TRYOUTS, ONE-SHOTS, & ONE-HIT WONDERS!

Marvel Premiere • Marvel Spotlight • Showcase • 1st Issue Special • New Talent Showcase & more!

Featuring **BRUNNER • COLAN • ENGLEHART • PLOOG • TRIMPE**

Volume 1, Number 71
April 2014

Celebrating the Best Comics of the '70s, '80s, '90s, and Beyond!

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THE BAT-SQUAD

Batman's small band of British helpers who appeared in a single issue of *The Brave and the Bold*

by Mike Pigott

The Brave and the Bold *#92 (Oct.–Nov. 1970) is a comic that has a great deal of significance for me … it was the first superhero comic I ever read.* Well, sort of. I grew up in Australia, and the version I had was called *Superman presents Tip Top Comic Monthly #72* (inset), a black-and-white Australian reprint with a partly redrawn version of Nick Cardy's cover.

I was given two comics for my sixth birthday by a friend of my mother, a lady named Bev Ryan. The gift consisted of this comic and a *Road Runner* reprint. I must have looked at *Tip Top* with a somewhat puzzled look, as if to say, "What the heck is this?," because Mrs. Ryan remarked, "I thought you said you liked Batman?" Yes, I did like Batman … but this wasn't the light-hearted, confident Batman I knew from TV. This looked more like a poster for a horror movie, with Batman searching desperately through thick fog, while a girl he was supposed to be guarding was being snatched away by a monster under his very nose! The story was quite complex for a six year old, but it showed me that I could get access to Batman stories even when he wasn't showing on TV, and led to my seeking out other comics. As Australia sold both American and British comics, and with this issue being set in London, for some time I was unsure of whether Batman was an English or American character!

NICK CARDY

Photo by Luigi Novi.

"NIGHT WEARS A SCARLET SHROUD"

The story opens on a film being shot in the London docklands. Bruce Wayne is in town to oversee a movie he has invested in, *The Scarlet Strangler*, directed by the great Basil Coventry. While on set, Bruce meets script girl and stand-in Margo Cantrell; technical advisor Major Dabney, a former Scotland Yard inspector; and a young guitarist doing incidental music, Mick Murdock. The film is about the Scarlet Strangler, a Jack the Ripper-type villain who terrorized London in the Edwardian era.

During filming, leading actress Vivien Tremaine is abducted by what appears to be the real Strangler. Basil Coventry is found unconscious, while the actor playing the Strangler is found dead in his dressing room. Bruce Wayne disappears, and soon Batman arrives on the scene, under the rather flimsy pretext of being in London "to study British police methods." Quite uncharacteristically, he asks Margo, Mick, and the Major to assist him in tracking down the kidnapper through the thick fog, and also to look for director Coventry, who has since gone missing. Although keeping in touch with walkie-talkies, Batman becomes disorientated, and briefly believes himself to have travelled back in time … a feeling reinforced when he is nearly run over by an old stagecoach. He is then attacked and nearly throttled by the Strangler, who suddenly bolts when Major Dabney approaches. Dabney finds a piece of cloth that Batman tore from the attacker, and notices it is covered with small bugs, a type of sightless beetle found only in dark wine cellars.

Bat-Chap and Friends

Nick Cardy's moody cover for *The Brave and the Bold* #92 (Oct.–Nov. 1970), premiering (and retiring) the now-you-see-them, now-you-don't Bat-Squad.

ONE-HIT WONDERS 1 THE CRUSADER

by Bryan D. Stroud

Some heroes just weren't built to last, and that was certainly the case with the ill-fated Crusader, who made his entrance and exit in the pages of* Aquaman *#56 (Mar.–Apr. 1971). There is an implied history with the Detroit-based hero when it is revealed that he was denied membership in the Justice League due to his overly violent crimefighting techniques, but this was his lone appearance.

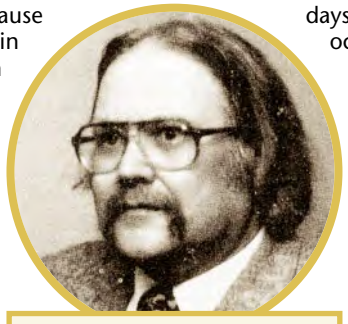
Crusader's alter ego is that of Don Powers, a former police scientist who has since opened his own private-investigation laboratory. The current mission of Powers Investigations is to hinder the criminal element via a satellite equipped with mirrors that have kept Detroit bathed in artificial sunlight for a solid week, denying criminals the luxury of darkness. Unfortunately, there have been unanticipated side effects. The algae in Lake Erie is growing at an alarming rate, causing a state of emergency in Detroit as fears of it overrunning the city and beyond take hold. This gets the attention of Aquaman, who hastily makes his way to deal with "The Creature That Devoured Detroit!"

Author Steve Skeates shares that the notion behind this eco-disaster was inspired in part by the socially conscious success of the Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams stories in *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*:

"I had, in fact, rather jumped aboard their coattails via writing an *Aquaman* tale about water pollution—it was called, as I recall, 'As the Seas Die!' [*Aquaman* #49]—and had succeeded in thereby getting Aquaman mentioned in a number of newsmagazines!

