

FEATURING AN EXCLUSIVE CHAT WITH EDITORIAL, AL MILGROM!

BACKISSUE!

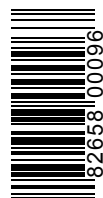
TWO MONTHS
June 2017
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BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE
CELEBRATED '80s ANTHOLOGY SERIES

MARVEL FANFARE

FEATURING BREYFOGLE • CLAREMONT • COCKRUM •
GOLDEN • PÉREZ • PLUNKETT • ROGERS •
SMITH • STEACY • VESS & MORE!



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BACK ISSUE
Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!

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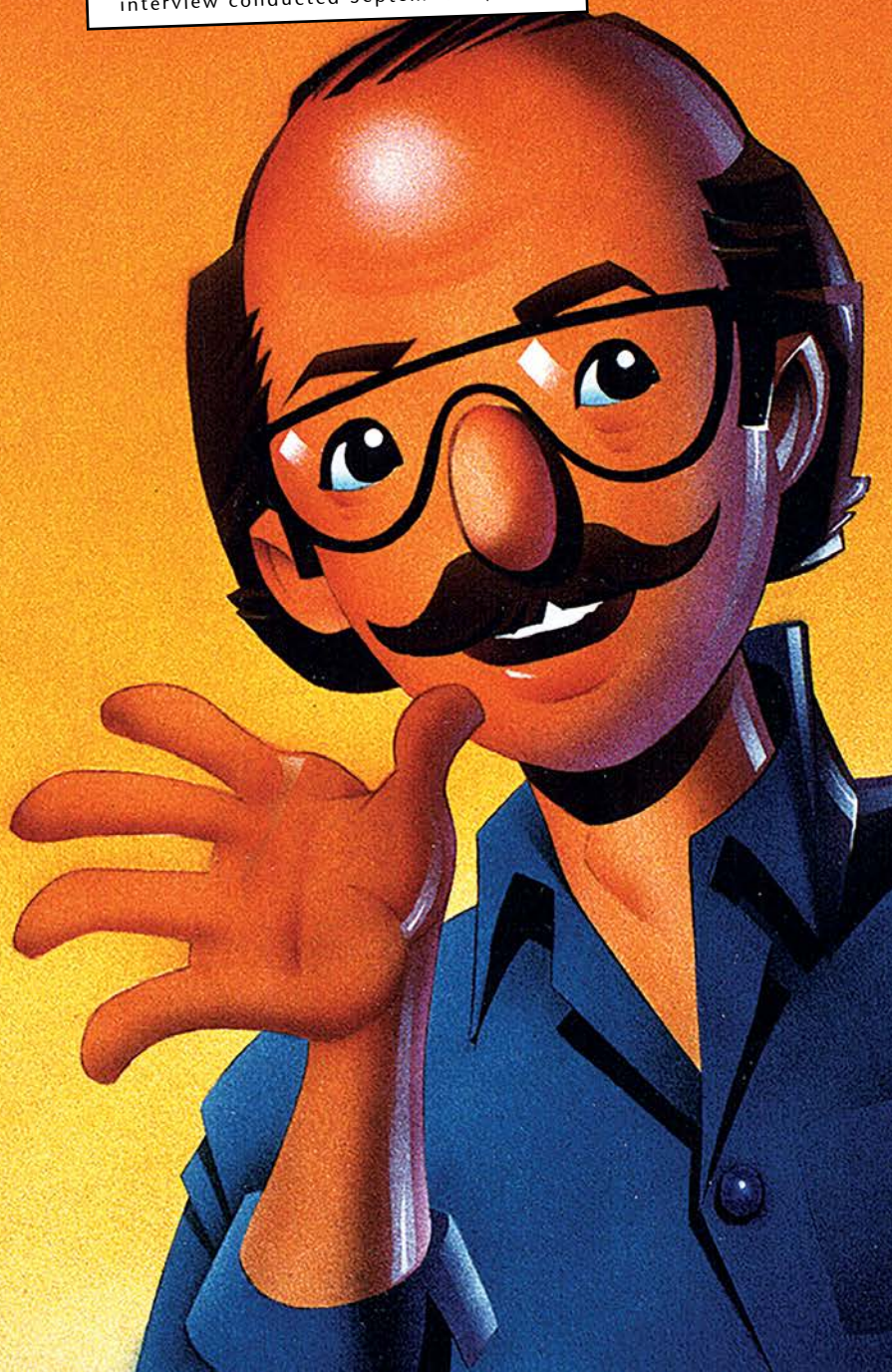


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MARVEL FANFARE'S EDITORIAL, AL MILGROM

by **Shaun Clancy**

interview conducted September 9, 2016



AL MILGROM: You're doing an article on *Marvel Fanfare*?
SHAUN CLANCY: Yes... *BACK ISSUE* is doing an issue on the series. I noticed you were involved in *Marvel Fanfare* at the beginning, but I'm not sure if you were there for the end.

MILGROM: The original run of the series ran 60 issues, and I was the editor on all 60. In fact, the idea for the book was mine.

CLANCY: How did the idea come about? The first issue was a *Spider-Man* and *Angel of the X-Men* team-up.

MILGROM: Right. Michael Golden worked on that, and it was originally slated for a *Marvel Team-Up* issue that I was in the process of editing. When we decided to do *Fanfare*, I co-opted it for that book.

The way the title came about was... [Marvel editor-in-chief] Jim Shooter had explained to me at one time or another that we didn't actually make money on our advertising—which sounds counterintuitive, I know—but it wasn't so much that we made profits on the advertising, but we did get paid for them, and we didn't have to pay any editorial costs, writing, penciling, inking, lettering, or coloring for those pages. Plus another thing that made the ads cheap to produce in the regular books was that they could print the ad pages in the same spot usually in the folios of the pages of the books in all the Marvel titles that they appeared in all at once.

