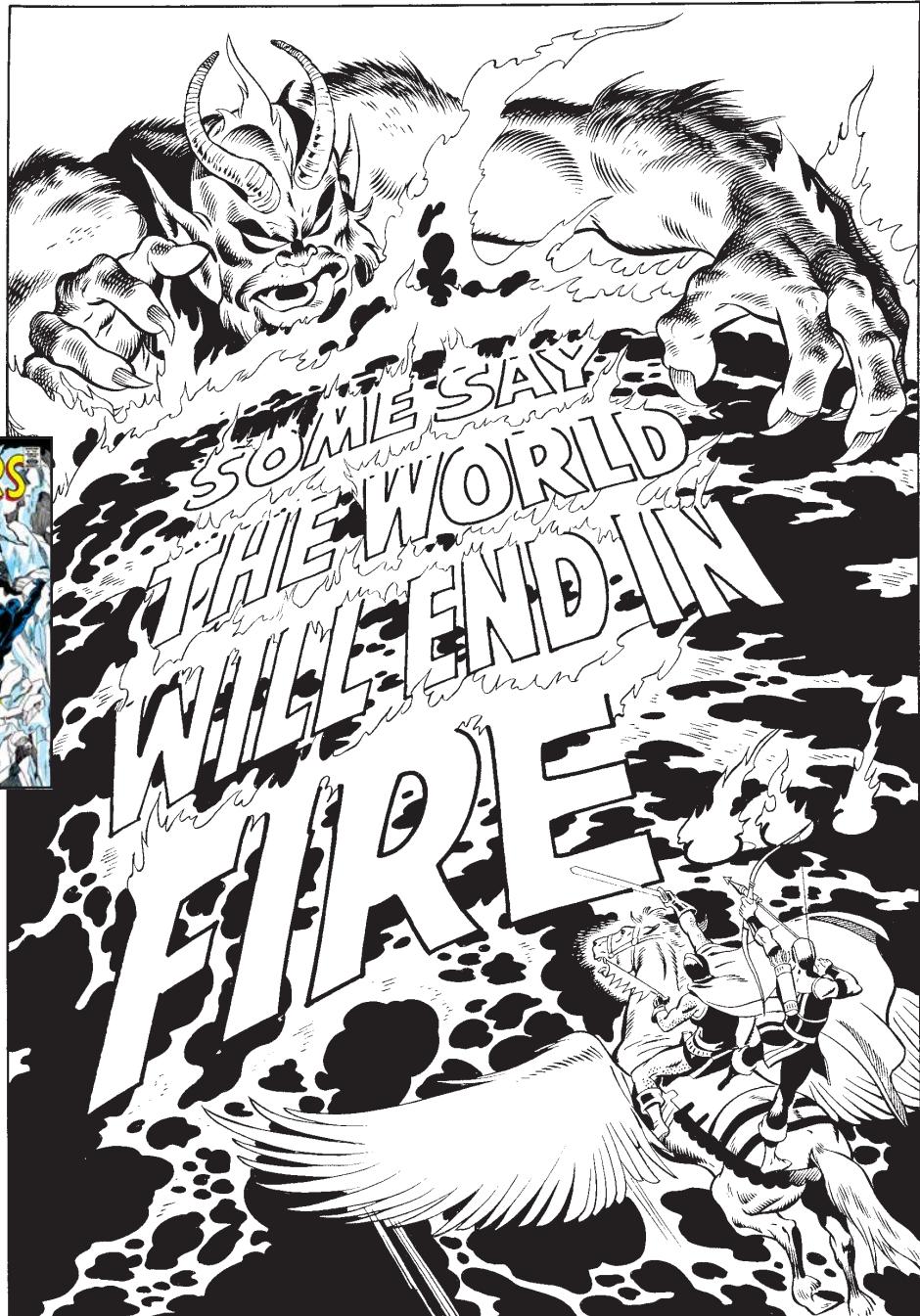
"Some Say the World Will End in Fire...Some Say in Ice!"

Roy Thomas (script);
John Buscema (pencils); George Klein (inks)

Stop! Although readers at the time weren't warned on the opening pages of *Avengers* #61 (Feb. 1969), they should not have read this issue before reading *Dr. Strange* #178...due out only the following month! But those who managed to piece this crossover together found themselves in another inter-title event courtesy of scripter Roy Thomas. Remember how Thomas had previously engineered an *Avengers*/X-Men multi-part crossover, two titles that he also happened to write and so, presumably, was better able to coordinate between them? Well, he takes advantage of the same circumstance here. As writer of both the *Dr. Strange* and *The Avengers*, he was able to bring the two together. (And if it helped to boost sales of *Dr. Strange*, so much the better!) Be that as it may, the story here continues from *Dr. Strange* #178 in which the Asgardian demons of fire and ice (hence this issue's title, freely taken from the poem by Robert



Frost) Surtur and Ymir invade the Earth and Strange, through intermediary help of the Black Knight (who not only guested in *Strange* #178, but was also an Assembler himself) recruits the aid of the Avengers in repelling the two monsters. Along the way, Strange must use his earthly skills as a physician to operate on an injured Black Knight, who recovers in time to not only go into action, but to give penciler John Buscema a chance to draw the character again as only he can. (Check out that half-page panel on page 13 for confirmation!) And speaking of Buscema: man! He was literally on fire in these months. First a stunning 39-pager over on the *Silver Surfer* book and now this! Every page



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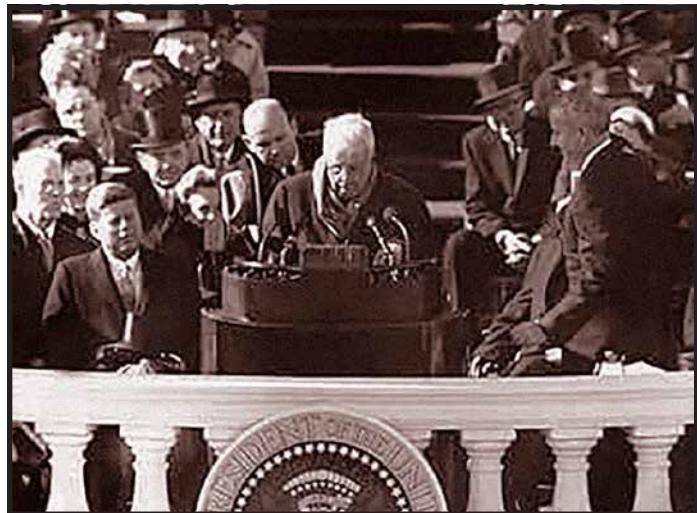
AVENGERS #61, PAGE 1: IT WOULD BE HARD TO TOP THIS INCREDIBLE SYMBOLIC PAGE (FEATURING THE FIRST LINE OF THE CLASSIC ROBERT FROST POEM AS THE FIRST HALF OF THE STORY'S TITLE) BY PENCILER JOHN BUSCEMA AND INKER GEORGE KLEIN! DID WE SAY THAT BUSCEMA WAS ON FIRE IN THIS PERIOD? WELL, HE WAS HERE, LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY!

here is gorgeous, beginning with a first and second page opener composed of two full splashes of Ymir and Surtur. Aided by the flawless inks of George Klein, Buscema's work here is so slick, so perfecto, it's hard to believe that Marvel ever let him go back in the '50s! And Thomas' tale of the two demons who end up canceling each other out at the end isn't bad, either—a textbook example of economy of story telling that at once is filled with action while not forgetting all the little character touches that kept making this title one of Marvel's go-to books every month!

Captain Marvel #11

"Rebirth!"; Arnold Drake (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Hoo, boy! Not even the inks of Vince Colletta could save *Captain Marvel* #11 (March. 1969) as artist Dick Ayers took over from Don Heck. Page after page of awkward posturing and oddball angles did little to help keep scripter Arnold Drake's story from sliding into sheer inexplicableness. But an attempt will be made here to make sense of it: Mar-Vell is saved from being shot by firing squad with the timely intervention of a group of Aakon aliens (despite the fact that the attackers don't look anything like the Aakons readers had seen the previous issue). In the melee, Una is seriously injured and only by



ROBERT FROST BECAME PERHAPS THE MOST BELOVED OF AMERICAN POETS AND PERHAPS THE COUNTRY'S LAST GREAT POET. WINNER OF MULTIPLE PULITZER PRIZES FOR POETRY, HE WAS AWARDED THE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL IN 1961 "IN RECOGNITION OF HIS POETRY, WHICH HAS ENRICHED THE CULTURE OF THE UNITED STATES AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORLD." THE MEDAL WAS OFFICIALLY BESTOWED ON FROST BY PRES. JOHN F. KENNEDY IN 1962 BUT THAT WASN'T THE FIRST TIME THE TWO HAD MET. FROST WAS THE FIRST POET TO READ AT A PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION WHEN HE RECITED HIS "THE GIFT OUTRIGHT" FROM MEMORY AT KENNEDY'S 1961 INAUGURATION.

getting her back to the Kree home world can Mar-Vell save her. He commandeers a rocket from the airbase (where Carol Danvers is employed as security chief and apparently failing utterly at her job) and takes off expecting Earth technology to get him across interstellar space. Then, in a strangely emotionless scene (one panel) Mar-Vell watches as Una dies. Landing on an asteroid, Mar-Vell intuits his beloved, thinking noble thoughts about her while oddly (for an alien) comparing their love to that of Camelot. Leaving the asteroid, Mar-Vell's ship is caught by Col. Yon-Rogg, his rival for Una's affections, is diverted into uncharted space where he drifts for 112 days (not 111 or 113) until falling into a weird full-page panel that ends in a close-up of Cap's face that's positively idiotic looking. (On the other hand, he is wondering if he's going mad...) He's forced to land on a mysterious planet where he's met by a group of beautiful women bringing food and nourishment and leaving him with word of revelation to come. Finally, he steps into the presence of a golden tower that says its name is Zo. (Clearly, Ayers was out of his depth by this time!) Zo claims to be a kind of god who knows all about Mar-Vell and is willing to help him get revenge on Yon-Rogg in return for doing his bidding at a time indeterminate. Mar-Vell agrees and in return receives new powers including teleportation, illusion-casting, and super strength. (Seems to cover all the bases). Also, supposedly, wisdom. Which is immediately thrown into doubt in the final panel where Cap tells Zo: "I have no further interest in any living thing. I am your servant, Zo, throughout eternity!" Obviously, all of these changes, the death of Una, the powering-up of Mar-Vell and his switching of allegiance from the Kree to Zo, were meant as a change in direction for a strip that was failing. The question was: was Arnold Drake the man to do it? One can only point out the clumsy manner in which he made the effort and failed, necessitating even more radical changes only a few issues hence with the return of Roy Thomas as scripter. But even Thomas was not able to save the book completely. It would eventually be canceled for a few months before coming back, still teetering. The irony is it would take another writer to put the Captain through his cosmic awareness paces for a second time and prove the charm, but that was a few years in the future. For now, readers were stuck with a book that was spiraling out of control with a creative team unsuited to stop the downward plunge.

Avengers #62

"The Monarch and the Man-Ape!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); George Klein (inks)

The classics just kept on comin'! What else can be said about this latest entry of *Avengers* #62 (Mar. 1969)? Scripted by Roy Thomas, this issue's story spotlights the Black Panther in a tale of scheming would-be usurpers and symbolic endings. By this time, Thomas had the feel for this ensemble title down pat, moving easily from

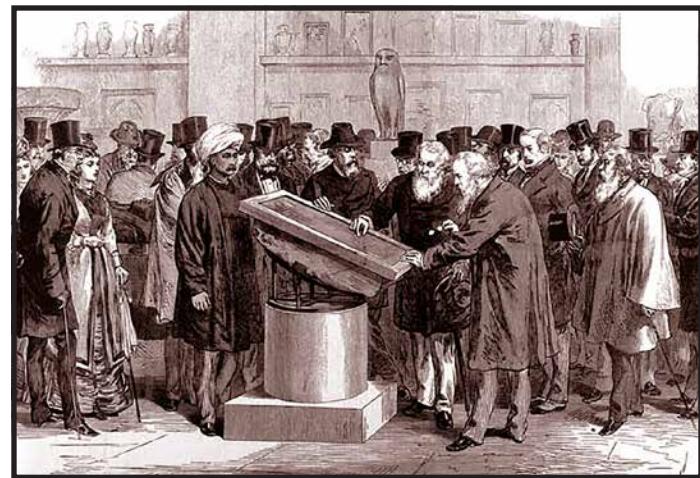
sub-plots concentrating on single characters or pairs of characters to solo spotlight issues, guest stars, to day in the life sequences. In between of course, there was plenty of action and thrills with some of the most literally colorful heroes and villains in the entire Marvel universe. This issue, for instance, picks up from the previous story involving the defeat of Ymir and Surtur and moves smoothly to Wakanda, where the Avengers are attacked by the Panther's own subjects. Turns out they did so under orders of one M'Baku, the regent appointed by the Panther to oversee his country while he served with the Avengers. The twist is that the scheming M'Baku just might have grounds for his resentment, angered as he was that the King of Wakanda preferred to spend time overseas rather than attending to his duties as ruler. Be that as it may, the way M'Baku chooses to confront the issue wasn't exactly kosher. Dressing up in the forbidden outfit of the white gorilla and calling himself the Man-Ape (and thus a new arch villain is born!), he plans to supplant the Panther cult with that of the White Gorilla, but ends up in a symbolic burial amid the rubble of a giant Panther idol instead.

Throughout, John Buscema's art continued to amaze, beginning with a fantastic opening splash page that, inked by George Klein, is nothing short of eye-catching, despite the fact that the Avengers are simply standing around waiting to be rescued. But maybe that was Buscema's secret. The characters aren't just standing around. Their body language enlivens the page, conveying all kinds of information that supplements Thomas' script. But that was Buscema all over as he continued his magic through the rest of the issue re-introducing readers to the wonders of the mechanistic Wakanda, the sumptuousness of the Panther's banquet hall, and M'Baku's savage court. All that and the Black Knight too! Readers couldn't ask for a more perfectly balanced, well told comic book story... except maybe Thomas and Gene Colan's *Dr. Strange*!

Amazing Spider-Man #70

"Spider-Man Wanted!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)

Scripter Stan Lee pulls out all the stops in *Amazing Spider-Man* #70 (Mar. 1969). Amid the ongoing plot involving the ancient tablet that Spidey has taken from the Kingpin (and that the Kingpin in turn stole from the campus of ESU), Lee weaves in new developments in the life of Peter Parker. As Peter, he's accused of cowardice by girlfriend Gwen due to his inability to take a stand with other protesting students and, as Spider-Man, apparently giving J. Jonah Jameson a heart attack that might possibly lead to his death! This latter event takes place at the conclusion of this issue's story when Jameson places his Daily Bugle radio car in between Spidey and a fleeing Kingpin, allowing the crime lord to escape via another car driven by a mysterious female. Losing his cool with Jameson, Spidey grabs him and begins unloading on him resulting in the aforesaid heart attack. All that comes atop the ancient tablet running plot that



WAS THE WORLD FAMOUS ROSETTA STONE WITH ITS MYSTERIOUS COLUMNS OF GREEK, DEMOTIC/COPTIC, AND EGYPTIAN HIEROGLYPHICS THE INSPIRATION FOR THE ANCIENT TABLET THAT DOMINATED MULTIPLE ISSUES OF THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN? IT TOOK MANY YEARS AFTER ITS DISCOVERY FOR THE TEXT TO BE DECIPHERED, PROVIDING THE KEY ARCHAEOLOGISTS NEEDED TO READ THE HIEROGLYPHICS THAT LITERALLY COVERED EVERY SURFACE OF EGYPTIAN RUINS AND THAT FINALLY REVEALED THE FULL HISTORY OF ONE OF THE OLDEST CIVILIZATIONS IN THE WORLD.

Lee manages to massage in a unique, out of focus style, that will include issues that seemingly have nothing to do with it and others that do; with villains that at first are intricately involved then disappear to be replaced by new villains after the same tablet for different reasons. It was definitely an approach that intrigued many a fan at the time but that was prevented from becoming a really top-notch Spider-Man saga by the art which though penciled by John Romita, continued to be finished and/or inked by Jim Mooney whose vague, shadowy blacks simplified the art and cartoonized many of the faces. Add to that a period in Marvel's history where coloring on its books fell short with the palette seemingly restricted to grays and browns and maybe some light purples. The overall effect of which was an unattractive melange of muddy tones. (Was it caused by the transition from Stan Goldberg to Marie Severin doing the coloring?) All those factors taken together, conspired to keep this run of *Spider-Man* issues not all they could've been.

Sub-Mariner #11

"The Choice and the Challenge!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); George Klein (inks)

To the relief of fans, Gene Colan signals his continued presence on *Sub-Mariner* with a startling cover design depicting Namor swimming furiously into the sights of a submarine's periscope! And give whoever decided to keep the area outside the lens of the periscope solid black while keeping the image inside in emotional pinks and reds a

gold star! Inside, *Sub-Mariner* #11 (Mar. 1969) is more of the same with Colan again on the pencils, assuring that the quality readers had come to expect with the title was still there. Although inker George Klein had done good service over Colan's pencils over in *Daredevil*, here he slips up some rendering of the artist's work so that figures look rubbery and indistinct. Not bad, but not the kind of job that, for instance, Tom Palmer's inks were doing over in *Dr. Strange* that showed what Colan could really look like under the hands of a completely sympatico inker. Be that as it may, Roy Thomas' story here is less than stellar, dealing as it does with Namor vs. the US Navy and the boring Barracuda and his theft of something called the sonic magno-directoid that ends up hoisting the pirate on his own petard. A decent diversionary yarn, but the sooner Thomas got back to the more interesting Serpent Crown saga the better!

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #10

"Twas the Night Before Christmas"; Gary Friedrich (script); Frank Springer (pencils); Johnny Craig (inks)

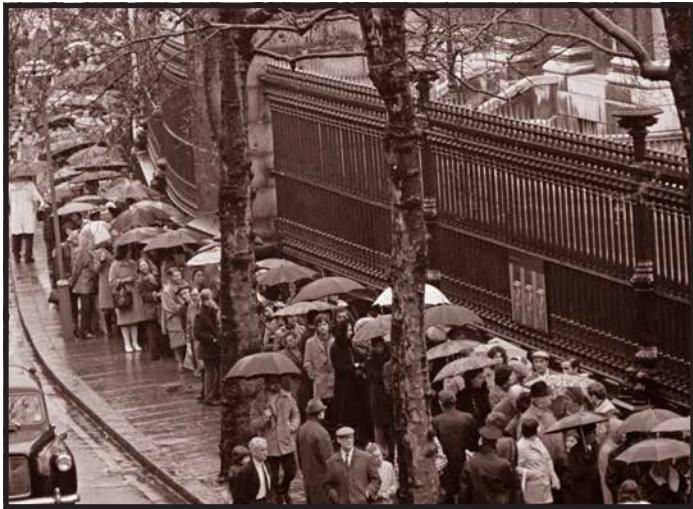
By *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #10 (Mar. 1969), the feature had settled down with the seemingly permanent creative team of Gary Friedrich on scripts and Frank Springer on pencils. In fact, with Friedrich's world-threatening plots and Springer's admirable attempts to preserve the full throttle visuals with which Jim Steranko had imbued the strip, the *SHIELD* book appeared to have a fair chance of moving on and even satisfying readers. Take this issue as an example: with the Hate Monger back for a second go-round with our hero, Springer opens the story with a neat Eisneresque splash page as Fury breaks away from holiday shoppers dominated by the word "night" in towering zipatone lettering heralding the Christmas season (and the title of the story). Then, after Fury is called to action, Springer breaks things wide open with a series of full and even double-page illos peppered with crazy quilt panel layouts (check out page 9!) rivaling those of fellow artist Gene Colan's work on *Dr. Strange* and *Daredevil*. Pretty good! Now, if only the artist could improve the way he drew human beings, the dying embers of the strip might be fanned into flame. Unfortunately, he wasn't helped much by Marvel neophyte penciler Barry Smith whose figure work on pages 2 and 3 was as bad as Springer's so that their styles barely clashed! For his part, Smith would improve, while Springer went on to more sporadic work in the coming years. Meanwhile, Friedrich provides a yuletide thriller involving another plot by the Hate Monger to conquer the world by dropping a germ agent on New York City. Nuclear war will erupt thus wiping out the human race allowing him to repopulate the world with perfect Aryans. *But what about the fallout?* readers might ask. Well, apparently, the Hate Monger hadn't thought that far ahead. It was all he could do to enjoy the prospect of seeing Fury, trapped in the germ bomb, going down to his doom. On top of all that, Friedrich even manages some character development this

issue as Fury romances the much younger Laura Brown... with hints that previous flame Valentina de Fontaine was still in the picture. Hoo, boy!

X-Men #54

"Wanted: Dead or Alive... Cyclops!"; Arnold Drake (script); Don Heck (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

As with most of the original material that scripter Arnold Drake came up with, it was left to later writers to take, spruce up, and make more interesting. It's what happened to the Lorna Dane character (later Polaris) and Alex Summers (later Havok), as well as the new villain introduced in *X-Men* #54 (Mar. 1969). The Living Pharaoh is a kook who somehow associates Alex Summers (Cyclops' long lost brother) with Egyptian mythology and is determined to sacrifice him to the gods. But as told in flashback this issue, the X-Men foil his plans. The issue ends back in the present where Cyclops finds himself again confronting the Pharaoh. It's all so-so, enlivened only by the presence of penciler Don Heck who's finally unleashed on the art without the hindrance of doing only layouts for the likes of Werner Roth to finish. Heck's work is further enhanced by the inks of Vince Colletta, who seemed to lavish his greatest attention whenever Marvel Girl enters the picture. But that's okay! Otherwise, Heck does a good job keeping up with panel layout innovations being explored by fellow bullpenners Gene Colan and John Buscema. There are lots of angular and circular panels here and other configurations less describable, but that suit the action



EGYPT WAS IN THE AIR THROUGH THE MID 1960s WHEN FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE TREASURES FOUND IN THE TOMB OF KING TUTANKHAMUN WERE ALLOWED TO TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. THE EXHIBIT CAME TO THE UNITED STATES TO GREAT FANFARE (AND LONG LINES!) AND SO WAS PERHAPS ON THE MIND OF SCRIPTER ARNOLD DRAKE WHEN HE CAME UP WITH THE LIVING PHARAOH FOR X-MEN #54 AND HIS NOT SO OBVIOUS RELATION TO ALEX SUMMERS.

nicely. All in all, if this art team had continued on the book, all would have been well. But it was cut short right in the next issue when Heck was again joined by Roth. But that disappointment wasn't to last, because issue #56 would see the arrival of an artistic talent nearly as great as Jim Steranko—one who'd completely transform the X book and move it from the bottom of the Marvel heap to the top tier. Suddenly, the X-Men weren't going to be the poor cousins to Marvel's other characters any more. They were going to be the ones everyone else began to chase after! Who was this artist that would help to make this amazing transition? That would be telling!

Amazing Spider-Man #71

"The Speedster and the Spider!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Jim Mooney (finishes/inks)

Editor/scripter Stan Lee continues the innovative, zig-zag course of the ancient tablet storyline in *Amazing Spider-Man* #71 (April, 1969). With the Kingpin now firmly in the rearview mirror, what to do with the ancient tablet in his possession has become an ongoing problem for Spider-Man. Wanted both as an accomplice of the Kingpin and for the possible death of J. Jonah Jameson, Spidey is stuck with the tablet whether he likes it or not. But Lee provides a light at the end of the tunnel in the form of Robbie Robertson, who's running the Bugle while Jameson recovers in the hospital. That's right. When Peter Parker shows up at the Bugle, he finds out that Jameson is not dead and he is not responsible. With that load off his mind, he falls into a second bit of luck: the photos he sells to Robbie exonerates Spider-Man of collusion with the Kingpin. Add to that a fat check in payment, and Peter is on cloud nine. But not everything is going his way. Elsewhere, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch have escaped the defeat of Magneto by the Avengers and when the former appears at Avengers mansion to inform his former partners, he learns that Spidey is wanted by the police. Figuring that bringing Spidey to justice would put him in good stead with the partners he and his sister betrayed to join Magneto, Quicksilver decides to bring in the webspinner. The resultant battle is vintage choreography by penciler John Romita as he once again lays it all out in a series of oversized panels. The results are held back from complete fannish nirvana however by the inks of Jim Mooney (who also finished Romita's layouts). Luckily, however, it wasn't enough to spoil the overall effect and our tale ends on a satisfactory note. Hint: Spidey's defeat of Quicksilver is both simple and eloquent! And though Spidey leaves the tablet off with Captain George Stacey, its saga is not over. In fact, it only heats up again going into the stretch next ish. Be there, or be square!

Sub-Mariner #12

"A World Against Me!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils/inks/colors)



THE ERA OF THE "SUMMER OF LOVE" OFFICIALLY CAME TO AN END IN 1969 WITH THE CONCERT AT ALTAMONT, CALIFORNIA, SPONSORED AND HEADLINED BY THE ROLLING STONES ROCK BAND. THE CONCERT SOON DEGENERATED INTO VIOLENCE AND MURDER WHEN MEMBERS OF THE MOTORCYCLE GROUP THE HELL'S ANGELS, HIRED TO PROVIDE "SECURITY," BECAME OVER ZEALOUS AND KILLED A CONCERT GOER.