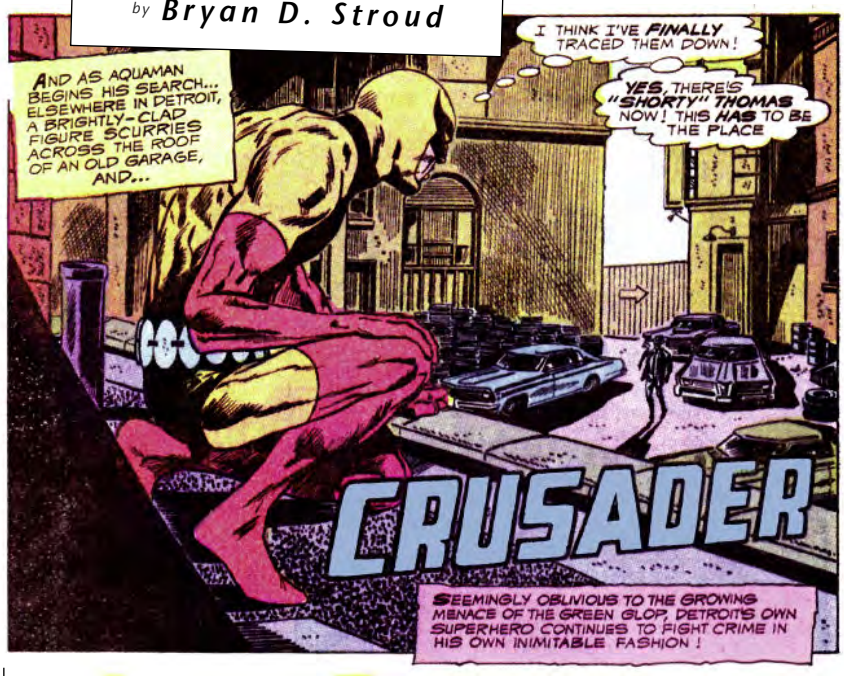
"Thus I was on the lookout for some way we could get back into the socially conscious scene, and unrestrained algae growth seemed like a good idea, but what would be the cause of it? Maybe continual daylight! I had no idea if that would really work, but I went with it! The title for my story was a variation on one of those phony '50s horror movies, hence the movie-like poster for a title panel!

"And I set the story in Detroit because back then, seemingly half the artists in the comic-book industry were from that city (Starlin, Milgrom, Buckler, et al.)! Typically I leapt right into writing the tale without even consulting a map, and therefore placed Detroit on Lake Erie, which isn't where it is at all! But this being DC, I could use the usual DC copout: Sure, on Earth-Prime, Detroit isn't on that lake, but this story is taking place on Earth-One, where Detroit IS on Lake Erie!"



STEVE SKEATES

In the story, Aquaman and Powers are friends, but the Sea King is incensed at Powers' dismissal of the environmental damage his satellite is causing, all in the name of reducing crime statistics. Our hero vows to destroy the satellite, but Powers subdues him and decides he has time for one more mission as the Crusader.



Before Justice League Detroit...

...the Crusader prowled the streets of Motor City. Panel from *Aquaman* #56 (Mar.–Apr. 1971), written by Steve Skeates and drawn by Jim Aparo.

Powers quickly dons the colorful costume and his thoughts reveal the other important reason for the perpetual day he has created. He is rapidly going blind and his poor night vision was hampering his war on crime. He has been particularly bent on breaking up a car-theft ring and reasons he only needs a couple more days, and that shouldn't foul up the ecology too much. These thoughts occupy the hero as he leaps from rooftop to rooftop.

Later, Aquaman revives and finds himself at a lakeside park, just in time to save a little girl from a surge of algae. While making his way back to the lab, he notices a crowd gathered and is stunned to see the Crusader lying dead. An eyewitness states he saw him running across the roof when he tripped on some wires and fell to his death. When the Crusader's mask is removed, Aquaman recognizes his friend and knows what he must do.

Hurrying back to the laboratory and overpowering all resistance, he enters a control room and presses a destruct button, exploding the satellite and ending the threat as well as the story.

Steve Skeates explains his premise in eliminating the Crusader, despite his splashy entrance and even having a logo of his own:

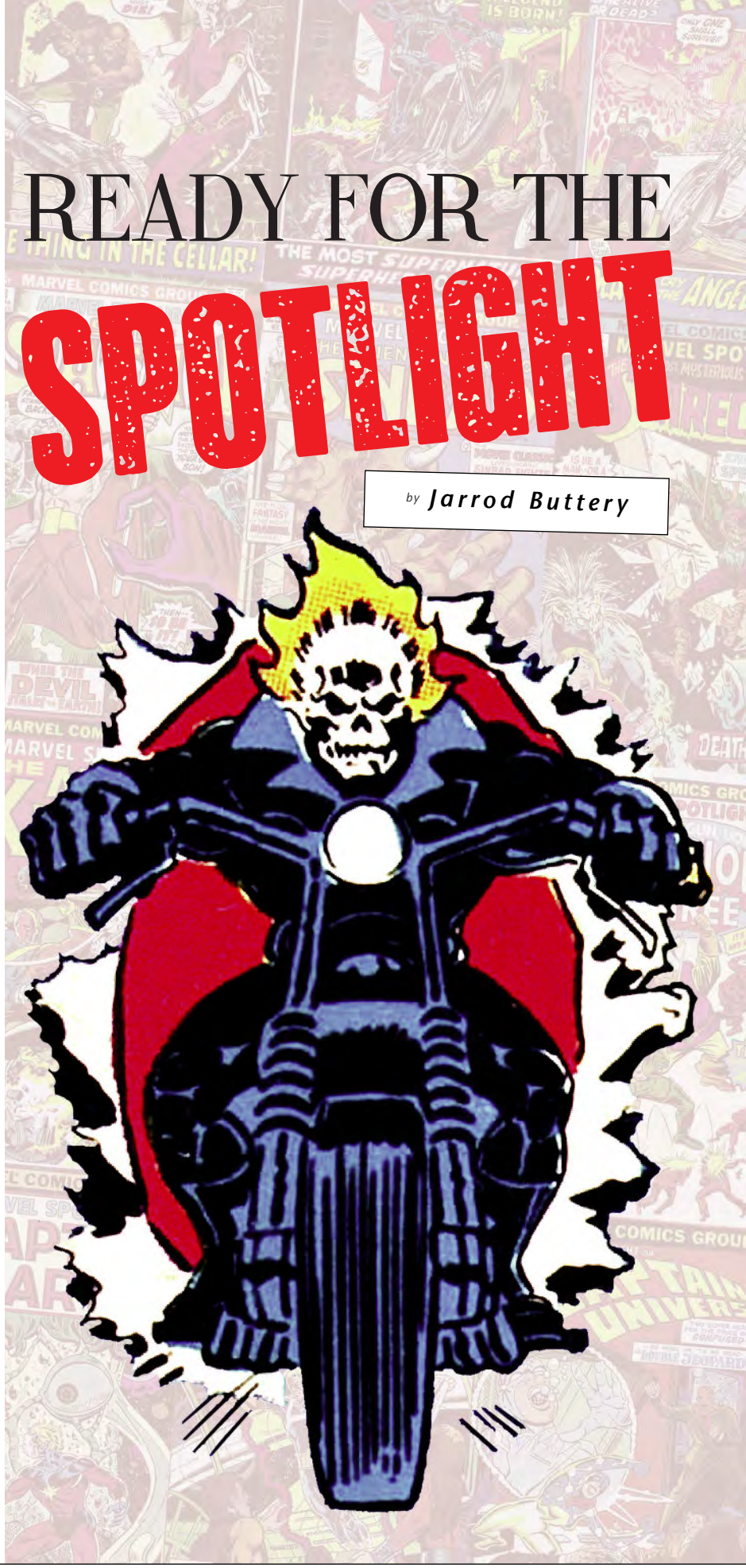
"Jim [Aparo] came up with the nifty Crusader costume and logo, which helped make this superhero's death a few pages later all the more of a surprise!

"I was mainly going for the surprise of the shock of it all! Also, in a big way, Don Powers (in whatever identity) was the villain of the story—out of control, messing up the entire planet just so he could catch a car-theft ring, and ultimately story-wise [I figured] he had to pay the ultimate price for his villainy!"

FlashBacks

READY FOR THE SPOTLIGHT

by Jarrod Buttery



A decade after* Fantastic Four *#1 (Nov. 1961), Stan Lee took a sabbatical from writing comics. According to Sean Howe's book, *Marvel Comics: The Untold Story*, Lee suggested some anthology titles so as to encourage the creation of new characters in his absence. Exactly ten years after *FF* #1, *Marvel Spotlight* #1 (Nov. 1971) hit the stands. This was followed by *Marvel Feature* #1 (Dec. 1971) and *Marvel Premiere* #1 (Apr. 1972).

One might assume that *Marvel Premiere* would premiere new characters, while *Marvel Spotlight*, for instance, would spotlight established characters that did not have their own books. In fact, almost the exact opposite occurred. Roy Thomas tells *BACK ISSUE*, "You're right about the titles' inherent meanings, but I don't think Stan (or I) cared much what went where. They were just names to us."

THE COMING OF RED WOLF

Red Wolf actually arrived in *Avengers* #80 (Sept. 1970). "Stan and I decided it'd be good to have a book with an American Indian hero," explained Roy Thomas in *Alter Ego* #70 (July 2007). However, "Stan didn't want it as a modern-day character. I guess he was trying to see if he could find a way to get a Western to sell, because everybody in the field wanted to write or draw a Western."

As such, when Red Wolf made his solo debut in *Marvel Spotlight* #1, the character wasn't Will Talltrees of the 20th Century, but Johnny Wakeley of the 19th Century. As detailed in *BACK ISSUE* #42 (Aug. 2010), Johnny Wakeley soon earned his own series with *Red Wolf* #1 (May 1972).

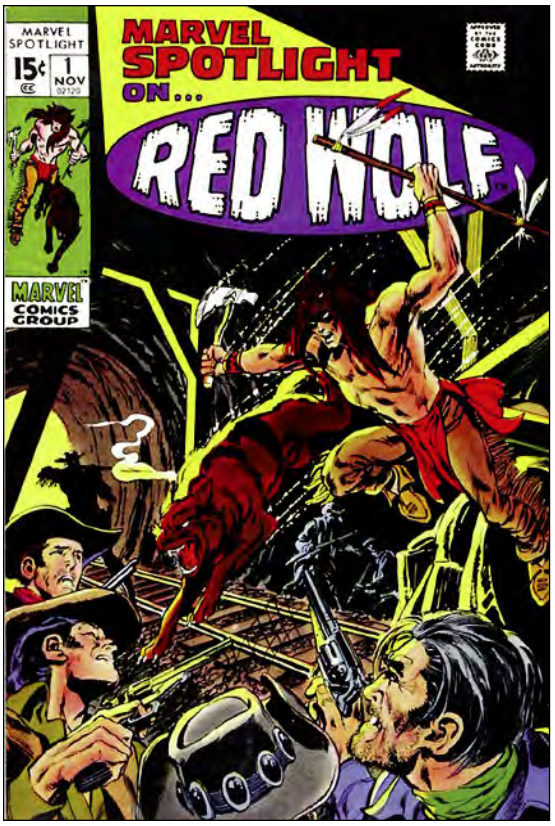
A WOLF OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