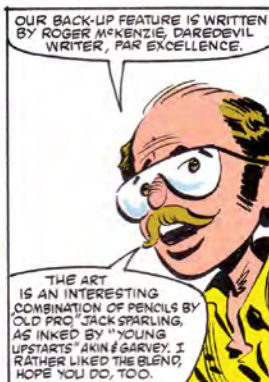
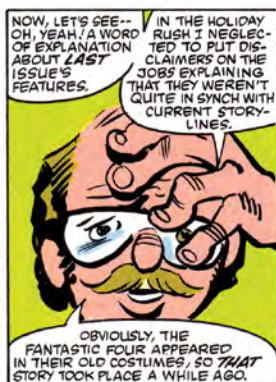
Although it wasn't profitable, *per se*, it did cut down the costs of producing the comics. That stayed with me for a couple of years, as I don't remember when Jim first brought that up, but I always thought in the back of my mind, "Why run ads if they're not profitable?" I guess it depends on your definition or the semantics, because if you're spending less money and making money on the sales of the comics then in some ways it makes it more profitable. Most commercial magazines would make the majority of their profits from the advertising. Not so much from the cover price of the magazines to subscribers or from people who buy them at the newsstands. Subscribers would always get a deep discount off the newsstand's price, and that was partly due to the publisher wanting their circulation numbers to be as high as possible so that they could charge their advertisers more. Newspapers worked that way, too.

The bottom line is that I said to myself, "If these aren't profitable, then why don't we do a comic book that has no ads? The readers don't like the ads, so why don't we do a book where the cover price is high enough that if it sells well, then it would be profitable based strictly on the size of the circulation and we could do stuff that would be fan-specific." Stuff that we thought the fans would really like and buy it in droves but priced higher than the newsstand stuff. If they liked it enough and were willing to pay the extra money, then we could do it on better paper stock instead of on the cheap, crappy newsprint that comics had been traditionally printed on. This would be a win-win. We could produce a high-quality book, charge more for it, the fans would get high-quality material, pay more for it, and get 32 pages of sheer enjoyment, hopefully... and Marvel would make profits hopefully, which, of course, was the goal.

Shooter took the idea to whomever he took it to and said, "One of the editors has this idea for a different

Editorial-Al

Al Milgrom's self-caricature, as reimaged by artist Ken Steacy for the cover corner boxes of *Marvel Fanfare* #22 and 23. Special thanks to Ken for the scan.



A Flair for Fans

(top) Lettercol header for MF's "Marvel Fan Flair" readers' forum.
(bottom) Milgrom's "Editorial" from issue #15 (July 1984).

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so I convinced them that if we were gonna make money on the sale of the book then I needed to give talent some incentive to want to work on this book. At the time we came up with a formula that we would pay everyone involved rate and a half of what they would normally get. That made it quite a good deal for the freelancers, which meant I could pick some of the best guys to work on the title because they were gonna get more money for doing it. That went well, but at some point the bean counters looked at it and said, "We can understand paying more for the writing. We can understand paying more for the art and the coloring, but why the lettering? The lettering's not any different or any better and not a big draw, so why are we paying more for the lettering?" So they stopped paying rate-and-a-half for lettering.

So I got to try new things and I even got Mike Mignola to pencil an issue. Mike used to come in with samples all the time and they were really good. He would draw stuff and ink it, but for some reason, and I don't know why, he wanted to be an inker. I asked him, "Why do

you want to be an inker? No one wants to be an inker. Inkers are guys who want to be pencilers and for whatever reason they're not quite good enough or not fast enough or not quite dynamic enough... there's drawbacks. There's things that keep them from being a successful penciler. I don't think anyone starts out wanting to be an inker." Certainly I didn't. I wanted to pencil ultimately, and I like inking and enjoy it. It's one of the few things you can do artistically to collaborate with another artist. I like trying to come up with the best approach to inking different pencilers and I like putting different pencilers with different inkers where I think they'd be a good match. Most of the time it didn't work, but a few times it did.

Getting back to Mike, he got a little bit of inking work, but his inking wasn't great. It was okay. I think the first thing I saw was a Don Perlin [*Defenders*] job and I said to Mike, "Your inks look much better on your pencils and your pencils are very good, so why are you trying to be an inker?" He said he didn't know if he could do penciling and that he thought penciling was hard. I asked him to draw something for me and if he wanted to, he could ink it as well. Then he said he didn't really like to draw superheroes, which I had a laugh over. This is what Marvel did—superheroes. But I asked him if there was any character he wanted to draw? He said he liked Sub-Mariner and thought he was pretty cool. I said okay and asked if there was anything particular he'd like to have in the story that he'd like to draw and he said, "Well, I like drawing animals." [both laugh] Here's a character that's in the ocean all the time and he wanted to draw in animals.

So I then called Bill Mantlo, who was one of my go-to guys because Bill was real cooperative, always eager and always happy to do stuff, so I told him I had a new guy here and that he had a lot of talent. He likes Sub-Mariner but he also says he wants to draw animals. Can you come up with some story that has Sub-Mariner and animals in it? Bill wrote this really nice little story, which was a back-up story for *Fanfare*, where Sub-Mariner is swimming around the ocean and there's a ship that has these beautiful Arabian stallions on board and he admires their great beauty [in *Marvel Fanfare* #16, Sept. 1984]. Somehow, there's a big storm—maybe Neptune causes it... Mike also liked the supernatural elements—the ship is wrecked and sinking with all the horses struggling in the water and are going to drown, so Sub-Mariner prays to Neptune or maybe it was Poseidon, I don't remember which one [it was Neptune—ed.], and he says, "Please, oh, great Neptune, can you spare these lovely creatures? Can you save them for me?" Neptune changes them into sea horses. It was a sweet little cool story and I don't think Sub-Mariner saved any of the humans [both laugh], but the horses were transformed and saved.

So Mike turned in the pencils on this story and I asked him if he wanted to ink it. He said, "No, I'd feel like I'd be repeating myself." I said okay and then thought, "Who'd be a good match for him?" I thought Craig Russell might be a good match for this job and so I called him and he said sure. They actually did another Sub-Mariner job together that had something to do with a female pirate. To this day I get people coming up to me telling me how much they liked the sea horse story. There were some Bill Mantlo detractors who thought Bill was just a hack because of Bill also doing licensed characters. At the time there was an anti-licensing fan base who thought Marvel was selling out because they were doing all this licensed stuff. We were doing a ton of licensed stuff during that time period.

CLANCY: Wasn't Bill Mantlo involved in a hit-and-run accident?

Sitting down and chatting with legendary X-Men writer Chris Claremont is always an enlightening experience. Chris is a walking cornucopia of ideas and Marvel Comics' history; to talk with him about his involvement with *Marvel Fanfare* is not only a great way to spend an afternoon, but also provides great historical insight into this unique anthology and comics creation.