It was a hail and farewell to superstar Marvel pencilers such as John Buscema and Gene Colan, marking the end of the Sub-Mariner title's very own Golden Age. In a step downward, the art chores were taken over on a more or less permanent basis by Marie Severin, who does both the penciling and inking of this issue (as well as the coloring). While nowhere near the calibre of Buscema or Colan, Severin had her moments, particularly if she were embellished by a competent inker. For instance, in *Sub-Mariner* #12 (April, 1969) she seems to blow hot and cold. Her opening splash page is impressive, capturing as it does scripter Roy Thomas' ongoing efforts to place Namor and his undersea adventures within the context of epic fantasy *a la* the *Lord of the Rings*. Severin continued the quality imagery of the opening splash on the next few pages as the Serpent Crown saga continued. Then, through the heart of the book, the style readers of past stories of Dr. Strange and the Hulk might recognize, reasserts itself and all of Severin's faults become obvious again, namely contorted figurework and unlikely forced perspectives that were more appropriate for her work on *Not Brand Echh* than dramatic subjects. She pulls back some across pages 10-11 with a pretty good half-page sized panel introducing readers via a high-angle shot to the capitol of Lemuria and a three panel sequence of its ruler, Naga, donning the Serpent Crown. Then it's back to uninspired action stuff before the final pages where the artist exerts herself again with some nice big panels depicting the death of Lady Dorma—apparently at the hand of Namor himself! Was it another of Naga's illusions or what? Readers had to wait until the next ish to find out.

X-Men #55

"The Living Pharaoh!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (layouts); Werner Roth (finishes); Vince Colletta (inks)

There was good news and there was bad news regarding *X-Men* #55 (April, 1969): The good news was that Arnold Drake was gone as scripter and replaced by Roy Thomas. It was true that by the time Thomas had handed over the writing chores to Gary Friedrich back in issue #43 and subsequently to Arnold Drake, he had begun to lose focus plot wise. The Factor Three story-line went on a tad too long and its denouement was somewhat anticlimactic. But before all that, Thomas had been in the zone. Now, he was off to a slow start here having to pick up the reins mid-story where Drake had left off. Something about a nut styling himself a "Living Pharaoh" coming after Cyclops' long lost brother who turns out to be a mutant too. But very quickly, teamed with hot penciling sensation Neal Adams beginning next ish, Thomas would guide the X book into its best run since Stan Lee and Jack Kirby produced the book back in the years of consolidation. The bad news was that artist Don Heck was back to doing only layouts with Werner Roth on finishes. The results aren't ugly but rather clean (thanks also to inks by Vince Colletta), with Heck's influence still recognizable under it all. Roth, however, is on his own in this issue's installment of the origins of the X-Men featurette. (Yes, they were still running but quickly drawing to their end.) Here, the origins finally get around to what turns out to be the most interesting member of the team: the Angel, or "the Avenging Angel" as he styles himself here. Seems after his wings grew out while in boarding school, Warren Worthington III decided to don a colorful uniform and turn himself into a superhero, thus becoming the only member of the X-Men to have had a costumed identity before joining the team. Sporting a costume far more attractive than the one he was using in his present day adventures, the Angel rounds up a gang of bad guys before returning home only to find Cyclops and Iceman waiting for him. Again expertly written by Roy Thomas, the Angel origin was easily the most successful of them all. However, even if left to himself, Roth's art failed to measure up as a jumbled, unattractive affair, and a far cry from earlier issues such as #24 when he was in his heyday.



DON HECK HAD SERVED AS ONE OF THE THREE FOUNDATIONAL ARTISTS THAT HAD GIVEN BIRTH TO THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS BACK IN THE EARLY 1960S. SLOWLY, HIS STAR HAD FADED AS HE WAS REASSIGNED TO LESS HIGH PROFILE WORK ON STRUGGLING TITLES SUCH AS THE X-MEN.

Dr. Strange #179

"The Wondrous World of Dr. Strange!"; Stan Lee (script); Steve Ditko (pencils/inks)

Reprint time! When readers eager for the next Roy Thomas/Gene Colan/Tom Palmer magical extravaganza opened *Dr. Strange* #179 (April, 1969) they were likely intensely disappointed. At least if they had already been on board the strange train when this issue's tale first saw print back in 1965 when it appeared in the *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #2. That's right. It was a major bummer for readers at the time to open this issue only to find a reprint of the Stan Lee/Steve Ditko classic therein. Of course, it was likely just as much a delight for those who'd never seen the story before...

entirely possible back in the days before comic shops or the internet or even a recognition that older comics were worth holding onto. Be that as it may, the excuse offered for the reprint was to be found on this issue's splash page with an editorial claiming that because Gene Colan had caught "the flu bug" he was unable to finish the art assignment. Well, okay. At least it was a good reason but hardly enough to paper over the withdrawal symptoms likely suffered by Dr. Strange fanatics who needed their fix every month. Still, the sudden use of a reprint like this was an outlier of things to come. As Marvel continued to expand its line and Stan Lee retreated from scripting and editing, it all would become too much for a single person to handle, such as Roy Thomas, who later took over for Lee in the position of editor in chief. As the 1970s progressed, it became more common to miss deadlines until the problem became a chronic one and one where drastic measures had to be taken in order to prevent. But that was still in the future and for right now, a simple thing like a last minute virus could still throw the best laid plans of mice and men out the window. At

least this issue still sported a double-page letters section and an original cover drawn by bullpen newcomer Barry Smith in his best neo-Kirby style!

Captain Marvel #12

"The Moment of the Man-Slayer!"; Arnold Drake (script); Dick Ayers (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Things hadn't improved much from the previous issue. For *Captain Marvel* #12 (April, 1969), Dick Ayers was still doing the penciling although this time, Syd

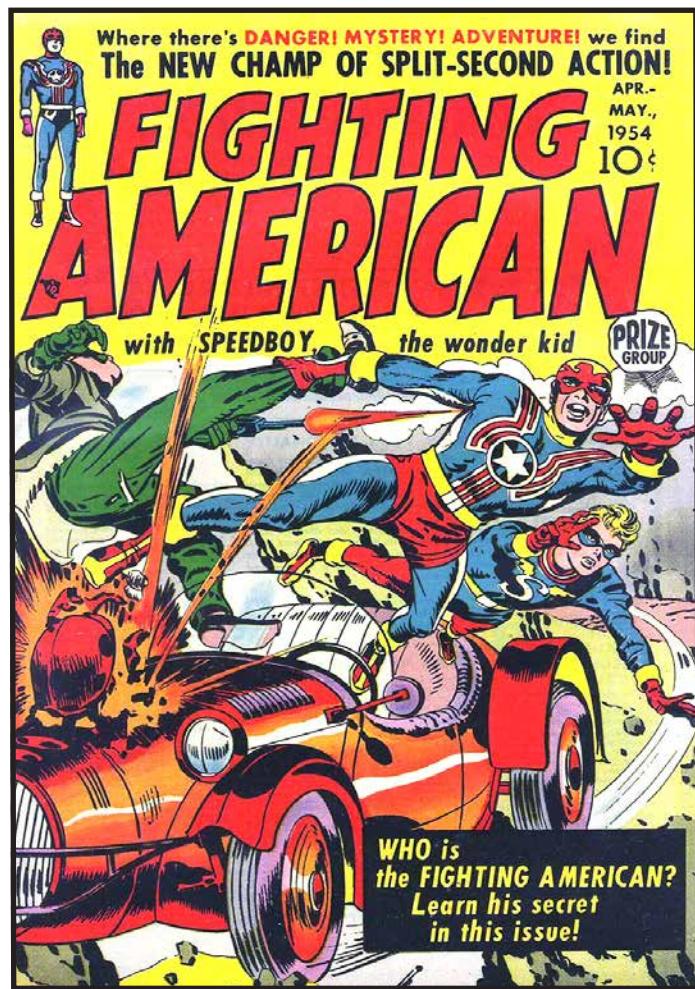
Shores was on the inks. More of an artist himself than Vince Colletta was, Shores is able to add more oomph to Ayers' flaccid pencils bolstering facial expressions, giving more body to figures, and managing to make Carol Danvers and guest star the Black Widow look good. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough to lift Arnold Drake's story out of the doldrums with its new, improved Captain Marvel. This time, Cap is distracted from getting his revenge on Col. Yon-Rogg for the death of girlfriend Una when the rocket base is threatened by Man-Slayer, a robot sent by the Soviet Union to destroy the base. A battle ensues until the robot suddenly stiffens and stops. What happened? Unknown to Cap, back in the Soviet Union, the Black Widow has knocked out the robot's controls. Throughout the story, Drake's dialogue is stiff and unrealistic with the action ill-coordinated. If it kept up, the strip would not be long for this world. **Fun Fact:** Letter writer Bill Cantey suggests that the Kree should enlist the help of the Inhumans in their plans for Earth. In reply, Roy Thomas states "And we dug your explanation of how the Kree might have drafted the indomitable inhumans! We might just write that into a future mag..." Was this the genesis for Thomas' inclusion of the Inhumans in his Kree-Skrull War epic written a few years later? Hmm...

Captain America #112

"Lest We Forget!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Tuska (inks)

It's a measure of the visual prowess of Jack "King" Kirby that even after two issues featuring the pop dazzle of Jim Steranko, he could still do some dazzling himself. By the time of *Captain America* #112 (April, 1969), Kirby was at the tipping point in his artistic career. After decades of continuous improvement and evolution, the steam had begun to run out. Presently, he was working on his last great story arc on the *Fantastic Four* and the grandiose but ultimately disappointing origin of Galactus over in *Thor* but in just over a year, he would be gone from Marvel not to return until 1975. It was hard to believe that he had produced some of his most exciting, and visually forceful (under the powerful inks of veteran Syd Shores) issues of *Captain America* only the year before, but he did. Hard to believe because for this issue, his art, though still forceful, is considerably more washed out than those earlier classics. This is no doubt due to a number of factors including it being a last-minute fill in for Steranko, who had fallen behind schedule; the inking by George Tuska (never a good fit for Kirby); and the retrospective nature of the story. And speaking of the story, was it left to Kirby to plot this one? Or did scripter Stan Lee have a hand in it? Due to the many panels recalling Cap action from the Golden Age, it seems more likely that Kirby would have a better memory (and soft spot) for those fabled tales than Lee. How else to explain Iron Man's recollections of such long-forgotten Cap villains as the Butterfly, the

Legion of Beggars, the White Death, and the Toadman? Kirby's memory would also likely serve to revisit Cap's more recent Marvel Age adventures including those that happened only a few issues back! Throughout, Kirby provides readers with a long series of slam-bang action shots doled out in big, half and quarter-page panels suitable for getting the job done quickly. Lee, naturally, provides words suitable to the occasion, especially for Iron Man, who reluctantly closes the file on Captain America whom the world presumes dead following the events in issue #111. But though fans didn't believe for a moment that Cap wouldn't come back from the dead within an issue or two, little did they realize that *Cap* #112 would be the last time Kirby would draw the character he had helped guide to maturity over the last six years. Except for a stray cover down the line, this was his *envoie*. When he eventually returned to Marvel following his DC sojourn, he was a changed



ARTIST JACK KIRBY'S OTHER FIGHTING AMERICAN WAS...THE FIGHTING AMERICAN! CREATED FOR CRESTWOOD/PRIZE PUBLICATIONS IN THE 1950S. THE STRIP BRIDGED THE ERAS OF KIRBY'S EARLIER LOOSER STYLE WITH THAT OF HIS LATER MORE STOLID STYLE EMPLOYED DURING HIS MARVEL YEARS. KIRBY'S ART WOULD ULTIMATELY EVOLVE INTO ITS GRANDIOSE PERIOD. THE FINAL STAGE BEFORE DECLINE SET IN.

man with different goals and intentions. Taking over *Captain America* again, it was as if he'd stepped from a time warp five years into the future. The character's development had passed him by and what he had to offer was not what readers wanted. Because that version is best forgotten, let this retrospective issue of *Captain America* serve as a tribute to Lee and Kirby's triumph in reviving the character and retooling him for a new generation, one that would prove far more enduring than the one-note version that had barely survived the war years.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #11

"The 1st Million Megaton Explosion"; Gary Friedrich (script); Frank Springer (pencils); Mike Esposito (inks)

Just when it seemed that artist Frank Springer was coming into his own on *SHIELD*, the rug was pulled out from under fans when *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #11 (April, 1969) turned out to be his last stand. Over the previous few issues, after being asked to fill in the big shoes of Jim Steranko, Springer made a noble attempt to at least capture the spirit of his predecessor's style, and frequently succeeded. Not necessarily with Steranko's various special FX and wholesale adaptation of current pop art trends, but in layout and outsized panel contents and panel frame breakthroughs. Unlike Steranko however, Springer never managed to conquer the human figure with characters often distorted in ways that looked more goofy than dramatic. That said, there was evidence that his work on the strip was beginning to heat up, evidence that continued to mount in this, his final work on the title. To be sure, he was abetted by Gary Friedrich's over-the-top plots and in particular what turned out to be a Hate Monger trilogy that began in issue #9 and ends here with the villain thrown into airless space. And though there are a number of highlights to the script, the best has to be the first few pages where Friedrich prefaces the story to come in the manner of a record album of the time. He does it with a splash page lead off featuring a Peter Max/Wes Wilson influenced psychedelic faux album cover belonging to the fictitious band, The First Million Megaton Explosion. Wes Wilson, in particular, popularized a font style using shape and color that took advantage of eye movement to make lettering on his posters seem as if it were moving. The artist's work became a staple in the San Francisco rock scene after he began a series of posters beginning around 1966 advertising local concerts. Springer, for his part, has

THIS WES WILSON DESIGNED POSTER WAS MADE TO SPOTLIGHT ROCK BAND THE GRATEFUL DEAD. BUT BY THIS TIME, HE'D ALREADY REVOLUTIONIZED ADVERTISING FOR ROCK AND ROLL CONCERTS MAKING POSTER ART, EVEN DIVORCED FROM ITS PRIMARY PURPOSE, AN ARTFORM BY ITSELF, ONE THAT PERFECTLY CAPTURED THE TRIPPY, PSYCHEDELIC MOOD OF THE TIMES.



fun attempting to duplicate Wilson's effects. The opening splash page for instance, featuring the story's title displayed in the shape of a sphere with a psychedelically-patterned background recalls late sixties San Francisco rock posters by the likes of Rick Griffin and others. (Indicia indicating the album is a "Marvel Records" release in "stereo" only add to the verisimilitude.) Page 2 is arranged in the style of film strips with succeeding cells showing a missile launch and descent climaxing on page 3 with a mushroom cloud with head shots of members of the album's featured band: The First Million Megaton Explosion. Page 4 ends the opening sequence with a full page illo of a post-apocalyptic New York (in a beach setting obviously in homage to the final scene in the *Planet of the Apes* film released

in 1968). Here, written in the sand, are the credits for Friedrich's faux rock album ostensibly by the Explosion wherein readers are informed that the album was "conceived and produced by Gary Friedrich" and "album cover drawn by Frank Springer." There are even song titles listed for sides one and two of the album and credited again to Friedrich. Furthermore, the album is dedicated to legendary real life rock and rollers Country Joe and the Fish, the Doors, and "John, Paul, George, and Ringo." Finally, after an evocative quote from William Wordsworth's "Splendour in the Grass," the album is said to be licensed by "Stan Lee and Marvel Music Inc." Finally, on page 5, panel 1, the camera pulls back and we see the album sleeve being held by Nick Fury as girlfriend Laura Brown prepares to escort him to an Explosion concert. "You call this noise music?" demands Fury. "Whatever happened to Tommy Dorsey...or Sinatra?" Clearly, it was all an ambitious attempt by Friedrich to not only echo Steranko's work on the *SHIELD* strip but also to elevate it into something more contemporary, more in tune with the times, to escape the title's old fashioned Lee/Kirby origins as a supercharged version of the James Bond films. At the concert, Friedrich even provides lyrics to the Explosion's songs which are interrupted by the Hate Monger's latest ploy, a space-based hate ray that turns young people into



THE FILM *PLANET OF THE APES* WAS ONLY RELEASED IN 1968 BUT ITS FINAL CLIMACTIC SCENE QUICKLY BECAME ICONIC IN AN ERA WHEN MANY FELT THINGS WERE FALLING APART AND THE CENTER COULDNT HOLD. OVER THE YEARS THE SCENE HAS CONTINUED TO BE A USEFUL SHORTHAND FOR DOOM AND EVEN IRONY AS IT DOES IN *NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD* #11.

violent mobs. Unfortunately, the unusual number of pages given over to non-action scenes don't play into Springer's strengths, but when the focus returns to the Hate Monger, the artist provides a cool, full page, chiaroscuro portrait of the villain in his control room as seen through a fun house mirror. (In fact, it might have made for a cool black light poster of the kind Marvel would license in 1971 to publisher Third Eye Inc.) When Fury invades the space station, action is confined to mostly regular panel-to-panel storytelling until the sudden death of the Hate Monger. Friedrich ends his story with a second victory for Fury: romancing Laura to the sounds of Benny Goodman! ("Lead the way, tiger! This little girl's going old fogey!") All in all, this issue was likely the highlight of the Friedrich/Springer team (it even had the best cover since Steranko did that of #7) and perhaps to the surprise of readers, a team that might actually be missed in coming issues.

Mighty Thor #163

"Where Dwell the Demons!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Back on Earth, Thor enters upon a new but somewhat pedestrian adventure involving "demons" who are actually mutated humans from some possible future where the Earth has been destroyed in a nuclear war. That doesn't stop Thor's past adversary Pluto from allying himself with the mutants and transporting an American atomic research center into the future, with the hopes of ransacking it for new weapons. Some people never learn. Anyway, that's the set

up for *Mighty Thor* #163 (April, 1969) and readers were stuck with it. In the meantime, back in Asgard, a concerned Odin hasn't forgotten about Galactus and continues to probe his origins to find out more about him. Jack Kirby's art this issue seems more perfunctory than inspired (which may or may not be the fault of inker Vince Colletta who, despite some doubts about his faithfulness to Kirby's pencils, pulls off some mighty fine renderings here including a full pager depicting the mutant chieftain). Still, a splash on page 14 depicting Thor amid the ruins of some future city is as spectacular as fans had come to expect from the mind of King Kirby. The story continues into the next issue with a hint of a surprise guest star...and not Hercules, as readers might have expected with Pluto around!

Mighty Thor #164

"Lest Mankind Fall!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

The future Pluto/Mutate story begun in the previous issue concludes in spectacular fashion in *Mighty Thor* #164 (May, 1969). As readers will recall, Thor and Sif are stuck in some future history where mankind has devolved into a strange race of savage mutants now led by Pluto, the Grecian god of the underworld. Meanwhile, back in Asgard, Baldur can't get the beautiful but evil Norn Queen out of his mind and in desperation, escapes to Earth with Odin's help. There, he arrives at the same timewarp barrier that Thor had encountered and, striking it with his sword, disrupts it and disgorges not only Thor and Sif, but the entire Mutate army (which proceeds to attack Earth). But, wait! Thor and Baldur aren't alone. They're joined by the US Army and a battle royal follows, ending only when Zeus appears to straighten things out. Throughout, penciler Jack Kirby is at near-peak of his form, held back only by the obvious lack of enthusiasm by inker Vince Colletta. But though Colletta cuts corners mostly on backgrounds, his inks on main figures are as incredible over Kirby as ever. Multiple use by Kirby of full-page splashes as well as half and quarter-page panels in the action sequences give Colletta plenty of opportunities to show what the team was capable of. At the same time, scripter Stan Lee was also at the top of his game dialogue wise with the best lines coming at the expense of his Asgardian characters. For instance, when Baldur makes the scene on Earth, a soldier, seeing him, says "Man! Despite the nutty getup, I sure wouldn't want to tangle with that guy!" And when Baldur tests the barrier and says "Methinks 'tis a mystic, enchanted force," a soldier next to him can only reply "Somehow, the way he says it, I believe it!" Top it all off with a hint of the next issue's story coming at the end of this one (a hand breaking out of a cocoon deep in the fastness of the atomic research facility that everyone was fighting over) and you've got another late period Lee/Kirby success!

Dr. Strange #180

"Eternity, Eternity!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)



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DR. STRANGE #180, PAGE 2: THE DR. STRANGE FEATURE PROCEEDED MERRILY ON ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE PATH COURTESY OF SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS, PENCILER GENE COLAN, AND INKER TOM PALMER (WHO ALSO COLORED) BLITHELY IGNORING AVERAGE COMIC BOOK READER SENSIBILITIES BY DISSOLVING PANEL BORDERS AND FILLING WHAT WAS LEFT WITH SWIRLING, INDISTINCT FORMS THAT PERFECTLY CAPTURED THE WEIRD WORLDS OF THE NOW MASKED DR. STRANGE. SO MUCH SO THAT THE STRIP FRIGHTENED AWAY MANY CASUAL BUYERS AND LIKELY DOOMED THE STRIP TO EARLY CANCELLATION WITH #183.

Fans everywhere no doubt breathed a collective sigh of relief when penciler Gene Colan appeared back on the job for *Dr. Strange* #180 (May, 1969) after recovering from an attack of the "flu bug," necessitating the use of a reprint in the previous issue. And though this issue's cover seemed to have been cobbled together from an old Steve Ditko illustration and photo reference of the New York skyline, inside it was peak Colan wonderment (abetted in no small part by inker Tom Palmer). It starts off with multiple full-page illos as the new superheroic-looking Dr. Strange is once again confronted by Eternity, the personification of the universe. But his form quickly shifts to that of Strange's old enemy, Nightmare, who is later revealed to have captured Eternity. But back at the start of the issue, readers discover that Strange has only been dreaming. After giving readers a glimpse of their hero's taste in bed clothes (hint: they're as far out as his regular costume!), scripter Roy Thomas proceeds with more of Strange's personal life as he picks up girlfriend Clea at her new digs. As the couple proceed to a Times Square celebration of the new year, Clea learns about dating, taxis, and snow and is introduced to gonzo journalist Tom Wolfe who's apparently an old friend of Strange's. Old enough for

Thomas to slip up just a tad in having Strange greet him with the clunky use of a topical reference: "Haven't seen you since you were just a *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby!*" Hoo, boy! The phrase was actually the title of a collection of essays published in book form in 1965, but that hardly excused its awkward insertion here. Thomas included Wolfe and the reference as a tip of the hat to the author after making his acquaintance. On the other hand, what better place to feature a cameo of the author than in *Dr. Strange*, surely one of

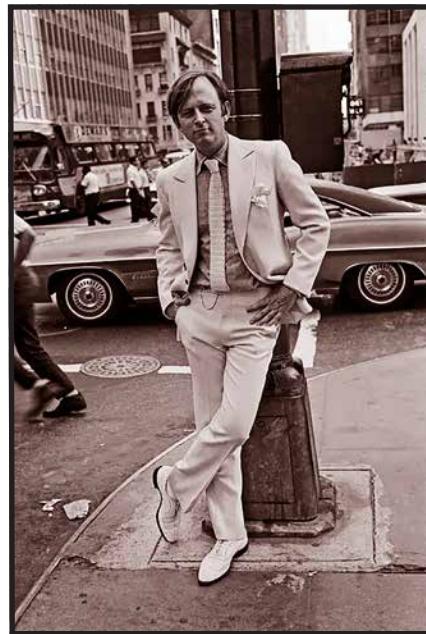
the trippiest-looking comics ever and one that was likely fully appreciated by the likes of Ken Kesey (whom Wolfe popularized in another book called *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*). Meanwhile, back in *Dr. Strange* #180, the pleasantries were interrupted by an invasion of dinosaurs and a horde of warriors plucked from every age. Rarely for Thomas on *Dr. Strange*, the writer stumbles with a ho-hum development (although to be sure, Colan and Palmer can make even the most uninspiring scenes a delight to look at) that readers have to put up with until the spectacular return of Nightmare and a challenge to Strange that the latter dare not refuse. Continued next ish, baby! **Fun Fact:** For some reason, this issue presents a pin-up of Dr. Strange apparently both penciled and inked by Gene the Dean himself. No particular reason is given on the letters' page for this return to a pin-up tradition that hadn't been seen in Marvel Comics since early in the years of consolidation.

Dr. Strange #181

"If a World Should Die, Before I Wake..."; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

Behind a stunning cover design by penciler Gene Colan, *Dr. Strange* #181 (July, 1969) picks up where the previous issue left off, namely with Strange accepting a challenge by Nightmare to face off with him

on the villain's home turf. That scene is reenacted on a whopping New Year's Eve double-page spread by Colan incorporating scripter Roy Thomas' latest adaptation of a familiar phrase from literature, the movies, or elsewhere to use as a title; this time, a snatch from the familiar children's bedtime prayer "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." What follows is Colan's imagination once more unleashed as nearly every page is laid out differently: some as montages, others as pages from a book, others overlapping panels all illustrating fairly mundane events as Strange takes girlfriend Clea home and gets ambushed by a pair of snowball throwers! As if all that's not enough, Colan then sets Strange loose on his magic mission with not one, not two, but three successive full-page illos, each more kaleidoscopic than the next! After that, more of the same, more overlapping, more full pagers as the images literally cascade to a finish where readers learn that the story is once again continued into the next ish. The Thomas/Colan/Palmer team were really humming at this point. It seemed they could do no wrong! On the other hand, was Colan's wild layouts interfering with the book's sales? Or was it that Dr. Strange himself just didn't have the mass appeal that other Marvel heroes did? In any case, the title was now on bi-monthly scheduling making for a looong wait for



"HEY LAMP POST, WHATCHA KNOWIN'?" AUTHOR AND "GONZO JOURNALIST" TOM WOLFE MADE HIS MARK WITH THE ELECTRIC KOOL-AID ACID TEST (1968). A NOVELIZATION OF THE EXPLOITS OF DRUG ENTHUSIAST KEN KESY AND HIS MERRY PRANKSTERS WHO TRAVELED THE COUNTRY EXCELLING THE VIRTUES OF TURNING ON, TUNING IN, AND DROPPING OUT. KESY WAS A FAN OF DR. STRANGE, A FACTOID NOTED IN WOLFE'S BOOK. SO WHAT BETTER PLACE FOR WOLFE TO GUEST STAR THAN IN MARVEL'S HIPPIEST, TRIPPIEST TITLE OF THE SAME NAME?

those fans who did appreciate it: a near perfect comic book produced by creators at the top of their game.

