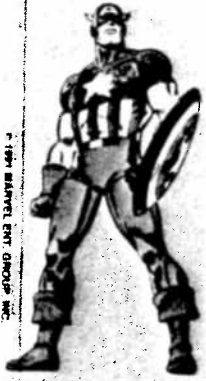


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**MARVEL
COMICS**

Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics

MARVEL



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SPECIAL
COLLECTOR'S
ISSUE

APPROVED
BY THE
COMICS
CODE
AUTHORITY

BY
LES DANIELS

INTRODUCTIONS BY
STILES

**700 COLOR
ILLUSTRATIONS!**

**FANTASTIC SUPER
HERO PROFILES!**

**BEHIND-THE-SCENES
ADVENTURES!**



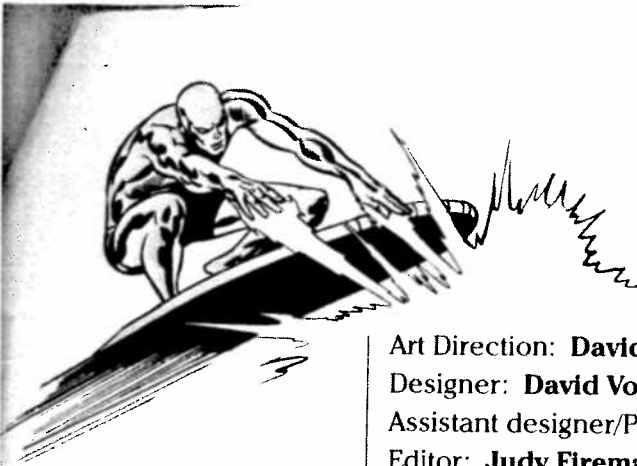
MARVEL

Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics

by
Les Daniels

Introduction by
Stan Lee

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers



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Printed and bound in Japan



and-white magazine exempt from Code censorship. Atlas hung on by a thread.

Atlas Shrugged

For a while, Atlas was able to stave off the worst effects of the general disaster. Because Goodman was his own distributor, he was independent of the nervous businessmen who kept some other comic book companies from getting their books to the newsstands. As a result, many of the industry's top talents drifted over to Atlas, but most of them didn't stay long. Declining sales meant fewer books and lower rates for free-lancers. "Every time I took another job I took another cut in pay," says

▼ Artist Don Heck's early work at Marvel included this series of well-crafted maritime adventures. From *Navy Combat* #1 (June 1955).

ANOTHER THRILLING NAVY COMBAT ADVENTURE STARRING "TORPEDO" TAYLOR
"ATTACK BY SEA!"

MEET "TORPEDO" TAYLOR, OF YOUR UNCLE SAM'S SUBMARINE SERVICE! IN WORLD WAR II, THE "BARRACUDA" AND ITS GALLANT CREW CHALKED UP A GREAT RECORD, AND WHEN THE SUB'S TIN FISH STRUCK HOME, YOU COULD BE SURE "TORPEDO" TAYLOR WAS ON THE JOB AT THE FIRING CONTROLS!

THEY CALLED THE SUB FLEET "THE SILENT SERVICE" THEY WERE THE UNDERSEA KILLERS WHO HUNTED IN THE SILENT DEPTHS OF THE PACIFIC! THEY STRUCK AND VANISHED! THIS IS THE STORY OF AN INCIDENT IN WHICH THE "BARRACUDA" WAS HUNTING JAP PREY IN THE CORAL SEA!

ENEMY SHIPS!

TAKE HER DOWN TO PERISCOPE DEPTH!

THE DISTANCE CLOSED! LIKE A GRAY GHOST, THE SLEEK BODY OF THE SUB LURKED BENEATH THE WAVES!

INSIDE THE STEEL HULL, POWERFUL ENGINES HUMMED AND THE SKIPPER APPRAISED HIS PREY CAREFULLY...

DUCK SOUP! TWO HEAVY TANKERS, AND THEY SEEM TO BE ALONE! LET'S TAKE 'EM!

POKER FACE!

THE GREAT CYLINDER CIRCLED THE STAIRS MANY TIMES BEFORE IT LANDED... IN RUSSIA!