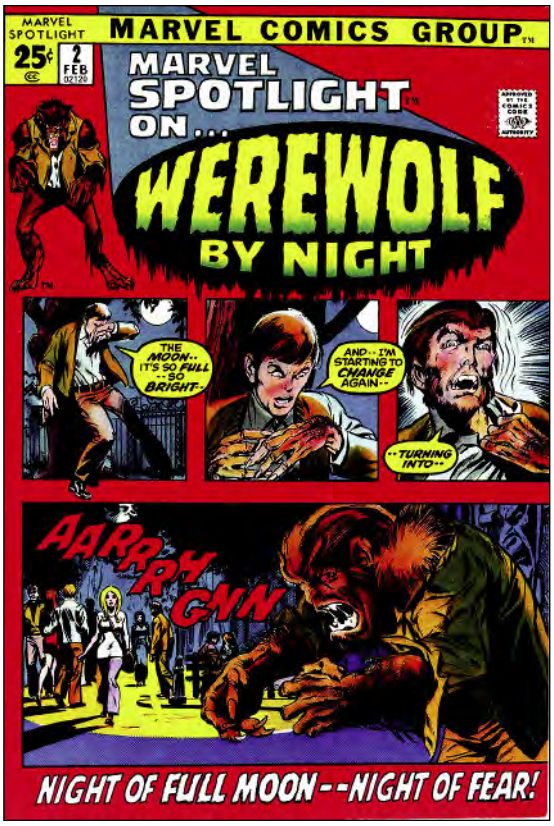
Thanks to Stan Lee's groundbreaking anti-drug issues in *Amazing Spider-Man*, the Comics Code Authority was shamed into relaxing its rules in 1971. Marvel immediately seized upon the opportunity. *Marvel Spotlight* #2 (Feb. 1972) introduced Jack Russell, who, on the evening of his 18th birthday, became a Werewolf by Night! Explained in *BI* #15 (Apr. 2006), Roy and Jean Thomas plotted the debut story then turned it over to Gerry Conway to write.

Werewolf by Night appeared in three issues of *Spotlight* and then quickly jumped to his own title. Gerry Conway was asked if this was a result of the success of the *Spotlight* issues. "Well, I think that the response was probably very good," recalls Conway, "but given that *Marvel Spotlight* was a bimonthly, I don't know that we would've had sales figures by the time that we decided to publish *Werewolf by Night* as its own title. But what I think tended to happen—and this was during the period when Marvel was expanding dramatically—is they were looking for market share on

High-Octane Hit

Of the many characters premiering in *Marvel Spotlight*, Ghost Rider—first seen in issue #5—was the title's runaway (make that rideaway) hit.





Wolfing Down Adams Covers

Marvel Spotlight started with a double-bang as Neal Adams drew its first two covers. (left) Red Wolf in #1 (Nov. 1971). (right) Werewolf by Night in #2 (Feb. 1972). Adams was inked by Tom Palmer on the Werewolf cover, which includes background character alterations by John Romita, Sr.

the newsstand. There were a lot of ideas that were in development, and I think that when Roy and Stan saw how well the book was turning out, they figured, 'This one's gonna go, let's just put it into its own title.' To be perfectly honest, I think a large measure of that had to do with the terrific art by Michael Ploog. He made it credible and interesting, and different from the typical Marvel book."

With the relaxation of the Comics Code's rules, horror characters could be used in comics. Conway was asked if this was an exciting time: "Absolutely! There are only so many superhero books you can actually produce. As creators, we were saying that we'd like to be able to do something a little different from the other books that we were working on. And horror titles provided you a whole new venue, a whole new set of rules you could break and stick with. So for me, it was a lot of fun."

GERRY CONWAY

"Jack Russell" is a wonderful name for a character that turns into a wolf. Conway was asked if this was deliberate: "Gosh, no, but as people have pointed out to me repeatedly, it is kind of an appropriate name! I know that Roy and Jean came up with the original premise for the first issue. And it's entirely possible that when I wrote the script, and I wrote the character's name, that I was subconsciously making that association. I'm pretty sure I would never have thought of it; I didn't own a dog, I wasn't raised with dogs, and the idea of calling a character Jack Russell—who turns into a werewolf—probably would've struck me as hilarious if I had thought of it, but I don't think I did."

After a successful three-issue debut, the *Werewolf by Night* solo comic lasted for 43 issues plus five *Giant-Size* issues, and the character integrated fully into the Marvel Universe, recently playing an important role in *X-Factor*.