Dr. Strange #182

"And Juggernaut Makes Three!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

Having gone from monthly to bi-monthly status and its end likely in sight, there didn't seem to be any lessening in the quality of the storytelling or artwork for the "master of black magic." That was obvious in *Dr. Strange* #182 (Sept. 1969), wherein the creative team supreme of scripter Roy Thomas, penciler Gene Colan, and inker Tom Palmer continued to give the strip their all in another razzle dazzler of a story in

the third and final chapter of the Nightmare series. Not only that, but Thomas even ups the ante by guest starring X-Men foe the Juggernaut as first a rival then an ally of Nightmare. Bringing the Juggernaut into the Strange-verse was a stroke of genius on the part of Thomas. As old time fans were sure to remember, the origin of the Juggernaut was a mystical one involving Cyttorak and the Crimson Cosmos. That connection proved to be natural as the once Cain Marko unleashes his own magical barrage and adds a new dimension to an already very cool character. And Colan and Palmer do their best to make readers believe it, introducing the personification of an unstoppable force in a full-page illo suitable for hanging in the Louvre! That followed an incredible double-page spread of Strange facing off with Nightmare who's symbolically juggling whole worlds in the palms of his hands. Those worlds represented Earth's past and future which the villain intended to combine unless Strange could stop him. You don't get much more cosmic than that, folks! And what in the world was Gene thinking with that second spread on pages 14-15 featuring a curving layout of panels that twisted across the two pages with a largely plain colored background? Whatever he was trying to do, it was par for the course for this book that the artist turned into

a *tour de force* of visual pyrotechnics. Top all that off with a freed Eternity and his final gift to Dr. Strange by helping him preserve his secret ID back on Earth, changing his back story from Dr. Stephen Strange to that of Dr. Stephen Sanders. It was related to the reader very simply by Thomas: a letter is delivered at the beginning of the issue addressed to Dr. Strange and then when it's given to Strange at the end, the same letter then reads Dr. Sanders. Nice touch! This all made it harder to accept the fact that the very next issue would be the title's last. Clearly, Thomas, Colan, and Palmer were at the very tippety top of their game on this book and it was a crying shame that they couldn't find an audience for it. In a later age, companies including Marvel would have killed for the sales figures that the *Strange* title had when it was canceled. But then, unlike those in the dark age beyond the 1980s, comics in the 1960s still needed to appeal to a mass audience. Unfortunately, the *Dr. Strange* series wasn't one of them. **Fun Fact:** Writer Tom Wolfe, whom Thomas had featured back in *Dr. Strange* #180, drops a note in this issue's letters' page giving his permission to be so starred. But if anyone could make anything out of the disjointed missive with its references to the Purple Dimension and heart transplants, hats off to them!

Sub-Mariner #13

“Death, Thou Shalt Die!”; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

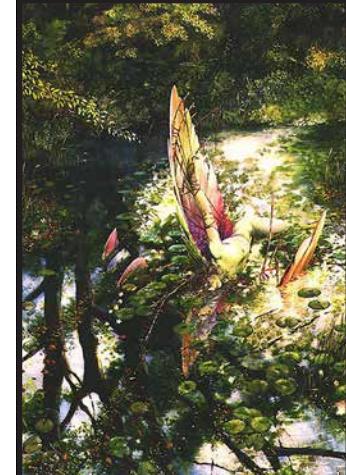
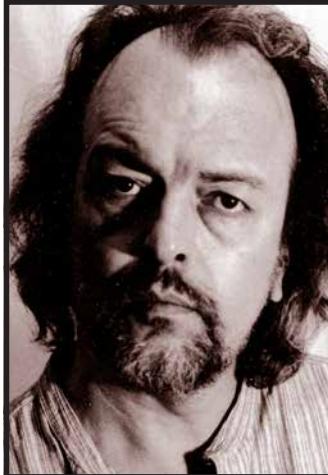
The saga of the Serpent Crown comes to a shattering conclusion in *Sub-Mariner* #13 (May, 1969) as scripter Roy Thomas winds up all the loose ends, including the revelation that Lady Dorma wasn't killed by Lemurian ruler Naga, after all. It was actually the sister of Naga's sycophantic loyalist, Karthon. In a rage, Karthon turns on Naga and does the same to him. After that, the sea floor opens up and swallows both Naga and the crown. Thomas was aided and abetted by the strip's new regular penciler, Marie Severin who, as was becoming the pattern, manages to create a really attractive cover image as well as opening splash page before falling back on her usual clunky figure work and average layout scheme. She was inked by Joe Sinnott this time, who does help the finished product somewhat. But Thomas and Severin must have been doing something right as the strip was destined to outlast two other former split book solo series: *Dr. Strange* and *SHIELD*. On the other hand, *Sub-Mariner* would prove to be the weakest of the remaining four, limping along for a few more years before finally being canceled with issue #72.

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #12

“Hell Hath No Fury!”; Steve Parkhouse (script); Barry Smith (pencils/inks)

SHIELD continued to soldier on following the final departure of long-time guiding light Jim Steranko...

but not for long. With only two more original issues remaining in the run (after that there'd be a few reprints of early *Strange Tales* material then cancellation), the series embarks on a complicated, continued story-line involving Fury being framed and going on the run from both fellow SHIELD agents and a revived Hydra. Though the following issues are forgettable, *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #12 (May, 1969) at least is a fun issue as it manages to catch some of the reflected glory of the Steranko era (or even its Frank Springer immediate precursors). The reason for that is mainly the art by Marvel newcomer Barry Smith. Still in his early, Jack Kirby influenced period, Smith nevertheless stretches himself here far more than he did on his introductory *X-Men* work, grooving in the Steranko manner with inventive layouts and special FX. Although his effects are limited to what he could accomplish with his pencil and imagination, Smith still manages some cool visuals, including page 2, panel 4, and the very Steranko-ish page 11 with its time-lapse depicted in the top three panels and warped lens view of a distorted Fury on panel 6. But Smith is far from perfect with the forced perspective shot of a Hydra goon used on page 8 being a total flop. On the script is one Steve Parkhouse who'd later make his mark on the British comics scene but here does a serviceable job keeping a complicated plot moving forward. But no one was fooled. It was left to future Marvel writer Don McGregor, on this issue's letters' page, to give the obituary for the *SHIELD* book: “SHIELD has seemed recently, as the passing away of an old friend. One who gave telling moments in the span of your own life. Now gone. Gone forever.”



AFTER JIM STERANKO, BARRY SMITH, OR BARRY WINDSOR SMITH AS HE WOULD LATER STYLE HIMSELF, BECAME ONE OF THE EARLIEST NEWCOMERS TO THE RANKS OF MARVEL ARTISTS. STARTING OUT BY EMULATING JACK KIRBY, HE QUICKLY MOVED ON FIRST WITH HIS OWN TAKE ON LAYOUTS, THEN IN THE NEXT DECADE, PENCILING ITSELF WITH A NEW, EXCITING, STYLE BASED ON THE PRE-RAPHAELITE MOVEMENT OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

Captain Marvel #13

"Traitors or Heroes?"; Gary Friedrich (script); Frank Springer (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

The winds of change continued to whirl around Captain Marvel. After Cap was given new powers and wisdom a few issues back, he was now given a new writer and a new artist in *Captain Marvel* #13 (May 1969). Likely taking over a thankless job, neophyte comics writer Gary Friedrich relieved Arnold Drake on scripting chores this ish with Frank Springer taking over on the art for fish out of water Dick Ayers. Friedrich was new to Marvel, having just arrived from Charlton. He was a friend of fellow writer Roy Thomas when they knew each other back in Missouri. Since then, Thomas moved on to DC and then Marvel while Friedrich worked as a journalist for a local paper. But when Thomas suggested he travel East and try his hand in a resurgent comics industry, he'd been laid off and was working in a factory manufacturing heating irons. Obviously, writing comics looked better than working on an assembly line, so Friedrich soon found himself at Marvel picking up the reins on *Sgt. Fury* and various westerns. It was around this period that he found himself assigned to the floundering *Captain Marvel* strip where Drake had begun to swing wild. He was joined by artist Frank Springer who began his career as an assistant to George Wunder on *Terry and the Pirates* before moving on, first to Dell then DC Comics, where he made little impression on fans. He shifted to Marvel in 1968 filling in on *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD*. There, he tried to ape artist Jim Steranko's inventive layouts before finding himself here on *Captain Marvel*. Unfortunately, he brought little of what he put into *SHIELD* and instead seemed to fall back on his unexciting DC work. In fact, his art here is barely better than Dick Ayer's was. Admittedly though, he did have his moments, such as the full page splash on page 11 showing Cap heading toward a Kree supply ship, but they were few and far between. Meanwhile, Friedrich's story isn't much to write home about either with Cap again fighting the Man-Slayer robot from the previous issue, Carol Danvers needing rescue again, and his attempt at vengeance on Col. Yon-Rogg less than satisfying. A cliffhanger ending leaves Cap about to be arrested for treason.

Amazing Spider-Man #72

"Rocked by...the Shocker!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (layouts); John Romita (finishes); Jim Mooney (inks)

The credits for *Amazing Spider-Man* #72 (May 1969) didn't bode well for the title's immediate future. Oh, sure, Stan Lee was still doing the writing as the meandering plot involving the ancient tablet continued to move in unexpected ways (this time, old Spidey foe the Shocker returns to steal the tablet from Captain



ON JANUARY 20, 1969, RICHARD NIXON WAS INAUGURATED PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES FOR THE FIRST TIME. THE NEW PRESIDENT WOULD FIGURE LARGELY IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE MAKING NUMEROUS APPEARANCES IN VARIOUS TITLES OVER THE YEARS OF HIS TWO TERMS.

Stacey, in whose keeping Spider-Man left it in the previous issue; meanwhile, a hint is dropped of the impending reappearance of another old Spidey opponent, the Lizard), but it was in the art department that things began to get really sketchy. Bad enough that for the past few issues, John Romita had only been doing the layouts with Jim Mooney the finishes and inks (making for watered-down Romita at best), but with this issue a new element in the form of John Buscema was added. Worse still, Buscema was now doing the layouts for Romita and Mooney to finish. Now, Buscema was one of Marvel's top artists doing fantastic work on *The Avengers* and *Silver Surfer* but the artist himself later admitted that he didn't like doing superheroes—and *Spider-Man*, in particular. Add to that, that like Jack Kirby before him, no matter how good Buscema was on every other feature, with *Spider-Man* he just could never get the hang of it. What resulted was some of the most uninspired Buscema art he ever did for Marvel. That quality would really begin to tell when Buscema actually took over full pencils on the strip a few issues down the line. Here, though, Romita's presence at least makes Buscema's work palatable, that is, before Mooney's inks turn it into a soft blur.

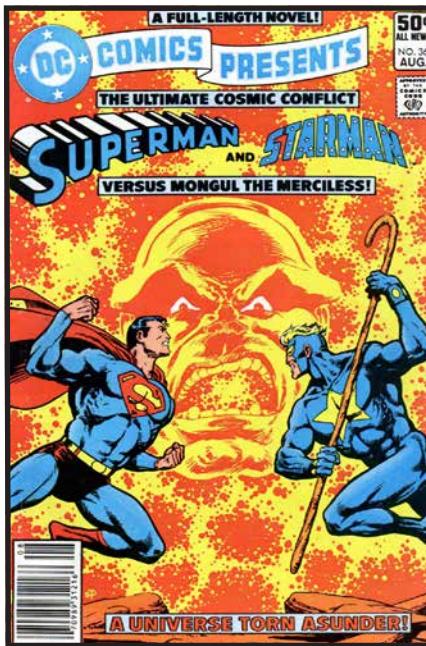
Marvel Superheroes #20

"This Man...This Demon!"
Larry Lieber/Roy Thomas (script); Larry Lieber/Frank Giacoia (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

The final issue of the double-sized *Marvel Superheroes* title to feature original material was also a tag-team collaboration involving a number of bullpen stalwarts.

On the surface, the Dr. Doom lead feature in *Marvel Superheroes* #20 (May, 1969) seemed to be a Larry Lieber production. After all, credits did list him as both contributing to the story as well as the pencils. It marked the first time in a number of years that the younger brother of editor Stan Lee made an appearance among Marvel's best-selling superhero titles since the glory days, when he scripted many of the earliest appearances of the company's characters and frequently drew the weird backup stories as well. Although he did return a couple of times to pencil the annual *Spider-Man Specials*, Lieber had been relegated mostly to the fading western titles where he often wrote and drew his own work and went by the bullpen sobriquet "Larrupin' Larry Lieber!" The credits list Lieber and Roy Thomas equally as writers, so it's not clear what each did in the creation of the story, although continuity bits suggest Thomas' hand in the plotting. In a story that foreshadows a later Doom-starring vehicle of the twilight years called *Super-Villain Team-Up*, the good doctor is approached by Diablo with an offer to team up against their common foes, the Fantastic Four. As inducement, Diablo informs Doom that he's holding captive one of his childhood friends, a woman named Valeria. Not taking kindly to Diablo's blackmail, Doom turns the tables on him and rescues Valeria. The adventure ends on a sombre note as Valeria asks Doom to give up his villainous ambitions for her but, of course, he can't. Penciled by Lieber and inked nicely by Vince Colletta, the story ends on an effective note (and a nice full-page splash of a shadowed and diminutive Doom standing alone in his vast, empty castle) of sorrow and regret that adds heretofore unknown depth to the character of Doom.

Throughout, (aided by fellow artist Frank Giacoia) Lieber makes a noble attempt to echo the art style of Jack Kirby with a result that's not unpleasing. Overall, this usually overlooked story was a rewarding one for any Marvel fan who managed to find a copy. **Fun Fact:** The next issue blurb hints at the introduction of a new character called Starhawk to the Marvel firmament. Alas! It was not to be as a last minute decision to turn the book into an all reprint format must have been made between this issue and the next. It would be some years before a character called Starhawk appeared in the Marvel universe but whether he was the same one that was intended for *Marvel Superheroes* #21 is anyone's guess.



COSMIC MAKEOVERS WOULD BECOME A THING IN THE 1970S WITH THE MASTER OF SUCH EVENTS BEING WRITER/ARTIST JIM STARLIN WHO KICKED THINGS OFF AFTER TAKING OVER THE CAPTAIN MARVEL BOOK THEN WITH WARLOCK, AND THEN WITH STARMAN OVER AT DC. BUT HE COULDN'T CLAIM BEING THERE FIRST. SCRIPTER ARNOLD DRAKE TRIED IT IN CAPTAIN MARVEL #11 ALBEIT FAILING MISERABLY.

Captain Marvel #14

"When a Galaxy Beckons..."; Gary Friedrich (script); Frank Springer (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Scripter Gary Friedrich and penciler Frank Springer were again on the job for *Captain Marvel* #14 (June, 1969), this time with a measure of improvement. The issue's story

involving Mar-Vell's return to the Kree home world opens up possibilities for interesting visuals, something that Springer was quick to take advantage of. In short, the story is divided into two parts, the first of which involves a plot by the Puppet Master to take over Iron Man and sic him on Captain Marvel. (It was all part of a multi-title crossover involving *Sub-Mariner* and the *Avengers* but no need to worry about that here.) Suffice it to say, Cap stops the mind controlled Iron Man by unintentionally inducing a heart attack after socking him in the chest! (Don't worry, IM recovers while on the way to the hospital.) In the meantime, Cap escapes the authorities by using the teleportational powers granted him by the mysterious, godlike Zo to transport himself into space. (Apparently there's no limit to this acquired power.) On a lonely asteroid, he agonizes over the seemingly empty future that awaits him when he's contacted by an irate Zo. The being reminds him of their deal: Zo would give him new super powers to get revenge on Col. Yon-Rogg in return for being his slave for the rest of his life. The issue ends with Zo ordering him to the Kree home world with details of his mission to follow. One thing was for sure: no one could accuse Friedrich of creeping things along at a snail's pace! And what about Springer? All of a sudden, bolstered by the inks of Vince Colletta, he seemed to catch fire this issue with full-page, panoramic shots that attempt to capture the cosmic

scope of Friedrich's story. While the fight with Iron Man is rather ho-hum, ironically, its final panel, a virtual full page, borderless illo on page 14 showing the tiny figure of Iron Man slumped against a pile of smoking wreckage, isn't bad; page 17 is divided into four big quarter-page panels but sort of in the shape of a square pizza; page 18 is another splash with the small figure of Cap standing in the bottom right corner with the rest of the space given over to a few paragraphs apparently being shouted by Zo against a background of multi colored beams of light; finally pages 19 and 20 is a double-page splash with page 19 hosting a full figure of Cap with the rest depicting a panoramic shot of the solar system. Whew!

Mighty Thor #165

"Him!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta (inks)

Artist Jack Kirby still had over a year left as penciler and chief plotter on *Thor* and, though his enthusiasm for the feature soon began to slip and stories tended to single issue tales, there was no immediate diminution in the quality of his art. In fact, their final appearance in the pages of *Thor* as published may have had to do with inker Vince Colletta cutting corners. That said, as of *Mighty Thor* #165 (June, 1969), Kirby could still muster enough verve in his pencils so as to make the strip a fitting echo to the preceding grandiose years. Not only that, but his interest in the book didn't seem to have flagged with much going on here. Continued from events in the previous issue, Thor, Sif, and Balder return to the atomic research center to find out why Pluto had been so interested in it. There, they find Him, the man-like thing created in the Beehive (seen in *FF* #66-67). Upon waking, Him decides his loneliness could be assuaged by female companionship and that Sif could fill the bill. Naturally, Thor objects and a tussle ensues with Him making a break with Sif. Thor and Balder follow, using the power of Thor's hammer and there's a second confrontation but (due to the culmination of an ongoing sub-plot) they're prevented from stopping Him and Sif from disappearing again. It was a fast-moving story with plenty of patented Kirby Kosmicism laced by scripter Stan Lee's appropriately high blown dialogue.

Adding to the action were extras such as the Norn Queen's plot to make Balder fall in love with her. (It was part of that plot that interfered in Thor's second fight with Him; in turning to help Balder from being snatched by Haag, Karnilla's seeress, Thor allowed Him to escape.) Meanwhile, back in Asgard, Odin conducts a search for the origins of Galactus. In an interlude, Him reminiscences on his origin and how his cocoon came to rest in the research center, a reminiscence that Kirby takes advantage of to present what came to be his forte ever since the grandiose years, namely scenes of cosmic space opera captured in big quarter and half-page sized panels.

The first panel on page 11 depicts the Watcher riding along in some kind of Kirby space contraption that just looks awesome and is worth the price of admission by itself. Clearly, at this point, the King had lost none of his power to amaze readers. **Fun Fact:** Look closely at the soldiers marching in review on page 2, panel 1! Their shoulder patches bear the emblem of the international peace symbol that had

become ubiquitous during the 1960s. Originally designed by Gerald Holtom for the British nuclear disarmament movement in the 1950s, it was later adopted in the United States as an anti-war symbol before becoming a symbol for world peace in general. Was using it *Thor* #165 a Kirby touch or what?

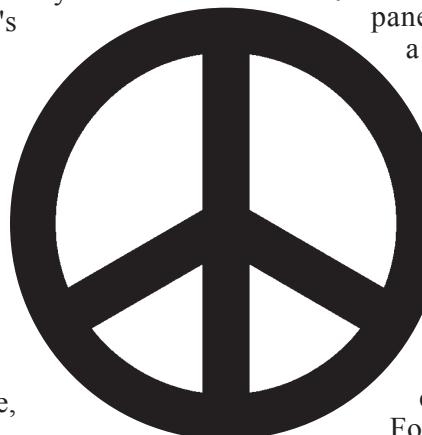
Captain America #114

"The Man Behind the Mask!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (pencils); Sal Buscema (inks)

John Romita to the rescue! Just as he did for *Daredevil* when he took over from Wally Wood, and then for *Spidey* when he did the same for Steve Ditko, and as he would eventually do for Jack Kirby on the *Fantastic Four*, Romita stepped in for *Captain America* #114 (June, 1969) for Jim Steranko. Well, actually, it was unlikely that Steranko had plans to continue on the book beyond his three-part opus covering issues 110, 111, and 113, but still, following up those incredible issues wasn't going to be easy. Nevertheless, Romita had managed similar services before so that by now, editor Stan Lee had confidence that not only could the artist successfully take over from Steranko, but that fans would accept the change. And, why shouldn't they have? Obviously giving this first shot at the feature his full attention (to the detriment of his regular berth on *Spider-Man*), Romita lays out the story in big half and quarter-page panels for the action scenes culminating in a full-page splash depicting the return of the Red Skull. His pencils were so tight that his style is clearly evident even from under the inks of Sal Buscema. He was helped by a solid script from Lee who, after ten issues with art by the pulse-pounding Jack Kirby and then the pop psychedelic/faux forties style of Jim Steranko, was ready to dive back into intensive character development concentrating on Cap's identity issues.

For that, he reached way back to the final installments of the Cap stories from *Tales of Suspense* where his identity of Steve Rogers had been revealed to the world. That revelation exposed Cap and those he loved to constant danger from his foes. But since then, our hero has managed to convince

the world that Steve Rogers is dead, leaving the slate clean for him to create a new ID for himself. But his early optimism quickly turns to morose introspection as he realizes that his life is actually empty and meaningless outside his identity as Captain America. That fact is more forcefully brought home to him when, expressing his fears for her safety, girlfriend Sharon Carter refuses his requests that she resign as



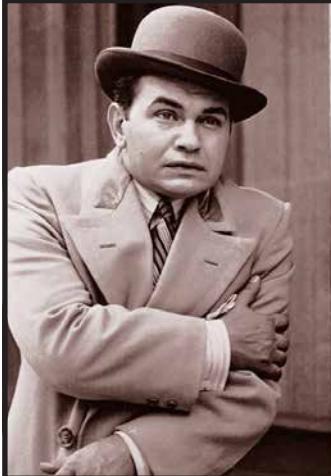
NOTHING SAYS "THE 1960S"
LIKE THE INTERNATIONAL PEACE
SYMBOL, BRAINCHILD OF ONE
GERALD HOLTOM.

an agent of SHIELD. Her decision leaves the future of their relationship in doubt. “Is this the way it must be, for the rest of my life? Must I live out the rest of my days as a human symbol, as an emotionless masked fighting machine?” It was a strong start to a new era, but could it be maintained? Stay tuned!

Silver Surfer #6

“Worlds Without End!”; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Sal Buscema (inks)

As the double-sized format was nearing its end, scripter Stan Lee's stories for *Silver Surfer* continued to be as expansive as ever, acting as modern fables that ended either as a kind of morality play or with our hero questioning the nature of reality or the way things are. In the case of *Silver Surfer* #6 (June 1969), it was the latter. After spending 39 pages streaking into the future and battling a someday Genghis Kahn, the Surfer returns to the present wondering if his adventure had all been a dream, after all. It might as well have been if the question were left to fans who spent the next several issues' worth of letters' pages arguing over assumptions made in Lee's plot, which involved the Surfer traveling to the future in order to bypass the barrier that prevents him from leaving Earth. He succeeds, only to arrive at his home planet of Zenn-La to find it laid waste. Later, he discovers that the entire universe has been conquered by the Warlord who claims to have killed every human being in it! Questions raised in the story but never addressed included: how could the Surfer expect to find his beloved Shalla-Bal alive eons into the future? How could she even be portrayed as alive in the present when, as the Surfer, Norrin-Rad had been serving Galactus for eons? How could the Warlord kill every human in an infinite universe? And where were Earth's other superheroes to stop him? In a way, readers missed the point of the Surfer tales that worked best as allegory than as literal tales of a superhero contemporaneous with the likes of Spider-Man and the Human Torch.



SCRIPTER STAN LEE CONTINUED TO MINE THE LORE AND LEGEND OF OLD TIME HOLLYWOOD GANGSTER MOVIES AS FODDER FOR THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN THE INTRODUCTION OF SILVERMANE AND HIS SCHEMING MOUTHPIECE, CEASAR CICERO, A RINGER OF SORTS FOR LITTLE CAESAR (1931) ACTOR EDWARD G. ROBINSON.

(Even though the Surfer would end up meeting those two in future issues.) That said, readers shouldn't have had any complaints about the art for this ish! Penciler John Buscema, at the very height of his powers, turned in another exemplary job. And though readers had been happy when Joe Sinnott was doing the inking on the first three issues, they could only be giddy with delight at the results John's younger brother Sal had managed this issue! Utilizing mostly a delicate line and eschewing blacks except for outer space backgrounds, the Buscemas end up with visuals perfect for the depiction of this SF-based fairy tale of the far future. Buscema had asked Lee to assign Sal to the finishes after registering dissatisfaction with the way Sinnott's inking was coming off. He believed Sinnott's style was too assertive and tended to bury his own. Lee wasn't necessarily sure about that, but acquiesced and the rest was history! Meanwhile, the Tales of the Watcher feature continued to fill out the rest of the pages in the back of the book but by now, Gene Colan had moved on and was replaced on the penciling this issue by Syd Shores (inked surprisingly, by newcomer Frank Brunner, freshly recruited from fandom). Shores continued the feature in the style established by Colan that included wide open layouts in big, half and quarter-page panels. Lee's script is sparse, much like it was when these short stories were first presented in Marvel's pre-hero Atlas days. Together, sparse scripting and big panels, worked to zip the tale right along.