Considering *Marvel Fanfare's* amazing array of story ideas and printing on high-quality paper—a novel innovation for the time—we begin by talking to Chris about how the chance to write the initial issues presented itself.

"Well, Marvel was trying all sorts of experiments in those days with stories that were by folks who you wouldn't normally see with characters that weren't regular fare," Claremont says. "In this instance it was a great opportunity to put me and Michael [Golden] together after our work on the *Avengers Annual*. From my perspective: way cool." [Editor's note: Claremont and Golden co-produced 1981's *Avengers Annual* #10, which introduced the breakout character Rogue.]

Chris wrote stories for the first five issues of *Marvel Fanfare*: a continuing saga set in the Savage Land with Spider-Man, Angel, and Ka-Zar in issues #1 and 2, with the X-Men joining in with #3 and 4. Claremont did a Dr. Strange story in #5 and also wrote for issues #24, 33, and 40, including tales featuring Dr. Strange and various members of the X-Men and their associates or enemies. Mystique and Destiny encountered Storm in a very memorable tale in issue #40.

Regarding *Marvel Fanfare* #1–4, "It was something that we had thought up for *Marvel Team-Up*—hence the Spider-Man involvement, and my memory might be wrong—but that's why it never ended up in *Team-Up*, because my run ended before Michael finished the story. Rather than drop it into the regular continuity, *Fanfare* was seen as a way to burn off the inventory [of stories] that was around but also to showcase writers and artists' stories that wouldn't fit into the normal continuity. There was no easy way to put the Savage Land story in X-Men continuity and there was no easy way to put it in Spidey continuity.

Fanfare was it. The reason why it kept going after that was, we had loose ends. How do we tie up those loose ends? Well, we fell back on the continuity. We were left with Sauron still in the Savage Land—you know, back in the days when it wasn't a problem to use a name like Sauron, because who was ever going to read *Lord of the Rings* [laughs]?"

Claremont attributes a great deal of the comic's success to the variety of artists he worked with on each of these issues.

"Who better to draw the X-Men than Dave [Cockrum]? Dave did one really cool issue and then we ran into schedule glitches. But then Paul [Smith] doing the final part of the story was essentially his showcase that told us that he could draw the X-Men. Of course, one look at that and we were there. My only regret with Smitty was if he could have only stuck around for two years instead of one, we would have hit the half-million mark then and not ten years later, dang it." [Editor's note: For more on these mutant milestones of the Bronze Age, see *BACK ISSUE* #29.]

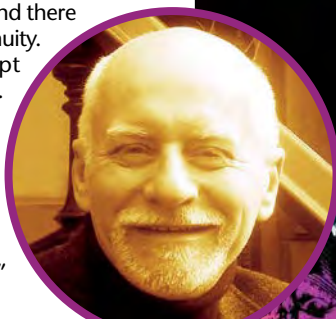
Does Whatever a Spider Can

Ka-Zar joins the "fun" in Chris Claremont's *Marvel Fanfare* serial. Cover to issue #2 (May 1982) by Michael Golden.

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THE CHRIS CLAREMONT MARVEL FANFARE INTERVIEW

by John Kirk



CHRIS CLAREMONT

GOLDEN YEARS

These were golden years. *Marvel Fanfare's* goal may have been to showcase a variety of talent, but in order for it to successfully launch, it needed the tried-and-true comic appeal of veteran dynamic writers and artists like Claremont and Cockrum. While Smith was a relative newcomer at the time, his work was truly scintillating and as Claremont indicated, his work in *Fanfare* only served to confirm his talent and popular appeal. Of course, the pun notwithstanding, the work of Michael Golden in these "golden years" was also impossible to leave out. Claremont is emphatic in stating that the challenge of working with such an eclectic and diverse range of artists and characters only added to the "fun" of this anthology.

"When you work with someone as cinematically gifted as Michael... I mean, just look at the double-panel spread of the establishing shot of Angel flying around over the Grand Canyon and the insert panels of Candy Southern and Karl Lykos' girlfriend, Tanya. The establishment of Warren and Candy Southern—it's wonderful. Michael can present the most prosaic of moments in the most visually enticing and evocative characterizations to evoke the emotions you need for the scene and the bonding moments of the characters. It's an exaggerated moment of reality that you love in good television and cinema. It's wonderful to me and the character moments with Angel playing with the falcons, it's like you wished you had wings so you could do that too."

Claremont characterizes Golden's style as brilliant and logical with visual storytelling that wisely heeded all the elements of the story that completely matched the context. For Golden, everything had to fit perfectly. Before Step G could be reached, it was essential to understand everything in Steps A through F. In comparison to the work of Cockrum and Smith, Claremont has this to say:

"Dave knew the characters. For him it wasn't about telling who everybody was—it was more about how best to present them. What would be the coolest evocative presentation of the characters? With Paul, it was getting to know him as a penciler—what his strengths and weakness were, what he liked to draw or how he approached the responsibility of telling the story. How much did I need to tell him? All that stuff got worked out in the first issue. But what was cool was, that enabled us to do the Japan two-parter [X-Men #172-173] after the *Wolverine* miniseries. He hit the ground running and



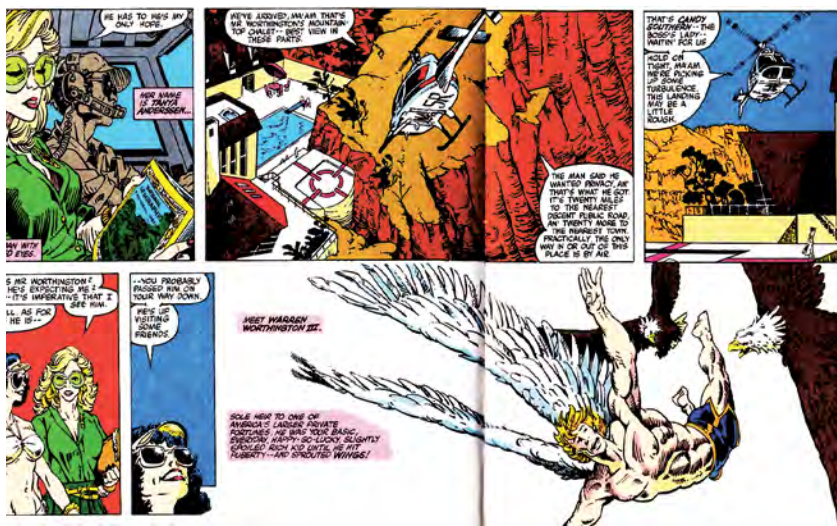
MICHAEL GOLDEN

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Bugle Fever

(top) A Claremont story, illustrated by Golden? No wonder *Marvel Fanfare* caught the attention of readers! Signed original art from issue #1, courtesy of Heritage (www.ha.com). Note its title stamp, signifying its original *Marvel Team-Up* home. (bottom) Chris loves this Golden-drawn Angel spread from issue #2—and so do we!