NOT ANOTHER WESTERN HERO

In *Daredevil* #58 (Nov. 1969), Roy Thomas introduced a motorcycle-riding villain called Stunt-Master. Gary Friedrich began writing the title with issue #67 (Aug. 1970). According to an interview with Roy Thomas in *Comic Book Artist* #13 (May 2001), Friedrich suggested: "Instead of Stunt-Master, I'd like to make the villain a really weird motorcycle-riding character called Ghost Rider." Thomas approved, stating, "That's too good an idea to be just a villain in *Daredevil*. He should start out right away in his own book."

Marvel Spotlight #5 (Aug. 1972) introduced Ghost Rider—a motorbike-riding, leather-clad, flaming skeleton (not a Western hero in a phosphorescent costume)—conceived and written by Gary Friedrich, drawn by Mike Ploog, with aid and abetment by Roy Thomas. Discussed in *BI* #15 (Apr. 2006), the supernatural biker appeared in seven issues of *Spotlight* before *Ghost Rider* #1 (Sept. 1973) debuted. One of Marvel's most visually arresting characters, successfully straddling the line between horror and superheroes, *Ghost Rider* ran for 81 issues and has been revived many times since.

SON OF THE DEVIL

In his book, *Origins of Marvel Comics*, Stan Lee described how—after creating the Fantastic Four, Hulk, and Spider-Man—"The only one who could top the heroes we already had would be Super-God, but I didn't think the world was quite ready for that concept just yet." And: "I couldn't—I wouldn't—do a series featuring God as a comic-book hero. But I could—and would—do a series featuring *a* god as a comic-book hero." And Thor was born.

A decade later, the doors had opened wider. After featuring comics with werewolves, vampires, and satanic bikers, the letters page of *Marvel Spotlight* #11 (Aug. 1973) proclaimed: "Next issue we'll debut perhaps the weirdest spin-off strip of all: *The Mark of Satan*! That's right, gang, the flaming father-figure of the netherworld in his *own* strip."

According to *BI* #21 (Apr. 2007), Roy Thomas suggested an alternative. Subsequently, *Ghost Rider* #1 introduced Daimon Hellstrom: the Son of Satan. The story continued in *Ghost Rider* #2 (Oct. 1973), then directly crossed over into *Marvel Spotlight* #12 (Oct. 1973). *Spotlight* hosted Hellstrom for 13 issues, then, as with his predecessors, he was granted a solo title. *The Son of Satan* debuted in December

FlashBacks

MARVEL Feature

by Dewey Cassell

When it comes to* Marvel Feature*, the tryout comic book published by Marvel Comics in the early 1970s, two old adages come to mind. The first would be "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." The second would be "timing is everything."

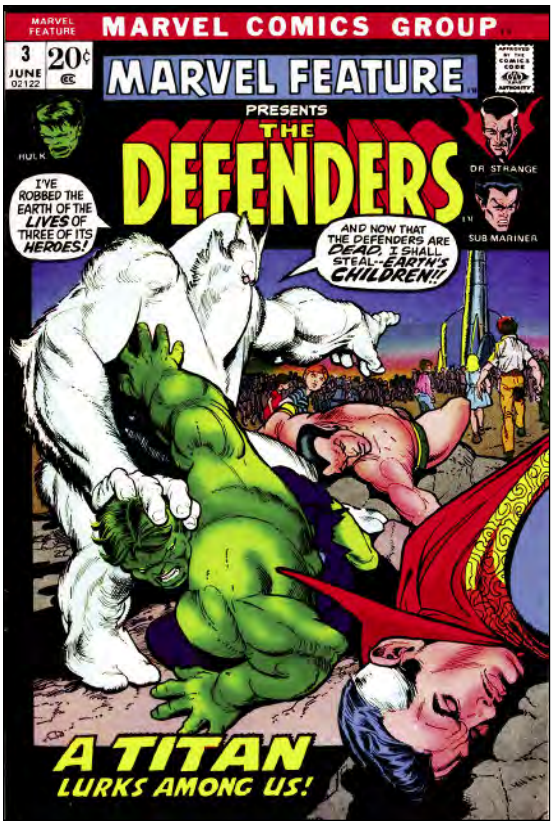
Marvel Feature debuted in 1971 as a bimonthly forum for trying out new characters (or more accurately, new combinations of characters and variations on existing characters) before giving them their own book. It was in concept, if not in format, similar to DC Comics' *Showcase*, which was first published in 1956. *Showcase* featured tryouts (typically between one and three issues) of existing characters not currently appearing in print, new characters, and updated versions of older characters. *Showcase* marked the first appearances of the Silver Age Flash, the Silver Age Green Lantern, and the Silver Age Atom, as well as Adam Strange, the Metal Men, the Creeper, and Hawk and Dove, among others. Many of the characters that appeared first in *Showcase* went on to get their own titles and some, like the Flash and Green Lantern, became cornerstones of DC Comics' success in the following decades. One of the novelties of *Showcase* was that if a favorite character received his own title, readers would pick up the new book, but they kept reading *Showcase*.

Prior to 1971, Marvel Comics had never really had a tryout book. They had several anthology titles, which typically featured reprints of classic stories or new stories about existing characters, but if they wanted to try out something new, they often just launched a new title. There were risks with this approach, namely that the title might not be successful, so the effort spent promoting it would be wasted and its failure might be perceived negatively by readers. It could also take months to find out that a title was not selling well. That said, Marvel had enjoyed a tremendous run of success introducing new titles in the 1960s. And they had occasionally introduced new characters in existing titles, such as Thor in *Journey into Mystery* and Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense*, a "split-book" that featured two characters in separate stories in each issue. (Spider-Man was not exactly the same thing, since he debuted in the last issue of *Amazing Fantasy*.)