Amazing Spider-Man #73

“The Web Closes!”; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (layouts); John Romita (finishes) Jim Mooney (inks)

Truth to tell, there isn't much of John Romita in *Amazing Spider-Man* #73 (June 1969). The credits list Romita as “coordinated by,” whatever that means. But since John Buscema's name comes first as “innovated by” and judging from the style of the art throughout the issue, it can be safely assumed that Buscema actually penciled this one with some touch ups (maybe on the characters' faces) by Romita and all the rest finished up by inker Jim Mooney, whose own style continued to muddy the artistic waters resulting in a largely boring visual presentation. And that's too bad, because scripter Stan Lee's continuing story involving the ancient tablet begins to really heat up with some new and interesting elements, not least of them being the introduction of Man Mountain Marko, an Ox wannabe that Lee still manages to define with his own distinctive personality of a merciless (if not overly bright) organized crime hit man. Made distinctive in full-length Johnny Cash style black leather, he's able to give Spidey a hard time before getting hold of the ancient tablet for his boss, Maggia leader Silvermane. In between, we meet Ceasar Cicero (“big-time mouthpiece for the Maggia” and nod toward Edward G. Robinson) who's angling to take over from the aged Silvermane and drop in on Robbie

and Randy Robertson as Robbie fills in a confused Randy on the need for education and being able to recognize who the real enemy is: "bigotry, injustice, and want." Finally, the issue ends with the recruitment of Curt Connors by Silvermane to help decipher the writings on the ancient tablet. And with Connors around, can the Lizard be far behind?

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #13

"The Super-Patriot!"; Gary Friedrich (script); Herb Trimpe (pencils); Sam Grainger (inks)

Even with artist Frank Springer's limitations, it was definitely a step down, maybe a few steps down, when Herb Trimpe was called in to take over on the art chores for *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #13 (July, 1969). Although he'd become a Marvel mainstay over the next decade, most especially with his long run on *The Incredible Hulk*, Trimpe's blunt, no-frills style left nothing to be desired by connoisseurs of comic art. His bland, unimaginative work was on full display here where his most ambitious scene was a double-page spread of a "sea battle" on the East River delivered in by-the-numbers, set piece fashion. Meanwhile, we find the SHIELD ramrod on the run as he encounters the costumed Super-Patriot of the story's title. Ironically, scripter Gary Friedrich has the villain spout vitriol accusing unelected forces within the US government of conspiring to rob Americans of their freedoms, rhetoric that would have been alarming in 1969, but now seems prescient in its anticipation of what has since been labeled "the deep state" and its alleged efforts to undermine presidents and the will of voters! Be that as it may, the effort to stop the Super-Patriot from blowing up the United Nations is foiled (hoisted on his own petard so to speak!) even as Fury discovers that beneath his mask, the villain was...himself!

Amazing Spider-Man #74

"If This Be Bedlam!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Jim Mooney (finishes/inks)

With some relief, fans opened *Amazing Spider-Man* #74 (July, 1969) to find that artist John Romita was back in the penciler's chair for what would prove to be the penultimate issue of the ancient tablet story-line. The only problem was that though John Buscema was gone, Romita was still only laying out the pencils and



WAS JOHNNY CASH'S PERSONA AS "THE MAN IN BLACK" THE INSPIRATION FOR MAN MOUNTAIN MARKO? YOU BE THE JUDGE!

leaving Jim Mooney, he of the cartoony faces and fuzzy inking, to finish the art and then ink it. The difference between these results and pure Romita was readily seen when readers compared the interior pages with the art on this issue's wonderful symbolic cover: with its sharper images and overall more dynamic style, it was pure, undistilled Romita. If only this and the next issue could have been done with full pencils and inks by Jazzy Johnny! It was all the more to be regretted as Stan Lee's story builds to its climax in the next issue. Here, readers finally discover the secret of the tablet (and one wonders if even Lee knew what it would be when he first began the meandering plot half a dozen issues back), one that Maggia boss Silvermane already suspected: that it was a formula for eternal youth. That was the reason why he had a chemist like Curt Connors kidnapped to work on deciphering the tablet. Well, Connors succeeds and, cooking up the formula, gives it to Silvermane who promptly drinks down the potion. Our tale ends in cliff hanger fashion complete with full-page splash of an aged Silvermane now transformed into the prime of his life. The ancient tablet story-line was indeed winding up with a surprising and unexpected finish, setting up another classic Spidey villain in the mold of the Kingpin...or was it? Readers had to stay tuned for 30 days to find out!

Amazing Spider-Man #75

"Death Without Warning!"; Stan Lee (script); John Romita (layouts); Jim Mooney (finishes/inks)

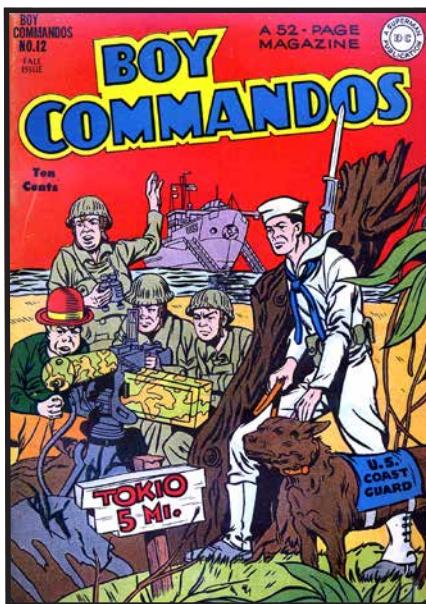
It's action all the way in *Amazing Spider-Man* #75 (Aug. 1969) as scripter Stan Lee and layout artist John Romita conclude their epic plot involving the mysterious ancient tablet. But a tablet that's not so mysterious anymore as readers finally learn that the markings on the stone are actually a formula for eternal youth...or so they and Maggia boss Silvermane, were led to believe! Actually, it's a de-aging formula. Big difference. As Silvermane and Spider-Man soon learn when the bossman becomes younger and younger, ultimately to disappear into pre-conception nothingness! Penciler John Romita provides a sombre cover image that suggests the ending of the story without giving anything away while on the insides, the artist's work is once again finished off by the inadequate Jim Mooney. Add to that a failure in Marvel's coloring department that made everything appear to be gray, brown, or green and you have a recipe for unappealing visuals. It was something that wasn't

escaping the notice of some long time fans including Steve Games, whose letter in this issue's letters' page states up front that "a certain something is missing from the web-slinger's mag." He sensed a diminution in story quality and characterization as well as in the art. All true. Too bad too, as the climax to the tablet plot turned out to be an interesting one. Not so interesting however, is the lay up for Spidey's next adventure: the return of the Lizard. Ho-hum.

Captain America #115

"Now Begins the Nightmare!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Sal Buscema (inks)

No sooner had fans settled in with the dramatic change in artists the issue before, from Jim Steranko to John Romita, than they were asked to accept another. Turns out that Romita's takeover in issue #114 was only temporary (he'd be back in a couple years for a longer stay with #138) until John Buscema could move in for *Captain America* #115 (July. 1969). More used to handling Cap by way of all those great past issues of the *Avengers*, Buscema delivers a more naturalistically forceful sentinel of liberty than did Romita, whose more elegant lines never could quite match the bludgeoning figure work of his predecessors. (Even though he'd had prior experience years before when Lee first tried to revive the character in the 1950s). Unfortunately, denied the services of inker Tom Palmer who'd worked his magic over Buscema on *Avengers* or Frank Giacoia on *Sub-Mariner*, the artist here appears somewhat washed out and his figures light weight. The lack of detail and often empty backgrounds suggest this was more of a rush job than a lack of support from inker Sal Buscema. Be that as it may, the elder Buscema packs this issue with plenty of action and movement as Stan Lee's story moves events at the whimsy of a returned Red Skull, now empowered by his re-possession of the Cosmic Cube. It seems that the Cube had been rediscovered by a lowly fisherman after the Skull lost it following his epic battle with Cap circa *Tales of Suspense* #80. Tracking him down, the Skull steals it back and becomes all-powerful. Now, of course, he wants his revenge on Cap, a revenge that will be stretched over a good five issues as the unreconstructed Nazi toys with his intended victim before dispatching him. Although the long, serialized story format was first exploited by Lee with artist Jack Kirby in earlier issues



AT LEAST RICK JONES' TEEN BRIGADE WAS GROUNDED IN MORE REALITY THAN JACK KIRBY AND JOE SIMON'S PREVIOUS KID GANGS SUCH AS THE NEWSBOY LEGION OR BOY COMMANDOS.

of the *Fantastic Four* and *Thor*, it had now become a regular thing at Marvel, a tool that one suspects, was used to stretch out stories, making them easier to write rather than coming up with new ones every issue. Such appears to be the case here as Lee stretches his yarn out beyond its natural borders. Sure, he'd take a break in one issue to introduce the Falcon, but the background of the struggle with the Red Skull made that event appear to be a mere afterthought. To spice things up a little, Lee manages to throw in some soap opera in the form of Rick Jones needling Sharon Carter about showing some love for the absent Cap, (she's too busy at the moment) then scooting over to Avengers mansion to find out if they know anything about his whereabouts. (Little does he know that within a couple of issues, Cap will have picked up a new partner in the form of the Falcon and

Rick's services as the new Bucky would no longer be required.) And don't blink or you'll miss the brief return of the fabled Teen Brigade, those youthful descendants of Kirby's old kid gangs such as Boy Commandos and Newsboy Legion assembled by Rick himself in those halcyon days before he became involved with the Hulk!

Mighty Thor #166

"A God Berserk!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Vince Colletta; (inks)

The action continues beneath another classic Kirby cover that features two battling, bludgeoning combatants drawn in cataclysmic titanitude! *Mighty Thor* #166 (July. 1969) picks up where the previous issue left off, with Thor vowing to follow the vanished Him to rescue the fair Sif from his clutches. But this time, it's personal and that makes all the difference as events soon to follow will launch the feature into yet another extended story arc over a number of

issues. And that only follows upon other arcs that have already been leading one into the other for some time. The story here, far from being just another hero rescues girl story, is that the hero is going after the bad guy for his own gratification and not just because it's the right thing to do. Driven over the edge with anger (illustrated by Kirby in a series of power-packed panels showing the God of Thunder destroying the landscape around him), Thor goes berserk, a warrior madness forbidden by Odin and something Balder tries to warn his friend about, but to no avail. They track Him down and when the time comes, Thor shows no mercy. But unbeknownst to him, the battle is being observed by Odin, who punishes his

son by sending him into what appears to be permanent exile: to seek out the origins of Galactus. Meanwhile, Karnilla still seeks to seduce Balder by hook or crook. And a reader had to wonder why Balder needed to be compelled at all, after checking out the full-page illo Kirby provides showing the Norn Queen in all her sultry glory! And speaking of full page illos, Kirby provides a number of them this ish (including the shot of Karnilla, Thor and Him body slamming each other, a close up of big daddy Odin, and the massive spaceship Thor is to take in search of Galactus) and making it all the more impressive that he could squeeze so much story and action into a mere 20 pages. And lest anyone complains about Vince Colletta's inks, no matter his shortcomings, no one else could make these pages look as good or as powerful as they are. The end may have been approaching when Kirby and Marvel would go their separate ways, but not so anyone could tell by this ish!

VERY COOL DOUBLE SPLASH PAGES FROM FANTASTIC FOUR #88 BY PENCILER JACK KIRBY FIRST SHOWING THE FF FROM THE FRONT AS THEY APPROACH REED AND SUE'S NEW HOME AND THEN FROM THE REAR AS THEY PROCEED INSIDE.



Fantastic Four #88

"A House There Was!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Although Kirby's last hurrah as a creative force on the FF (not to mention the rest of Marvel) was the multi-part Latveria captivity story-line concluded in the previous issue, the two-part tale presented here and in issue #89 (the pay off to a running sub-plot from earlier issues) may serve as the penciler's last half-decent effort on the title. Artwise, it still carried a punch strongly aided by Joe Sinnott's inks. And though underlying details of the story lack credibility (any of the realities of buying and selling a home such as banks, real estate agents, insurance companies, appraisers, deeds, prior owners, etc., are completely absent), it does retain the feel of a single issue story that might have appeared in early issues of the title. Up front, helping to sell *Fantastic Four* #88 (July, 1969) is a simple but cool symbolic Kirby cover showing the FF in the coils of the issue's main menace: a house? That's what readers were expected to swallow as Sue Richard's ongoing hunt for a place in the suburbs to raise her new baby leads her to a strange, futuristic-looking domicile that a real estate agent says she could have for a song. The rest of



the FF are introduced to the house in not one, but two consecutive full-page panels, reverse angles actually, with the first showing the FF from the structure's POV and the second the house from the team's perspective. Quite clever on Kirby's part. The artist mostly confines his work to big, quarter-page panels to tell the story which, among other things, involves team members' concerns about their eyesight. Moving day arrives and so do a number of other unforeseen problems with the house—including its defense devices that are triggered after Reed Richards tries to hang some pictures on the wall! Finally, taking their places at the table for their first meal in their new home, the entire team is suddenly struck blind and the Mole Man introduces himself as the real builder of the house which is not a house at all but a machine he intends to use to conquer the surface world! A fun, fast-paced story with the usual effortless dialoguing by Stan Lee, it was an entertaining yarn but nothing of the quality that fans had grown to expect from Lee and Kirby. It was a sign of things to come as the greatest creative team in comics history began to separate and grow apart. In a year, it would all be over, leaving a stunned fandom to wonder: what happened?

Fantastic Four #89

"The Madness of the Mole Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

At one time, probably one of the easiest issues to find in back issue bins, *Fantastic Four* #89 (Aug. 1969) picks up more or less where it left off the previous issue. More or less because while it's true that the FF are still menaced by the Mole Man after suddenly being struck blind by a machine he built for the purpose (one that they mistook for an ordinary albeit extremely modernistic house), penciler Jack Kirby opts for an unexpected opening to the tale. Instead of jumping right into the action, he begins on the opening splash page with a view outside the house before moving in closer on page 2. There, each of the next four panels leads the reader deeper and deeper into the recesses of the building until a full-page splash on page 3 bursts onto the viewer's sensibilities, showing the FF in desperate battle with the Mole Man. For his part, scripter Stan Lee adds drama to the unfolding scene with some opening text: "At the edge of a shadowy woodland it stands, emitting strange and sinister rays like some monstrous, glowing toad. This is the mysterious dwelling which Reed Richards had chosen for his home, and this is the start of a battle like none which you have ever seen before!" Lee's text accompanying the four introductory panels on page 2 are equally effective at building mood and suspense as Kirby's camera moves down twisting corridors, past ruined furniture, and into the ongoing battle. That goes on for a few more pages before the first interlude, a gathering sub-plot to be fully revealed in the next issue, and introduced here with a full-page Kirby collage! Kirby had begun experimenting with

collage and using actual photographs as background for his pencils early in the *FF* run but had used them less frequently in recent years. This one works wonderfully as a group of spaceships emerge from some kind of cosmic dust cloud drifting behind the Moon on their approach to Earth. Who are the occupants? What are they up to? Well, according to the Skrull slaver (captured by Kirby in a rather pointless full-page portrait), he's out looking to capture a gladiator for the games, whatever they are. Wonder who he has in mind? But there was no time for speculation because the scene shifts back to the FF's struggle with the Mole Man and as luck would have it, the good guys regain their sight and defeat the madman. But their victory is a pyrrhic one as in defeat, the Mole Man is once again the same pitiful creature he was when they first fought him years before. "He's just lying there, weeping," observes the Torch. "Nobody understands! Nobody ever cares," whimpers the Mole Man. But instead of sympathy, the Torch reprimands the villain for his self-pity. "So you had a gripe. Did it ever occur to you that everyone's got a gripe? Nobody exiled you to subterranea! You went there on your own, 'cause you couldn't face up to your problems. You took what you thought was the easy way out. Well, I've got news for you, mister. Ben Grimm had a problem, a lot bigger than yours. But he faced it like a man! ...But you live on hate, on blaming others for whatever's bugging you. If pity's your bag, you won't find it here." It may have been the twilight of the Lee and Kirby partnership and the stories from this point on became slighter as the months counted down to Kirby's eventual departure, but Lee still had the ability to infuse nobility into otherwise static characters, could still put words in their mouths that had the power to



THE HAUNTING (1963), DIRECTED BY ROBERT WISE AND ADAPTED FROM A NOVEL BY SHIRLEY JACKSON MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE INSPIRATION FOR THE PLOT IN FANTASTIC FOUR #88-89 AS A SMALL GROUP OF CHARACTERS STAY IN A STRANGE HOUSE FROM WHICH STRANGE, FRIGHTENING EVENTS ARISE.

move readers and even inspire them. Backed by Kirby's dramatic imagery (Johnny Storm's posture and the look on his face in the sequence quoted above) underlined and no doubt inspired Lee's choice of dialogue, but there was no doubt that Marvel in these years still had the mojo to rise above mere action and give readers more, a lot more, for their fifteen cents. And as if the scene with Johnny and the Mole Man weren't coda enough, Lee and Kirby followed it up immediately with an equally moving scene of the Thing using his power to revive a stricken Reed Richards: "Ya might as well start breathin', hear? 'Cause I ain't gonna stop. I'll never stop. No matter how long it takes. Till yer your own long-winded, stuffed-shirt, egg-headed, nutty ol' self again. So come on, Stretcho, do it fer Sue, and the kid, and all of us!" It was stuff like this that reassured fans that Marvel still packed the goods. It was only too bad that a key element in the delivery of those goods would soon be removed from the equation.

Captain Marvel #15

"That Zo Might Live...A Galaxy Must Die!";
Gary Friedrich (script/breakdowns); Tom Sutton
(pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

The first thing observant fans will have noticed about *Captain Marvel* #15 (Aug. 1969) was that Frank Springer, who'd delivered a somewhat hopeful art job the previous issue, was gone. And so was inker Vince Colletta, who'd provided a measure of continuity over the last several issues while helping to prop up the pencils of unexciting artists. So readers at the time might have had good reason to be trepidatious when they opened this issue. Not to worry...maybe! With writer Gary Friedrich being given credit for "breakdowns" as well as script, it's to him readers had to look for the phantasmagoric pages that dominated this tale of Cap being sent to the Kree home world by the godlike Zo to put an end to a religious cult there that worships the god Tam-Bor. Seems that in the process of their liturgical goings on, a magnetic force is unleashed that threatens the entire universe...including Zo! But that's kid stuff compared to the layouts utilized for this issue! The art was done by Tom Sutton, another relatively new hire by Marvel. At bottom, Sutton was awkward in his art style but showed promise having worked some in advertising before breaking into comics at Warren Publications. He landed at Marvel in 1967 doing westerns before cracking into superheroes sorta by way of *Not Brand Echh*. But you couldn't get any more backdoor than the *Captain Marvel* strip, and that's where Sutton had eventually clawed his way to by the time this issue was published. More attuned to wild and crazy layouts than predecessors Dick Ayers and Frank Springer, and likely following Friedrich's breakdowns, Sutton provided crude but serviceable illos for the psychedelic goings on. That said, he provides readers here with a delirious ride as Zo plunges Mar-Vell into a vortex of visions that sum



TOM SUTTON'S OUTPUT FOR MARVEL COMICS WAS LIMITED BUT HIS OUTRE STYLE, THOUGH CRUDE AT TIMES, WAS SOMEHOW APPEALING. NOT SO MUCH WITH SUPER-HEROES MIND YOU, BUT FOR WORK DONE IN THE EARLY 1970S AFTER THE COMICS CODE WAS REFORMED ALLOWING MARVEL TO EXPAND INTO THE HORROR GENRE, THERE, SUTTON PENCILED OR INKED STRIPS LIKE WEREWOLF BY NIGHT AND MARVEL'S HORROR TITLES, FOR WHICH HE WAS WELL SUITED.

up the history of Earth, his own back story, and heaven and hell before filling him in on why he wants him to destroy Kree-Lar, his own home world. Overall, it was an intriguing issue anticipating cosmically aware heroes that became a staple of comics later in the twilight years. The trend, however, had its crude beginnings here, in *Captain Marvel* #15.

Daredevil #55

"Cry Coward!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan
(pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Wow! What a difference a switch in inkers makes! Although George Klein was adequate over Gene Colan's pencils, Syd Shores' would prove to be the best short of Tom Palmer's later in the run. Maybe just as good! Not convinced? Then just take a gander at this issue's opening splash page of a hat and coated DD making his way along a wind swept sidewalk. Just the judicious use of shading and cross hatching here turns an ordinary-looking image into something eye-catching with the DD figure looking almost 3-D. And there's more to come, plenty more, as each succeeding page in *Daredevil* #55 (Aug. 1969) becomes pure eye candy. Pages 2 and 3 are both full pagers that Shores' inks fill out wherever necessary. And when there's some empty space, there's reason for it, as in the shot of DD escaping from an exploding plane. Colan's interest in film is on display in a quartet of panels on page 9 as DD walks dejectedly along an alley, stepping into puddles. Here, the lens of the "camera" zooms in closer with each panel until

finally focusing on a single puddle. But Shores' inks on this final panel as the ripples smooth out to reveal the image of Mr. Fear reflected in the water is just amazing. Colan's sense of the dramatic is revealed on the very next page as the POV shifts from a dim figure in a puddle to the real thing on the very next page. There, the reader's senses are slammed by a full page shot of Mr. Fear in all his arcane glory. Shores is unafraid to ladle on the inks creating a darksome figure lined against a storm tossed sky. Man, fans



DAREDEVIL #55, PAGE 9: PENCILER GENE COLAN (AIDED BY INKER SYD SHORES) SHOWS HIS CINEMATIC INCLINATIONS WITH THE LAYOUT OF THIS PAGE WHEREIN HIS PANELS ACT AS THE EYE OF THE CAMERA ZOOMING IN BEHIND AND BELOW DAREDEVIL WHO MOVES OFF STAGE, AND THEN ON A CLOSE UP OF THE PUDDLE HE JUST STEPPED IN REVEALING A REFLECTION AND POTENTIAL THREAT OF MR. FEAR. MASTERFUL!

at the time must have thought they were living right! And the story isn't bad, either, as scripter Roy Thomas has DD re-confront Mr. Fear after doing a little research. Seems Zoltan Drago (the Mr. Fear of *DD* #5) had a fear of heights and the Mr. Fear that just defeated him flew around way up high on a flying disc. Ergo, this new Fear was not the same as the old Fear. Unmasked, he proved to be none other than Starr Saxon who then conveniently falls from the disc to his death. (Well, maybe. We never saw him hit, did we?) In remarks on this issue's letters page, Thomas gets a bit ahead of himself by predicting issue #56 a classic, but if Shores was still on the inks, it was likely a safe bet!

Captain America #116

"Far Worse Than Death!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Captain America finally found its regular penciler in the unlikely form of Gene Colan. Sure, Colan had established his bona fides with super-heroes with his stellar work on *Daredevil* but it was not to be forgotten that he also managed to make his mark on such bludgeoning characters as Iron Man, so his taking over an action strip like *Captain America* did not require too great a stretch of the imagination. But though he did good work on the book, something about his style just never seemed to gel with a character that perhaps was

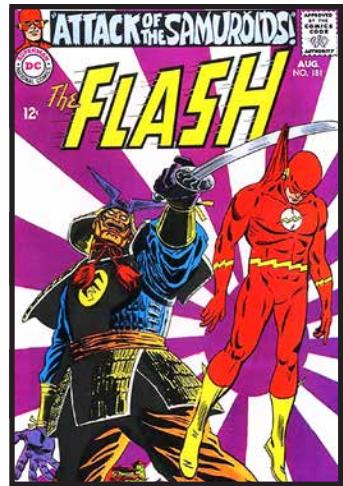
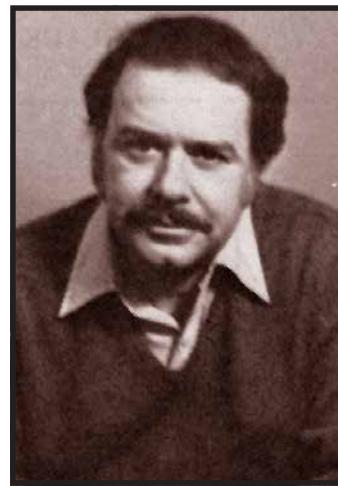
still too closely associated with the more outsized, in-your-face style of Jack Kirby rather than the more elegant lines of a John Romita. Thus, his long stint on the title would rarely if ever translate among fans into instant association as it did for *Daredevil*, *Iron Man*, *Dracula*, or even *Howard the Duck*. Still, there's no doubt that Colan hit the ground

running for *Captain America* #116 (Aug.. 1969), which just so happened to guest star the Avengers, a colorful team of heroes that Colan had just filled in for on a few wildly successful issues of their own mag. Here, he pulls out the stops beginning with a busy, colorful cover showing Cap going crazy, and well he should, what with the Red Skull still toying with him aided by the power of the Cosmic Cube! In a situation that would drive anyone out of their minds with despair, scripter Stan Lee has the Skull switching bodies with our hero and even stealing his girl! But instead of spending more time with the beautiful Sharon Carter, the Skull slips away to work a frame on Cap, now in the Skull's body. Soon, Cap is on the run from the police and Lee gives Colan an opportunity to draw a car chase scene (one of the artist's favorite things to illustrate) that ends at Avengers mansion. Meanwhile, Rick Jones in Bucky costume finds the Skull whom he thinks is Captain America and gets the brush off. "Since when do I need the help of a teenage brat?" says the Skull. "Get out of here! If I need you, I'll send for you. And don't hold your breath waiting!" A shocked Rick walks away, his partnership with Cap over and a new one soon to begin with another captain named Mar-Vell. Meanwhile, Cap faces off with the Avengers, who refuse to believe he's not the Red Skull. A fight ensues, climaxing with the arrival of Sharon Carter who takes aim at the "Skull" but in the end, instinct taking over, cannot shoot him. Whew! With all this going on, no wonder this issue was...to be continued!