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DOCTOR

IS/WAS in!

by **Brian Martin**

Stephen Strange probably appreciated the rest. After all, here was a character that, throughout his career, had been involved in more than his fair share of extended storylines.

Early on in Strange's series in *Strange Tales*, Stan Lee and Steve Ditko had the good doctor chased all over the planet by Baron Mordo. Dr. Strange went to the ends of the universe and met Eternity, for Pete's sake!

Steve Englehart and a couple of different artists sent him all through time, and even had him the only survivor when the planet Earth was destroyed!!

Then, just a couple of years before arriving in *Fanfare*, he was engulfed in the year-long Creator Chronicles.

Extracurricular activities were no better. Over in *The Defenders*, Steve Gerber involved the Sorcerer Supreme in a year-long storyline involving a gorilla with a human head and a veritable plethora of bozos!

MAY I HAVE A FANFARE, PLEASE?

Suffice to say, the short, one-issue stories that Dr. Strange was involved with in *Marvel Fanfare* surely came as a welcome respite. And yes, one of those stories spanned two issues, but that was balanced out by the fact that three of the tales were short back-up stories of eight or 13 pages.

The series probably also served as an ego boost for Stephen. His first story appeared in issue #5 (Nov. 1982) and was cover-featured. This is rather significant since the four-issue storyline that preceded it featured heavy-hitter characters the X-Men and Spider-Man and creators such as Chris Claremont, Michael Golden, Dave Cockrum, and Paul Smith. Heady company, indeed.

Dr. Strange was even fortunate enough to have Mr. Claremont stick around and pen his first *Fanfare* adventure. Having recently scribed issues #38–45 (Dec. 1979–Feb. 1981) of the Doctor's own title, Claremont feels the story in *Fanfare* was, "If not actually left over, it was an idea I was playing with."

The villain of the piece was a sorcerer who had only previously made one appearance, and that was in a back-up feature in *The Defenders* #53 (Nov. 1977), where he battled Clea alone. The choice of a minor adversary such as this was, "I think basically [out of] desperation," recalls Claremont. "You go through the list of who is available, who haven't we seen in a long time."

Further to that idea, regarding his run on the *Dr. Strange* title, Claremont states, "I was always trying to come up with new and different ways of presenting magic and magical-themed antagonists that ideally hadn't been seen before." In this case, of course, it was a foe who had not encountered Strange before, but was still a logical adversary.

The fact that Nicodemus battled Clea in his other appearance lent itself to this story featuring Clea in quite an active role mystically. After Nicodemus steals Stephen's powers, it is up to her to stop their foe and take those powers back. "It's a Claremont story," says the author. "Women do not generally [play] second fiddle to the men."

Master of the Marvel Fanfare Arts

Detail from the Dr. Strange pinup from *MF* #33 (July 1987). Art by Ian Akin and Brian Garvey.

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FlashBack!

Of all the issues of *Marvel Fanfare*, some of the most reprinted have been #10–13 (Aug. 1983–Mar. 1984), a four-part Black Widow story written by Ralph Macchio and largely illustrated by George Pérez. The story is full of flashy costumes and international travels, and pushed adult boundaries, ramping up the twisted history of Marvel's redheaded femme fatal. But what is the actual history of the story itself? Top secret files were declassified, and writer Macchio (pronounced Mack-eo) unleashes the truth in the confession that follows...

TWISTING TENDRILS

The cover of *Tales of Suspense* #52 (Apr. 1964) headlined "Introducing the gorgeous new menace of... the Black Widow!" and saw the Armored Avenger facing down the equally armored Crimson Dynamo while a purple-clad, fur-wearing woman gestured imperiously. The story inside, plotted by Stan Lee, scripted by "N. Korok" (a pseudonym for Don Rico), and illustrated by Don Heck, introduced the Russian spy-seductress Madame Natasha Romanoff, who was sent to Stark Industries to retrieve—or kill—the defecting scientist Ivan Vanko, as well as Iron Man. Although failing in her first mission, Widow stuck around in the States to steal Stark's anti-gravity ray in the very next issue.

Natasha would appear in several further Iron Man stories, duping Hawkeye into battling the armored hero, receiving a black-and-blue costume replete with fishnets, suction boots, and weaponized bracelets, and vacillating between her harsh masters in Russia and a desire to lead a freer life in America. Defecting to the US, she would encounter the Avengers and work alongside Nick Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D., as well as watch her husband die in the costume of the Red Guardian, but in *Amazing Spider-Man* #86 (July 1970), the displaced spy would make another fateful choice to forge her own destiny. A part of her decision involved designing her own new costume (aided by John Romita, Sr. and Jim Mooney), which, as she says, "will be more in keeping with the swifty seventies! And with the modern image of the new Black Widow!"

Over the following decade, Black Widow would headline her own stories in *Amazing Adventures*, join the Avengers as its 16th member, move to San Francisco to share title billing with Daredevil, and become a founding member of the misfit superhero team the Champions. Through it all, tiny bits of her origins were teased out, but much of her past remained a Cold War mystery.

BLACK WIDOW... IN BLACK AND WHITE

The magazine series *Bizarre Adventures* was Marvel's bid at an older audience, allowing creators to work outside the Comics Code, like the sexier and darker Warren magazines of the day. *Bizarre Adventures* #25 (Mar. 1981) was subtitled "Lethal Ladies," and its contents including the Daughters of the Dragon, Lady Daemon, and the Black Widow. The Widow story was by writer Ralph Macchio and artist Paul Gulacy, with Natasha receiving a S.H.I.E.L.D. assignment to infiltrate a Soviet arms depot in

Web of Intrigue

George Pérez's cover to *Marvel Fanfare* #10 (Aug. 1983), launching a Black Widow story arc originally planned for *Marvel Premiere*.