But in the early 1970s, Marvel decided to launch several tryout books, among them *Marvel Feature*. Former Marvel Comics editor and writer Roy Thomas explains the motivation behind a tryout book: "Stan wanted to do a bunch of them: *Marvel Premiere*, *Marvel Feature*, *Marvel Spotlight*. They were all his ideas, and his titles. In the early '70s, we were just trying to get an increased place on the newsstands. That's the period when we began to actually outsell DC in terms of number of books, and that's the period when Stan became president and publisher, so we were a separate division then. We weren't attached to Magazine

Little Man's Big Day

The Astonishing Ant-Man leaps into his own solo strip! Splash page to *Marvel Feature* #4 (July 1972), rendered by Titanic Herb Trimpe! Special thanks to Dewey Cassell for the scan.



Management anymore, and Stan kept saying we had to generate more income. He would always say it was to pay my salary, but I don't remember ever getting a raise. [*laughs*]"

THE DEFENDERS

Marvel Feature started out with 52 pages and a cover price of 25 cents, but by issue #3 it had dropped back to 36 pages for 20 cents, as did other Marvel titles. The first characters to appear in *Marvel Feature* were not new, but the notion of them working together was. The first issue of the title featured the debut of the Defenders, starring the Incredible Hulk, Dr. Strange, and Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner in what, on the surface, would appear to be the least likely team of heroes in the Marvel Universe.

ROY THOMAS

Photo by Luigi Novi.

Given the success of *The Avengers*, which was also a team consisting of existing heroes, it is not surprising that Marvel would want to try the formula again. And like the Avengers, the Defenders later had a rotating lineup that included Valkyrie, Nighthawk, Hellcat, and others. But for their initial appearance in *Marvel Feature* it was just Hulk, Strange, and Namor.

The first issue of *Marvel Feature* provided the origin of the Defenders by Roy Thomas and Ross Andru, although the groundwork had been laid in earlier issues of their individual titles. It also featured a new solo Dr. Strange story by Thomas and Don Heck, and a Sub-Mariner reprint by Bill Everett. Subsequent issues featured encounters with Dormammu and Xemnu the Titan. (Issue #2 also featured cameo appearances by Roy and Jean Thomas and Tom Fagan.) Fan reaction to the team was positive, and after three issues in *Marvel Feature* the Defenders got their own title, which ran for 152 issues, just going to prove that comic-book readership is not always (if ever) logical. [***Editor's note:*** For more on the Defenders, see *BACK ISSUE* #19 and #65.]

ANT-MAN

When the Defenders cleared out of *Marvel Feature*, Ant-Man moved in. Ant-Man had starred in the split-book *Tales to Astonish* in the mid-1960s and was a founding member of the Avengers, but his most recent solo appearance had been in a backup story in issue #44 of *Iron Man*, six months previously. Thomas felt it was time to try it again. "I know that I had wanted to do Ant-Man more than most, because I just felt like he was a good character, and I thought it'd be good to bring him back," Roy says. "I think at one stage I was actually hoping I could write it, but that proved impossible." So Thomas tapped Mike Friedrich to write the Ant-Man stories and artist Herb Trimpe to illustrate them. Echoes Friedrich, "Roy started the series and intended to write

The Defenders

From *Marvel Feature* #3 (June 1972): (left) the Gil Kane/Ralph Reese cover, and (right) a Thomas/Andru/Everett interior page, courtesy of Heritage. Seen on this page is one of Hulk's Bronze Age sidekicks, Jim Wilson.

MARVEL PREMIERE

by Chris Brennaman

FlashBacks

Marvel Comics in the 1970s was at a turning point. The forces behind that initial influx of creativity in the early 1960s had mostly moved on. Stan Lee had transitioned from editor-in-chief into the role of publisher, Jack Kirby had jumped to DC Comics, and Steve Ditko was working over at Charlton. By 1972, Roy Thomas had finally stepped into the role of editor-in-chief and was overseeing a new batch of writers and artists. They were young, they were hungry, and they were ready to take the creative reins of the company and push its characters into new, often strange places.

"That was a time when Marvel was bursting at the seams creatively," says Steve Englehart, former writer of *The Avengers*, *The Defenders*, and *Dr. Strange*. "There were a lot of people doing some pretty entertaining stuff in those days."

But for all the change, there were still some fairly common practices, chief among them the regular publication of anthology and tryout books. Since comics first appeared on newsstands, those types of books were more than a little common. *Showcase* and *The Brave and the Bold* were some notable tryouts published by DC, while Marvel published anthologies like *Journey into Mystery*, *Amazing Fantasy*, and *Strange Tales* early on.

For comic-book readers today, the idea of a tryout book like *Marvel Premiere* may seem like, well, just that: like an idea. However, well into the 1970s and even the early 1980s, tryouts were still considered one of the best ways to get the attention of readers focused on new ideas and lesser characters without having to invest in an entirely new monthly series.

"We were going for newsstand space," Englehart says. "You wanted to maintain that space on the newsstand, so if you had *Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*, *The Avengers*, and they're doing great, well, that's good. But if you put out a lousy book, that could tarnish your company's image with new readers."