Sub-Mariner #16

"The Sea That Time Forgot!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Joe Gaudioso (inks)

One would think that the Sargasso Sea would be a natural location for a submersible hero looking for action but, unlikely as it sounds, the famous "sea" only makes its first appearance in *Sub-Mariner* #16 (Aug. 1969). Discovered and named by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century, the Sargasso Sea lies in the Atlantic Ocean and is so named because of the kind of floating seaweed it's composed of. Anyway, enough with the history lesson! Our hero this ish travels to the Sargasso after he learns that's where he can find the evil Tiger Shark. Sure enough, that's what happens, along with Namor's discovery that the villain has allied himself with a race of immortals planning to take over the Earth (what else?). But when the immortals suddenly begin to age upon leaving the area of the Sargasso, there go their plans and those of Tiger Shark. And though Tiger Shark escapes in the end, it's not without the self-sacrifice of Namor's friend, Walter Newell. It was another solid entry in the series by scripter Roy Thomas with acceptable penciling by Marie Severin, inked this time by one Joe Gaudioso (who was actually the ubiquitous Mike Esposito). Severin surprises with a really striking cover image that must have helped



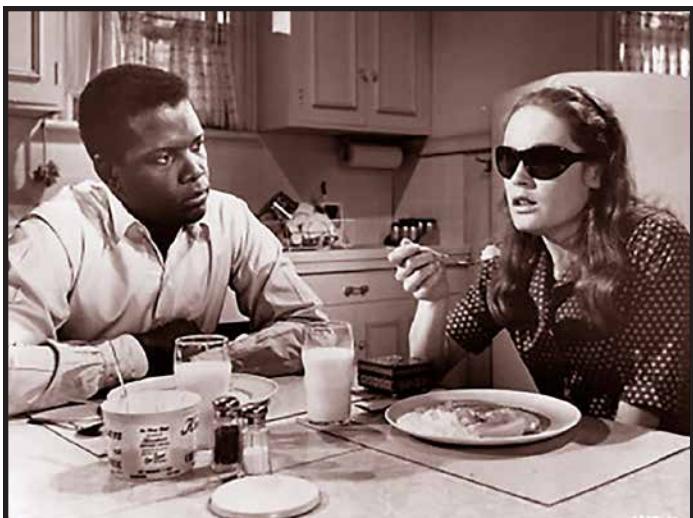
WHILE MIKE ESPOSITO WILL NEVER BE MISTAKEN FOR MARVEL'S MORE ARTISTIC INKERS SUCH AS TOM PALMER, SYD SHORES, OR EVEN BILL EVERETT, WHO TRANSFORMED THE WORK OF SUCH PENCILERS AS JACK KIRBY, GENE COLAN, AND JOHN BUSCEMA, HIS STRAIGHTFORWARD EFFORTS AT LEAST, DID NO HARM. AT DC HE PROVIDED THE SAME LEVEL OF SERVICES PRIMARILY FOR ARTIST ROSS ANDRU.

sales but as usual, her awkward figure work mars much of her interior art. (With the exception of page 15, panel 3, showing a closeup of Tiger Shark's face; the inks on it are so different from the rest of the book, one wonders if it had been done by someone other than Esposito.) Still, *Sub-Mariner* continued to roll along, outpacing such fellow graduates of Marvel's split books as *S.H.I.E.L.D.* (now canceled) and *Dr. Strange* now downgraded to bi-monthly status and soon to be canceled, as well. So Thomas and Severin must have been doing something right.

Silver Surfer #7

"The Heir of Frankenstein!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Sal Buscema (inks)

The last double-sized issue of *Silver Surfer* was also somewhat of a climb down from those that preceded it. Somewhat reminiscent of the plot for *Fantastic Four* #57, where Dr. Doom tricks the Surfer and drains his cosmic power into himself, a descendant of the original Victor Frankenstein (who's as mad as his forebear) plans to do the same, except this time the subject won't be himself but a lump of lifeless clay. Capturing the trusting Surfer (who never seems to learn), Frankenstein succeeds in his plan and creates a duplicate of the skyrider. Angered at the hostility of nearby villagers, Frankenstein sends off the duplicate to destroy the town. A revived Surfer goes after him and battle ensues until the Surfer's will overpowers the duplicate. Meanwhile, the villagers attack Frankenstein and instead of seeing them killed, the evil scientist's lackey stops him at the



A PATCH OF BLUE (1965): IN A WAY, SAM WILSON'S LATER OCCUPATION AS A SOCIAL WORKER AND HIS REJECTION BY THE MORE RADICAL ELEMENTS IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, REFLECTED REAL LIFE FEELINGS TOWARD ACTOR SIDNEY POITIER WHO ALSO SUFFERED CRITICISM FOR THE ROLES HE CHOSE TO PLAY IN FILMS THAT ACTIVISTS AT THE TIME CONDEMNED AS MERELY "ACCEPTABLE" TO WHITE AUDIENCES.

cost of both their lives. *Silver Surfer* #7 (Aug. 1969) had an okay story by Stan Lee scripted with his usual heavy dose of humanism, but nothing as hard-hitting as in some of the earlier issues. John Buscema's pencils, embellished by brother Sal, were top-notch, also as usual. And even the Watcher backup tale called "I, the Gargoyle" being a Mole Man prototype, carried its share of irony and moral twist as illustrated this time by Howard Purcell. The penciler began his career back in the 1940s before ending up at DC comics in the 1960s. From there, he drifted to Marvel. He didn't get a chance to do much work there but his style seemed to come up to the company's standards with his most high profile work having appeared in *Marvel Superheroes* #17, where he illustrated a Black Knight lead story. Here, he maintains the look of the Watcher series set by Gene Colan, using large size panels to give a veneer of modernity to an older tale as retold by Lee.

Captain America #117

"The Coming of...the Falcon!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Captain America #117 (Sept. 1969) might well be considered a mere interlude in the ongoing Red Skull/Cosmic Cube saga except for one thing: the introduction of a new superhero, the Falcon! And not just any superhero, but a Black superhero (the second to be created in the Marvel stable following the Black Panther, who made his introduction four years prior),

as well as the first African-American superhero. (He beat DC's substitute Green Lantern, John Stewart, by two years.) The Falcon arrived at an important time in the civil rights movement. Standing at the tipping point would later pose social worker Sam Wilson with a dilemma, and symbolically place him at the crossroads of the two extremes of the Black power movement, a circumstance that Lee would exploit brilliantly when the time came. But that time was not this early in the Falcon's development. But despite its importance in the history of comics in general and Marvel Comics in particular, the creation of the Falcon here still comes across as almost an afterthought by Lee. There was no ballyhoo on the Bullpen Bulletins pages that month except for a brief notice in the Mighty Marvel Checklist for *Captain America* #117: "Introducing Marvel's newest and possibly most dynamic fighting hero...the Falcon!" In addition, the next issue blurb at the end of #116 made no mention of the Falcon, but only of the Exiles, the Red Skull's group of Nazi henchmen (although the next ish blurb on the letters page did). Anyway, like Cap, the Exiles find themselves stuck on a desert island by the will of the Skull. The villain has whisked off Cap there (still in the body of the Skull) to trap him at their mercy. But Cap escapes, and in a revelatory scene, removes the Skull's head piece and disguises himself using local materials. The scene is revelatory in the sense that readers are finally given definite proof that the Skull's skeletal features do not comprise his real face. That was suggested but never quite proven in his origin told way back in *Tales of Suspense* #66. Anyway, in his new guise, Cap makes the acquaintance of one Sam Wilson, an American stuck on the island who tells him how the Exiles have turned the natives into serfs. Cap hatches the idea of training Wilson and making him a symbol of resistance to the natives. At first Wilson scoffs, but by the final splash page, he's trained, costumed, and ready for action! Meanwhile, back in the world, the Skull (in Cap's body) luxuriates in Cap's reputation, settling in in an expensive hotel suite while day dreaming of turning the fawning public into his personal slaves. But storm clouds are gathering: AIM, the inventors of the Cosmic Cube, plot to render the device powerless...

Daredevil #56

"...And Death Came Riding!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Ah, life is good! That, at least, must have been the reaction of DD fans everywhere when they opened up *Daredevil* #56 (Sept. 1969) and had their fondest hopes verified. Yes, indeed! Syd Shores was still on the job as inker over Gene Colan's pencils. Having debuted on the job in the previous issue and knocked every readers' socks off with his interpretation of Colan's pencils, he was back doing the same this ish. Every page was gorgeous. No, not just gorgeous, lush and fulsome. Dare it be said? So round, so firm, so fully packed, as a

certain TV commercial back in the day had it. Women were now beautiful, heroes and villains muscular, and Colan's distinctive tricks to simulate speed were all accentuated. And details were not overlooked. Just take a gander at panel 3, page 6. It's just a small thing—a train pulling into a rural station—but Shores' inks bring it to autumnal life with the grainy siding and bare trees in the deep background. And what about that spectacular full-page shot of Death's Head on page 10? Well, if that's not your artistic cup of tea, then go to the very next page, panel 4. Details again as Colan gives readers a shot of what might as well have been the house from Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* in every clapboard detail. Oh, there was a lot to like, that's for sure. But wait, there's more! Scripter Roy Thomas' story is worthy of the art as DD travels to Vermont where Karen Page has gone to grieve over the apparent death of Matt Murdock. DD, you see, wants to come clean with her and then propose. But trouble is brewing in the form of Karen's father, disgraced scientist Prof. Paxton Page, developer of the Cobalt bomb. When he gets to Vermont, Daredevil finds out that the Page family is being terrorized by a headless horseman type calling itself Death's Head who claims to have kidnapped Prof. Page. Realizing he can't propose to Karen while she's worried about her father, DD goes after Death's Head, and is defeated. What could happen next? Will Daredevil be killed? Will the Pages be run off their property? Will DD ever reveal his identity to Karen and ask her to marry him? And if he does, what will be her reaction? For the answer to all those questions and more, stay tuned! **Fun Fact:**

Taking his cue from editor Stan Lee, Thomas began using variations on famous works of literature to use as titles for many of his stories. This issue is no exception. Its title "...and Death Came Riding," is actually taken from lines in the poem *The Highwayman* by Alfred Noyes: "And the Highwayman came riding, riding; The Highwayman came riding, up to the old inn door."

Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD #14

"A Day in the Life"; Gary Friedrich (script); Herb Trimpe (pencils); Sam Grainger (inks)

Was penciler Herb Trimpe trying to tap into the Steranko pop art legacy with his work on *Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD* #14 (Sept. 1969)? If so, it was a rare

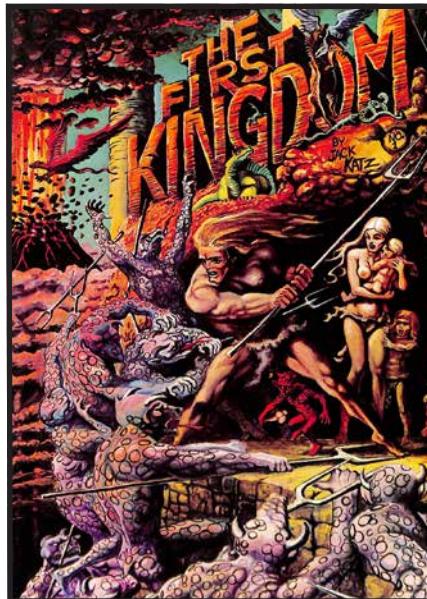
display of attempted ingenuity on the mostly down to Earth artist who had little history of pushing the artistic envelope. In a story by scripter Gary Friedrich (whose title riffs off the Beatles' climactic track on their recently released "White Album"), Nick Fury is being probed by SHIELD's psycho-projector to find out if he's fit to lead the organization, following his killing of one of its agents in a previous issue. Here, in a big, half-page panel, is Trimpe's first surprise for the reader as he manfully attempts some *outré* design work for the psycho-projector. (A few pages later, Trimpe even uses a photo background in a panel featuring Fury's flying car. Gasp!) Still unsure of Fury, Dr. Kraus invalidates him home where an attempt on his life takes place, the first of several throughout the day until Dr. Kraus tips his hand as a Hydra mole. His try at shooting Fury fails, of course, as Fury is saved in the nick of time by female agent Huff. Somewhat sexist, even for the 1960s, Fury "thanks" the female agent who saved his life with a definitely unprofessional cuddle! ("Oh, you don't have to thank me sir," says a smiling agent Huff. "The devil I don't," replies Fury. "You just stop squirming and come here!") Unfortunately, this issue's story elements dealing in multiple attempts on Fury's life strained credibility. They were just piled up too high, with Fury showing an impossible-to-believe string of luck. Add to that some of the worst art in Marvel's lineup at the time, and you have a title ripe for cancellation, which duly happened following the next issue. And in truth, if editor Stan Lee couldn't find a decent regular artist, and a writer who could properly address the title's basic aimlessness,

then the resultant loss in sales was surely unavoidable.

Sub-Mariner #17

"From the Stars...the Stalker!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin/Jack Katz (pencils); Joe Gaudioso (inks)

Scripter Roy Thomas continued to widen the mythology of Atlantis in *Sub-Mariner* #17 (Sept. 1969) as Namor returns to his capitol only to be tricked by the religious authorities in the form of Kormok to embark on another quest, but it's a trap with the Sub-Mariner falling into the clutches of an alien being named the Stalker. The Stalker's race, it seems, plans to steal all of the Earth's water with the connivance of traitors like Kormok. Our hero defeats the Stalker in single combat, but not before



JACK KATZ STARTED IN COMICS AS FAR BACK AS THE 1940S WHICH MADE HIS 24 ISSUE EPIC, *THE LAST KINGDOM* (BEGUN IN 1974). SUCH AN UNUSUAL PROJECT AT A TIME WHEN FEW ARTISTS FROM MAINSTREAM COMICS CHOSE TO DIP THEIR TOES IN INDEPENDENT PUBLISHING.

the alien activates a beam that takes Namor into outer space. To be continued! Artwise, penciler Marie Severin is somewhat easier to take this ish in that she may have found an inker with some compatibility with her style. Credited for some reason as “Jay Hawk,” it was actually Jack Katz, a veteran comics professional who’d worked some for Marvel in the 1950s and now had drifted back for some freelance work. Although Katz did help Severin here, he himself was not that hot of an artist, as would be seen later when he left mainstream comics to devote himself to an ambitious project of his own creation called *The First Kingdom*, a 24-issue science fiction opus that concluded in 1986. Overall, it was hard to understand how *Sub-Mariner* could continue on its merry monthly way, while Thomas' more impressive assignment with the *Dr. Strange* title foundered. For more discriminating fans, there just didn't seem to be any justice in the cruel world of commercial comics!

Mighty Thor #168

“Galactus Found!”; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Klein (inks)

With George Klein inking Jack Kirby's pencils in *Mighty Thor* #168 (Sept. 1969), fans could better appreciate the way Vince Colletta performed the same duties over so many past issues. Here, Klein's inks perhaps follow Kirby *too* literally and resulted in a flat, often uninteresting presentation. With much of the grandeur leached from the artist's forceful pencils, the story suffers and prevents readers from being fully engaged (faces, in particular, look odd and incomplete). Check out those for the Warriors Three and Balder on page 5, where eyes are reduced to tiny dots and Fandral in panel 6, page 6, looks like a two-dimensional cartoon figure rather than a fully rendered Kirby character. This was all a shame as this issue presents readers with so much that would have looked spectacular under Colletta's more sympathetic inks (even if he left some stuff out). Recall that Thor had been sent into space by big daddy Odin to seek out Galactus and doggone it if he didn't find him right off! (Who knows? Kirby may have intended for Thor's search to go on for a few more issues before running into Galactus, but an announcement by editor Stan Lee in this issue's Bullpen Bulletins page that single-issue stories would be the company's new policy, may have short circuited those plans.) Thor barely has time to relax aboard his new ship when it's seized by an unknown force and grounded on an asteroid. There, he's confronted by Galactus himself, who begins to relate the secrets of his beginnings. Meanwhile, a subplot developing on Earth spends a goodly number of pages detailing the creation of the Thermal Man, a giant robot to be unleashed on the U.S. by Red China. Good thing Balder is recovering nicely from his coma and is joined by Fandral, Hogun, and Volstagg. He's going to need their help when the Thermal Man strikes! However, over the years, how these two plot lines turned out (Thor's



RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND COMMUNIST CHINA WOULD ONLY BEGIN TO THAW IN 1972 WHEN PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON TRAVELED THERE TO MEET WITH CHAIRMAN MAO TSE TUNG. THUS, RED CHINA'S ATTACK ON THE US VIA THE THERMAL MAN BEGINNING IN MIGHTY THOR #168 WAS PERHAPS THE LAST OVERT ACT OF WAR ON THE WEST BY THE FORMER CELESTIAL KINGDOM!

search for Galactus and Balder's battle with the Thermal Man), became clouded in some controversy dealing with a conflict between Kirby's intentions regarding the origin of Galactus and how editor/scripter Lee may have interpreted those intentions. The question would come to a head in the events depicted in the very next issue...

Captain Marvel #16

“Behind the Mask of Zo!”; Archie Goodwin (script); Don Heck (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Forecast in the previous issue's letters' pages, readers were told that the new regular creative team beginning in *Captain Marvel* #16 (Sept. 1969) would be Archie Goodwin writing and Don Heck penciling. An added bonus was Syd Shores on inks. After suffering so long under the inadequate scripting of Arnold Drake and rookie Gary Friedrich (as well as barely passable artists such as Frank Springer, Dick Ayers, and Tom Sutton), *Captain Marvel* was at last under capable hands, right? Well, not really. The truth was, the new team would only be on the book for this issue and then they'd be gone. Apparently, sales were so weak for the Kree warrior that even more radical changes than those introduced a few issues before, when Mar-Vell went cosmic and became a servant of Zo, were deemed necessary by the powers that be. But for this one issue, at least, readers were treated to Archie Goodwin on the script. Goodwin had adapted quickly to the Marvel style doing a good job mimicking editor Stan Lee's voice when he took over *Iron Man* from him. Inked by Syd

CAPT. MAR-VELL'S NEW UNIFORM INTRO'D IN CAPTAIN MARVEL #16 SIGNALED DRAMATIC CHANGES FOR THE FEATURE, CHANGES SPEARHEADED BY NEW SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS WHOSE IMPROVEMENTS WOULD BE INSPIRED IN PART BY FAWCETT COMICS' OWN BIG RED CHEESE, THE ORIGINAL CAPTAIN MARVEL, MOST NOTABLY THAT OF A YOUNG BOY MAGICALLY BECOMING THE FULL GROWN CAPTAIN.

Shores, the man who single-handedly revitalized Jack Kirby on the first issues of Captain America's new book and transformed Dick Ayers' work on *Captain Savage and His Leatherneck Raiders*, Heck's pencils this issue look better than ever. And the story needs them because it fell to Goodwin to make sense of the plot left him by Friedrich (and to some extent, Drake) and wrap things up quickly in time for the surprise ending. Consequently, as Cap tries to destroy the "god" Tam-Bor, he's halted by Ronan the Accuser. It seems that Ronan is in league with Zo (who turns out to be a Kree renegade named Zarek) both of whom are plotting to destroy the Supreme Intelligence. Cap is saved by the timely arrival of the "Super Sentinel" who takes him to the Supreme Intelligence. There, rewarded for his role in thwarting Zarek and Ronan, Mar-Vell is transformed and given new powers and a new red and blue uniform with the injunction to return to Earth and deal with the treacherous Col. Yon-Rogg. But in doing so, he's diverted into the Negative Zone... The radical alterations given to Cap at the conclusion of this story were made with no warning on the cover. A letters page mentioned in the voice of Roy Thomas, did give readers a strong hint that things were about to change drastically however: "...as you might have noticed, the good Captain gets a new and way-out suit of threads in this very issue. But that's just the beginning. After next ish, you may love Mar-Vell...you might hate him...but we practically guarantee you that no merry Marcher is gonna be indifferent to him!" There was truth to the hyperbole. When next fans met Captain Marvel, everything would be different. But was it for the better or worse? Be there, and find out!

Amazing Spider-Man #76

"The Lizard Lives!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)

Sure, every dyed-in-the-wool Marvel fan knew by now how great an artist John Buscema was. His outstanding work on the *Avengers*, *Silver Surfer*, and *Sub-Mariner*

proved that...in spades. But there were some assignments that even Buscema's massive talent just could not get the hang of, and one of them was *Spider-Man*. Hey, Buscema himself once admitted not liking to draw superheroes and Spider-Man, in particular. And that lack of enthusiasm shows here, in the first issue where he takes over completely on the art chores from John Romita (except for the helping hand, if you could call it that, from inker Jim Mooney). Sure, there are

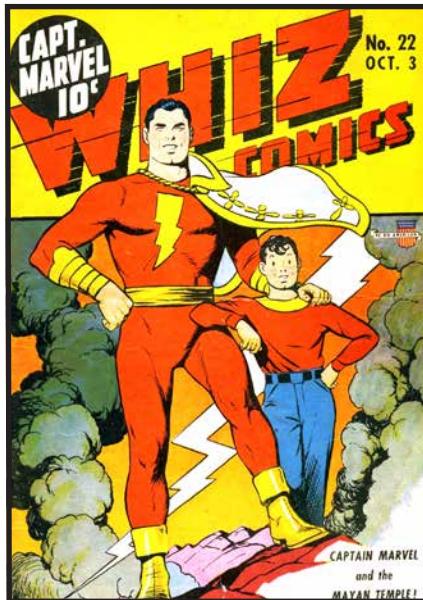
the requisite action sequences, but those panels featuring the book's cast of supporting characters are strictly nowhere and page 19, panel 3, introducing the Human Torch is strictly from hunger. As for scripter Stan Lee, he sort of sleepwalks through this one, signaling a general downturn in overall quality. In fact, with the departure of Romita from regular duties (except for covers...he was picking up more office duties as well as contributing to the first issue of Marvel's re-entry into the romance genre with the new *My Love* title), the title was now poised to enter the lowest point of its storied history: a position it would hold for some months to come until fan response became so negative that Lee was forced to regroup to get the book back

on track quality wise. In the meantime, as of *Amazing Spider-Man* #76 (Sept. 1969), readers had to contend not only with unexciting artwork and dull coloring, but also with the return once again of the Lizard, surely one of Spidey's most uninspired villains (sorry, Steve!). Since readers knew that Spidey could do no harm to him, knowing he was actually his friend and family man Curt Connors, it only remained to wonder in what ingenious fashion their hero would inevitably defeat his foe. Unfortunately, they'd have to wait till next issue since this was, you guessed it, a continued story. Rats!

Amazing Spider-Man #77

"In the Blaze of Battle!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)

Still at the nadir of Stan Lee's tenure on the book, *Amazing Spider-Man* #77 (Oct. 1969) continues with artwork now solely done by John Buscema and inked by Jim Mooney. Although exciting in many places (especially with the opening splash page and in laying out the story mostly in big quarter-page panels), there's still something about Buscema's interpretation of the wallcrawler that turns the strip into something lackluster when it should have been exciting, even with the Lizard as the villain. (Although the artist does manage to give the Lizard a scarier, more brutish appearance than past appearances.) Not helping is the soft focus of Jim



Mooney's inks that blur details and bury any nuances in black ink. Meanwhile, John Romita, the man who could have turned it all around, was still only doing the covers while being credited as "consultant emeritus in residence," whatever that was. And though Lee's story is rather by-the-numbers, it was fun to see the Human Torch back in the book—a call back to those halcyon Steve Ditko days when the Torch frequently guest starred first as a rival (then as a friend) of Spider-Man's. Here, though, it's as if none of that ever happened and Torch is out to subdue the Lizard and refuses to listen to reason. Overall, however, the strip would remain in a holding pattern for some time until Romita chose to return and contribute more fully to the actual pencils.

Fantastic Four #90

"The Skrull Takes a Slave!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

It begins here: one of the most forgettable epics in the Lee/Kirby FF run (or anywhere, for that matter)!

With only about a year to go before Jack Kirby's final issue and eventual departure from Marvel to DC, the artist had seemingly made a conscious decision not to apply his considerable imaginative powers to *Fantastic Four* #90 (Sept. 1969). Although his art, enhanced as it was by the inks of Joe Sinnott, would continue to offer visual delight to fans throughout the rest of his tenure on the book, Kirby's contribution to the storytelling or plotting of the title would show a definite lack of steam. By this time in their professional relationship, the Kirby/Stan Lee creative team itself had become strained with Lee having given over almost complete control over plotting to

Kirby. Thus, reduced to just scripting the pages the artist had already finished, Lee was presented with few opportunities to explore nuances of character development or even sub-plots that would lay the groundwork for future issues. That situation contributed mightily to the entertainment value of the remaining issues in their *FF* run, as Kirby launches on a familiar plot that will see the Thing kidnapped

by the Skrulls to be used in gladiatorial games on a distant world resembling the United States in the 1930s gangster era. (A scenario Kirby likely picked up from the *Star Trek* episode "A Piece of the Action" aired on January 12, 1968. Was it also a coincidence that one of the first projects he did after he moved to DC was a newsstand magazine called *In the Days of the Mob*, devoted to gangster era subjects?) The overlong and padded-out tale would extend over an exhausting four issues as the rest of the FF track down the imprisoned Thing and rescue him. That said, this issue at least gives readers an 8-page overlap, concluding events from the previous issue's Mole Man story before allowing Lee some opportunity for characterization, as readers are reminded that Reed and Sue Richards are new parents and the Thing is chased by autograph hounds. Throughout, Kirby's late period art is flawlessly executed with whatever eccentricities it might have smoothed out by Sinnott's clean inks—making for a typically attractive superhero package by the King.

