

"MAKE MINE MARVEL" ISSUE

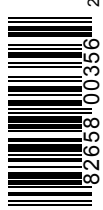
BACKISSUE!

TWO MONTHS
February 2019
No. 110
\$8.95



STEVE ENGLEHART's *Lost* WEST COAST AVENGERS Issues!

DENNY O'NEIL & CARMINE INFANTINO at Marvel • Marvel Comicon 1975
Pizzazz Magazine • Speedball • Marvel Comics Presents • British Marvel
fandom • and a MARK WAID & ANN NOCENTI Daredevil Pro2Pro interview



1 82658 00356 2

Volume 1,
Number 110
February 2019

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Michael Eury

PUBLISHER
John Morrow

DESIGNER
Rich Fowlks

COVER ARTISTS
Al Milgrom and
Mike Machlan
(unused cover for
Marvel's *West Coast
Avengers* #38)

COVER COLORIST
Glenn Whitmore

COVER DESIGNER
Michael Kronenberg

PROOFREADER
Rob Smentek

SPECIAL THANKS

Will Alonis
Jim Amash
Ken Avidor
Michael Browning
Dewey Cassell
Tom DeFalco
Cecil Disharoon
Dave Drew
East Coast Comicon
Scott Edelman
Steve Englehart
Chris Evans
Irving Forbush
Cliff Galbraith
Grand Comics
Database
Paul Gulacy
Heritage Comics
Auctions
John Holmstrom
Terry Kavanagh
Robin Kirby
John Kirk
Erik Larsen
Ed Lute
Ralph Macchio
Mike Machlan

Howard Mackie
Sam Maronie
Franck Martini
Marvel Comics
Marvel Epic
Collection Podcast
Robert Menzies
Allen Milgrom
Ian Millsted
Doug Moench
Ann Nocenti
Luigi Novi
Dennis O'Neil
Harold Parker
Rose Rummel-Eury
Jason Sacks
Mark Sears
Ken Segal
Roger Stern
Dan Tandarich
Roy Thomas
Steven Thompson
John Trumbull
Mark Waid
Marv Wolfman
Xum Yukinori

BACK ISSUE
Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!



MAKE MINE MARVEL ISSUE

FLASHBACK: Carmine Infantino: The Marvel Years 2
How the former Flash artist and DC publisher got his groove back at Marvel

INTERVIEW: Carmine Infantino Discusses His Marvel Days 9
An archived Q&A with the legendary artist

BACKSTAGE PASS: Mighty Marvel Comicon 1975 10
Insiders and attendees recall Marvel's first homegrown con; with a teaser for the '76 con

UNKNOWN MARVEL: The Batty British Fans of the 1970s 19
Marvel UK's lettercols were home to mirthful misinformation and wild requests

GREATEST STORIES NEVER TOLD: The "Lost" West Coast Avengers Stories 24
Steve Englehart's much-maligned Mantis... and a WCA civil war!

FLASHBACK: All That Pizzazz 38
Marvel's pre-teen zine of the late '70s

INTERVIEW: Denny O'Neil: The Marvel Years 42
The legendary Batman writer/editor discusses his Spidey, Daredevil, and Iron Man work

FLASHBACK: Marvel Comics Presents 49
Launching in the late 1980s, this biweekly anthology showcased top and new talent

FLASHBACK: Speedball: The Silver Age Superhero from the Copper Age 61
So, why did this Masked Marvel get bounced from his solo series?

PRO2PRO: Writing Daredevil with Ann Nocenti and Mark Waid 67
The fearless fan-favorites compare notes on Ol' Hornhead

BACK TALK 78
Reader reactions

BACK ISSUE™ is published 8 times a year by TwoMorrows Publishing, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614. Michael Eury, Editor-in-Chief. John Morrow, Publisher. Editorial Office: *BACK ISSUE*, c/o Michael Eury, Editor-in-Chief, 112 Fairmount Way, New Bern, NC 28562. Email: euryman@gmail.com. Eight-issue subscriptions: \$76 Economy US, \$125 International, \$32 Digital. *Please send subscription orders and funds to TwoMorrows, NOT to the editorial office.* Cover art by Al Milgrom and Mike Machlan. West Coast Avengers and related characters TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc. All Rights Reserved. All characters are © their respective companies. All material © their creators unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter © 2019 Michael Eury and TwoMorrows. Printed in China. FIRST PRINTING.

Don't STEAL our Digital Editions!

C'mon citizen,
**DO THE RIGHT
THING!** A Mom
& Pop publisher
like us needs
every sale just to
survive! **DON'T
DOWNLOAD
OR READ ILLEGAL COPIES ONLINE!**



Buy affordable, legal downloads only at
www.twomorrows.com
or through our Apple and Google Apps!



**& DON'T SHARE THEM WITH FRIENDS
OR POST THEM ONLINE.** Help us keep
producing great publications like this one!

FlashBack!

When Carmine Infantino (1925-2013) was a kid, his mother told the young boy that she was sorry he was going to be an artist. But he had a clear vision of what he wanted to do with his life. The 1930s were years of economic hardship and people struggled to make a wage, never mind their dreams. Infantino began his art career penciling comic features for what would be DC Comics, supplementing his parents' household income. Over time, he would make friends and climb the corporate ladder that would lead him to the security of executive positions helping the company. Sadly, this ended abruptly when it seemed he was at the zenith of his work. But after this emotional setback, Infantino's return to artistry with Marvel Comics was one of the most meaningful periods in his career.

The Depression Era-raised Infantino had to recover from an emotionally crippling blow, after his disappointing departure from the company to which he had dedicated most of his career. But those raised in the Great Depression were made of resilient stuff, and it was his time at Marvel Comics that served as a gateway to a renewed success. Coming back to freelance artistry and working on characters like Spider-Woman, Paladin in *Daredevil*, and his iconic work on *Star Wars* re-established him as a premiere artist in the Bronze Age. In the end, Infantino was remembered who he was—a hard-working comic-book artist.

THE EARLY YEARS

Infantino was raised during the Great Depression. Work was hard to come by and every extra penny earned was one that was saved for a rainy day. From working-class Italian stock, Carmine's parents were disappointed when, after finishing high school at New York City's School of Industrial Arts on 42nd Street, he announced he was going to pursue a career in art. Work was scarce and to lock oneself into a career that offered little stability, despite the talent the young Carmine clearly demonstrated, seemed risky and counter to every one of his parents' instincts. They had hoped to instill within him the same value of a secure job that would provide for a pension in his latter years.

Infantino's mother told him to get a "city job" and make a living for life. That way, he wouldn't "have to worry." Worry was an essential part of the Infantino household. He shined shoes as a boy and brought money home to his parents as an essential part of their family income. This was a discipline that Infantino never lost, and it contributed greatly to his career.

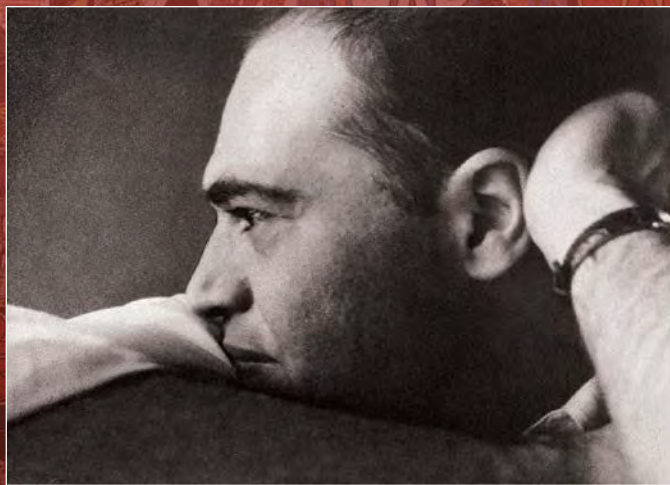
Neither of his parents wanted their son to suffer as they had. His mother sewed pants in a factory and Infantino's talented musician father had little education and needed to work early to support his own family. Later, he would give up his musical career in the Depression to work as a plumber. Yet they were insistent that their son received an education. Perhaps going to the School for Industrial Arts was a compromise to supply him with that education, yet at the same time, expose him to the arts.