SOMETHING CAME OUT OF THE SHIP. SOMETHING DEFINITELY NOT HUMAN. AND, YET, NOT UNLIKE A MAN!

YOU LOSE, VICTOR! NOW LET A BRAVE MAN SHOW YOU NOW IT'S COME!

I MIGHT EVEN CAPTURE YOUR SPOOKS FOR YOU! HA! HA! HA!

I'LL GO TO THE TOWER FIRST, THEN SHOW VICTOR HIS GHOSTS! HA! HA!

HE'LL NEVER GET OVER... WHA--???

DON'T WORRY! I WARN YOU!

WELCOME TO GRISHMOOR CASTLE, MORTAL! I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO ENTERTAINING YOU IN A MANNER THAT ONLY YOU COULD APPRECIATE!

NO! I CAN'T BE!

COME, COME MORTAL YOU CAN'T LEAVE YET! YOU JUST GOT HERE!

PUT ME DOWN! LET ME GO! HELP!

WHA? HAPPENING? I MUST BE GOING MAD!

PANICKY! PANICKY! NO ONE'S HERE! NO ONE'S HERE!

MOVE, MORTAL!! YOU'RE STANDING ON ME!

▲ Science fiction and fantasy art by Jack Kirby (above) and Steve Ditko (below) were Marvel mainstays during the late 1950s.

THE VILLAIN TO BEAT: THE YELLOW CLAW

To capitalize on the specter of a Communist conspiracy haunting American minds during the 1950s, Stan Lee decided to go all the way and create a comic book named after a Commie: *The Yellow Claw*. "We fashioned him after Fu Manchu," admits Stan Lee, referring to the famous villain created in 1913 by British author Sax Rohmer. (In fact, Rohmer also wrote a novel called *Yellow Claw*, but Fu Manchu wasn't in it.) Like his literary predecessor, the comic book Yellow Claw was a brilliant scientist; he also dabbled in the occult and had created an elixir that extended his life abnormally.

After the Korean war, the Red Chinese were disliked perhaps even more than the Russians, but *The Yellow Claw* avoided blatant racism by making its hero Chinese too. This evenhandedness may have been one reason why the comic book lasted only four issues, but then again, very few bad guys ever got their own comic books in the first place.

Revived in the 1960s, the Claw abandoned Marxism and set out to rule the world himself. If he hasn't succeeded yet, credit must go to Marvel heroes like Nick Fury, Captain America and Iron Man, who in recent years have struggled to thwart his nefarious schemes.



Top two covers by John Severin;
bottom cover by Bill Everett.
Clutching Claw by Joe Maneely.

John Romita.

Many artists were forced out of the field by economic pressures. Bill Everett took a job with a greeting card company. John Buscema, and then Gene Colan, drifted into advertising. "It was a very bad time," says Colan. "I had the full catastrophe. I had a house and a family and I just had to do whatever else I could." Romita held on as long as possible and then moved over to DC, where long-standing conservative fiscal and artistic policies had kept the company in comparatively good shape. He stayed at DC "doing really dreadful, mindless romance comics for about eight years." By 1955 it looked like Atlas might be nearing the end of the line.

Oddly enough, it was a group of recent arrivals at Atlas who eventually turned things around. Artist Don Heck had arrived in 1954 and was soon enhancing the war books with his vigorous work on characters like "Torpedo" Taylor. In 1956, artist Steve Ditko brought his unusual drawing style to the toned-down horror books and turned out a series of atmospheric fantasies. Most important of all, in 1956 Jack Kirby came back.

Recently separated from his longtime partner Joe Simon, Kirby was one of the most creative forces in the business and he needed the outlet that Atlas could provide. "When I got back they were practically taking the furniture out of the place," he says, "and I had to stop them. I had to have a place to work."

But before things got better, they got worse. Atlas, Goodman's distribution arm, was gradually becoming a liability. By 1957, because there weren't many comics to distribute and expenses were high, Goodman closed down Atlas and arranged for a deal with the American News Company, one of the country's largest magazine distributors. To Goodman it seemed like a good idea at the time. He didn't realize how far Dr. Wertham's poison had spread, and he never suspected that American News was itself on the verge of collapse until suddenly it fell. Catastrophe turned to cataclysm, and suddenly there seemed to be no way at all for Goodman to get the comic books to the customers.