Silver Surfer #8

"Now Strikes the Ghost!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

As readers were informed by a special note penned by scripter/editor Stan Lee himself and appearing on the last page of *Silver Surfer* #8 (Sept. 1969), the story featured this issue had been intended as another 39-page blockbuster, but had to be cut in half after the book's double size format was abruptly ended. According to the note, the reason for the reduction in size was reader demand: Lee stated that fans wanted the book to go monthly, and the only way to do that was to reduce the size of the comic. More likely, slow sales had at least as

much to do with it. Marvel's accounting office likely concluded that it was a combination of the book's bi-monthly publishing schedule coupled with its price (almost twice what regular sized comics were selling for) that were causes for sluggish sales, and demanded action be taken accordingly. Whatever the reason, the book suddenly found itself shrunken, with the wind taken out of Lee's creative sails as a result. With the



ARTIST JACK KIRBY LIKED HIS OLD GANGSTER MOVIES OR WAS SIMPLY FASCINATED BY THE ERA OF SUCH LUMINARIES AS BONNIE AND CLYDE, MACHINE GUN KELLY, AND PRETTY BOY FLOYD. THUS, PERHAPS, HIS LATCHING ONTO THE STAR TREK EPISODE "A PIECE OF THE ACTION" WHEREIN OUR INTREPID SPACE EXPLORERS FIND THEMSELVES ON A WORLD THAT HAS BASED ITSELF ON AMERICA'S PROHIBITION YEARS.

exception of this story and possibly the next two-part (both likely planned for the double-size version of the mag), the rest of the run would feature a definite lack of energy in the storytelling until eventually petering out until its cancellation with issue #18. Bringing back fan favorite villain Mephisto, still craving after the Surfer's unsullied soul, Lee has him resurrect the ghost of the Flying Dutchman to harass our hero and throw him into despair. There's not much action going on here, due to the bifurcation of the story into two parts, but John Buscema's pencils are still fun to pore over with Dan Adkins taking over for Sal Buscema on inks. Adkins' style difference with Sal is clear in some places but especially on page 2, panels 1 and 2, where he manages to put a sheen on Buscema's pencils that is marvelous to behold. Sal's finer inking style would have made these scenes less impactful than they are here. Also unlike Buscema, Adkins chooses to spot blacks more liberally, creating more atmosphere in the scenes featuring Mephisto and the misguided devil worshipers he exploits as part of his plan to enlist the Dutchman's aid. The Flying Dutchman himself would not seem on the face of it to be a very interesting antagonist for the Surfer, but Lee and Buscema had enough stored goodwill based on previous issues for readers to give them the benefit of the doubt this time.

Fantastic Four #91

"The Thing...Enslaved!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

Fantastic Four #91 (Oct. 1969) mostly marked time in this four-issue story arc as the Thing is brought to a Skrull world where everyone and everything looks like something from an old Warner Bros. gangster movie. That's because of the influence of Earth gangster Machine Gun Martin, who was accidentally transported to the planet and whose mannerisms became an instant infatuation with the natives. The gladiatorial games for which the Thing has been kidnapped however, was the natives' own invention. In order to compel reluctant contestants to fight, their home worlds are threatened with destruction by use of a machine that will pull them out of orbit. It was another borrowing by Kirby (in addition to a recent episode of *Star Trek*), this time from Fredric Brown's classic SF story, "Arena." (Ironically, "Arena" was also borrowed for an episode of *Star Trek*!) Though growing late in his career, and definitely past his peak, penciler Jack Kirby still manages to give readers a thrill with an expertly paced story told in plenty of large panels and a number of attention-grabbing full-pagers. Scripter Stan Lee does the words while not wasting time on extraneous verbiage. The issue is most notable for perhaps Kirby's final creative contribution to the strip in the form of Torgo, a formidable-looking robot destined to meet the Thing in battle. Not that Torgo was anything to crow about, but his close-up does look impressive on page 19. To be continued.

Daredevil #57

"In the Midst of Life...!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

The action doesn't let up in *Daredevil* #57 (Oct. 1969) and neither does the art team of penciler Gene Colan and inker Syd Shores, as DD survives the opening trap set for him by Death's Head then goes back to the Page residence for some well-earned shuteye. But suspicious goings on continue to swirl about him inside the Victorian "Psycho" house with a creepy butler who likes to listen behind the drapes. As DD catches some z's, Karen follows the butler out of the house and into an old watermill where she's discovered. (It sounds by-the-numbers, but Colan and Shores' art transform the scenes into things of beauty, first with a low angle shot of the old house swathed in nighttime shadows; then Karen looking on at the edge of the forest as the butler enters a covered bridge; then Karen slipping into the deserted water mill.) But before she can be harmed, DD makes the scene—as does Death's Head. What goes on here? Well, not to give too much away, but suffice it to say the butler was a government agent and Death's Head...was not what he seemed. Anyway, all that was but prologue because it's the last two pages of the story that provide the kicker. Although given away on the cover, (who'd believe in the literalness of it anyway?) any experienced comics fan could be forgiven if they thought Karen lifting DD's mask to reveal his secret identity as Matt Murdock was just a come-on to get them to buy the mag. But this time, it was an accurate reflection of the story inside. The final page contains the scene that every Daredevil fan from the beginning had ardently wished for: Daredevil reveals his identity to Karen Page! And whether or not the scene had



"...AND DEATH'S HEAD CAME RIDING..." EITHER FILM FAN GENE COLAN MUST HAVE BEEN FAMILIAR WITH THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK FILM PSYCHO (1960) OR THE NORMAN BATES HOUSE HAD ALREADY BECOME AN ICONIC IMAGE OF SPOOKINESS AND HORROR BY THE 1969 PUBLICATION DATE OF DAREDEVIL #57.

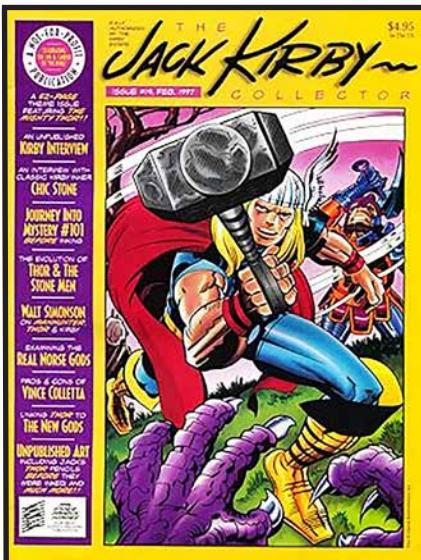
been planned with scripter Roy Thomas' involvement, it was done in such a cool way! (Flash! Thomas has verified that indeed, he had made the suggestion that Colan take the entirety of the final two pages to draw out the big moment!) Again, Colan creates an illusion of movement, catching DD from behind on page 19, panel 3 as he approaches Karen. The next five panels, extending onto page 20 keep the reader steady with the figure of DD, even as the figure of Karen moves closer and closer as he walks towards her. Finally, the "camera" pans from DD to focus on Karen's face, her hand reaching out into the foreground. Panel 1, page 20 has her hand almost completely obscuring her face. Panel 2, page 20 shows her hand grasping DD's mask, beginning to pull it off. Finally, the payoff: a big, half-page final panel showing an unmasked Matt Murdock from behind, with a close up of Karen's shocked face dominating most of the image. Of course, this dramatic scene is...continued next ish! Argh!

Mighty Thor #169

"The Awesome Answer!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); George Klein (inks)

Readers should have felt something was not quite right when they laid their eyes on the cover of *Mighty Thor* #169 (Oct. 1969) and saw an odd collage of Kirby images from various interior pages punctured with a white silhouette of Galactus, and a figure of Thor in its center drawn by John Romita. Not only had penciler Jack Kirby again missed executing the cover for this issue (as he did for the previous issue), but inside, the storytelling seemed a little curt, the art as inked by George Klein inadequate to the cosmic scope of the events being covered. Except for a hint provided in the company's contracted Marvelmania *Jack Kirby Portfolio* (1971) that published pages that may have been intended for this issue and others preceding it, the reason for it all became the object of speculation among fans. In a brief article by John Morrow published in *The Jack Kirby Collector* #14 (Feb 1997), the author speculates that unpublished pages that had turned up over the years seem to have been meant for the Galactus/Thermal Man story. But due to a change in editorial policy ending continued stories, whatever extended plot line Kirby may have planned for this issue (and others moving forward) were cut short. In doing so, the main thrust of Kirby's long-range plotting may have been irreparably harmed. Case in point: pages that clearly indicate that his intention was for Galactus to join Thor in returning to Earth to combat the menace of the Thermal Man. Even though that ending could have been preserved with a shortened story-line, it wasn't, indicating that there

UNABASHED PLUG DEPT: AS READERS MAY OR MAY NOT KNOW, THE SAME PUBLISHER OF THIS FINE VOLUME OF MARVEL COMICS IN THE LATE 1960S, ALSO PUBLISHES THE LONG RUNNING JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR MAGAZINE, AN INVALUABLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION ON THE ARTIST'S CAREER AND DEEP DIVES INTO SUCH ESOTERIC QUESTIONS AS KIRBY'S VS LEE'S INTENT REGARDING THE ORIGIN OF GALACTUS AS PRESENTED IN MIGHTY THOR #169.



was more to the pages being rejected than simply ending a story quickly. As Morrow speculates, this other reason could have been a fundamental difference of opinion between Kirby and scripter/editor Stan Lee on how to best preserve Galactus' dignity. Whatever the case, Galactus doesn't end up going with Thor. Instead, Odin makes a sudden appearance (raising the question why Thor had to travel space in search of Galactus when his father could have popped onto the scene any time he wanted), tells Thor he's completed his mission, and zaps him back to Earth. Galactus is left alone and readers are left wondering what the point of Thor's mission was. Even learning about the space god's origin didn't turn out to be as

awesome as the title of this story lets on: It seems that Galactus was once a human being living a peaceful life on the super advanced planet of Taa, until a rocket hits and the man who would become Galactus joins others in committing suicide by flying a rocket ship into "the heart of the largest sun in all the universe." There, the crew becomes irradiated but the radiation doesn't kill our man. Instead, after the ship crashes on a planetoid, and realizing his sudden craving for energy, the man in question leaves and creates for himself an incubator where he resides for centuries until finally emerging as the Galactus fans knew and loved. Hm. As origins went, it was sort of okay but fell far short of "The Awesome Answer" promised in this issue's title. A fuller understanding of Galactus' origin would have to wait until the back half of the twilight years and the next generation of creators who could tackle the issue and finally deliver a more satisfying answer. In the meantime, as a result of the problems raised in the production of this issue, strains that had already begun to appear in the relationship between Kirby and Lee were exacerbated and, as an immediate consequence, the former lost enthusiasm for his work and would spend the rest of his time on the title doing single-issue stories without much of a throughline. That said, fans did get one more thrill from Kirby before the artist's final departure from Marvel: inking by Syd Shores that would again transform Kirby's art into something to behold.

Silver Surfer #9

“...To Steal the Surfer's Soul!”; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

The second part of the Flying Dutchman story appeared in *Silver Surfer* #9 (Oct. 1969). It had been intended as a single, 39-page epic when the book was still being published as a double-sized magazine. But with the increase to monthly frequency and a commensurate reduction in page count, the story had to be divided in two. Beginning the previous issue, Mephisto enlisted the aid of the ghost of the Flying Dutchman to defeat the Surfer in return for freeing his soul from eternal damnation. Eager to comply, the Dutchman attacked the Surfer just in time for the main event to begin this issue's page 3. Stan Lee's story proceeds apace with Mephisto secretly taking a hand in the action, but when the Surfer risks his own life to save that of a woman taken hostage by the Dutchman, the ghost's eyes are opened and he renounces Mephisto: “He has shown me that not even I am beyond redemption,” cries the Dutchman. “I renounce my pledge. Though I may never know rest, I will serve you no more.” “Though you were the most wretched of all who lived, it is you who have sacrificed the most,” the Surfer tells the Dutchman. “May the peace that you long for some day be yours.” “You, whom I tried to destroy, you pity me!” “Your sin was but weakness,” replies the Surfer, shedding a tear for his foe. “And you found strength too late.” But it's the Surfer's willingness to share the Dutchman's tragedy that releases him from his curse. “A tear! After all these centuries, a single living being has shed a tear for me!” It was all that was needed. The Dutchman's soul was free and Mephisto is forced to once again retire in frustration. It was another surprising and unconventional ending to a superhero tale and one that had become *de rigueur* for the book. It was true that readers had begun to complain about the Surfer's constant bemoaning of his fate, of his endless self-pity. But his heroism wasn't due to his victories against super-villains as it was with other heroes, his were victories of the soul, achieved as much by his willingness not to give up on the underlying character of his antagonists as from the use of his cosmic power. In this way, despite

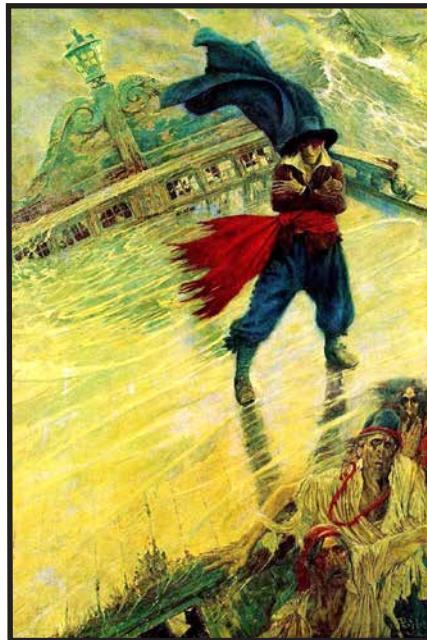
the surface changes made to him by Lee from partner Jack Kirby's original intentions, the Surfer was still the same naive but eternally optimistic hero and champion of the weak who fans first encountered in *Fantastic Four* #48.

Captain America #118

“The Falcon Fights On!”; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

In *Captain America* #118 (Oct. 1969), the spotlight is predominantly on the Falcon. Now clad in his distinctive green and orange colored uniform (much better than later versions with the same design but with a downright ugly white and red coloration...not to mention the addition of a jet pack that allowed him to actually fly) and sporting his trained falcon Redwing (who rested on Falc's single falconing glove when not in flight; hats off to whoever it was that exercised enough restraint not to give the Falcon a matching glove on his other hand!), the Falcon continues his training under Captain America's guidance. Finally ready, the two attack the Red Skull's Exiles and trounce them such that the island's natives, inspired, rise up and join in the melee. Meanwhile, a frustrated Red Skull, still in Cap's body, works to undermine Cap's reputation with his adoring public. Again, Gene Colan's art is as confident as ever in its layouts with the surprising inks by Joe Sinnott supportive, giving heft to the figure work. One would think that after inking Kirby so long on the *Fantastic Four* that

Sinnott's style would render Colan's work too literally, holding it back some, but no. Sinnott provides just the right grounding that keeps the penciler's work moving in the fast action style that worked so well for him on *Daredevil*.



THE LEGEND OF THE FLYING DUTCHMAN WAS PERFECTLY ENCAPSULATED IN THIS EVOCATIVE PAINTING BY HOWARD PYLE EXECUTED FOR THE COLLIER'S WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR DECEMBER 8, 1900.

Avengers #69

“Let the Game Begin”; Roy Thomas (script); Sal Buscema (pencils); Sam Grainger (inks)

The story arc that begins in *Avengers* #69 (Oct. 1969) is proof that even the best writers can't hit home runs every time at bat. In this case, it was scripter Roy Thomas's turn to strike out. Well, not completely. After all, this was still Marvel Comics in the earliest of the twilight years! That said, this tale of kidnapped heroes used as pawns

in a chess game played by vastly powerful beings smacks too much like a standard plot used by DC Comics for books like the *Justice League of America* or *Justice Society*...titles for which Thomas was an

DID SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS HAVE JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #1 IN MIND WHEN HE USED ITS CHESS PLAYING MOTIF FOR AVENGERS #69? THERE, KANG THE CONQUEROR PLAYS AGAINST THE GRANDMASTER WITH THE AVENGERS AS PAWNS. AND WAS IT MERE IRONY THAT THE AVENGERS END UP CONTESTING AGAINST THE SQUADRON SINISTER, STAND INS FOR MEMBERS OF THE JUSTICE LEAGUE? YOU DECIDE!

avowed fan. In fact, it seemed poetic justice that at the conclusion of this issue, the Avengers come face to face with stand-ins for a number of Justice League heroes including Green Lantern (Dr. Spectrum), Superman (Hyperion), Batman (Nighthawk), and Flash (Whizzer). The irony was that the new characters would become, on the whole, more interesting than the heroes they were ostensible copies of. Anyway, this first installment of the arc has the Avengers transported into the future where their old foe, Kang the Conqueror, tells them that he's chosen them to represent him in a game of cosmic chess with a powerful being called the Grandmaster. If they lose against the Grandmaster's chosen antagonists, Earth will be forfeit. So what choice do they have? (Come to think of it, wasn't this

situation a little bit too similar to the one going on in the FF book, where the Thing is forced to fight with the Earth being forfeit?) So, in grand *Justice League* style, the Avengers are broken up into different teams with Goliath, Captain America, and Thor going into action first, against the Squadron Sinister. On the art front, Sal Buscema continues filling in for big brother John on the pencils. After entering the field as an inker (John insisted he replace Joe Sinnott inking him on *Silver Surfer*), Sal was given a major break taking over for his brother on the *Avengers*. Buscema said he'd worked for a year on his style before submitting samples to Marvel at his brother's urging. The work paid off. He was called in for an interview with editor Stan Lee who loved the samples and hired him immediately. His first assignment was a western but it didn't take long before he graduated to superheroes, there to stay, a Marvel mainstay for decades. **Fun Fact:** Thomas created the Squadron Sinister (a later version was called the Squadron Supreme) as part of an off-the-record agreement with DC scribe Denny O'Neil who would include similarly disguised versions of Marvel heroes in the JLA book he was then writing. Unfortunately, O'Neil's end of the deal never really panned out, but Marvel's readers were the beneficiaries in that the Squadron proved popular with them and appeared together as a team or singly many times over the years.



Captain Marvel #17

"And a Child Shall Lead You!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gil Kane (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Oh, the changes were a'comin'! And coming fast as *Captain Marvel* #17 (Oct. 1969) presented readers with a whole new creative team. Perhaps an indication of how seriously editor Stan Lee took the title's dipping sales, he went with his number two man to take over the writing, along with a veteran penciler for the art. That writer was Roy Thomas, who'd long since proven himself a master of the Marvel way of telling exciting stories on titles ranging from *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos* to the *X-Men*, *Avengers*, and *Daredevil*. The failing sales of *Captain Marvel* must have been on Thomas' mind as thoughts of how to save the book came to him one morning: "...suddenly I got an idea for a new approach for *Captain Marvel*, which was going down the tubes," stated Thomas in an interview for *Alter Ego* magazine. "I phoned Stan at home...and told him I wanted to write the book." Thomas says he wrote up a plot and sent it off to Don Heck to draw when soon after, Gil Kane walked into the office looking for work and suggested that he'd like to

try his hand at *Captain Marvel*, whose space age setting was similar to that of DC's *Green Lantern*, a strip he had drawn for years. Eager to work with Kane, Thomas gave him his script and found other work for Heck. And though the two men worked well together over the next few issues of the book, said Thomas, it would be a rocky run as the title found itself canceled twice over a half-dozen issues but always revived due to rising sales. As for inker Dan Adkins, Thomas said he and Kane were such a good fit that Kane tried to get him to ink his work as often as he could. And what about that plot Thomas came up with from out of nowhere? Based loosely on the original *Captain Marvel* published by Fawcett Publications in the 1940s (and put out of business after a long lawsuit with DC over copyright infringement relating to Superman), the new *Captain Marvel* would be an adult superhero while sharing his existence when not in action with a youthful counterpart. Where the Big Red Cheese became Billy Batson, Mar-Vell would exchange places with Rick Jones, who'd been kicking around the Marvel Universe since the early years. Anyway, Thomas has the Supreme Intelligence lure Rick (now at loose ends after the events in *Captain America* #114-116, where he was rejected by who he thought was Captain America but was really the Red Skull in disguise) to an ancient Kree site where he finds a pair of "nega-bands." Putting them on and striking them together, he exchanges places with Captain Marvel, who is trapped



AS PROMISED IN CAPTAIN MARVEL #16, BIG CHANGES WERE AFOOT FOR MAR-VELL IN THE VERY NEXT ISSUE. AND HOW! SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS TEAMS UP WITH PENCILER GIL KANE (ABLY ASSISTED BY INKER DAN ADKINS) AND TOGETHER, IN CAPTAIN MARVEL #17, THEY TURN THINGS COMPLETELY AROUND. SUDDENLY, THE MORIBUND CAPTAIN MARVEL STRIP WAS REENERGIZED, STREAMLINED, AND ENDOWED WITH STRAIGHT AHEAD ACTION THAT RECALLED IT'S EARLIEST ISSUES UNDER THOMAS AND ARTIST GENE COLAN. ONLY TIME WOULD TELL IF THE TEAM OF THOMAS AND KANE COULD RESCUE THE STRIP FROM ULTIMATE CANCELLATION.

in the Negative Zone. Freed from the zone, Cap then offers a brief battle with his enemy Col. Yon-Rogg but the Kree officer gets away. The story ends with Rick and Cap agreeing to continue the relationship. Kane's art is all movement and overwrought emotion, from the opening splash with Cap's face in a tight grimace to Rick's day dreams and recollections to Cap's twisting, athletic contortions, Kane (in a single issue) returned the book to its exciting early days when Gene Colan's similarly stretched out and agonized figure work made the strip one of Marvel's most promising.

Sub-Mariner #18

"Side by Side With Triton!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils), Joe Gaudioso (inks)

Namor teams up with Triton of the Inhumans again as both discover themselves prisoners aboard an alien spacecraft. It happened at the end of the previous issue when Subby found himself being drawn into space by the Alpha Centaurians who intended to steal the oceans of the world, but Namor and Triton escape, wreak havoc among the aliens, and foil their schemes. But it's a pyrrhic victory for Namor as he learns upon returning to Earth that, because the aliens had operated on his gills while he was unconscious, he can no longer breathe underwater! Thus, penciler Marie Severin's uninteresting cover image for *Sub-Mariner* #18 (Oct. 1969) with its awkwardly foreshortened beachcomber creeping up to Namor's prone and gasping figure. It all turned out to be a rather hum-drum affair by scripter Roy Thomas who was doing much better work elsewhere. A Namor no longer able to live underwater though, had some potential for an ongoing through line. Certainly, if the *Sub-Mariner* title was going to continue it needed some livening up both in stories and art. As it was, it was ranking near the bottom of Marvel's lineup, just beneath *Iron Man* but at least above that of *The Incredible Hulk*!

Fantastic Four #92

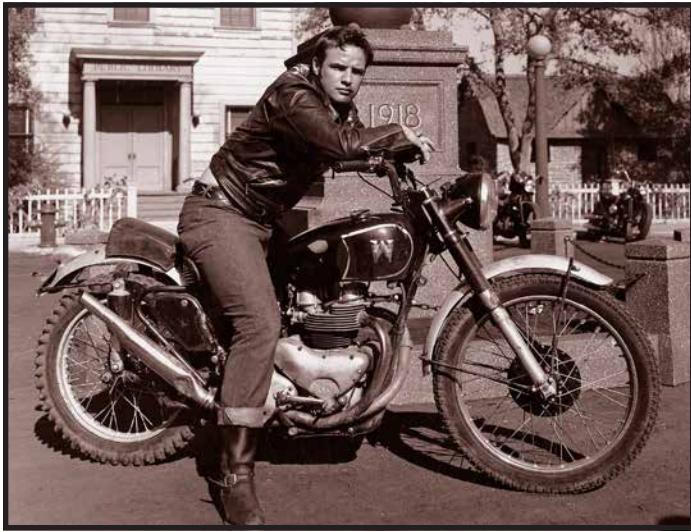
"Ben Grimm, Killer!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

The gangster saga continues in *Fantastic Four* #92 (Nov. 1969) as the captured Thing learns he can't escape and begins his training for the arena. Meanwhile, back on Earth, Mr. Fantastic has put two and two together and is prepping the FF's captured Skrull ship for a rescue mission. Kirby, plotting the story, allows some room for characterization as Mr. Fantastic decides that the adventure is too uncertain to risk the Invisible Girl's life. "She's the mother of my son and that means this mission goes without her," Reed tells the Torch. Instead, Sue's place will be taken by Crystal, Johnny's Inhuman girlfriend. (Her extended presence with the team engendered a long running discussion on the letters' page about whether the title of the book should be changed from the Fantastic Four to the Fantastic Five, but Crystal was written out of the feature and out of Johnny's life before a final decision needed to be made.) But even as the FF leave Earth on their rescue mission, the Thing is being herded into the gladiatorial pens. Will his teammates arrive in time?