However, this environment allowed the teenaged Infantino to "make the rounds," honing his craft under the guidance of some of the greats of the day. He received an offer from cartoonist Al Capp, which would have meant leaving school early. His father objected to that, stating that if the job was there then, it would be there later after he finished school. He visited artists like Morris Weiss, who was generous with advice to Carmine and other artists. He learned from artists like Charlie Flanders, who used to draw *The Lone Ranger*, and he hung out with Frank Giacoia, who, like Carmine himself, got his first professional

CARMINE INFANTINO

The Marvel Years

by John Kirk





SPIDER-WOMAN™ is published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Gilton, President, Stan Lee, Publisher, OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 675 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. Published monthly. Copyright ©1978 by Marvel Comics Group. A Division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Vol. 1, No. 1, April, 1978 issue. Price 35¢ per copy in the U.S. and Canada. Subscription rate \$4.50 for 12 issues. Canada, \$5.50. Foreign, \$6.50. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. Printed in the U.S.A. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. SPIDER-WOMAN (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP.



job from publisher Victor Fox. He had a network that would serve him well, more as an executive than an artist.

While clearly indulging his talent, nurturing his artist's spirit, Carmine found work, even as early in his high school years, but even after he graduated and worked, in the back of his mind was still that family-ingrained mentality of finding and keeping a steady and secured income. All of the money the young Infantino made went to the family, keeping home and hearth together. While he was learning to become a better artist and doing what he clearly loved, his mind was always on stability. This was how Infantino viewed success.

In an interview with Jim Amash, in the TwoMorrows book *Carmine Infantino: Penciler, Publisher, Provocateur*, Infantino admitted that he never felt successful. Growing up in the Great Depression filled him with a fear, one that was shared by Jack Kirby.

"He said, 'Carmine, you've got my problem.' I said, 'What the hell is that?' He said, 'The fear. You never lose that fear of the Depression. As long as you live, you're going to have that. No matter how successful you get, you will never lose that.' And he was right. I never felt successful because of that. Never, never at any point."

For a lot of us in the 21st Century, it's difficult to even conceive of the level of impoverishment that was so rampantly prevalent in the 1930s, and the emotional aftereffects of living in that time: soup lines, overwhelming unemployment, riots in the streets of the major cities of the US, and folks simply looking to earn a daily wage to feed their families. Infantino grew up during this time,

and it is the attitudes of this decade that shaped his perception to work.

Moving between the '40s and the '50s, Carmine was lucky enough to frequent the studios of the likes of Joe Kubert and Alex Toth. Though he never shared space but would work with them later, the association with these legendary artists gave him pause for self-doubt and uncertainty. He was to have said that while other artists liked their own work, he never did. In another conversation with Jim Amash, he recounted:

"I always felt there was something wrong, not quite good enough, always not good enough. Maybe they felt the same way and never said it. One time, Jack Kirby told me that the minute you're satisfied with what you're doing, you're no good anymore. I didn't want that to happen to me."

A combination of diminished self-worth and a sense of financial insecurity were extremely prevalent during these formative years of Infantino's career. Not only would these pervade his decision-making but they would also form the foundation of the artistic sensibilities, perhaps overriding his love of art for art's sake. It's a good question, but while no one can dispute his talent and artistic sensibilities, at heart, Carmine Infantino was born of that practical working-class stock who knew the value of a dollar and never turned away a bird in the hand. This style of thinking would emerge and influence his future career as he grew older and looked at life through more experienced eyes.

As he grew older and more secure in his career, Infantino became a company man. He was constantly

Good Hair Day

(left) When launching *Spider-Woman's* monthly series (#1, Apr. 1978), Carmine Infantino had inherited the character's hooded costume... (right) but within that very issue he allowed her to let her hair down. Script by Marv Wolfman, inks by Tony DeZuniga.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



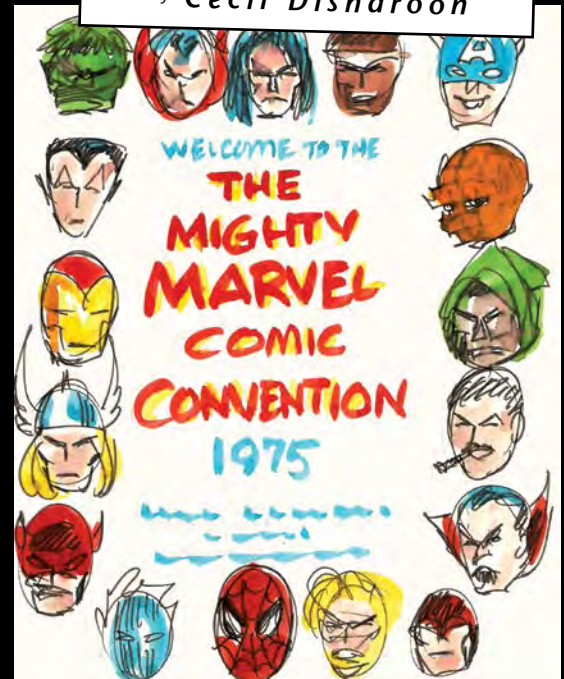
MIGHTY MARVEL COMICON 1975

by Cecil Disharoon

Con Game

(top) Mirthful Marie Severin's preliminaries for two possible takes on the cover for the first Marvel convention booklet, (bottom left) her note to project manager Scott Edelman, and (bottom right) the actual program cover. Courtesy of Scott Edelman.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.,
except for Conan TM & ©
Conan Properties, LLC.



Memo from

MARIE SEVERIN

Scott
(We don't have to bother Mr. R.)
Stan OK'D both
of these - use whichever
pleases you -
We can use stats -
Only problem is to get
good looking type for
Title - find out
how much we can spend
on hand lettering or set type -
Marie



Look! I got Dr. Doom's time machine! Hop on! *BACK ISSUE's* set it for an event lost to the world at large—memory, existences!—until now: Mighty Marvel Comicon '75!

Our visit contains the promise of a secret guest. Maybe these pre-settings on the time platform suggest that Doom looked for a moment he could again encounter his creators? John Romita, Sr. spins a web of drawing demonstration! Flying in from St. Louis and resembling JJJ for traveling with a photographer, there's writer and former editor-in—"Don't Call Me Chief!" Roy Thomas!

Heck, the whole blamed Bullpen's going to be there!

Quoth Irving Forbush: "Keep your hands inside the platform... enjoy the show!"

We're going to recollect a big weekend here in New York City: you, me, Stan Lee, and Marvel Comics Group! Call our group "The Recollectors"!

Pop-culture writer Sam Maronie can tell you this about the first Marvel Con: "The big thing was that Jack Kirby was coming back to Marvel! This was his big welcome! They had it at the Commodore Hotel!"

The cab in front of us opens for a barrel-shaped dude in an overcoat. He pulls down his hat. Thick, orange fingers, with a texture somewhere between stone and dinosaur plate, pry the taxi's banana-yellow door. The longhaired, bearded cabbie's mouth visibly loses its cigarette as a gruff voice barks, "Thanks! Commodore Hotel, and try not to menace any pedestrians! It's bad fer my image!"

ORGANIZING THE CON

BACK ISSUE's saved you a cab seat next to the guy in charge of organizing the first Marvel Con, a Bullpenner through and through, the fella who wrote Marvel's Bullpen Bulletins throughout the mid-'70s as well as the copy for the Marvel 7-11 Slurpee cups and created Marvel's Scarecrow, science-fiction writer and the host of the *Eating the Fantastic* podcast... Scott Edelman!

CECIL DISHAROON: *I first asked David Anthony Kraft what he remembered about Marvel Con '75, and he pointed me toward you.*

SCOTT EDELMAN: There were people who handled more of the details, because [legendary convention organizer] Phil Seuling was the one who knew about how you organize one, in terms of dealing with the hotel, signing the contacts, and so forth. In terms of what went on at the convention itself, and what was in the program book, I was the point person on that. Which, when you think about it, is pretty ridiculous: They would let a 19-year-old kid be in charge of what was going to happen at a convention.