Stan Lee was left alone in a small office with a backlog of finished art. There was no work for anyone, not even on a free-lance basis. "It was very tough," says Lee. "These were all people that I'd worked with. I knew their families. And I was asked to let everybody go. I don't know why Goodman kept me on. I guess he just felt that if there was any chance at all he wouldn't give up the comics completely."

The Thing that Lived

Somehow the company survived, even though it was now nameless since the Atlas trademark was gone for good. Ingeniously, Goodman made a deal with rival publisher DC to get his few remaining

► When The Sub-Mariner returned, he was up to his old tricks. Pencils: Jack Kirby. Inks: Sol Brodsky.



► Introducing Doctor Doom, one of the great villains (far right). Pencils: Jack Kirby. Inks: Joe Sinnott.



Fantastic Foes

When The Fantastic Four weren't fighting among themselves—which they did quite often—they needed enemies, and Stan Lee provided one of the best when he revived Bill Everett's classic character from 1939, The Sub-Mariner. This time around, Namor's hostility was caused by a nuclear test that had destroyed his underwater kingdom, and he complicated matters by developing a not entirely unrequited passion for the Invisible Girl. The triangular relationship among Sue Storm, Reed Richards and the vengeful but noble Namor would continue for years. More significantly, in *The Fantastic Four #4*, Lee and Kirby set the stage for a reenactment of one of the company's great successes, and soon The Sub-Mariner and The Human Torch were at each other's throats, just as they had been twenty years before. A sense of continuity had been established: "I always loved the old characters," explains Lee.

The fifth issue's encounter, "Meet Dr. Doom," introduced The Fantastic Four's most frequent future foe, a crazed scientific genius who hid his scarred face behind a metal mask. Formerly one of Reed Richards' college classmates, Victor von Doom had become the ruthless ruler of a small country who used his diplomatic immunity to cloak his plans for world conquest. He was perhaps the ultimate refinement of Marvel's many megalomaniacal villains, and in issue six he even

teamed up with The Sub-Mariner to take on our heroes. Namor, who ultimately rejected his more corrupt cohort, was back again in issue nine, gloating as The Fantastic Four went bankrupt due to bad investments—a kind of misfortune that had never happened to ordinary super heroes. And Dr. Doom returned again in issues ten, sixteen and seventeen. Although each tale was complete in itself, Lee and Kirby were also clearly establishing a super story that extended over months. Before long, only narratives that ran to several issues would be able to contain their increasingly complex ideas.

Very soon, The Fantastic Four were not alone in the stable of new Marvel super heroes. A whole crew of innovative characters had been created, and Stan Lee's career plans had changed. "I never left," he says, "because The Fantastic Four sold well, and next The Hulk sold well, and then Thor, and then Spider-Man...."

The Green Giant

For their second super hero, Lee and Kirby came up with another monstrous figure, who was inspired by the success of The Thing, and also by the numerous creatures they had been devising for comic books like *Tales to Astonish*. The result was *The Incredible Hulk* (May 1962).

Clearly, The Hulk was derived in part from



shrapnel that is working its way toward his heart, Stark is ordered to spend his last days inventing new armaments for the Communists; instead he constructs a suit of transistorized armor that also serves as a pacemaker to keep his heart beating. As Iron Man, he conquers his foes and manages to escape, but he is doomed to

remain at least partially encased in metal until the day he dies. Life as a Marvel hero was never a bed of roses.

Don Heck had the honor of drawing the initial Iron Man story, a rare opportunity in the days when Jack Kirby seemed to get first crack at just about everything. And, in fact, Kirby did have a hand in Iron Man. "He designed the costume," says Heck, "because he was doing the cover. The covers were always done first. But I created the look of the characters, like Tony Stark and his secretary Pepper Potts." Over all, it was Heck's solid craftsmanship that set Iron Man on the road to success.

Meanwhile, Heck was introduced to the intricacies of The Marvel Method of comic book creation. When he was first handed a story synopsis, Heck told editor Lee: "You've got to be kidding. I'm not used to that. I'm used to a full script." Eventually Heck adjusted, and gradually came to enjoy the chance to contribute to the stories, but he remembers that some artists "said the hell with it and left." Some top talents in the field passed in and out of the company quickly because they never adapted to Lee's revolutionary method. "Stan would call me up," says Heck, "and he'd give me the first couple of pages over the phone, and the last page. I'd say, 'What about the stuff in between?' and he'd say, 'Fill it in.'"