Daredevil #58

"Spin-Out on Fifth Avenue!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

Be aware! Motorcycles are everywhere! That bumper sticker label only became popular beyond the early



IN POST-WAR AMERICA, MOTORCYCLES CAME TO REPRESENT NOT ONLY THE FREEDOM OF THE OPEN ROAD BUT FREEDOM FROM SOCIETAL MORES AS EARLY CLUBS DEVOLVED INTO SEMI-OUTLAW GROUPS LIKE THE HELL'S ANGELS. THE MOVEMENT TOWARD OUTLAWRY GAINED MOMENTUM WITH SUCH FILMS AS *THE WILD ONE* (1953) AND *EASY RIDER* (1969). MOTORCYCLE CULTURE SPREAD QUICKLY THROUGH POP CULTURE MEDIA INCLUDING COMICS SO THAT NOT ONLY WOULD PETER PARKER GET HIM SOME WHEELS, BUT DD WOULD FACE DOWN THE STUNTMASTER AND, ONLY A FEW MONTHS DOWN THE LINE, CAPTAIN AMERICA WOULD HOP ON A BIKE TO EXPLORE AMERICA...

twilight years but the motorcycle craze began long before. In the post-war years, in fact, many veterans found motorcycling an exciting substitute for their wartime experiences and began to form clubs. The interest trickled down to the younger set and, with the success of *The Wild One* starring Marlon Brando, the pastime finally crystallized in the American psyche as symbolic of freedom and (especially) freedom from societal mores. Motorcycle gangs formed with their own rules and protocols. Youthful motorcyclists, with their black leather jackets and headgear, became more menacing. Thus, it became easy for comic book writers to eventually turn the image into sometime adversaries for their heroes. Scripter Roy Thomas was familiar with the routine, having pitted Ice Man and the Beast against out of control bikers in *X-Men* #32. In *Daredevil* #58 (Nov. 1969) he revisits the theme again but with a variation. This time, it's not a gang of bikers, but a single rider. And he's not out just to harass innocent people, he's being paid by the mysterious Crime Wave to kill Daredevil. Thomas' clever plot is designed to intrigue readers, both newcomers who might wonder what is going on with the opening trial sequences and regular readers who remembered that the previous issue ended on the shocking note of DD revealing his identity to Karen Page. Well, as the trial unfolds and attorney Matt

Murdock makes his closing arguments, the reader is taken back to that dramatic event beginning in a knock-out full-page shot by penciler Gene Colan and inker Syd Shores, showing a head and shoulders rear view of Daredevil as he holds his mask back and reveals his face to a shocked Karen Page. Now we learn what happened immediately following that disclosure: Karen faints and when she revives, Daredevil explains all, including his apparent death as Matt Murdock a few issues before. Back in New York, Matt pops the question and Karen accepts with one condition: he gives up his dangerous life as DD. Easier said than done! No sooner does Matt show up as DD (ostensibly for his final public appearance) for a benefit event, than the motorcycling Stuntmaster shows up to bump him off. Of course, DD has to defend himself and goes into action. To Karen's horror, Daredevil is almost killed in defeating the Stuntmaster. When asked after the fight by Foggy Nelson about a special announcement he was going to make, DD can't say he's going to retire, not with Crime Wave still on the loose. Our flashback ends in some nice matching panels by Colan. In two panels atop page 20, we see Karen walking away from Matt, obviously disappointed and not speaking to him. In two more matching panels directly below, we see Matt leave the court in the same way. Will the two find a way to get back together? Stay tuned!

Captain America #119

"Now Falls the Skull!"; Stan Lee (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Joe Sinnott (inks)

This is it! Finally! The honest-to-gosh end of the latest Cosmic Cube saga as scripter Stan Lee brings our heroes (Captain America in the Red Skull's body and new hero on the scene, Falcon) face to face with the Red Skull (in Cap's body) for the showdown. But then, we all knew this was coming, right? At least when we saw that sneaky sub-plot building over the last few issues wherein the scientists of AIM were seen working on a way to render the Cosmic Cube powerless. Frustrated that his Exiles were not able to stop Cap, the Skull finally decides in *Captain America* #119 (Nov. 1969) that it would be more satisfying to kill the star-spangled hero himself and so, whisks him and the Falcon to a castle in Berchtesgaden "where the Fuehrer and I once conspired to rule all mankind!" There, he switches bodies with Cap, again restoring the status quo ante much to the Falcon's surprise (it seems that Cap never told him who he really was). Of course, the Skull then toys with our heroes until it's too late. AIM, now led by the revived MODOK (remember him from *Tales of Suspense* #93-94? Sure you do!) has finally found a way to cut off the power of the Cosmic Cube. Without warning, it begins to melt away in the Skull's hands but not before the arch villain can make one last wish, to vanish out of the reach of our heroes!

Mighty Thor #170

"The Thunder God and the Thermal Man!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Bill Everett (inks)

Harkening back to the good old days prior to the grandiose years, *Mighty Thor* #170 (Nov 1970) takes the Thunder God back to Earth to battle an ordinary, everyday super-villain. Or, if not a super-villain exactly, then something like it.: The Thermal Man was created by the Red Chinese in a running subplot that began in issue #168 and now culminates here in a building shattering battle that only the power-packed pencils Jack Kirby could do justice to. Those, and inks provided by Bill Everett! The legendary artist who first made his mark in the industry way back in the Golden Age with his creation of the Sub-Mariner, had left, then returned to comics to help launch *Daredevil* #1 back in the years of consolidation. He left the fold again, then returned off and on from the late '60s before settling down somewhat as penciler, inker, and scripter for later issues of the *Sub-Mariner*. But before that, he somehow landed the inking chores on *Mighty Thor*. Just in time too, as George Klein, who himself had replaced Vince Colletta, just wasn't up to the job. (To be fair, the reason for that may have been due to declining health; Klein, who'd been one of the giants of the field and been a top inker over John Buscema on the *Avengers* and Gene Colan on *Daredevil*, died that year, soon after his final issue of *Thor*.) Although Everett's inking style utilized a heavy line and sometimes made the same mistake later Kirby inkers did in sticking too closely to the artist's use of shadows (check out how he inked Thor's face on page 1), somehow, he was able to



WHILE SCRIPTER ROY THOMAS AND PENCILER MARIE SEVERIN WERE EXPLORING INNER SPACE WITH THE SUB-MARINER, NEIL ARMSTRONG, BUZZ ALDRIN, AND MICHAEL COLLINS WERE EXPLORING OUTER SPACE, LANDING ON THE MOON ON JULY 16, 1969.

pull it off and retain the weight of Kirby's figures while also preserving the larger than life goings-on. While the Thermal Man looked as heavy as a giant robot should, his interpretation of Kirby's Norn Queen was too arch. With her arcing eyebrows and high cheekbones, she lost the beauty she'd shown under both Colletta and Klein and looked closer to middle age than youth. But then, this was Everett's first issue and he might have just been getting used to Kirby's pencils because he'd improve in later installments. But overall, this was a plain ole fun issue to look at and read with scripter Stan Lee's usual mix of Earth normal and Elizabethan dialogue keeping everything in perspective. In fact, Lee's own style of scripting was evolving just as Kirby's art was. Gone were most text boxes now. Even on the opening page, his accustomed snap summary of the story so far is completely missing. Instead, he relies on dialogue to fill readers in resulting in a faster, and in some ways less satisfactory, read.

Sub-Mariner #19

"Support Your Local Stingray!"; Roy Thomas (script); Marie Severin (pencils); Johnny Craig (inks)

Penciler Marie Severin manages to produce another decent cover image for *Sub-Mariner* #19 (Nov. 1969) with the help of inker Johnny Craig in an issue that features new hero/villain Stingray. Craig, a veteran artist from the fabled EC comics stable, also joins Severin on the interiors. There, he brings some substance to Severin's pencil work but like others before him, is hobbled by the artist's bad figure work and uninteresting layouts. On the other hand, Craig may not have done Severin any favors by eschewing for the most part the use of blacks making for an overall two-dimensional, cartoony feel in most places. Severin was best in illustrating humor and caricature, a talent that made her perfect for Marvel's now defunct *Not Brand Echh* book as well as the occasional gag cartoon she'd draw purely for the enjoyment of her fellows at the Marvel offices. That talent was on full display in this issue's opening splash page where Severin includes the likenesses of a couple dozen bullpenners from John Verpoorten to Roy Thomas in a beach crowd that gathers round Namor's unconscious form. And speaking of Thomas, he tells a tale of a still gill-less Sub-Mariner as he discovers that the mysterious Stingray is actually Walter Newell, whom he thought dead following an explosion back in issue #16. There's action, characterization, and invention galore but it's all prevented from soaring by Severin's substandard art. If only Severin could've drawn the strip with the same attention she gave many of her covers or if the book could be drawn by a returned John Buscema or something...

Avengers #70

"When Strikes the Squadron Sinister!"; Roy Thomas (script); Sal Buscema (pencils); Sam Grainger (inks)

In an even more blatant effort acknowledging the classic DC storytelling technique used in its early Justice Society of America tales and later in their *Justice League of America* Silver Age iteration, scripter Roy Thomas has the first group of Avengers taking part in the Grandmaster's cosmic chess game, split off each to face his counterpart with the Squadron Sinister over the capture of some famous monument (Statue of Liberty, Taj Mahal, etc). It was always a ho-hum plotting technique, even way back in the 1940s when it was first and all too frequently used, and it was still a snoozer in the Marvel Age. The only thing that saves it here, in *Avengers* #70 (Nov. 1969), is Thomas' Stan Lee honed scripting skills that at least keeps the dialogue snappy and characterizations of individual heroes on target. Otherwise, the Sal Buscema pencils don't help much, even if he was somewhat channeling older brother John Buscema's superior style. (Including the fun cover with its two groups of heroes charging at one another; check out the way cool cover of *Avengers Special* #2 for Sal's direct influence!) Otherwise, there's not much to write home about here.

Captain Marvel #18

"Vengeance is Mine!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gil Kane/John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Likely taking more cynical readers by surprise, the same creative team that had turned the book around the issue before were still on the job in *Captain Marvel* #18 (Nov. 1969).

It was still too early to know if the radical changes made to the feature over an issue and a quarter (remember, Cap's new uniform was introduced in the last few pages of ish #16) met with the approval of readers, but that didn't stop writer Roy Thomas and artist Gil Kane from plunging ahead. "We took a long, hard look at what had happened to Captain Marvel in recent issues and frankly decided we weren't entirely satisfied with what we saw," revealed Thomas on the previous issue's letters page. "It isn't often perhaps, that a comic mag company will admit that it's been on the wrong track, but that's more or less what happened to mixed-up Marvel. And so, we set to work to alter Mar-Vell once and for all into the kind of character we thought he should be, figuring that, if we would follow



UNLIKE HIS WORK AT MARVEL, GIL KANE'S PENCILS WERE NECESSARILY MORE RESTRAINED AT DC COMICS DUE TO THE COMPANY'S USE OF FULL SCRIPTS IN WHICH THE WRITER DETERMINED WHAT THE ACTION WOULD BE IN EACH PANEL RATHER THAN LEAVING THE PACING UP TO THE ARTIST.

our own instinct, our own inclinations, we'd probably come out on top." Which begs the question: what had the powers that were at mighty Marvel been thinking/doing in all the issues prior to Thomas' return to the title? Had they been deliberately going against their instincts and their own better judgement? More likely, it had just been given little attention after first Stan Lee, then Thomas, left early on. After that, it was cast adrift with a series of lesser writers and artists to keep it bumping along in the Marvel backwater. At least, that is, until the bean counters in the accounting office noticed the sales numbers and brought them to the attention of publisher Martin Goodman. In any case, immediate cancellation was avoided after Thomas and Kane got to work and, after their first ish, wherein the new arrangement of Mar-Vell and Rick Jones was established and a perfunctory nod to the ongoing threat of Col. Yon-Rogg was made, the team settled down to some dyed in the wool Marvel style scenarios. Namely, this issue's threat of the Mandroid, a robot unleashed by Yon-Rogg to kill Mar-Vell. But the tables are turned, there's an explosion, and Yon-Rogg is killed (hopefully for good!). Thomas also livens things up on the characterization front by turning Rick into a folk singer, bringing in a supporting cast that includes his manager, Mordecai P. Boggs and later his girlfriend, Lou-Ann. Kane's art this issue was as frenetic as his first as he enjoyed a freedom he never really had while at DC where an imposed house style and full scripts held him back. But after testing the waters with a few installments of the Hulk in *Tales to Astonish* a few years back, he'd been ready to move from his long-time employers to Marvel. That said, he had some uncredited help on this issue, including John Buscema who stepped in to do pages 12-20.

These were the last days of the artist's peak when his layouts were experimental and his figure work expansive so these pages, rushed though they might have been, are real standouts. (According to a note by Thomas on the letters' page, Buscema whipped out the pages over a weekend.) What would it have been like to have Buscema as the regular penciler on the strip, giving it his full attention in these months? Only one word can describe it: Wow! **Fun Fact:** A little known incident in this issue resulted in Carol Danvers eventually becoming Ms Marvel. Kidnapped by Yon-Rogg, she was caught in the explosion of a psyche-magnetron, forbidden tech created by the Kree. The explosion affected her DNA giving her super-powers (and her own book) in 1977.

Silver Surfer #10

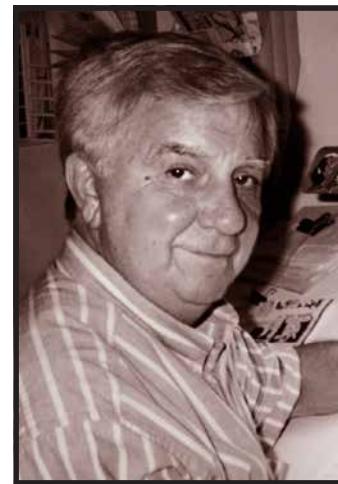
"A World He Never Made!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

In what could very well have been another story planned for when the book still sported its double-size format, scripter Stan Lee presents the first of a two-part tale in *Silver Surfer* #10 (Nov. 1969). Here, the Surfer finds himself embroiled in an unnamed South American country taken over by a brutal dictatorship. Taken in by resistance supporter Donna Maria Perez, the Surfer must later rescue her after she's captured by the regime. And wouldn't you know it? Just as the attractive Maria embraces him in thanks, they're spotted by Shalla-Bal as she arrives on Earth with scheming wannabe lover, Yarro Gort! See, Gort's been trying to woo Shalla-Bal but Shalla will have nothing to do with his advances, as she's still in love with the long absent Norrin-Rad. So Yarro makes her a deal: he'll take her to Earth and if they find that Norrin-Rad has been unfaithful to her, she'll agree to marry Yarro. So, right off, readers likely knew where this was headed and were confirmed in their suspicions with the very last panel of this story as Shalla catches the Surfer just when he's being kissed by the grateful Maria. Hoo, boy!

Homer the Happy Ghost #1

Stan Lee (script); Dan DeCarlo (pencils/inks)

By 1969, Marvel was under new ownership and freed from the distribution restrictions that had hobbled the company for years. With its new freedom, the dual stars of Marvel's former split books gained their own solo series and entirely new series such as the *Silver Surfer* and *Not Brand Echh* were launched. At the same time, Marvel also took steps to re-enter genres that once had been mainstays of the company but fell by the wayside with the rise of its superheroes. Of course, though its westerns had receded in popularity, Marvel had never stopped publishing them—as well as teen humor books like *Chili* and *Millie the Model*—but other genres such as horror, romance, and children's had been ignored. Those lapses had begun to be corrected with the debuts of *Tower of Shadows* and *Chamber of Chills*, as well as *My Love* and this month with *Homer the Happy Ghost* #1 (Nov. 1969). Unfortunately, the Homer book didn't feature any original material; at least not in the sense that the material was all new. Its four issues would all feature reprint material from the 1950s but being scripted by Stan Lee and penciled by Dan DeCarlo (who'd go on to greater fame as a mainstay of Archie Comics), the stories of Casper-wannabe Homer and his friends were still as fresh and clever as they ever were. Unfortunately, its time had apparently passed. Younger readers had apparently become used to finding their fare elsewhere than Marvel and the book was soon canceled. In future years, Marvel would occasionally



FAR FROM SIMPLY BEING KNOWN AS A LONG TIME ARCHIE COMICS ARTIST AND CO-CREATOR OF SUCH CHARACTERS AS JOSIE AND THE PUSSYCATS AND SABRINA THE TEENAGE WITCH, DAN DECARLO CUT HIS EYE TEETH ON BEHALF OF EDITOR STAN LEE AT MARVEL PRECURSOR ATLAS COMICS PENCILING SUCH TEEN HUMOR TITLES AS SHERRY THE SHOWGIRL, MY FRIEND IRMA, AND MILLIE THE MODEL.

try to reenter the kids' market but with no more luck: its superheroes had been too successful. The company had become branded in readers' minds and it would prove to be increasingly difficult to break the mold. **Fun Fact:** Lee and DeCarlo featured themselves in one of the stories in this issue, a gimmick that predated appearances by Lee, Kirby, and other Marvel artists in the later superhero titles.

Tower of Shadows #2

"Witch Hunt!"; Roy Thomas (script); Don Heck (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)
 "Look Out Wyatt...Automation's Going to Get Your Job!"; Gary Friedrich (script); John Buscema (pencils); John Verpoorten (inks)
 "One Hungers"; Neal Adams (script/pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

An odd assortment of creators this issue with a story penciled by early years mainstay, Don Heck leading off *Tower of Shadows* #2 (Nov. 1969). As readers no doubt recalled, the title launched with a strong start, headlined by a Jim Steranko produced tale that set a difficult pace for others to keep up with. Editor Stan Lee no doubt thought he'd matched that high point this issue with "One Hungers," a story, like Steranko's, both written and drawn by a superstar creator. Reader favorite Neal Adams, beginning with his days at DC Comics revamping the Batman, writing and drawing *Deadman*, and designing innumerable cover images (which begs the question why he wasn't called upon to do the same for this issue's cover) had since moved

Neal Adams

Artist Neal Adams began his career in comics strangely, with his work debuting at DC comics rather than the hotter, hipper Marvel. As a result, with his highly advanced, realistic style, he instantly became DC's best artist with editors there soon clamoring for him to draw their covers.

Adams had come from the more prestigious world of newspaper comic strips where he drew the Ben Casey feature for over three years. Casey's tough "take no prisoners" attitude perfectly suited Adams' increasingly realistic style and prepared him for his later work in comic books.

Still, it took a while for his worth to be recognized as he was given assignments on the likes of *The Adventures of Bob Hope/Jerry Lewis* before catching a break and being allowed to draw Batman...but not for Batman line editor Julius Schwartz. Adams branched out from there to other characters including Deadman and the Specter before Schwartz finally took notice. Adams was teamed with scripter Denny O'Neil and together they proceeded to update Batman into the creature of the night that inspired fan excitement.

At that point, along with fellow artist Jim Steranko, Adams became one of the hottest names in comics and finally turned his attentions to Marvel where he took over penciling for the floundering *X-Men* book. At that point, he also received his best inker, Tom Palmer, and scripting partner, Roy Thomas and together, the team produced some of the best comics of the late 1960s.

However, art wasn't the only thing demanding Adams' attention. Over the years, he became involved in getting the Academy of Comic Book Arts off the ground, concerned himself with improving the creative rights of employees of the comic industry, and championing the case of Superman creators Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel for fair compensation from DC comics.

Adams then concentrated on advertising work before eventually launching his own comics imprint in the 1990s with Continuity Comics. But by then, his own personal art style had begun to blur around the edges. The dynamism was still there, but strokes became heavier, cruder, less delicate. That, however, could never and would never, dim the admiration fans for the work he produced during the prime of his career, when he was at his most influential, the mid to late 1960s and 1970s.

to Marvel, where he knocked the fan world upon its collective ear with his work on the *X-Men* and *Avengers*. So, expectations were understandably high for his story here. Unfortunately, this time, Adams came up short: checking out an old, empty house, a hippie couple came upon a blobbish creature risen from the Earth's depths looking for "FOOD!" They discover that it feeds on sound and so manage to remain silent as they make their escape until, at the last second, readers are left to wonder if the girl ended up screaming or not and thus spelling their doom. Pretty slight stuff with Adams' pencils looking good as inked by Dan Adkins, but not as good as they did when Tom Palmer embellished him on *The X-Men*. Back to the front of the book now, to that aforementioned



Heck story scripted by Roy Thomas. Adkins is at work here again but, as has often been said, no one inks Heck better than Heck. Still, Adkins manages to preserve much of Heck's hard edges despite slopping a bit too much ink for shadowing. Somewhat less impressive is the story by Roy Thomas about a ruthless television producer who gets mixed up in what seems to be a modern day witch hysteria, until the twist ending reveals otherwise. The issue's third story, "Automation's Gonna Get Your Job," a retelling of an earlier pre-hero Atlas tale by scripter Gary Friedrich is predictable but well drawn by John Buscema. However, he's somewhat less than satisfactorily inked by John Verpoorten whose too literal work seemed to tease out the spirit of Buscema's style.

Dr. Strange #183

"They Walk By Night!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

All good things must end. Despite some optimistic words on this issue's letters' column (presumably written by scripter Roy Thomas), *Dr. Strange* was not doing well. After trying different things to jog reader interest from giving the hero a more superheroic look, fiddling with his secret identity and providing him with a steady girlfriend, tweaking the masthead giving the logo a jazzier look and adding the "Master of Black Magic" tag line, and finally, easing the financial burden by reducing the book to a bi-monthly status, the *Dr. Strange* title was canceled. There were few tragedies in the comic book world as striking as this one. With its diamond-hard scripts by Thomas that captured the multi-dimensional universe inhabited by Strange, and its outstanding art by penciler Gene Colan and inker Tom Palmer with its wild invention, the book surely ranked at the top of the industry's heap of great comics. Perfect in every way, it was a shame to have it all come to such an early end. And just after a new, very promising story-line was begun with *Dr. Strange* #183 (Nov. 1969). There, Thomas took a leaf from the classic work of horror writer H. P. Lovecraft (whose work had entered the public domain and that Thomas had been busy exploring with adaptations in Marvel's horror titles, as well as in his work adapting stories by Lovecraft friend and sometime collaborator Robert E. Howard) to craft a story that fit very much in the Lovecraftian vein. He lets the cat out of the bag early on the splash page with a famous quote from Lovecraft: "We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity and it was not meant that we should voyage far." One of those who dared to voyage far was Strange's former patron, Kenneth Ward. When Strange arrives at Ward's home, he learns that while exploring in the Himalayas, Ward came away with a statuette of entities called the Undying Ones. Turns out he's become the captive of a group of demons seeking the statuette and, following a battle between them and Strange, Ward dies. But the servants of the Undying Ones are many and vow to continue their attacks until their idol is found. If anything, Colan's art this issue is even more impressive than ever. Perfectly capturing a blend between the look he'd established for the Strange strip over the last dozen issues and the gothic mood of Lovecraft, Colan and Palmer made it really hard for fans to accept the cancellation of the book. Meanwhile, the story itself was meant to continue into the next issue, but sadly, that would never happen. Instead, readers would have to pick up *Sub-Mariner* #22 and then *Hulk* #126 to find out what happened next. Sequels that fell short of the excellence of this first chapter due to the basic incompatibility of Namor and the Hulk with Strange, and because their artists were nowhere close to the caliber of the Colan/Palmer team. Strange fans would have to wait another couple years before Dr. Strange returned in *Marvel Feature* #1 and that would only be as a member of the Defenders. (A team ironically, that was inspired

by the Strange story being continued into their respective mags.) Strange would only fly solo again in 1972 with *Marvel Premiere* #3.

X-Men #62

"Strangers in a Savage Land!"; Roy Thomas (script); Neal Adams (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

Talk about loaded! Still in the midst of the great Thomas/Adams/Palmer run of the latter day *X-Men* run, the trio knocks *X-Men* #62 (Nov. 1969) out of the park! Adams alone provides more visual pyrotechnics than he did even in his own preceding issues, beginning with a page 1 and page 2 aerial battle between the Angel (as only Adams



AS EXAGGERATED AS IT COULD SOMETIMES APPEAR, NEAL ADAMS' STYLE, WITH ITS ANATOMICALLY CORRECT MUSCULATURE AND CHARACTERS THAT SHOWED THE FULL RANGE OF HUMAN EMOTION, STRUCK MANY FANS AS MORE REALISTIC THAN THE TRADITIONAL WORK OF MARVEL STALWART JACK KIRBY. THE CONTRAST SET THE STAGE FOR MUCH DISCUSSION AS TO WHO WAS THE PREFERRED COMICS ARTIST.

could draw him) and the leather-winged Sauron. He quickly follows that up with pages 3 and 4 featuring a flashback sequence about how the Angel found himself in his predicament, with Sauron only drawn in a surrealistic color negative style. The whole opening sequence culminates on page 6 with a full splash depicting a “new look” Magneto and henchman Amphibius hovering over the fallen Angel. The following pages are barely less exciting to look at as the rest of the X-Men venture into the Hidden Land to look for the Angel and stumble across old pal Ka-Zar and, soon after that, Magneto’s mutated natives with their various powers (Gaza, Lupo, Amphibius, Brainchild, Lorelei, and Piper). Meanwhile, the Angel is revived by Magneto (who also gives him a spiffy new costume) but the catch is, Angel doesn’t know that. He thinks Magneto is just a lost soul called the Creator by the natives he’s mutated. At the “Creator’s” request, the Angel agrees to go out and stop the X-Men from interfering in his project, setting up next issue’s conflict. It was another fast-paced, exciting entry for the Thomas/Adams team with Thomas providing just enough text to keep the goings-on clear and staying out of the way of the visuals. A good example of that can be found on page 18 wherein Thomas leaves silent a sequence by Adams of Ka-Zar finding Piper and leaving him for dead (maybe that was the beauty of leaving it wordless: who could tell what exactly Ka-Zar did to poor Piper? Certainly not the Comics Code Authority, which allowed the sequence to remain). Adams himself has praised Thomas’ judicious use of text and as a result called him his favorite scripter to work with. No arguments here!

Fun Fact: One thing that the Code expressly forbade was Thomas and Adams’ original notion to make Sauron a vampire! It’s true! When that idea was shot down, they transformed the character into a psychic “vampire” who changed into a leathery winged pterodactyl instead of a bat. Whew! Thank gosh for the Code! Sometimes, as it did in this instance, its rules forced creators to keep thinking, often to come up with better ideas than they started with.

Amazing Spider-Man #78

“The Night of the Prowler!”; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)

Things were still looking bleak in *Amazing Spider-Man* #78 (Nov. 1969) as John Buscema continued with the pencil work and Jim Mooney with the brush. This time, John Romita wasn’t even around as an “innovator.” The result visually, was another somewhat bland look with dark inks and even dull coloring that did nothing for scripter Stan Lee’s story involving frustrated window washer Hobie Brown, who decides to use his window washing tech improvements as weaponry for a new costumed identity. According to a small blurb with this issue’s credits, the Prowler was conceived by John Romita Jr, which would prove to be the first of many credits he would garner in the late twilight years as an artist who’d



THE PROWLER WOULDN’T BE THE LAST READERS HEARD FROM JOHN ROMITA JR! FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER’S FOOTSTEPS, THE YOUNGSTER GREW UP TO BECOME A MAJOR ARTISTIC FORCE AT MARVEL BEGINNING IN THE LATE 1970S AND BEYOND WITH LONG STAYS AS PENCILER ON SUCH FEATURES AS DAREDEVIL, SPIDER-MAN, THOR, AND IRON MAN.

prove to be almost as good in some respects as his father (in fact, Romita Jr would eventually serve a number of stints as artist on *Spider-Man* and was even inked a time or two by Romita, Sr). And though this issue overall might be classed as pleasant if unexciting, it did come with its requisite Lee touches, including scenes of Spider-Man scaring off a pushy brute trying to break in on his phone call to Gwen Stacy; a hint of something between Gwen and Flash Thompson, now returned from Army service; and Peter Parker laying waste to a pair of local goons. (Still, it was hardly enough for some fans as noted by letter writer Ronald Gayda who thought there was too much action and not enough “social life” for Peter.) The issue ends on a cliffhanger as Peter catches the Prowler robbing the Bugle’s payroll. Yeah, there was stuff going on, but somehow, the visuals just weren’t putting it across in any convincing fashion. It would take an artist with more interest in the strip than Buscema was able to muster to really liven things up. But would fans have the patience to wait until their rescuer finally showed up?