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BLACK LEATHER REQUIRED: THE BLACK WIDOW STINGS

by Andy Mangels



DOUGLAS R. KELLY: *Roger, I'm gonna throw the chronological approach out the window and start with the stories you wrote about the Vision in Marvel Fanfare #14 and 32, because I'm a huge fan of the Vision and I want to get right to the dessert.*

ROGER MCKENZIE: Okay, sure.

KELLY: *Your story in Marvel Fanfare #14 (May 1984) was entitled "Dangerous Vision," and it opened with the Vision brooding about the absence of his wife, Wanda. He leaves Avengers mansion to look for her and finds that, of all things, she's been attacked by the Fantastic Four. Did you have an idea in mind for how you wanted to explore the character of the Vision in this story?*

MCKENZIE: If I did, I don't recall now what it was, but I have to say that *Marvel Fanfare* was like being a kid in a candy store. I got to use characters like the Vision and the Scarlet Witch and Iron Man, characters that had their regular writers and characters that I never got to do. But I could in *Marvel Fanfare*.

KELLY: *The Vision is a hugely powerful being, but he often uses that power in kind of non-violent ways... here, for example, you had him partly solidify his hand inside Ben Grimm's head. That's a non-violent way to end, or win, a fight. Did you see the Vision this way?*

MCKENZIE: I did. I've always liked the Vision, pretty much for the reasons you just outlined.

KELLY: *At the end of your story here, the Vision grabs one of the bad guys, the Thinker, and says to him, "I may be less than human, but I am more than machine."*

MCKENZIE: Yeah, and if I'd been writing the character in the *Avengers* or in a miniseries book, that's how I would have played it. It gives him human appeal and you can build stories around this dichotomy... questions like, "What am I, really?" "What do humans think of me?"

KELLY: *Your editor on Marvel Fanfare was Al Milgrom. Do you recall him giving you input on the characters and stories, or was it a looser arrangement than that?*

MCKENZIE: As I remember it, we had pretty much free rein. But still, you couldn't take these characters outside of their usual realm. You can't suddenly make Captain America a member of Hydra, for instance. I wouldn't have done things like that, so I never ran into that kind of situation with Al, who I think is a great editor and a great talent all around.

My two favorite Marvel heroes are Captain America and Daredevil. I was lucky enough to be able to write both of those characters. But I never gravitated toward the powerful characters... I never really wanted to write a Superman story, for instance, because he's too powerful.

KELLY: *A few years later, you returned to the Vision character with Marvel Fanfare #32 (May 1987), in*

KID IN A CANDY STORE

ROGER MCKENZIE HAD A BALL WITH MARVEL FANFARE

by Douglas R. Kelly



ROGER MCKENZIE



Fading In and Out of Marvel Fanfare

From the Vision tale "Rosie" in *Marvel Fanfare* #32 (May 1987), one of several memorable *MF* stories written by Roger McKenzie. Art by Paul Smith.

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Marvel Fanfare wasn't the first series to feature the adventures of the jungle boy Mowgli and his wild friends. Marvel wasn't even the first publisher to adapt the classic, as Dell featured adaptations of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* in the mid-1950s, and prior to that, *Classics Illustrated* adapted a few tales that follow the feral protagonist. But it was a love for those books, a film, and the original stories that pushed then-editor Roy Thomas to have Marvel adapt some of Kipling's narratives.

And he wanted Gil Kane to draw them, beginning with a discussion in the editor's Manhattan apartment in the mid-1970s. The primary reason? Kane's skill in rendering animals. "A lot of comic book artists just can't do it," Roy Thomas wrote in an introduction to a 2007 collection of *Marvel Fanfare* #8–11. "Their horses look like two men in a horse suit, and their bears are merely lions with more fur and greater girth."

A believable bear would be particularly useful, with Baloo serving as a key character in the run. This is a series in which animals dominate each and every page. Even though John Buscema was the most frequent collaborator of Thomas, Kane emerged as the desired artist. Thomas continued, in the introduction: "His beasts moved with fluid grace the way such creatures did in nature, remaining animals even when called on to exhibit nigh-human intelligence."

Yet, Thomas was gone by the time Kane's pages for the anthology series *Marvel Fanfare* were being sent for inking to P. Craig Russell. Thomas had exited Marvel and begun a "semi-exclusive" relationship with DC Comics. In his introduction, Roy lamented not getting to script those adaptations (or a splash-page nod, even, for formulating the plan). Instead, Kane would handle writing duties on the run, with Mary Jo Duffy jumping on to script the final two issues.

Russell remembers the assignment with fondness: "I was just ten years into my career at that time," Craig says. "I had grown up admiring the work of Gil Kane. And to hold the original penciled pages in my hand, and to see the markings [was special]. When I inked Gil Kane, I tried to be as faithful as possible to the linework. I thought to myself, 'How would Gil Kane ink this, if he had time?' I'm in the camp of wanting to see Gil Kane's pencils as unadorned. I'm not trying to add flourishes and a fantastical style to the work that's already there."

The introduction to *Marvel Fanfare* #8 (May 1983) maintains the literary cadence of *The Jungle Book*'s opening, yet simplifies some of the setup: "Now Mang the Bat sets free the night—the herds are closed in corral and hot and loosed till dawn are the jungle's own. This is the hour of pride and power, talon and claw, and for the telling of the saga of Mowgli and his brothers."

Compare that to the original Kipling: "Now Chil the Kite brings home the night/That Mang the Bat sets free/The herds are shut in byre and hut/For loosed till dawn are we. This is the hour of pride and power/Talon and tush and claw. Oh, hear the call!/Good hunting all/That keep the Jungle Law!"

Yet, Kane's task was more daunting than to simply take text and apply it onto his jungle backdrops and action, updating when needed. Russell has made a career of adapting classic works, including other Kipling tales (collected in 1997's *Jungle Book Stories*). "You can't just take chunks of copy and paste them down into the story," Russell says. "It has to work in the form you're working in. There's a great deal of editing and solutions that go into it. You have to get under the skin of the story, come up with visual metaphors, commenting on the story while you're telling it."

This is something Russell has honed over a four-decade career. With the series *Night Music*, Russell wrote and drew both literary and operatic classics, including works by Mozart,



P. CRAIG RUSSELL

Portrait by Michael Netzer.

The Jungle Book

by Andy Smith



Born to Be Wild

This P. Craig Russell portrait of Mowgli and Shere Khan graced the back cover of *Marvel Fanfare* #8 (May 1983). (inset) *Marvel Fanfare*'s adaptation of Kipling's classic was collected in the 2007 trade paperback *Marvel Illustrated The Jungle Book*, with this Russell cover.