DISHAROON: *Do you remember the earliest date when you were told this was going to be "your baby"?*

EDELMAN: The earliest I can prove is September 4, 1974, on which I sent a memo to Stan Lee saying, "This is the text that will be in programs at other conventions and go to advertisers." So obviously, it had to be before that. How long before then, I cannot recall. I only started on staff on June 24, 1974... That's less than three months later that I'm already working on a flyer for the convention to come.

DISHAROON: *[laughs] Stan Lee kind of "godfathered" the event a bit with memos that you were kind enough to share with me.*

EDELMAN: I would basically send memos to him, saying, "This is what we should do, this is the initial program." Things would go back and forth about that.

All the initial memos, back and forth, about what should be in the program, and the thoughts from people around the office about advertising, the deal with the Commodore Hotel: those are all January 13, 1975.



Scott's Free Grab-Bag of Memories

(top) Courtesy of Ken Segal, a membership card for the '75 Marvel Con. (middle) Edelman's Marvel ID (identity thieves, don't even try it...). (bottom) Scurryin' Scott with Joltin' Joe Sinnott and Dashin' Don Perlin. Photos courtesy of Scott Edelman.



So that is only—what, two and a half months, barely? But we were still coming up with programming. When you think about it, the final memo that I have relating to Marvel Con is dated March 10th, which is the third iteration of what I did, in response to what Stan told me. So basically... what, two weeks before the convention?

So the convention's Friday, March 21st. So here we are, and Stan's saying, "Here's what I think about the final program, based on our March 7th meeting." That's awfully late in the game! When you think about what you see at San Diego Comic-Con and others these days, it happens way in advance, so people can decide when they're going to go, what to see at the convention, and so forth.

So the first memo about "Here's what I should think should be in the program" is dated January 21st, exactly two months before the Con came out. January 27th is my first memo, addressed to Len [Wein], Marv [Wolfman], and Stan and myriad people. What is that—like, seven weeks before?—when we are first batting around ideas about what we should be doing at the convention! That is ridiculous!

DISHAROON: *What a picture of what Marvel of that era was like.*

EDELMAN: Yes! It's part of that thinking, "Everything is going to all come together."

I think about the difference in the way a corporation would be run today, how Marvel would be run today, now that it's owned by Disney. You'd probably have to have a massive committee to do these things, many meetings. Back then, it was just,

Iron Man's Hat: THE BATTY BRITISH FANS OF THE 1970S

Unkown Marvel

by Robert Menzies



Write On, British Marvelites!

Letters pages from *The Mighty World of Marvel* #215 (Nov. 10, 1976). All images in this article are courtesy of Robert Menzies, unless otherwise noted.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

British fans experienced Marvel differently than readers of the US editions, and, it seems, Marvel experienced a different type of reader in Britain.

Due to variations in format, there were inevitable dissimilarities in letters-column content between the two nations. Several themes repeated themselves, like the spotty availability of the US editions in the UK and what Marvel would do when the weekly British Marvels' voracious printing schedule inevitably caught up with the monthly original editions. [Editor's note: Marvel UK's editions were mostly reprints of US material, published weekly and in black and white.]

Where US fans debated the lineup of superhero teams, British fans debated the lineup of superhero books—the publishing combination of *The Avengers* and *Conan* was a particularly contentious one, and the amalgamation of *Planet of the Apes* and *Dracula Lives!* was also an odd fit. Appeals for the creation of British hero were another regular feature.

There were also some surprises, like the identity of the biggest Marvel sex symbol and discovering that the British weeklies were being distributed in Australia and New Zealand, albeit with a time lag.

Most striking about this period is that while I have little access to Silver Age comic books for comparison, my substantial Bronze Age collection never seemed to have such combative, insulting, and eccentric letters pages.

Welcome to the British letters pages of the 1970s, where the adjective "batty" described the fans more accurately than the Bullpen!

MAD DOGS AND ENGLISHMEN

There were frequent comments about the volume of letters received on a weekly basis. Estimates were said to be thousands, although the only documented record I have seen places the figure closer to 1500, which is, of course, still a vast amount. Inevitably, when it was competition time, that meant even more mail. Young fans would ask endearing questions about the size of Hulk's feet, for example, as I am sure they did in Silver Age monthlies stateside. Older fans would often comment on Conan and recommend novels. Hands down, *Planet of the Apes* (POTA) received the most correspondence from female fans, which we will come back to later. Sergeant Nicholas Fury had his own letters page in his own comic as well as *The Mighty World of Marvel* (MWOM), which often included stories of the heroic adventures (and, on occasion, ridiculous misadventures) of grandfathers during the Second World War.

In tune with the tired stereotype of the British, or at least the English, the letters pages were often quite eccentric, and it is worth sharing what are possibly the two greatest and/or battiest letters written by fans during the 1970s.

The first example comes from Cheshire's C. Green and was published in *The Avengers* #133 (Apr. 3, 1976). In the letter he claims a scene reprinted from August 1971's *The Avengers* #91 saved his life!

**HERE IT IS GANG...
A FISTFUL
OF POSTERS
FOR YOU!**



Yes a complete action set of your favourite heroes—poster size. Each poster is 22" x 16½" and in full colour! Just think of it—Cap. America, Spidey, Hulk, Thor, D.D. and Iron Man as close to you as the wall of your bedroom or den. And here's the best bit—this fistful of posters can be yours for only 90p. the lot!

6 POSTERS FOR 90p!

HOW TO GET YOUR POSTERS
Clip out, or make a copy of this coupon and mail it to us now—before we run out!

To: MARVEL COMICS LTD., ROOM 109,
52 HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON W.C.1.

I can't wait—please rush my fistful of posters right away.
I enclose a postal order or cheque for 90p.

NAME _____
STREET _____
TOWN _____

All prices include postage, packing and VAT.



Dear Stan,
I would like to say a big thank you to you. The reason? Because a month ago I was at my friend's house and we decided to go conkering. So off we went to this tree and we started to climb it. When we were at the top I reached out for a conker and fell. On the way down I could think of nothing else except the Avengers, and how the Panther landed in ish 91, page 19, frame 2. I managed to land in that position and was only stunned, whereas, falling from forty feet, I could have been killed. Thanks, Stan.

The second contender is Mark Broughton of Yorkshire. While I am confident that Silver Age Marvel also received naive requests about how to learn the mystic arts or make an Iron Man suit, the wording of this is just flat-out funny. This request appeared in *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* (SMCW) #37 (Oct. 27, 1973).

Dear Stan,
Could you send me a Spider-Man suit and a radioactive spider and some science books to tell me how to make the webbing? Don't forget the recipe for webbing and the gizmo. I will send the money when I get these things.

WHAT COLOR IS IRON MAN'S HAT?

The British readership was often ignorant of Marvel in a way that is hard to imagine today. They asked about character origins, what a No-Prize was, what "Excelsior" meant, who DC was, and whether Dr. Doom was a tin robot or a man. Unfortunately, the staff in London, hard-working and capable though they were, was not steeped in Marvel lore either and, in the early days, when faced with a question about a character they sent the letter to Alf Wallace, former boss of the line of Power Comics which had reprinted Marvel stories in the 1960s. He would write a reply for them to print.

Sometimes, however, the London staff bravely but recklessly answered letters themselves, to unintentionally comedic effect. In SMCW #60 (Apr. 6, 1974) a reader asked about the colors of Iron Man's armor. (A fair question. Remember: the comics are in black-and-white and Spidey was the cover star.) The response is ridiculous: "His body is Red [sic], his arms and legs are yellow and his hat and boots and gloves are also red." You can maybe forgive "gloves" for gauntlets, but "hat"? What??

Equally as barking mad is this reply from SMCW #35 (Oct. 13, 1973): "[When] Peter Parker was bitten by the radio-active spider all his senses were sharpened and so was his intellect. So we guess you could say that his I.Q. was increased." So, that would be the proportionate intelligence of a spider, then?!

The biggest goof occurred during one of the many competitions of that era. In SMCW #7 (Mar. 31, 1973) there was a quiz to win a Spidey LP, with one question asking whether art, games, or science was Peter Parker's best subject at college. Of course, Parker is a science genius, to make at least slightly plausible his invention of web fluid. However, according to the British staffers, Peter was an artist... and lots of fans missed out on winning despite sending in the right answer!