Captain Marvel #19

“The Mad Master of the Murder Maze!”; Roy Thomas (script); Gil Kane (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

One element everyone forgets about the production of comics is the coloring. Often taken for granted, it can spell the difference between the success or failure (or at least slower sales) of an otherwise decent strip. In the early years, Marvel’s books were known for their cheap production values with the limited palette of the company’s coloring being the most immediately noticeable factor. Drab greys, browns, and greens

predominated, which is why the Hulk's skin color was initially done in grey before being switched to green, one of the two other available colors. Not too much later, things improved, especially on the covers with a technique used by colorist Stan Goldberg that shaded them beautifully, giving images almost a 3-D effect and rivaling the graytone covers DC was using for some of its books, and the painted covers used by Dell/Gold Key. Later, Marie Severin replaced Goldberg at the color wheel and, except for a brief period at the start of the twilight years, also did a good job. But as the twilight years moved on and the number of titles increased, the work of coloring began to be divided among diverse hands, including Michelle Robinson. She'd been an underground cartoonist before moving from the West Coast to the East and entering into the comics industry proper. She began doing color separating for Marvel and later Warren Publications. Likely one of her earliest assignments was the new *Captain Marvel*, a fact that writer Roy Thomas was quick to acknowledge on the letters page of issue #17: "Adding the final touch to this epochal transition issue was the coloring by Michelle Robinson" who, as a colorist, was not credited on the first page as was the custom at the time. That said, for some reason, although past issues of the title were not bereft of color, when Thomas and artist Gil Kane took over, the book seemed like it burst with colors like never before. Maybe it was all those reds and blues of Cap's new uniform that appeared in nearly every panel? Contrasted with his previous outfit that was colored green and white (remember those dull grays and greens from the early years?), the new one practically jumped off the page, which is not to say it was a better design. The old outfit looked more like a military uniform and was pretty cool, not to mention unique in its color scheme. But if the change in uniform was necessary to save the book, then so be it. Storywise, *Captain Marvel* #19 (Dec. 1969) continues along the path set by Thomas, one more in tune with the Marvel superhero action style than a science fiction strip. As such, the idea of linking Mar-Vell to Rick Jones turned out to be just what the book needed. Tied to Rick, Mar-Vell became more or less earthbound,

thus allowing for more interaction with the Marvel universe of heroes and villains rather than nebulous and often pointless cosmic wanderings. For instance, this issue (whose plot Thomas credits to Kane in the letters page), Rick goes looking for work and a place to stay in New York City and ends up in the murder maze of the title with Cap getting involved fighting the bad guy while trying to rescue hapless citizens from a crumbling building. So far, Thomas' ideas for a revamp were working...

X-Men #63

"War in the World Below!"; Roy Thomas (script); Neal Adams (pencils); Tom Palmer (inks)

In what should've been penciler Neal Adams' swan song on his *X-Men* run, he and scripter Roy Thomas deliver an end to the Sauron/Hidden Land saga that was worthy of the creative team's too-short time together. Continued from the previous issue, *X-Men* #63 (Dec. 1969), the team is surprised to discover that the "Creator" who rescued the Angel and gave him a sharp, new uniform, is really Magneto, who miraculously survived their last encounter. The villain has been mutating local savages and bestowing upon them super powers. The X-Men and Ka-Zar battle their way through the super-powered natives only to be stopped by their latest member, a woman code named Lorelei with the power to enthrall men. So while the male members of the team and Ka-Zar are halted in their tracks, Marvel Girl holds the fort until putting Lorelei out of action. Thus freed, the male members of the team tear into Magneto's lab equipment and cause an explosion resulting not only in Magneto's apparent death, but the reversion of his super henchmen back into their savage selves. And though the art team of Adams and inker Tom Palmer deliver another winner this issue, it's scripter Roy Thomas who has the last word: "As mutants, they'd have been mere outcasts of a society that hated them," Cyclops tells Ka-Zar upon seeing the super savages revert to normal. "They'll be happier when they're back to normal." "Will they?" wonders Ka-Zar. "Who could be

happier to lose vast powers which set them apart from other men?" To which Cyclops replies (in a brilliant final panel that perfectly captures the despondent looks of the X-Men) "Did you say...who? Offhand, Ka-Zar, I can think of at least five people without even trying." "And their initials, jungle man," adds the Beast, "are...the X-Men!" If this issue turned out to be the



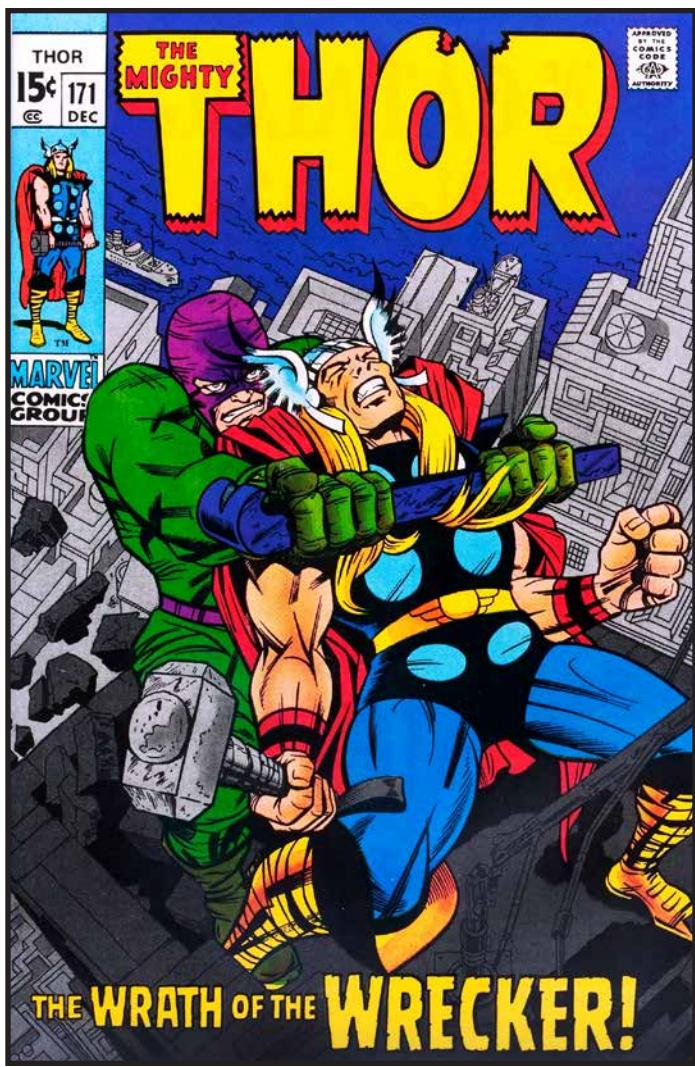
COLOR WAS A MAIN FACTOR IN ATTRACTING THE EYES OF BROWSERS AT THE CROWDED COMICS SPINNER RACKS. ESPECIALLY WHEN MANY MONTHS' WORTH OF COMICS MIGHT BE JAMMED IN EACH POCKET! THIS COVER TO CAPTAIN MARVEL #19 WITH ITS EXCITING GIL KANE/DAN ADKINS IMAGE WOULD HAVE GRABBED ANY YOUNGSTER'S ATTENTION!

final one of the series, this ending, that summed up the entire underlying pathos of the strip, would have been a perfect one. But the feature, doomed as it was to cancellation, would go on for three more issues. Together (including one more lesser effort by Adams), they'd constitute an epilogue to the series as a whole.

Mighty Thor #171

"The Wrath of the Wrecker!"; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Bill Everett (inks)

With the origin of Galactus fiasco behind him, the enthusiasm Jack Kirby had for the Thor feature quickly evaporated resulting in a series of single-issue stories strung together by the thinnest of threads. That pattern would hold until the artist's departure from Marvel early in 1970. But that didn't mean he was incapable of delivering a great story. Case in point: *Mighty Thor* #171 (Dec. 1969). In the wake of his battle last issue with the Thermal Man, Thor has little time for rest after he hears of the plight of civil rights leader Pedro Luis Lopez, who hovers near death after an assassination attempt. Changing to his mortal identity of Dr. Don Blake, Thor determines to do whatever he can to help the patient pull through. But in the middle of the operation, the Wrecker escapes prison and in a rampage, sends the hospital rocking on its foundations. Unable to continue the operation, Blake leaves to change to Thor and ends up in battle with the Wrecker. He defeats him, of course, and manages to get back in time to save Lopez' life but at the cost of his reputation as a man: "I'm surprised at you, doctor," observes an assisting physician. "Running out the way you did. By abandoning your patient, you might have lost him. How can you be so cold, so unfeeling? What kind of man are you?" In the final panel of the story, Kirby shows Blake's receding figure as growing smaller and lonelier as he walks alone down a long, empty corridor: "Let's just say, that none of us is perfect," he replies. It was a great story, all stuffed within the confines of a mere 20 pages and though Kirby's art throughout is colossal, scripter Stan Lee manages to shine with the kind of dialogue and values that not only gave meaning to the power-packed art, but made his reputation in these years. When Blake enters the operating room, he's entreated: "You've got to save him! If he dies, the city will be torn by riots!" To which Blake replies: "I would fight to save him even if his passing would be unnoticed by a single man. He is a human being, and as such his life is sacred!" Lee may not have been the only one who could put such words in his characters' mouths, but he was the only one who did it consistently and with such conviction. Aiding immensely in making this story one of the best is Bill Everett who continued to provide the inks over Kirby in this, his second outing on the title. And what a difference a month made! In the previous issue, he seemed to follow Kirby's pencils a trifle too close for comfort, not taking the route others like Sinnott and



ANOTHER EYE GRABBER! MIGHTY THOR #171 MAY HAVE COME AT THE TAIL END OF JACK KIRBY'S HISTORIC RUN AT MARVEL THROUGH THE 1960S. BUT INKERS SUCH AS BILL EVERETT HERE, COULD STILL BRING OUT THE INHERENT DRAMA, ACTION, AND POWER OF THE KING'S IMAGERY!

Colletta had in rounding off the artist's less attractive affectations. This time, Everett seemed more at ease, doing a more carefully considered job. That could be seen right off on the opening splash page as Thor looks down on the city from the rooftops. Everett's delineation of the buildings across the street is perfect down to every last detail. One feels certain that every brick in those walls, every pedestrian on the sidewalks, were all preserved from Kirby's pencils. It just gets better from there. Though lacking the feel of ancient times that Colletta's inks gave Kirby, Everett manages to give the pencils a sleek, up-to-date look with harsh lines and little shading. Gone is the literal interpretation of the artist's use of shadows and blacks from the previous issue, with more light thrown over the characters, opening up the panels and giving them an almost 3-D look. That style really pays dividends when the Wrecker makes the scene

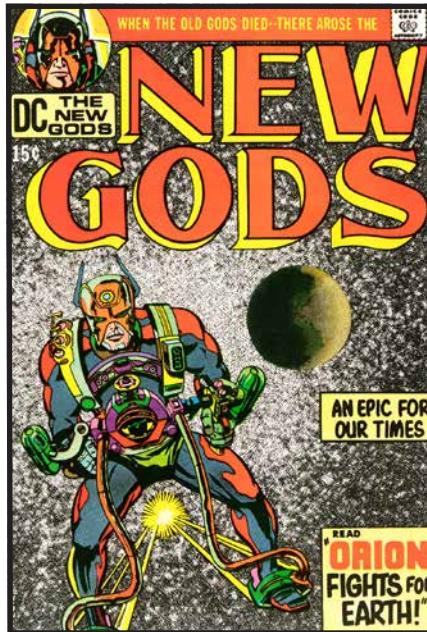
first breaking out of prison, then going on his rampage (A shot in panel 5, page 8, with the Wrecker's crowbar ripping the engine out of a truck is eye-popping!). And when Thor finally goes into action, Kirby's use of big, quarter-page panels really opens up the story and allows Everett to go to town. Not since the days of the Hulk/Thing fight in *FF* #25 or the Iron Man/Sub-Mariner clash in *Suspense* #82 was there a fight as bonecrushing as this epic confrontation between the Wrecker and the Thunder God! All of it was finally topped by a full-page illo of the Wrecker pounding at Thor through a wall. Here, Kirby, faithfully inked by Everett, seems to spare his fans no detail in showing every single brick as they fly in every direction. What a panel! And in its way, panel 2 on the next page was equally as impressive, with an apartment building behind the falling figures of the Wrecker and Thor rendered in incredible detail with every nook, every crenelation, every window and sill, every cornice right there for the examining eye. If this was Kirby on the downslope of his career at Marvel, what incredible vistas awaited fans when he became reinvigorated at DC? As it turned out, though his early *New Gods* titles showed promise, they didn't hold up. Inferior inking and the insistence on doing his own scripting without editorial interference, doomed any chance that Kirby's work there would eclipse even what he was doing at Marvel in his final months there. If nothing else, issues like this one were more than enough to prove that though he was exiting the scene of his greatest career victories, Kirby was still the King!

Fantastic Four #93

“At the Mercy of Torgo!”; Stan Lee (script); Jack Kirby (pencils); Frank Giacoia (inks)

Finally (whew!) the climactic chapter in the gangster saga as the Thing at last meets the robotic Torgo in the gladiatorial arena of a Skrull planet that has become infatuated with the Prohibition era of American history. But *Fantastic Four* #93 (Dec. 1969) is marked by an even more epochal event than the climax of a multi-part epic: the substitution of Frank Giacoia for long time Kirby inker Joe Sinnott, who'd been the artist's partner on the strip since all the way back to issue #44. Sinnott brought a clean but hard-edged feel to Kirby's pencils that proved perfect for a science fiction oriented comic like the *FF* (by contrast, he likely wouldn't have been

able to capture as well the feel of *Thor* the way that fellow inker Vince Colletta did). Sinnott was there for every important event in the *FF*'s career through the grandiose years and into the twilight years and now, suddenly, he was gone. (And inexplicably moved over to *Captain America* to ink over Gene Colan's pencils.) He was replaced this issue by Frank Giacoia who had done good work inking Kirby in the past, most notably on *Captain America* when the feature was in its *Tales of Suspense* period. Unfortunately, his inking here doesn't measure up to those past performances maybe because Kirby himself wasn't as sharp as he'd been even in the relevant recent past of the grandiose years. The slip begins immediately on the cover with all of Kirby's little affectations that had become more noticeable in his later period (squiggles, square knees, squared off finger tips) left in the finished art. Affectations that anyone could see had likely been smoothed over, covered up, or altered by Sinnott. The result is two-dimensional, almost a bare basics layout rather than a finished piece of art. The inside art is more of the same with Giacoia adding little to Kirby's barebones look (particularly on the Thing, where the inker seems to have dropped Sinnott's habit of adding shading to the Thing's individual plates to give them weight and texture). It all made for a distracting, unsatisfying look that took away much of the emotion that should have been present when the Thing is finally rescued by his teammates. Luckily, though, Sinnott would be back on duty next issue just in time for the return of some old time FF baddies.



STILL THE KING! THE EARLY ISSUES OF *NEW GODS* PROVED THAT JACK KIRBY, AFTER LEAVING MARVEL FOR DC, STILL HAD IT. AT LEAST ON A CONCEPTUAL/ARTISTIC LEVEL (HIS SCRIPTING LEFT MUCH TO BE DESIRED) AS THIS COVER IMAGE FROM *NEW GODS* #1 PROVES.

Avengers #71

“Endgame!”; Roy Thomas (script); Sal Buscema (pencils); Sam Grainger (inks)

No, the “Endgame” title of *Avengers* #71 (Dec. 1969) had nothing to do with the blockbuster film *Avengers: Endgame* (2019)! If only it did! That overwrought filmic bore would have been so much better if it had been! Instead of the film's disassociation from the comics that inspired it and its confusing mass of heroes and villains all contending in continuous combat (to coin a phrase), viewers would've had the pleasure of seeing such heroes as the Black Panther, Yellowjacket, and the Vision facing off with the 1940s versions of Sub-Mariner, Captain America, and the Human Torch! And on top of that, Thor,

Iron Man, and Goliath vs. the Squadron Sinister (from the previous issue), and not to mention a special guest appearance by the Black Knight as he and the Avengers gather in the end to defeat Kang the Conqueror and the Grandmaster. Yup, now that would've made for a great movie! Alas, all fans would have is this issue and its previous two installments. But with Roy Thomas on the scripting and even the lackluster but serviceable Sal Buscema on pencils, it made for a far more interesting tale than that lumbering betrayal of Jim Starlin's original Thanos saga. That said, the Grandmaster story itself was still below par for Thomas, who needed to get away from this DC-inspired tale (of heroes breaking off into teams only to reassemble to fight together at the end) and back to what he did best: telling stories that grew naturally out of Marvel continuity and established characterizations. Though he'd do that soon enough in following issues, the series would still sputter along under so-so pencilers like Sal Buscema and Frank Giacoia until #74 saw the triumphant entry of the art team supreme: John Buscema and inker Tom Palmer!

Sub-Mariner #20

"In the Darkness Dwells...Doom!"; Roy Thomas (script); John Buscema (pencils); Johnny Craig (inks)

It was a return to greatness for *Sub-Mariner* #20 (Dec. 1969), or at least a semblance of it. Or maybe it just seemed great because John Buscema, any kind of John Buscema, even rushed or restrained Buscema, was better than the work of the strip's regular penciler, Marie Severin. That was the feeling for many fans when they flipped this issue's admittedly uninspired cover to its opening splash page with what looked like a return to form for Buscema with its dynamic, full body posturing of the Prince of Atlantis. Buscema had returned just in time to guest illustrate (according to a notice in the credits, Severin was off on vacation to the Bahamas) this Roy Thomas scripted tale where Subby meets Doomsy (that's Doctor Doom to those not on informal terms with

MARVEL'S CONCEPT OF TEAMING UP ITS SUPER-VILLAINS WAS A GOOD, EVEN INTRIGUING ONE: AFTER ALL, WHAT DID ALL THOSE VILLAINS RUNNING AROUND LOOSE DO WHEN THEY WEREN'T TANGLING WITH OUR HEROES? UNFORTUNATELY, WITH SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP #1 (1975), THE PATTERN WOULD BE SET FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE TITLE'S RUN: INSTEAD OF DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS OF VILLAINS EVERY ISSUE OR THREE, IT WOULD BE MOSTLY SUB-MARINER AND DOCTOR DOOM AGAINST THE WORLD AND EACH OTHER.

the villain). In a foreshadowing of sorts for Marvel's later *Super-Villain Team-Up* title that regularly featured the pairing of Sub-Mariner and Doctor Doom, the two characters mix it up here as Namor seeks refuge at New York's Latverian embassy. There, Doom offers a renewal of their old partnership (hands up those who can remember way back to *FF* #6 when the two teamed up against the Fantastic Four!) but a somewhat reformed Subby turns him down resulting in a fight that Namor barely escapes. It was a solid, entertaining tale that could have been more if Buscema had laid it out in the sprawling style he used in his earlier issues on the title. As it was, the action seemed cramped (except for those pages where the artist uses quarter-page sized panels) and wasn't helped by Johnny Craig's inks that seemed to skimp on detail as well as backgrounds—which may or may not have been the result of the fill in nature of Buscema's assignment. Unfortunately, any promise of better yet to come would be dashed next issue when Severin returned from vacation.

Amazing Spider-Man #79

“To Prowl No More!”

Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Jim Mooney (inks)



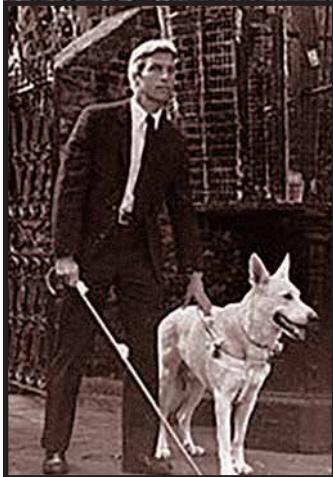
simply buying the book out of habit or off the momentum begun in earlier years. Lee's story isn't much either with its continuation of the tragic tale of window washer Hobie Brown and his misguided career as the costumed Prowler. And though Peter Parker mishandles his own private life, as Spider-Man, he defeats the Prowler and, after hearing his sob story, gives him a chance to go straight. Sigh. Unfortunately for readers, things were not due to improve for another few issues. And there was still the infamous intro of the Kangaroo to endure in issue #81...

Daredevil #59

"The Torpedo Will Get You if You Don't Watch Out!"; Roy Thomas (script); Gene Colan (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)

One of the best kind of story that Marvel did was the extended search for the hidden crime lord plot. You know, stories like the one with the Green Goblin, Crime Master, or the Big Man in great past issues of *Spider-Man* or even the Masked Marauder or the Exterminator from right here in the *Daredevil* comic. In fact, the longer the mystery of the top guy's identity remained in question, the more acute the enjoyment for readers as his story-line unraveled. For *Daredevil* #59 (Dec. 1969), scripter Roy Thomas added a variation to what Stan Lee had done in each of those previous occasions by having the behind the scenes bad guy hire other supervillains to tackle the hero individually, issue after issue. Last issue, for instance, master criminal Crime Wave hired the costumed Stuntmaster to take out Daredevil. He failed, of course, setting up this issue's villain, the Torpedo, to take over. But Thomas' variation wasn't completely original. It's well known that Thomas had a fondness for Fawcett Comic's character Captain Marvel, whose most well known story-line extended for over two years from *Captain Marvel Adventures* #22-46. Over those issues, criminal mastermind Mr. Mind gathers many of Cap's old enemies to tackle him one at a time, each time hoping one will find a way to defeat him. Cap triumphs though until finally confronting Mr. Mind himself.

(Come to think of it, Lee himself used this basic premise



WHICH CAME FIRST? THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG? WAS THE 1971 TV SHOW LONGSTREET, ABOUT A BLIND INVESTIGATOR WITH A SEEING EYE DOG INFLUENCED BY THE MATT MURDOCK CHARACTER OR BETTER YET, DETECTIVE WILLIE LINCOLN IN MARVEL'S DAREDEVIL SERIES? OR DID IT GO FARther BACK FOR INSPIRATION (AS POSSIBLY DD HIMSELF MIGHT HAVE!) TO THE PULP ERA'S BLACK BAT WHO WAS BLINDED BY ACID BUT GAINED ENHANCED SENSES MAKING HIM A "SUPER-HERO" OF SORTS?

in encapsulated form for the plot of *Spider-Man Annual* #1 featuring the Sinister Six.) That said, a good idea is a good idea so why not use Otto Binder's *Captain Marvel* plot here with *DD*? It got off to a good start in issue #58 and continues with a bang of an opening splash page as our hero catches a couple crooks putting the protection squeeze on a local druggist. (And by this time, do we have to point out how incredible the inks of Syd Shores look over Gene "the Dean" Colan's pencils?) Later, police detective Willie Lincoln, following up on a clue, stumbles into the lair of Crime Wave who releases him thinking he's merely a helpless blind man. But once he reads the next day's papers and finds out who he really is, he hires an underworld hit man to eliminate him (The Torpedo, natch. A clever moniker based on underworld slang for a professional assassin). Luckily for Lincoln, DD has been watching out for just such an attempt and goes into action. The Torpedo has him on the ropes, when Lincoln steps in to save the day. It was an exciting, thrill-packed chapter in the serial with nice instances of characterization for all the principles including blind detective Willie Lincoln, fighting DA Foggy Nelson, and the Matt Murdock/Karen Page ongoing tension show.

Silver Surfer #11

"O, Bitter Victory!"; Stan Lee (script); John Buscema (pencils); Dan Adkins (inks)

Our tale of tragedy and disappointment concludes in *Silver Surfer* #11 (Dec. 1969) as the spaceship carrying Shalla-Bal and Yarro Gort to Earth is shot out of the sky by the forces of an unnamed South American country torn by civil war. The action came just moments after Shalla-Bal witnessed the Surfer being kissed by an Earth woman and of course, misinterpreting the gesture of thanks for being rescued for betrayal. Then, she and Yarro are captured by the country's dictator and the scheming Yarro immediately sells out to save his skin. Building a weapon that can defeat the Surfer, he's about to use it when Shalla-Bal risks her life by throwing herself between the gun and the Surfer and is struck instead. Weakened by the fighting, the Surfer is unable to help Shalla-Bal and, determining that only the medicos on their home planet can save her, sends her back to Zenn-La and once again beyond his reach. Talk about frustration! This dangling of Shalla-Bal before the Surfer and then yanking her away again was beginning to wear thin. Either scripter Stan Lee had to reunite the two or write off Shalla-Bal for a while, because even when she was drawn ever so lusciously by penciler John Buscema, absence did make the heart grow fonder after all. In the meantime, he needed to introduce a supporting cast of some kind for the Surfer to develop more permanent connections with them on Earth if the book was going to break out of the rut it seemed to be falling into. The question was: would there be enough time for that before sales declined further, necessitating cancellation?

TWOMORROWS AD PAGE