And that, according to Englehart, was the beauty in tryout book like *Marvel Premiere*. "The idea was, if you're going to try something out, do it with a book with less exposure so it doesn't loom as large in the general brand."

Marvel Premiere was a place for creators at Marvel to take established characters and try a new spin in search of a new audience, or to put new ideas to paper in an effort to find the next big thing. Or, in some cases, to make that old thing seem new again. One month might find an adventure featuring the Falcon, a known supporting player in *Captain America*, while the next may see something new along the lines of the space-opera science-fiction piece Seeker 3000.

House of Hits and Misses

The first three stars of *Marvel Premiere*—Warlock, shown here in detail from the Gil Kane/Dan Adkins-drawn cover to *MP* #1 (Apr. 1972), followed by Dr. Strange and Iron Fist—spun off into their own series, but *Premiere*'s other concepts failed to launch.

Strange Magic

(left) Writer Stan Lee and artist Barry [Windsor-] Smith unveiled the Master of the Mystic Arts in a new solo series beginning in *Marvel Premiere* #3 (July 1972). Cover by Smith and Frank Giacoia. (right) Gardner Fox was winding down his long comics-writing career when he picked up the Doc Strange gig, like this issue, #5 (Nov. 1972), with its Mike Ploog cover.

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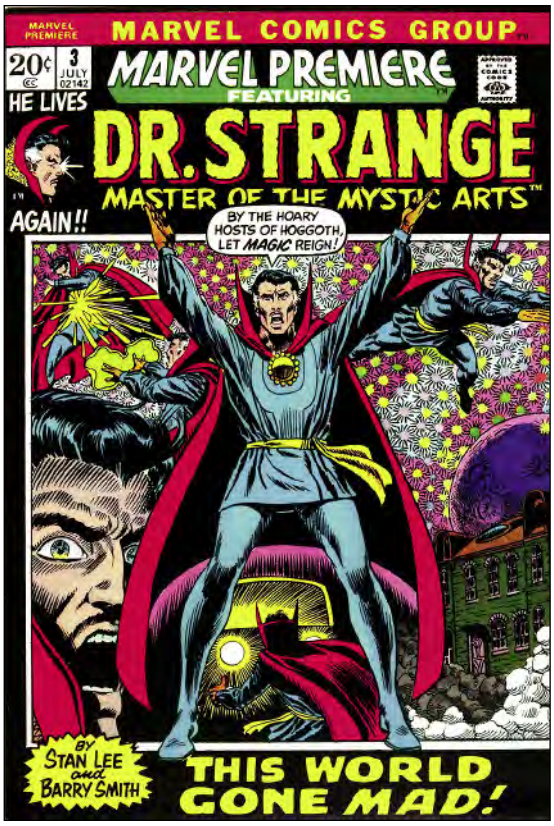

"The thing with a book like that is the whole idea that you just came up with a new concept," says writer Chris Claremont. "If it flew, great. If not, move on to the next one. A number of pitches didn't do so well. It was a matter of finding the right character, the right creators, and the right concept."

Sometimes it worked. Characters like Iron Fist came to prominence in the pages of *Marvel Premiere* and are still relevant in the Marvel Universe to this day. Other times … well, writer Ed Hannigan may have said it best:

"Sometimes it became a dumping ground for miscellaneous stuff no one wanted."

For good or ill, *Marvel Premiere* did offer readers a chance to follow characters that often times found themselves forgotten, and a place to watch their favorite creators cut loose and do something completely different, if just for one issue.

MAKING A WARLOCK OUT OF HIM

The series kicked off with a April 1972 cover-dated story focusing on Adam Warlock. With Roy Thomas writing and Gil Kane on art duty, readers would immediately be treated to something that wasn't quite like anything that had come before. In the first issue of this new comic series, the protagonist wouldn't just be a hero, he would be a messiah.

The character Him, as Warlock was known for the first part of his life, had been created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby during their much-celebrated *Fantastic Four* run in the 1960s. The product of an experiment performed by a secret cadre of scientists, Him was first introduced as