You can maybe—at a push—turn a blind eye to the ignorance of Marvel history demonstrated above, but there is surely no defence for revealing future plots. The letters page for SMCW #98 (Dec. 28, 1974) actually printed a spoiler about Gwen Stacy's death, roughly 18 months before she would die in UK continuity!

One last editorial reply is worth reporting. In SSM #208 (Feb. 2, 1977), a fan writes in asking for a No-Prize based on something that appeared in SMCW #1 four years earlier! The question concerned Electro and water being a conductor, and the editor openly admitted that "We've had a quiet word with our electricity expert (he's the chap who operates the lift [elevator]), and he says..." The lift operator rejected the No-Prize application!

SEX SYMBOL

Thor and to a lesser degree Iron Man were popular with female readers, but no one could hold a candle to a certain Roderick Andrew Anthony Jude "Roddy" McDowall, a.k.a. Galen in the *Planet of the Apes* TV series!

[T]hat voice is "huh, swoon, faint, unique."

Susan Gilpin, Oxfordshire, *Planet of the Apes* (POTA) #82 (May 15, 1976)

MORE COODIES FROM MARVEL



With one of these colourful MARVEL special tin cutouts you can put your favourite Super hero on a T-SHIRT, on a cushion, on a flag or pin them to your wall! It's so easy, just stick on the adhesive on the back! It's a fun and easy way to make your own Marvel cutouts!

These cutouts from MARVEL are only 90p each. Mail in the coupon and get yours today!

NAME _____
STREET _____
TOWN _____

All prices include postage, packing and VAT.

LIMITED EDITION



IT'S THE WILDEST PATCH YET!

For the first time ever, regular Marvel patches, now available in LIMITED EDITION, are now available in the UK. These patches are made from a special material that makes them look like real patches. They are made from a special material that makes them look like real patches. They are made from a special material that makes them look like real patches.

SPECIAL OFFER £1 ONLY

NAME _____
STREET _____
TOWN _____

All prices include postage, packing and VAT.

Eye-Popping Posters

(top) The legendary Rafael Lopez Espi posters from spring 1974! This scan was taken from *The Avengers* #29 (Apr. 6, 1974), although the ad appeared in many titles many times. Iron-on transfers were a popular seller among UK fans in the early 1970s. (bottom left) Back page ad for iron-on transfers from *The Avengers* #6 (Oct. 27, 1973). (bottom right) Spider-Man patch offer from *The Avengers* #87 (May 17, 1975).

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Greatest Stories NEVER TOLD

Steve Englehart took risks—with characters, stories, and editors. By the summer of 1987, Englehart had his own corner of the Marvel Universe. Simultaneously, he wrote the adventures of the West Coast Avengers, the Fantastic Four, and the Silver Surfer. Englehart excelled in using Marvel's vast continuity to his advantage, steeping his stories in the history of the Marvel Universe as well as tying together disparate threads of older stories to create the new Marvel landscape. The Englehart-verse bounced around ideas and characters in these three titles. Stories from one would reference another to create an intricate cross-pollination.

No one character would get bounced around as much as Englehart's own creation, Mantis. After a lengthy absence she appeared in the Silver Surfer's title, then moved on to *The West Coast Avengers*, only to have the pages of *The Fantastic Four* resolve her story.

This article will showcase Englehart's original plans for his WCA run including the unpublished stories for what would have been *West Coast Avengers* #38–43 and *Silver Surfer* #23 in 1988 and 1989, as well as some WCA plans that morphed into *Fantastic Four* stories. These "Greatest Stories Never Told" include the author's original resolution to the Mockingbird/Phantom Rider plot, a romance between Hawkeye and Mantis, confrontations with the Yellow Claw, Graviton, and Ultron XI, as well as the machinations of Kang and the resurrection of Thanos. After 30 years, Englehart's never-told tales take the spotlight!



STEVE ENGLEHART

steveenglehart.com.

LISTEN TO THE MOCKINGBIRD

The West Coast Avengers had received their own ongoing series in 1985, written by Steve Englehart with art by Al Milgrom and Joe Sinnott. Milgrom had a dream: "I was hoping [at the time] for over 100 issues on the book. Wanted to break Kirby's record run on the FF." Those early days featured team leader, Hawkeye the archer (Clint Barton), and his superspy wife, Mockingbird (Barbara "Bobbi" Morse). The team was rounded out with Tigra, the Feline Fury; Wonder Man, actor/stuntman/superhero; and Iron Man, the Armored Avenger. The "Lost in Space-Time" story arc, starting in issue #17 (Feb. 1987), threw the Avengers into the past. This included one of the Avengers' most controversial storylines involving Mockingbird being stranded with the Phantom Rider in 1876.

Live in Living Black and White

Although it's repurposed on the cover of this very magazine, this dynamic original artwork—the unpublished version of the cover of *West Coast Avengers* #38 (Nov. 1988), penciled by

Al Milgrom and inked by Mike Machlan—

is shared here for you True Believers, courtesy of the always-amiable Mr. Milgrom.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

The "LOST" West Coast Avengers STORIES

FEATURING
THE RETURN OF MANTIS
a.k.a. the Civil War of the West Coast Avengers!

by Dan Tandarich





The WCA's Yoko Ono

The shadowy Mantis tears apart the team on the cover of *West Coast Avengers* #37. Shown at top, courtesy of Al Milgrom, is the original version of the cover (with Mike Machlan inks). When comparing it to the published version at bottom, note that Al changed the poses of Tigra and Wonder Man, turning their backs away from the Avengers' resident goddess.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



When asked if he was laying the groundwork for the Yellow Claw almost 30 issues earlier, Englehart responds, "Not at the time, but making connections when they present themselves is part of my thing."

Directly from Englehart's script, it reads: "The thing to show here is Mantis' kung fu vs. kung fuers' kung fu, and WM [Wonder Man] & Vizh [Vision], working together against WM-worthy power of Claw and others' powers." During the fight, Zaran and Shockwave continue with the idea that they never fought them before, but Razorfist slips up and exposes that he did. With that revelation, the Yellow Claw stops the fracas. He does not tolerate deception among his men and, using his powers of hypnotism, orders Razorfist to kill himself. The razor-fisted villain struggles to disobey the order. With that same power Claw stops the Avengers in their tracks and forces Razorfist to slice his throat (off-panel). To Be Continued!

West Coast Avengers #39 (unpublished version): Claw explains that Monsieur Khrul was just a cover for his own schemes. The hypnotized Avengers have no choice but to listen. Claw was impressed with Mantis' fighting skills and goes in for a kiss. Mantis sends him flying with a martial-arts throw. Shocked, the Yellow Claw pulls out his Satan claw and attacks, but Mantis lands a blow. Mantis rallies and yanks off his glove with a judo flip and shocks him, which in turn loosens his control over the enthralled Avengers. Yellow Claw escapes, but vows revenge. Hawkeye and Mantis show a little extra happiness towards each other. When asked how she managed to defeat Claw she answered that she acted without conscious thought and willed the pain of the glove away. Hawkeye says, "I've hung out with Thor, lady, but it's still awesome having a goddess on my team." Mockingbird, who?

An unpublished cover for WCA #38 by Al Milgrom and Mike Machlan has been unearthed from the Milgrom collection featuring the Yellow Claw and this team of Avengers, and has finally seen the light of day as the cover of this edition of *BACK ISSUE*. Milgrom says of this cover, "I'd wanted to draw the Claw since acquiring the four-issue run [of the *Yellow Claw* Marvel series] from the '50s, and obviously I loved the Steranko take, since I stuck close to it visually."

Scene shift to Times Square, New York City, and the original resolution to the Mockingbird/Phantom Rider plot. Moon Knight confides in Mockingbird and Tigra and reveals, "I'm a god." To prove it, Khonshu rises out of Moon Knight's body. Mockingbird said she knew there was something different about him. Tigra just wants to know which one she has been kissing. Khonshu reveals to the Feline Fury that although it began with Marc it then switched to Khonshu. He wanted to experience life as an Avenger! And he would have kept his secret except that he finally knows what has been terrorizing Mockingbird. He now understands the mystery of the Phantom Rider. He's more than just a ghost—he's "a demon-god of a native religion." That means this kind of fight requires a god, a god like Khonshu, to fight him and end the curse haunting Bobbi.