Heck's solid background in war comics helped him get Iron Man off to a good start, but he wasn't entirely pleased with the character's armor despite his boundless admiration for Jack Kirby. "He was terrific," says Heck. "He was always willing to help somebody or tell you how to do something. And as for the super heroes, the main reason they existed was Jack Kirby. He used to call them 'the guys in the long underwear.'"

Kirby's original Iron Man suit, realistically bulky given the circumstances under which Tony Stark had to build it, soon changed from forbidding gray to gold. Later, it was streamlined into a red-and-gold design by Steve Ditko. Perhaps because the suit is a machine, many artists have been tempted to tinker with it, and over the years, Iron Man's costumed appearance has changed more often than that of any other Marvel super hero.

Iron Man, a wealthy patriot with a war injury, might have reminded some readers of President

John F. Kennedy, whose inauguration in 1961 had infused the United States with a feeling of adventurous optimism. Stan Lee has never compared J.F.K. to Iron Man, but he has speculated that the Kennedy era's spirit provided the ideal atmosphere for the introduction of new super heroes. Kennedy's assassination in 1963 ended the era all too quickly, and signaled the advent of the turmoil that would characterize the rest of the decade. Kennedy had encouraged the buildup of American troops in Vietnam, and as the war there became more deadly and more divisive, Iron Man began to look even more like a symbol of The United States: he went halfway around the world to fight for what

Iron Man clanks his way into *Tales of Suspense* #39 (March 1962) (below). By issue #44 (left), Iron Man had acquired a golden glow. Covers by Jack Kirby and Don Heck.





▲ The elegant simplicity of Jack Kirby's work is evident in this penciled page, which was nevertheless rejected in favor of a different approach to the action, inked by Paul Reinman. From *Avengers* #3.

and one of them was a black man named Gabe Jones. The visual stereotypes once common in comics were no longer acceptable at Marvel, and eventually Stan Lee was obliged to send a detailed memo to the company that did the color separations to make it absolutely clear that Gabe was a black man.

Marvel's progressive attitude delighted most readers, but annoyed at least one. Flo Steinberg recalls opening a letter addressed to the Sgt. Fury staff that read, "You pinko commies! What have you got against the Nazis? I'm going to come to the office and shoot you all!" The FBI was called in, but nothing ever came of the threat. Clearly, however, the new Marvel style was making an impact on the reading public.

The Super Group

By September 1963 it was easy enough for Marvel to fulfill Martin Goodman's 1961 wish that his company could publish a comic book as jam-packed with popular super heroes as DC's *Justice*

League. By late 1963, Marvel had super hero stars to spare, and some of them were joined together to form a new super hero group called *The Avengers*.

The original Avengers were Iron Man, Thor, The Hulk and Ant-Man, along with his female partner, The Wasp. Including the antisocial Hulk in the group was an odd choice, even for a company that made a specialty of character conflict. He quit in the second issue, but returned in the third to battle the remaining Avengers with the help of the traditionally testy Sub-Mariner. Jack Kirby handled the penciling for the first eight issues—exactly as long as he had stuck with *Sgt. Fury*—and then Lee turned the series over to "utility man" Don Heck. *The Avengers* often had a crowded look as multiple villains showed up to fight the many heroes. "It was easy enough for the writers," Heck notes, "to say that six guys come in from the left and six guys come in from the right, but the artist had to draw them all."

Given the rambunctious nature of Marvel's super heroes, it's not surprising that over the years *The Avengers* proved to be a singularly unstable super

group. Kirby, who often set the visual style for new books and then moved on, did stay long enough to draw once again the member who proved to be the heart of the group: Captain America. The great Golden Age hero created by Kirby and Joe Simon in 1941 was revived in 1964 when The Avengers discovered him frozen in the Arctic and thawed him out. He soon took command of the whole team, and by the sixteenth issue (May 1965), he was the only big star left.