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SKY-WOLF!

A LOVE LETTER TO BLACKHAWK

by Chris Brenneman

Months ago, when I sent Marv Wolfman an email asking for an interview about his *Marvel Fanfare* #16 (Sept. 1984) and 17 (Nov. 1984) contributions, *Sky-Wolf*, he was more than a little puzzled.

"Hard to believe anyone cares," he wrote back.

In the annals of the *Marvel Fanfare* anthology series, *Sky-Wolf* is most certainly one of the stranger, more offbeat entries. Penned by Wolfman with pencils handled by Dave Cockrum, the story details the origins of the titular team of World War II adventurers. Escape artist Jesse "Little John" Johns, Hollywood special-effects master Sidney "The Gaff" Levine, and Matt Slade III come together under the lead of Skyler "Sky-Wolf" Wolf in an effort to retrieve a super-secret airplane prototype.

That may sound fairly straightforward, but once you dig into the story, you're actually bombarded by a seemingly never-ending succession of insane images, over-the-top characters, and outlandish war machines.

"Both Dave and I really loved DC's *Blackhawk*," Wolfman says. "We kept thinking what we loved about the series was the stuff done in the 1950s.

The villains were so far advanced compared to the heroes. They had the War Wheel, they had the flying tanks, they had all this silly stuff that looked great in a comic book. That was when they were being published by Quality. When they came to DC, they weren't quite the same anymore."

That's what *Sky-Wolf* was—a love letter to the *Blackhawk* comics of old, penned by Wolfman and penciled by Cockrum.

"We did what we loved about them," Wolfman says. "We did giant, silly machines and big, dopey stuff. We just wanted to have a lot of fun with it and see if we could do the *Blackhawks* that never quite existed but the one we always wanted."

A Hawk-a Hawk-a Burnin' Love...

...for *Blackhawk*—Wolfman and Cockrum's *Sky-Wolf*! Dave's cover to *Marvel Fanfare* #16 (Sept. 1984).

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MARV WOLFMAN



MARVEL FANFARE #18: CAPTAIN AMERICA IN

"HOME FIRES!"

by John Trumbull



Roger Stern and Frank Miller's "Home Fires!" in *Marvel Fanfare* #18 (Jan. 1985) finds Captain America and the FDNY fighting a series of fires in Brooklyn. The mysterious arsonists "We—The People" threaten even more unless the city of New York pays them six million dollars. As Cap combs the city looking for leads, he pauses to admire a happy father kissing his wife and sons goodbye for the day. "I wonder if that man knows how lucky he is?" Cap wonders. "I'd give just about anything to have his life... to be just another ordinary man, working to keep my piece of the American Dream."

Captain America ultimately discovers that that same family man, Hal Brady, is also the leader of the arsonists. Feeling that the American Dream has failed them, Brady and his fellow Knights of Brooklyn have turned to arson and extortion to tip the country's scales in their favor. Cap is horrified that community leaders, local businessmen, and even a policeman have conspired to burn down a nursing home. When Brady is incinerated in a fire he started, Cap has little sympathy, observing, "He had chances... a lot of chances. He just looked for excuses not to take them."

After smashing through a brick wall to lead the other arsonists to safety, the Sentinel of Liberty charges back into the burning building for one last rescue: the American flag. Holding Old Glory before the remaining Knights of Brooklyn, Cap states, "This belongs to all of us. But it's not for free—and it doesn't come easy. It's America! America doesn't hand you things on a silver platter. Sometimes all she offers is hope. And now, I have to think of some way to bring hope to Mrs. Brady and her boys. If any of you still pray... pray for them!"



FRANK MILLER

FROM A SPARK TO A FLAME

In addition to Roger Stern, Frank Miller, and inker Joe Rubinstein, *MF* #18 carries the credit "Based on a story suggested by Roger McKenzie." Roger Stern explains the history to *BACK ISSUE*: " 'Home Fires' had a more complicated beginning than most stories. It actually started back when I was the editor of *Captain America* and other *Avengers*-related titles.

"At the time, Roger McKenzie was writing *Cap*, and he had come up with the plot for the first part of a proposed two-part story for what would have been *Captain America* #238–239 (Oct.–Nov. 1979). Except that, as originally plotted by McKenzie, there was very little Cap in the story. It mostly dealt with Steve Rogers getting involved in fighting a fire in his neighborhood. It's been a long time [and I don't recall all the details], but I think he may have appeared as Cap in a couple of panels. Anyway, the artist who was supposed to draw the issue wasn't interested in drawing the 'Adventures of Steve Rogers,' so he turned the plot back in and bowed out. To keep the book on schedule, I wound up substituting a different two-part story, one written by Peter Gillis and penciled by Fred Kida.

Uncle Cap Wants You

Frank Miller's soul-stirring cover to *Marvel Fanfare* #18 (Jan. 1985).

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FANFARE™

Bill Mantlo for
Bill Mantlo

by James Heath Lantz



BILL MANTLO

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Bill Mantlo's career in comics was a prolific one. One cannot think of *ROM: Spaceknight* or *Micronauts* without mentioning his contributions to their four-color adventures. Mantlo has also had celebrated runs on *The Incredible Hulk* and *The Spectacular Spider-Man*, and he co-conceived Rocket Raccoon, Cloak and Dagger, and the series *Swords of the Swashbucklers*.

Yet, of all his work, perhaps the superhero anthology series *Marvel Fanfare* has most shown his versatility as a writer. His *Micronauts* creation Captain Universe plus Spidey and the Hulk are just a few of the characters he's written for the title. Let's explore all of Mantlo's masterworks in the pages of *Marvel Fanfare*...

CONSCIENCE OF A FILL-IN KING

Much like Rod Serling and Gene Roddenberry did in television, Bill Mantlo used his writing as a platform to discuss the social issues that were important to him. Mantlo was, as his brother Michael tells *BACK ISSUE*, "a champion of the oppressed." He wanted everyone, human and animal alike, to be treated fairly and equally. Many of his stances on the state of the world, in this case underpaid civil workers, overcrowded animal shelters, and the unnecessary deaths of stray pets, were expressed in his stories. "Bless the Beasts and the Children," the back-up feature in *Marvel Fanfare* #7 (Mar. 1983) starring Marvel's resident Man without Fear, Daredevil, was such a tale.