Unexpectedly, Wanda, the Scarlet Witch, arrives. She sensed magick and came to investigate, not thinking it had anything to do with the three of them. Even though she sided with Hawkeye, she knows that freeing Mockingbird from the Phantom Rider is her job as an Avenger. When Mockingbird says, "You mean you'll help?" Wanda responds with a smile and says, "Avengers Assemble!" So with the mission decided on and the players ready, Khonshu summons a parallel dimension to New York City.

Comic-book history has traditionally been marked by short periods of creativity and innovation, followed by long periods of imitation. There are exceptions, of course, but it is a fair generalization. For every Flash, there is a Whizzer. And while some of the imitators have become successful in their own right, usually that has been the exception rather than the rule.

In March 1974, Jenette Kahn, who later became president and publisher of DC Comics, launched *Dynamite* magazine for Scholastic, Inc. *Dynamite* was aimed at pre-teens, featuring a mixture of popular culture and humor, including recurring features on magic tricks and puzzles, as well as some reprints of Marvel and DC superhero origin stories. *Dynamite* was available by subscription, at some newsstands, and through monthly order forms for Scholastic's Arrow Book Club, given out in schools. *Dynamite* was a hit, reportedly Scholastic's most successful publication, which prompted the company to launch *Wow* magazine for elementary age kids and *Bananas* magazine for teenagers the following year. Contributors to Scholastic magazines included Bob Stine, who went on to write the *Goosebumps* series of books, and Sam Viviano, who later drew for *MAD* magazine.

Marvel Comics had tried publishing magazines, but according to former Marvel editor and writer Roy Thomas, "[Marvel publisher] Martin Goodman had never really wanted to do a non-Code comic... nor did he really want to get into magazine-format comics; and Stan really did." [*Alter Ego* #81, Oct. 2008] When Goodman left in 1972, Stan took over his job and Marvel began publishing magazines, with varying degrees of success. By late 1974, there were 11 regular titles, the most enduring of which were *The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*, *Planet of the Apes*, and *Savage Sword of Conan*.

So it is not surprising that Marvel took notice of the success of *Dynamite* and decided to see if it could make lightning strike twice. What was surprising was the approach Marvel took in launching its own pre-teen magazine, *Pizzazz*. As reported in *The New York Times* on July 7, 1977, "The Cadence Publishing division of Cadence Industries, whose major property is Marvel Comics, is launching an ambitious new publication aimed at the 10 to 14 set. *Pizzazz* is the name of the monthly that will be started with a \$250,000 promotion budget, much of that money going into TV advertising. To be introduced initially in the South in September, the magazine is expected to attain a national circulation of 200,000 next year. 'We're launching it like a toy company would launch a new product,' said Nancy Allen, director of advertising and sales promotion. Norman, Craig & Kummel is the ad agency and Manning, Selvage & Lee is doing public relations. The cover price of *Pizzazz* will be 75 cents and the yearly subscription \$7.50."

Pizzazz wasn't the original title of the magazine. In issue #17 of the Marvel in-house fanzine, *FOOM*, it was referred to as *The Marvel Connection*, but by the time the magazine reached the newsstands, the title had changed to *Pizzazz*. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *pizzazz* as "the quality of being exciting or attractive: such as glamour; vitality."

A test issue of *Pizzazz* was printed a few months prior to the magazine's public debut. It included several articles and pictures not found in the first issue, as well as a completely different cover featuring an artist's rendition of John Travolta. (The popularity of *Star Wars* led the editor to change the cover.) The test issue was only given to the staff and never released to the public. A promotional button bearing the slogan "I've got Pizzazz" was also produced.

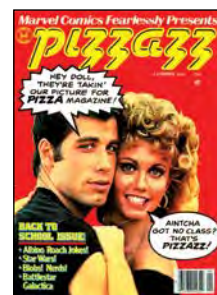
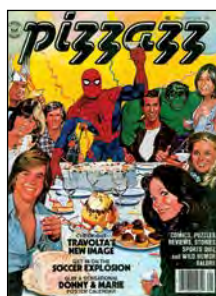
Pizzazz Cover Gallery

Issues #1 (Oct. 1977) through 15 (Jan. 1979) of *Pizzazz*, featuring your favorite heartthrobs, superstars, and sci-fi heroes of the late '70s. A standout cover is #5 (Feb. 1978), with its amazing Bob Larkin painting featuring Linda Ronstadt and her marvelous backup band.

Pizzazz, Spider-Man, Hulk, and Marvel characters TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.
Star Wars TM & © Lucasfilm, Ltd. Other characters © their respective copyright holders.

All That Pizzazz™

by Dewey Cassell



Dennis (Denny) O'Neil can be viewed first and foremost as a DC creator because of his legendary runs on Batman and Green Lantern/Green Arrow in the '70s or his later long editorial stint on the Batman titles. But between 1980 and 1986, O'Neil came back to where he started his comics career— at Marvel Comics.

During those six years, O'Neil worked both as a writer and an editor at Marvel. His early work includes the Spider-Man titles. He wrote Amazing Spider-Man #207–219, 220, 222, and 223, and edited Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man (PPSM) and Marvel Team-Up. He gave their first major Spidey assignments to Roger Stern and John Romita, Jr. O'Neil introduced two important characters for Spidey in the '80s, Lance Bannon, Peter Parker's competitor at the Daily Bugle, and Madame Web, the blind psychic who would be one of the earliest characters to discover Spider-Man's dual identity. He also brought artist Marie Severin on PPSM for a short while. During a little less than two years, O'Neil chose not to use the classic Spider-villains and had Spidey fight the Frightful Four, along with Namor, Mesmero, Hydro-Man, the Sandman, and Kraven being the only "regular" bad guys appearing in the title. Surprisingly, Aunt May seldom appeared and Mary Jane Watson was nowhere to be seen. The main supporting cast consisted of the Daily Bugle and Daily Globe teams, plus Debra Whitman, a secretary in the biophysics department of Empire State University, whose relationship with Peter Parker never really went anywhere. O'Neil also wrote two memorable ASM Annuals, #14 (1980) and 15 (1981), both with Frank Miller pencils.

In 1981, O'Neil also started editing Daredevil and chose to put newcomer artist Frank Miller in charge of the scripts in lieu of previous DD scribe Roger McKenzie, and Miller brought huge success to the book. Miller would leave DD with issue #191 (Feb. 1983). O'Neil dropped Daredevil's editor duties with #199 and took over the scripts, with a very Irish atmosphere evolving on the book with a villain such as the Gael and new character Glorianna O'Brien. His early issues were drawn by Klaus Janson and had a direct connection with the Miller days. Then artist William Johnson took over for a somehow less memorable time (artistically and story-wise, with the Micah Synn story in 1984's #202 and 204–206). The end of O'Neil's Daredevil run was marked both by the emergence of David Mazzucchelli as artist and the downfall of DD's longtime, on-and-off girlfriend, Heather Glenn, and her subsequent suicide in the dark and powerful story "Fog" (#220, July 1986).

Whenever the regular artists would not be available, a name appeared on Spidey and DD fill-in issues: Luke McDonnell. McDonnell would be O'Neil's main collaborator on his lengthiest Marvel run: Iron Man (#158, 160–208, 1982–1986). This controversial, always challenging and sometimes infuriating story could be called "The Downfall and Rebirth of Tony Stark," and that would only cover a part of what this story was. Following writer David Michelinie and artist co-plotter Bob Layton's tenure on Iron Man and inspired by 1979's "Demon in a Bottle" issues (#127–128, mainly), O'Neil took Stark on a path of self-destruction and alcoholism. The downfall would really start with issue #167 (Feb. 1983) when Tony starts drinking again, and would bounce with his near-death in issue #182 (May 1984) and conclude with his return as Iron Man in issue #200 (Nov. 1985). But the seeds had been planted since issue #160 and the introduction of the main villain of the story Obadiah Stane, who would manipulate Tony Stark into drinking again with attacks on Tony personally, his company, and Iron Man. O'Neil stripped Tony Stark of everything he had: first his dignity, then his Iron Man armor (#170, May 1983), and finally, his company and assets (#173, Aug. 1983)... and subsequently, most of the previously established supporting cast. Tony would be replaced as Iron Man by his best friend and bodyguard James "Rhodey" Rhodes, supported by new characters Edwin and Clytemnestra Morley. The story culminated with the final fight between Stark and Stane, and with the latter choosing suicide rather than defeat.