Stan Lee has admitted that by this period the intertwined tales of The Marvel Universe were beginning to confuse even him. Keeping top heroes like Thor active in *The Avengers* without contradicting the information in Thor's own series was becoming a chore. A changing of the guard was the result for *The Avengers* and Captain America was soon leading a motley crew of reformed villains like Hawkeye, Quicksilver and The Scarlet Witch. "It was difficult in the beginning," says Don Heck, "like losing old friends." There were eventual compensations, however. Hawkeye, an arrogant, sarcastic archer for whom Heck had done the original drawings in 1964, was named the most popular hero of *The Avengers* in a 1989 fan poll. Considering the competition—almost every Marvel hero has been a member of the group—this was quite a tribute.

Teenage Mutants

The X-Men, a comic book series featuring a very different sort of super hero group, made its debut

simultaneously with *The Avengers* in September 1963. Stan Lee had originally wanted to call the team of teenagers The Mutants, but Martin Goodman felt the name might baffle young readers, so Lee came up with X-Men, which had a nice hint of the unknown about it. The leader of the team was Professor Xavier, a wheelchair-bound telepath who ran a school for gifted youngsters who were all secretly mutants. Feared by ordinary people, The X-Men were nonetheless in training to protect humanity from a gang of evil mutants headed by the sinister Magneto.

The notion of mutants whose powers originated in their genes was new to Marvel, although the concept of the misunderstood adolescent was reminiscent of Spider-Man, and the idea of bickering malcontents inevitably suggested The Fantastic Four. At first, The X-Men seemed too busy to develop fully rounded personalities, especially when the six of them were battling five Avengers, as they did in *X-Men #9*. In addition to Professor X, the mutants were Cyclops, whose eyes emitted deadly rays; The Angel, who flew on huge feathered wings; Marvel Girl, who moved objects through telekinesis; Iceman, a reverse Human Torch who could freeze anything, including himself; and The Beast, whose erudition was masked by the strength and contours of a gorilla.

Once again, Jack Kirby joined Lee as cocreator of the comic book. "Jack was the best guy to work with you can imagine," says Lee. "Any idea I would give him, he could make it better. When Jack brought in the first story, it opened with all



▲ Fighting perennial foe Magneto in *X-Men #1* (September 1963). Pencils: Jack Kirby. Inks: Sol Brodsky.



◀ In *X-Men #1* the teenage mutants work out in The Danger Room while their leader Professor X welcomes a new recruit. Script: Stan Lee. Pencils: Jack Kirby. Inks: Paul Reinman.



▲ Unpublished covers by Werner Roth, who followed Jack Kirby on *The X-Men*. Editor Stan Lee, who also served as Marvel's art director, often requested several versions of covers as they were vital to sales.

The X-Men fighting in the place they called The Danger Room, where they were trained. That was Jack's idea. And it was the most brilliant opening because it started with action and showed all their abilities immediately." Yet Kirby, who was working simultaneously on almost everything, drifted away from the series fairly soon, and Lee eventually turned the writing over to other hands as well. "I think maybe Jack and I should have stayed with it a little longer, to give it more push," Lee admits. *The X-Men* drifted along, erratic and occasionally brilliant, but a decade passed before the series began to achieve its full potential.

Soap Opera

As the Marvel style continued to develop, the characters and stories became more and more complex, until not even an entire comic book had enough pages to contain a single adventure. For example, *X-Men* #4 concluded with a cliff-hanger that went unresolved for two months. "To get a really good story going," says Lee, "you have to

make it long. And I had to dream up so many plots that it was easier for me if I could continue them over two or three issues." Some readers wrote in to complain, suggesting that the serials were merely an artificial marketing device, but the majority found extended narratives to their liking. Gradually, cliff-hangers became the norm. It was yet another Marvel innovation that has become standard in the industry.

With tongue in cheek, Lee began to describe the comic books as "soap operas," a reference not only to the serial stories but also to the portrayal of suffering individuals that was one of his main strengths as a writer. The unresolved romantic triangle among Cyclops, Marvel Girl and The Angel of The X-Men was a perfect example. Like soap operas, Marvel sagas prompted a tremendous loyalty in their audience. The tiny office where Stan Lee had stuck it out for so many years was expanded and then moved twice to accommodate a growing production staff. Marvel was pulling itself up by its bootstraps to become one of the giants of the comic book industry.