The streets of New York are normally filled with traffic and chaos. However, on this particular day things get dangerous as a *Daily Bugle* van nearly hits a visually impaired boy. Daredevil saves him, but the young man's new guide dog was frightened by the vehicular incident. Ol' Hornhead scours the city for the canine, only to be overwhelmed by the fear he senses from the animals incarcerated in the cramped shelters full of city workers who are trying to make ends meet. Daredevil finds what he's looking for. Yet, he's too late. The poor pooch is put down because he was mistaken for a stray, leaving the Man without Fear wondering how he will tell the disabled lad that sometimes even superheroes fail in their quests.

Mantlo continued to write about animal cruelty in his second story featured in *Marvel Fanfare*, in issue #16. Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner was the star of that particular saga. Namor attempts to save a white stallion from both smugglers who beat the poor creature and a raging storm on the sea. When the Scion of the Deep is severely injured by his adversaries' weapons, the intervention and powers of Neptune save him and transform the steed into a beautiful sea horse.

Jumping a bit ahead (don't worry, we'll get to Mantlo's next *Fanfare* story soon), the Uni-Power and Captain Universe, first seen in *Micronauts* #8 and covered in depth in *BACK ISSUE* #93, show up to give some bullies their comeuppance in *Marvel Fanfare* #25's second feature

Marvel Beat-Up

Bill Mantlo penned this Spidey/Hulk mash-up/smash-up for *Marvel Fanfare* #47 (Dec. 1989). Art and colors by Michael Golden.

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THE ADVENTURES OF THE WARRIORS THREE

by Roger Ash

The Warriors Three—Fandral the Dashing, Hogun the Grim, and the Voluminous Volstagg—first appeared in the “Tales of Asgard” back-up in Marvel’s *Journey into Mystery* #119 (Aug. 1965) by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Fandral has the appeal and panache of Errol Flynn’s Robin Hood, Hogun is as grim and dour as they come, and Volstagg could be the brother of Shakespeare’s Falstaff. Throughout the years, they have joined Thor on many adventures and have become popular supporting characters, even appearing in the Marvel Cinematic Universe in *Thor* films. For all their popularity, they have had relatively few adventures on their own. However, some of the best have appeared in *Marvel Fanfare*, courtesy of creators Alan Zelenetz and Charles Vess.

Zelenetz told Steve Ringgenberg in *Marvel Age* #26 (Feb. 1985), “I had gone in to [Marvel *Fanfare* assistant editor] Ann Nocenti asking what she needed for *Marvel Fanfare*, and she said there’s this fellow named Charlie Vess who wants to draw the World Tree. Want to do a story about the World Tree and the Warriors Three?” That led to “Ballad of the Warriors Three,” the back-up story in *Marvel Fanfare* #13 (Mar. 1984).

In the story, the Warriors Three encounter Idunn, whose husband, Bragi, the God of Poetry, has gone missing in the woods while seeking inspiration for a new ballad. The Warriors Three split up and encounter dwarves, giants, and mermaids, all of whom tell them that Bragi was headed towards the World Tree. The Warriors come together at the tree. Bragi has taken the form of a bird and has become tangled in the tree’s branches, where he is menaced by a snake. Volstagg saves him by falling on the snake, and the Warriors Three become the inspiration for his new poem.

In *Amazing Heroes* #126 (Sept. 1987), Vess told Mark Askwith about the story. “He [Zelenetz] wrote a story that was lots of fun. It wasn’t violent. It wasn’t people hitting each other over the head. I enjoyed drawing it.” This enjoyable collaboration led to the two joining together again for the graphic novel *The Raven Banner*, an epic tale set in Asgard. This would, in turn, lead to a four-part Warriors Three story in *Marvel Fanfare* #34–37 (June–Dec. 1987), though Vess said in *Amazing Heroes* that it originally started as a four-issue miniseries. “It started off when Alan and I said, ‘Let’s have some fun. Let’s come up with a silly story and do a miniseries.’”

Jim Owsley was the original editor of the miniseries, but when he left Marvel editorial, finding a replacement proved difficult. “Well, we wanted to come up with a story that would be making fun of heroic-ness,” Vess told Christopher Irving in *Modern Masters* vol. 11:

The Warriors’ Tree

The Warriors Three by Charles Vess. Back cover art to *Marvel Fanfare* #13 (Mar. 1984).

Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com).

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ALAN ZELENETZ



BEYOND Capes!

Marvel's early-1970s output was an unending series of surprises, as readers were introduced to gothic horror, sword and sorcery, new heroes, new villains, and tons of new writers and artists. Many of these creators settled into roles closely identified with a specific style of story. Doug Moench, for example, came to Marvel and established himself as a street-level writer with his stirring *Master of Kung Fu* and *Moon Knight*. As a result, when I bought *Marvel Super Action* #1 in early 1976, the magazine stunned me with Moench penning a fantasy series, *WeirdWorld*. Clearly, it resonated with readers since it subsequently appeared in comics and magazines, fueling interest in its fantasy realm, especially since it was coupled with inspiring artwork from Mike Ploog and later, John Buscema.

Marvel Comics finally collected the *WeirdWorld* stories for the first time in a trade paperback in 2016, and on the day we spoke by phone, Moench had just penned the introduction from his Pennsylvania home, so had his memories refreshed. He clearly relished those early days with its lax editorial oversight and the freedom to try things. "And boy, was that joyous," he tells *BACK ISSUE*. "And I don't think you can say the [Marvel] books were terrible. There wasn't just me. There was [Steve] Englehart, Steve Gerber, Don McGregor, and on and on and on."