Essays could be written about this long and riveting story. But one of the most fascinating aspects is how the visuals followed the series' twists and turns: from Bob Sharen changing completely his color palette in the course of five issues from shiny and bright tones to muted and darker ones, Steve Mitchell's moody inks during the downfall issues, Luke McDonnell's art taking on a new vibe with Akin and Garvey's inks starting with issue #190 (Jan. 1985)... and then, the book takes a slightly more positive turn, with brighter colors being back (#196, July 1986), and finally new artist Mark Bright starts on the aforementioned issue #200. As O'Neil himself mentions in the interview following, this transformation would not have been possible without the work of editor Mark Gruenwald.

O'Neil would also oversee other books as editor including his six years at Marvel including What If? (in collaboration with Mark Gruenwald,

DENNY O'NEIL:

The Marvel Years

conducted by **Franck Martini**
transcribed by Rose Rummel-Eury



DENNY O'NEIL

Spidey Super Stories

(top) O'Neil added Madame Web to the Spider- Rogues. Cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #210 (Nov. 1980) by John Romita, Jr. and Al Milgrom.

(bottom left and right) Denny's collaborations with Frank Miller included these two beloved *Spidey Annuals* from 1980 and 1981.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

including issue #24, Dec. 1980, the Gwen Stacy story), John Byrne's Alpha Flight, Power Man and Iron Fist, and the first Moench/Sienkiewicz Moon Knight series.

What follows is an edited transcription of an April 2018 telephone conversation where Dennis O'Neil kindly shares with BACK ISSUE a few great stories from his Marvel days.

— Franck Martini

FRANCK MARTINI: How did you move from DC to Marvel?

DENNIS O'NEIL: I had been comfortable at DC, and I realized I wasn't getting any of the interesting jobs and I thought, "I'm a known quantity to these people. They know they can count on me for 70-odd pages of script every week and I won't miss the deadlines. I wonder if I'm going to be satisfied with that." I was writing a book on the history of comics for Scholastic Press and was interviewing lots of people... and I mean, I barely knew Jolly Jim Shooter, but he was the editorial head at Marvel and the logical guy to talk to. I interviewed with him and he offered me an editorial job there in the office. I stalled him and said, "Thank you," and stalled him for about three months. Things were a little tight financially, although I was not in financial trouble, but if I wanted more money, the only way DC made that possible was for me to write more. I could write as much as I wanted. The only problem with that, I thought, was I operating at the top of my capacity, or close to it. I thought the quality might suffer. What I would like to do was three books a month, and do something that wouldn't add other books to my schedule. Shooter was making that possible. I don't know if it was formalized or not, because it was a long time ago, but I think that he offered me a writer/editor deal. Those seldom, if ever, work out. Seems like everybody who gets put in charge of a comic-book line says, "We'll have editors and these same people can be writers." Inevitably, the editor part of the deal gets slighted.

MARTINI: How long did it take for you to accept the offer?

O'NEIL: I stalled and stalled and stalled until finally I decided, "Well, I'd better go to work for Marvel, this [at DC] is getting us nowhere." And so, I called Jim Shooter and said, "I'm happy to come to work for you." He said, "Oh, you waited so long, we hired somebody." (That turned out to be Mike Gold.) So, there I was; I'd burned my bridges! I was working on a *Shadow* graphic novel for DC and thought that would take me couple/three weeks to finish. It was a pretty interesting job. I finished it, and I was a distance runner at the time and I went out for a three-mile run and got back home and there was a message on the machine from Jim saying, "You're an editor here and you start Monday."

MARTINI: Do you remember when and how you took over Spider-Man?

O'NEIL: I had a pretty good reputation in the business. Jim Shooter offered me this job and for two years was the best boss I ever had. For these two years, I was put in charge of the Spider-Man franchise. That meant that I edited the books, except for *Amazing Spider-Man*, which I wrote. It was not my best work, and suddenly I was fired off *Spider-Man* without explanation because I wasn't doing good work. That was a quick hit in the head, because I'd been fired off editorial jobs, but never off a writing job!



RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Where could the work of Silver Age giants like Steve Ditko be found alongside that of the emerging stars of the late 1980s? Where could you find a 25-part Black Panther story or an epic origin story for Wolverine? What comic could lure Doug Moench back to Master of Kung Fu? Where did Sgt. Fury and the Howling Commandos meet Count Dracula? It all happened in the anthology series *Marvel Comics Presents*.

In the Golden Age of comic books, anthology titles, with different stories and characters present in each issue, were the bedrock of the industry. *Action Comics*, *Detective Comics*, and many others contained multiple ongoing series. When Timely [later Marvel] Comics entered the field with *Marvel Mystery Comics*, that book's pages contained the Human Torch, Sub-Mariner, Ka-Zar, the Angel, and others between its covers. This was the industry norm for years.

It was as publishers reduced the page count of comic books that the trend toward one complete story in one comic book gradually became more typical. By the 1970s, when many titles had just 17 pages of comic story, there was little room for anything other than the lead feature. This is not to say that publishers didn't try to reverse this trend. Both Marvel and DC tried increasing page counts (and, as a result, prices). There were Giant-Size comics, Dollar Comics, the rebirth of the Annual, and other innovations. Some were more successful than others. By the 1980s, the rise of the direct market and an upward swing in overall sales made a return to the anthology format potentially viable. In 1988, within a few weeks of each other, DC changed *Action Comics* to the anthology format with *Action Comics Weekly* #601 (Aug. 1988) [which we chronicled back in *BACK ISSUE* #98—ed.], while Marvel launched a new title, *Marvel Comics Presents* #1 (Sept. 1988).

At face value, it would seem that the two companies were spurred by competition with each other. However, Marvel's then-editor-in-chief Tom DeFalco reveals that the inspiration was a more surprising source: "Marvel Comics was doing very well at that time. We were producing and selling more titles each year and our plans were to produce even more in the years ahead."

"A lot of people wanted to break into comics, but they weren't quite ready," DeFalco continues. "They enjoyed penciling, writing, whatever, but didn't realize how hard it is to actually produce a professional comic book. We needed a training ground. DC had once produced a title called *New Talent Showcase*—an almost-perfect training ground. Almost-perfect except for one factor: It didn't sell."

"Here's a sad fact: New talent doesn't support new talent. People who want to break into comics won't buy a comic by other people who want to break into comics. If a title doesn't sell, you can't keep publishing it."

"I also had another problem. In order to keep a trademark, you must actively publish that trademark on a regular basis. That means you need to publish the Ant-Man logo in order to keep your trademark on Ant-Man. I needed a place to publish characters and logos that didn't have their own books."

These needs led to the creation of an ongoing Marvel anthology title. "I'm sure I discussed the concept with [Marvel editor] Mark Gruenwald—simply because I discussed everything with Mark—and eventually came up with the basic concept for *Marvel Comics Presents*," DeFalco says. "We would produce a 32-page comic book without ads, divided into four stories of eight pages each. It would be a flip-book with a cover on both sides, so that we could include more than one logo per book. We would feature top talent or a popular character on the two cover-featured stories and new talent or a character without his/her own title on the two interior stories. Yes, there was a connection between *Marvel Comics Presents* and a DC title, but it wasn't *Action Comics Weekly*. *Marvel Comics Presents* was our version of *New Talent Showcase*, but we wanted to keep that connection secret. We wanted it to sell so that we could keep publishing it. We never told the readers that its true purpose was to give new talent a place to polish their skills because new talent won't support other new talent. We were hoping the top talent and/or popular characters would help

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS

by Ian Millsted



TOM DEFALCO

© Luigi Novi /
Wikimedia Commons.

All covers TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

sell the comic and disguise the fact that the title was really a training ground. When we started, I was hoping the title would last for at least six months."