WEIRDWORLD DISCOVERED

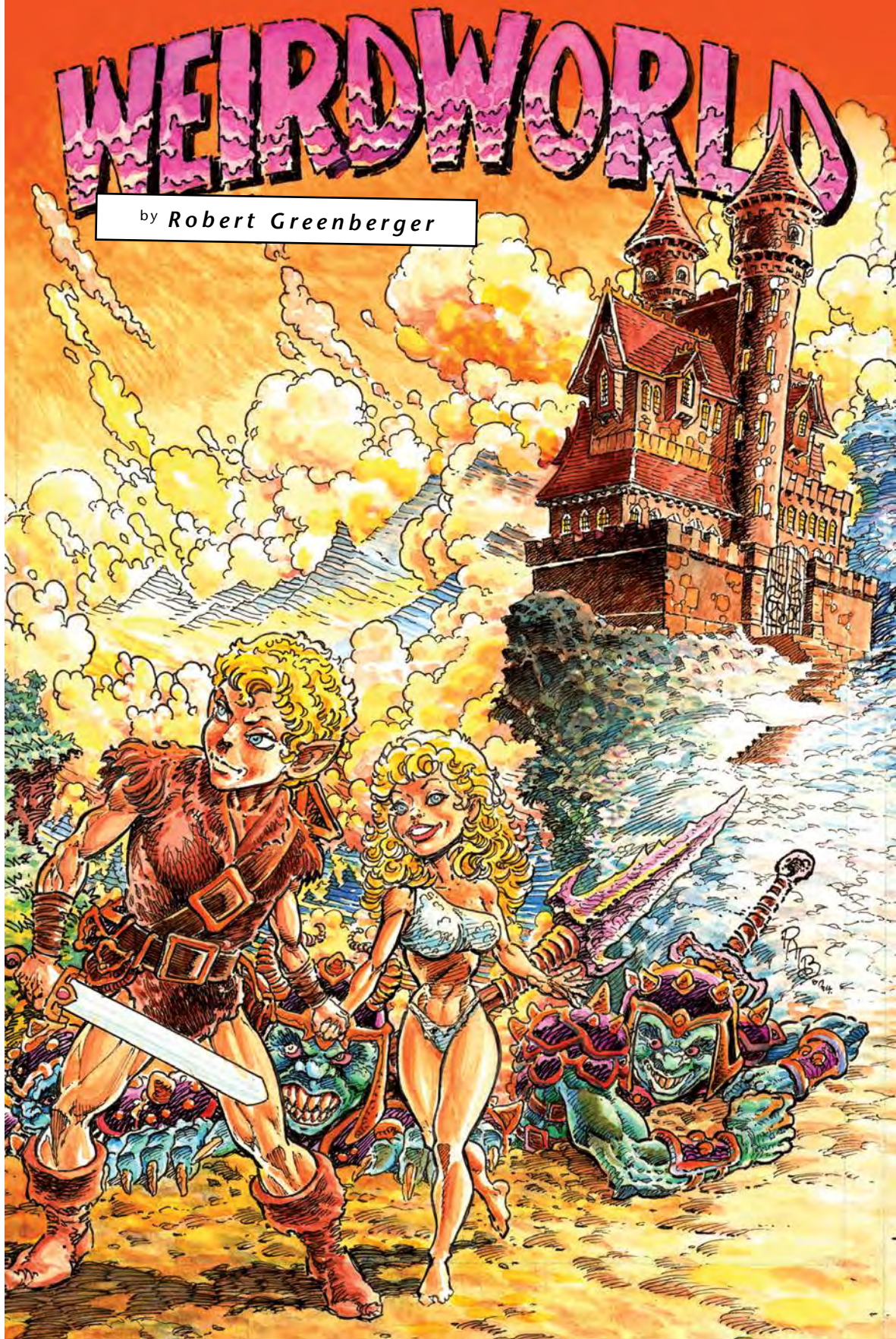
In the '70s, Moench was a prolific writer and Marvel's magazines were always in need of fresh content, so he had a fairly free hand to submit stories. "I'd dialogued my 20

The Great Darklens Saga

A wonderful *WeirdWorld* commission by Pat Broderick, contributed by the art's owner, Shaun Clancy.

WeirdWorld TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

by **Robert Greenberger**





As longtime fans of the medium know, comics can be like a jungle. Or like a lost civilization existing in the heart of a primal, verdant wilderness. In the wilds of this publishing jungle, some great comic stories are lost to the eyes of fandom. That is why we are here to pay tribute to *Marvel Fanfare*, a comic anthology that was like an intrepid jungle explorer, hacking and slashing to find the hidden treasures that may have otherwise been remained hidden forever.

As we stretch this jungle metaphor to the breaking point, we present *Marvel Fanfare* #56–59, featuring Marvel's very own queen of the jungle, Shanna the She-Devil. Now, these issues of *Marvel Fanfare* didn't just rescue just any old Shanna tale... no, these gorgeous volumes rescued a tale of Shanna told by the late, great Steve Gerber. Now, think about that for a second, my brave jungle explorers. If not for *Fanfare* and Milgrom, comic-book fans and historians would be denied four issues of jungle action from the legendary writer that penned so many issues of *Howard the Duck*, *Man-Thing*, and *The Defenders*, and what a crying shame that would have been.

GERBER'S JUNGLE GODDESS

For years, Mr. Gerber served as kind of a guiding force for the character of Shanna. Gerber dialogued the very first issue of *Shanna the She-Devil* in 1972 and was the custodian for the character after that debut. When Gerber wrote *Daredevil* from 1973–1975, Shanna was there. Gerber supplied additional details to Shanna's origin in *Marvel Two-in-One* #3 (May 1974) and even wrote a back-up strip featuring Shanna in *Rampaging Hulk!* #9 (June 1978). And in that unlikely place, we begin.

In *Rampaging Hulk!* #9, Gerber and the great artist Tony DeZuniga presented the tale "The Wrath of Raga-Shah!" The unlikely publishing pairing of jungle queen and raging monster didn't take and the Shanna feature was gone by next issue. But thanks to *Marvel Fanfare* editor Al Milgrom and *Fanfare*'s mission statement—to save stories from the dusty inventory drawer and to present stories by some of the finest names in comics—this Gerber-penned jungle tale was unearthed and brought to the light of civilization.

In author Jarrod Buttery's August 2010

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BACK ISSUE #96

"Marvel Fanfare Issue!" Behind the scenes of the '80s anthology series with AL MILGROM, interviews and art by ARTHUR ADAMS, CHRIS CLAREMONT, DAVE COCKRUM, STEVE ENGLEHART, MICHAEL GOLDEN, ROGER MCKENZIE, FRANK MILLER, DOUG MOENCH, ANN NOCENTI, GEORGE PEREZ, MARSHALL ROGERS, PAUL SMITH, KEN STEACY, CHARLES VESS, and more! Cover by SANDY PLUNKETT and GLENN WHITMORE.

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SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL

in

MARVEL FANFARE

by Marc Buxton



STEVE GERBER

Photo by John Tighe.
and said... 'I want
finish the storyline.'
do so.' "

es a Slinky!

ed in Marvel

1), with this

hiodo cover.

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vel Fanfare Issue