At one point the title was going to be *Marvel Weekly*. DeFalco selected Michael Higgins as editor and Higgins started lining up creators and material. He deliberately set about contacting a number of creators who had not worked for Marvel in some years. Doug Moench, Steve Gerber, Gene Colan, Don McGregor, and others were all contacted to see if they would like to work on the comic. While this was going on, the title and release schedule had evolved. "We originally planned for *Marvel Comics Presents* to be weekly," says DeFalco, "but our sales department convinced us that every two weeks would be better for the comic-book stores." Meanwhile, Michael Higgins decided to leave his editorial position to go freelance. DeFalco continues, "I originally selected Michael Higgins as the editor and Terry [Kavanagh] was his assistant. When Michael decided to leave the editorial staff, I promoted Terry and he did a great job."

"Aside from giving Mike and Terry their basic marching orders in regard to cover-featuring top talent and popular characters, I had no input into characters or series," DeFalco reveals. "That was all Mike and Terry. I did actively welcome back creators who had fallen out with my predecessor, but I welcomed them back to Marvel. I did not actively recruit them for *Marvel Comics Presents*. I just wanted them back."

Of course, Marvel did already have an anthology title at the time in *Marvel Fanfare* [see *BACK ISSUE* #96], whose editor, Al Milgrom, tells *BI*, "All the editors were sort of competing for all the best creators all the time. But I didn't feel *Marvel Comics Presents* was any more a direct competitor than any of the other books. The greatest similarity was the absence of ads. That was my original concept for *Marvel Fanfare*."

KILLER SERIALS

When the first issue of *Marvel Comics Presents* arrived (cover-dated early Sept. 1988), the contents acted as a statement of intent. The list of creators in that single issue was Walter Simonson, Chris Claremont, John Buscema, Klaus Janson, Doug Moench, Tom Grindberg, Dave Cockrum, Steve Gerber, Tom Sutton, and Al Milgrom. The new talent that DeFalco wanted to encourage would come later. The buying public saw creators they knew and liked on characters they wanted to read. Simonson's contribution was a wraparound cover (the flip format initially proposed didn't arrive until much later) featuring all four characters that appeared in that issue but placing Wolverine prominently on the front.

Wolverine was the box office required to lead off the title. Chris Claremont wrote a ten-part serial that would also act as a prologue to the *Wolverine* ongoing series that would follow in a few months' time. With art by John Buscema and Klaus Janson, Claremont set the serial, "Save the Tiger," in the imaginary city-state/island of Madripoor. This allowed Wolverine to act separately from the *X-Men* series (and team) and to develop a new supporting cast, including romantic interest Tyger Tiger. The *X-Men* continuity of the time had the team as believed dead by the rest of the world. This meant that Wolverine, in his various solo stories, operated under a pseudonym. All of this, combined with Claremont's use of first-person narration, gave the serial a classic man-with-a-past-in-an-exotic-location-battling-against-the-odds format. It worked.

The second and third stories in issue #1 were both examples of editor Higgins making successful attempts to lure back big-name creators and get them to work on characters that had not been seen in some time. Steve Gerber was asked to write a Man-Thing serial. With artist Tom Sutton he produced a 12-part story that reintroduced the swamp-based character in a tale with



Logan and Pals

(top) Walter Simonson's wraparound cover for *Marvel Comics Presents* #1 (early Sept. 1988). (bottom left) John Buscema illustrated MCP's initial Wolverine story arc. Shown here is *Wolverine* corner box art by Buscema, from Heritage Comics Auctions (www.ha.com). (bottom right) The Silver Surfer, in a tale in #1 written and drawn by Al Milgrom.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

SPEEDBALL™

THE MASKED MARVEL

THE SILVER AGE SUPERHERO FROM THE COPPER AGE!

by Ed Lute



The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a plethora of grim and gritty anti-heroes enter the comics world. Superheroes such as Cable, Spawn, and (future killer of the Marvel Universe) Deadpool made a splash on the comics scene, selling millions of copies and becoming the poster children for ultraviolent comics. Every new character had to be grim, gritty, or both. Characters not originally conceived as edgy were getting forbidding makeovers: John Walker took over the mantle of Captain America from Steve Rogers and gave the Sentinel of Liberty a bad name; Aquaman got a harpoon hand, grew a beard, and got an attitude with a capital A; and Green Lantern Hal Jordan became Parallax, killing his loved ones in the process!

During this dark time for superheroes, Speedball the Masked Marvel bounced onto the scene and into his own self-titled series. He came with an upbeat personality, more like a throwback to the Silver Age-era Marvel heroes rather than the then-current crop taking over comics shops.

So, how did this light-hearted character get created at the same time as the grim-and-gritty anti-heroes? Let's take a look at Speedball's introduction, his solo series, and why this Silver Age-esque series ultimately failed in the brutish Copper Age.

AN EVOLUTIONARY INTRODUCTION

Robbie Baldwin/Speedball was created by writer Tom DeFalco and artist Steve Ditko. According to DeFalco, "I came up with the original idea for the character and wrote a bible on him—which included his origin, his powers, personality, family dynamic, backstory, and everything else you needed to know in order to write a story about him. Steve designed the costume and also designed Robbie himself."

At the time DeFalco created Speedball, Marvel Comics' editor-in-chief Jim Shooter was developing the New Universe imprint for Marvel Comics' 25th anniversary in 1986. DeFalco originally pitched the character to Shooter for inclusion in Marvel's New Universe imprint because he thought Speedball would be a good fit: "I wrote the bible—although I originally called him Ricochet—and presented him to Jim Shooter for the New Universe. Jim didn't feel the character fit into his ideas for the New Universe and told me we should eventually do him for the Marvel Universe."



The DeFalco and Ditko creation eventually made his debut two years later in *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual*

In the Mighty Marvel Tradition

A young old-school hero, Speedball, bounces into the Marvel Universe in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #22 (1988). Cover by Ron Frenz (the intended Speedball artist) and John Romita, Sr. (inset) This article's writer, Ed Lute (left), and Tom DeFalco (right), at a 2018 comic-con. Photo courtesy of Ed Lute.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

"Robbie gained the ability to generate a micro-thin shield that covered his entire body," DeFalco indicates. The energy manifested itself as colorful bubbles. His costume formed around him, so he didn't even have to find a phone booth to change. Robbie also had the ability to absorb all kinetic energy directed at him and reflect it with even greater force. DeFalco further explains that Robbie's powers would cause him to "bounce from one surface to another so that he would gain speed as he ricocheted about." At first, any type of contact would cause Robbie's power to activate, but he eventually learned to control it. Robbie even learned that bullets couldn't harm him since they would bounce off.

The first issue also introduces Niels, a cat belonging to a Hammond scientist. DeFalco recalls, "[Niels] just seemed like a fun addition to the series." A big reveal in the second issue is that Niels had been exposed to the same extra-dimensional energy source as Robbie, thus giving the feline the same kinetic powers as our human hero. During the series, Robbie would unsuccessfully attempt to capture Niels.

In issue #2 (Oct. 1988), Speedball faced the Sticker in the first story and the Graffiti Guerrillas in the second tale. Issue #3 (Nov. 1988) introduced readers to evildoer Leaper Logan in the first story, while Speedball assisted Chick Harris (a Chuck Norris homage) while fighting off thugs in the second one. Speedball defeated the Basher, a rookie cop who flunked out of the police academy and took out his aggression by attacking other peacekeepers, and the Two-Legged Rat, a cat-hating/cat-killing man in a rat mask, in issue #5 (Jan. 1989). (No cats were harmed in the making of this issue.)

The first story from issue #6 (Feb. 1989) involved Speedball facing off against the Bug-Eyed Voice, an unscrupulous insurance investigator who stole the items he was supposed to investigate. In the second tale, Speedball came in contact with feline aliens. Speedball distracted the aliens with catnip. Bonehead was the highlighted baddie in issue #8 (Apr. 1989), which also

featured a story where Robbie saved his new classmate Monica from kidnappers that were trying to get to her father, a senator, through her. In issue #10 (June 1989), Speedball defeated mutated giant animals that were created by the villain of the issue, Clyde. A later retcon unsuccessfully attempted to tie Clyde to all of the villains that plagued Springdale during the series.

Speedball got his first full-length story in issue #4 (Dec. 1988). The story concerned the murder of Alexander Bow, Maddy's former boyfriend, whose body was found hidden inside of a wall at Springdale High School. The story would continue in issue #7 (Mar. 1989) and finally conclude in issue #9 (May 1989), the penultimate issue, with the revelation that upstanding Springdale citizen Mr. Boder had killed Bow because Bow attempted to blackmail him.

Stern enjoyed his time working on the series. "I had fun while I was working on it," the prolific writer tells *BI*. "After all, I got to see Steve Ditko's rough layouts months before anyone saw the finished art. That was some



STEVE DITKO

Just for Kicks

(left) Martial artist/actor Chuck Norris starred in Ruby-Spears' animated TV miniseries *Karate Kommandos* in 1986. (right) Steve Ditko's sly wink to the fast-footed fighter via the character Chick Harris in *Speedball* #3 (Nov. 1988).

Karate Kommandos © Ruby-Spears Enterprises. Speedball TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



Writing **DAREDEVIL** ANN NOCENTI and MARK WAID



Let the Storytelling Begin

(left) Ann Nocenti began her long *Daredevil* run with vol. 1 #236 (Jan. 1987). Cover by Arthur Adams and Klaus Janson. (right) Mark Waid's stint without fear began with *Daredevil* vol. 3 #1 (Sept. 2011). Cover by Paolo Rivera. Nocenti and Waid photos © Luigi Novi / Wikimedia Commons.

Daredevil TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

Ever since his debut in 1963, *Daredevil* has been a mainstay of the Marvel Universe. Tragically blinded in an accident, Matt Murdock's other five senses are boosted to superhuman levels, enabling him to fight crime as both a lawyer and a superhero.

The following is a transcript of the "Writing *Daredevil*" panel I conducted with former DD writers Ann Nocenti and Mark Waid, from the 2016 East Coast Comicon in Secaucus, New Jersey, on April 17, 2016. It has been copyedited by Nocenti, Waid, and myself for clarity.

– John Trumbull

JOHN TRUMBULL: My name is John Trumbull. I write for *BACK ISSUE* magazine, and I want to say welcome to both of our guests, both of whom had very significant runs on the Man without Fear, Matt Murdock.

We have with us Ann Nocenti. [applause] She wrote *Daredevil* from January 1987 to April 1991, a 60-issue run. [DD vol. 1 #238–291]

We also have Mark Waid, [applause] who wrote *Daredevil* from September 2011 to September 2015. [DD vol. 3 #1–36, followed by DD vol. 4 #1–18]

ANN NOCENTI: For how many issues?

MARK WAID: Well, here's the thing...

NOCENTI: What did I do, 60 issues?

TRUMBULL: 60 issues by my count.

NOCENTI: Wow.

TRUMBULL: And Mark did... you were thinking 57, 58?

WAID: 57, 58. But, but, but...!

TRUMBULL: Mark has done more consecutive issues.

NOCENTI: Ooooh.

TRUMBULL: An uninterrupted run.

WAID: [crying in triumph] Ahhh! Denied!

NOCENTI: Lose.

TRUMBULL: Those damn fill-in issues!

NOCENTI: Fail.

TRUMBULL: But! A distinction that you share is that you've both done more issues of *Daredevil* than a Mr. Frank Miller. [Waid and Nocenti exchange a fist-bump] So there you go.

NOCENTI: I mean, who's counting, right?

TRUMBULL: People like me! [laughter] Comics historians.

Now, I think a good place to start would be to ask: How did you two initially get the assignment? Ann, from what I understand, you did a fill-in issue of *Daredevil* [DD vol. 1 #236, Nov. 1986] and then an issue or so later [DD vol. 1 #238, Jan. 1987], you were the regular writer.

NOCENTI: Yeah. It was Ralph Macchio, who's an absolutely fabulous editor. You know, I think that some of the decisions you make early on in your career are a little bit naïve, because you just are new to the game.

I think my first assignment [at Marvel] was, "Kill Spider-Woman." I went, "Okay." And it wasn't until years later that I realized that I only got that job 'cause nobody else wanted to kill her. [laughter] And then when you get your first letter from some little girl and Spider-Woman was her favorite character and you killed her, then it really sinks in, and I don't think I ever killed anyone ever again.

Living the Dream

(top) Newbie comics scribe Ann Nocenti's fill-in in *Daredevil* #236 (Nov. 1986, cover by Walter Simonson and Bill Sienkiewicz) led to her getting the *DD* writing assignment two issues later. (bottom) Original art to Ann's story in #236, illustrated by the amazing Barry Windsor-Smith. Courtesy of Heritage.

TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.



And I think it was a little bit similar. Ralph tested me by having me do an issue of *Daredevil*, and then when I turned the script in, he was like, "Well, would like to take the series?" And in hindsight, I was so new to the industry, I didn't realize, like, "Frank Miller, big deal," you know? I was kind of like, "Oh, yeah, okay, I'll read the back issues, and then I'll do this..."

Fans come to me and they're, like, "Was it intimidating following Frank?" Well, not really, because I was too young and dumb and innocent to know. I didn't realize the significance, just like I didn't realize the significance of killing a major character.

WAID: There wasn't the significance to it then that there is now. Frank wasn't *Frank* then. Now he's Frank, capital F.

NOCENTI: Yeah. That's true.

WAID: Also, in that period, you weren't... there were no trade paperbacks, there were no collections, there was the sense that, you do it, and it's out there for a month, and if it doesn't click that month, then you do another one the next month. You don't hit it out of the park this month, you do the next one. The idea that it's always in print forever was completely alien to us.

TRUMBULL: *That's true. You never thought that this stuff would have a shelf life...*

NOCENTI: Have a shelf life, right. I know, it's horrible. It comes back to haunt me, when people bring me something to sign, and I'm like, "Man, I wrote that story in two hours hungover, I cranked it out, it sucked." And now I've got to sign it as if it's... *What are they bringing this stuff back for?* [laughter]

TRUMBULL: *We never forget! Mark, how about you? Did you pitch for the series, [or] were you asked to write the series?*

WAID: I was actually asked to write it. Steve Wacker, who was my editor over at DC Comics on *Legion* and on 52, he and I had become good friends, and he liked my work a good bit. When he headed over to Marvel, he inherited the *Daredevil* title. And he asked me to do it, and I was very hesitant at first, because it's been such a murderer's row of writers, all those years, so first I have to compete with all those guys, and secondly, especially since [Brian Michael] Bendis came along and put his stamp on it, it's been very *noir*. It's a very *noir* character, and it sort of evolved into—this is not a slight on the people who've come after Bendis at all, they're really great—but it'd become one of those books where you'd read it, and you'd need to have a stiff drink afterwards.

TRUMBULL: Yes.

WAID: It's very, very dark. And it's not my wheelhouse. I can write dark, and I think we did write a lot of really dark stories in my run, but I said, "Look, if I'm going to do this, I kind of need the freedom to get back to the swashbuckling a little bit." We're not ignoring anything that anybody else had done.

NOCENTI: Oh, wait. You

[laughter] You put him

WAID: You can't actually

'cause he would never.

his system, right?

NOCENTI: That's true.

TRUMBULL: *That's an*

WAID: And so, that was

because it was the first

it in a long time, as a

TRUMBULL: *Probably*

Cary Nord. [Author's

#353–364, June 1996–

WAID: Exactly. And we

and make a big deal in

everything that happen

his mindset or anything

I decided, we reached a

tired of digging a hole

it now. I've got to stop

of dealing with depress

like I said, the gamble

have gone so horribly w

fanbase of people wh

miserable all the time.

IF YOU ENJOYED THIS PREVIEW, CLICK THE LINK TO ORDER THIS ISSUE IN PRINT OR DIGITAL FORMAT!



BACK ISSUE #110

MAKE MINE MARVEL! ENGLEHART's "lost" issues of West Coast Avengers, O'NEIL and INFANTINO's Marvel work, a WAID/NOCENTI *Daredevil* Pro2Pro interview, British Bronze Age Marvel fandom, Pizzazz Magazine, Speedball, Marvel Comics Presents, and backstage at Marvel Comicon '75 and '76! With DeFALCO, EDELMAN, KAVANAGH, McDONNELL, WOLFGAN, and cover by MILGROM and MACHLAN.

(84-page FULL-COLOR magazine) \$8.95
(Digital Edition) \$4.95

bit.ly/BackIssue110