Welcome to My Nightmare

Signed by artist Frank Brunner, an original art page from the Dr. Strange shocker in *Marvel Premiere* #10 (Sept. 1973). Inks by the "Singing Sons of the Crusty Bunkers" (many hands in Neal Adams' studio). Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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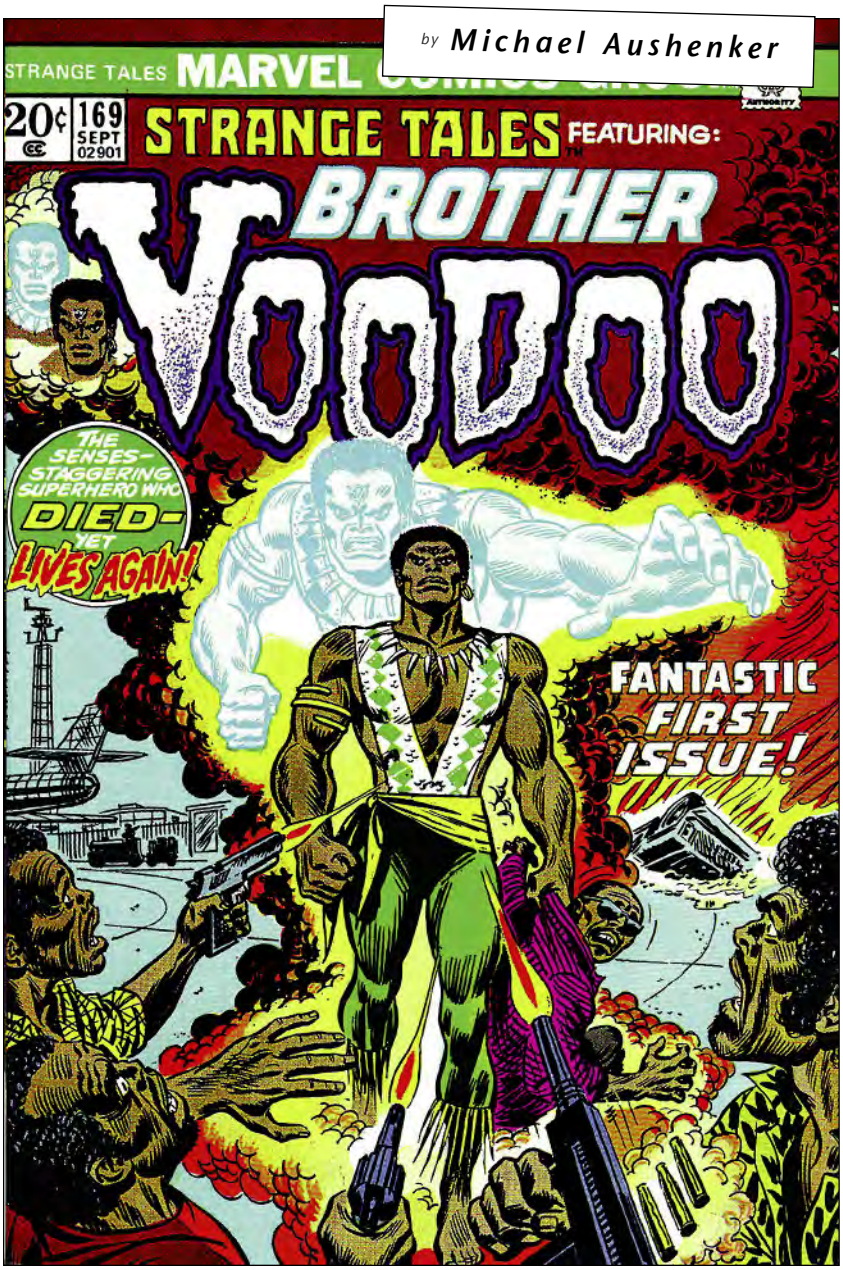
DISPOSABLE HEROES

OFFERING CONFUSING CONTINUITY, THROWAWAY CHARACTERS, AND BIZARRE BRIDGES BETWEEN BOOKS, MARVEL'S *STRANGE TALES* PROVED TO BE A TRUE, POOR-SELLING FAILED EXPERIMENT, INTRODUCING BROTHER VOODOO AND THE GOLEM ALONG THE WAY

by Michael Aushenker



FlashBack!

***Talk about* Strange!**

…as in *Strange Tales*, an aptly named series. For there was nothing normal about the characters that appeared within it … or even its numbering.

The poor-selling tryout title offered confusing continuity, throwaway characters, and segues into other series. However, before the entire enterprise went under in 1976, the hit-and-miss, trial-and-error comic book managed to offer a smattering of highlights, including the creation of one of the most interesting African-American characters to emerge from Marvel Comics Group: the bastion of black magic known as … Brother Voodoo.

"DR. STRANGE" LOVE

It's only fitting that the first Marvel hero to grace the pages of Marvel's *Strange Tales* was the Master of the Mystic Arts. Earlier in its life, the book featured stories about Dr. Strange and another popular second-tier character, Nick Fury. When the Dr. Strange saga temporarily ended with #168 (May 1968), his adventures continued in the full-length *Dr. Strange* #169, while Fury moved to the newly launched *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.*

Four years after the cancellation of *Dr. Strange* with #183 (Nov. 1969), *Strange Tales* resumed from its old numbering with #169 (Sept. 1973), embracing a brand-new supernatural feature which doubled as one of the then-rare forays into African-American superheroes. Courtesy of writer/editor Len Wein and atmospheric artist Gene Colan, the weirdo hero dubbed Brother Voodoo emerged from the misty New Orleans swamp-lands to conjure up some black magic.

"BROTHER," CAN YOU SPARE A NICKEL?

…a nickel …as in "five issues."

This master of the occult, a Southern Gothic flipside to Sorcerer Supreme Stephen Strange, did not go far. However, before his "five issues of fame" in *Strange Tales* fizzled out due to poor sales, the Brother Voodoo feature arrived fully hatched with amazing pedigree. Len Wein, the scribe who gave us the X-Men's Wolverine, wrote the series, while Marvel master artist John Romita created the character's costume. And, as if those Gil Kane covers with the Romita-designed costume were not enough eye candy, the interior pages boasted art by none other than the astonishing Gene Colan.

Brother Voodoo tells the tale of one Jericho Drumm, after his education in the United States, returning to his native Haiti. It is here where Drumm discovers his twin brother, Daniel Drumm, the local houngan, is dying, a victim of a voodoo sorcerer claiming to be possessed by the spirit of the serpent-god Damballah. Prior to his passing, Daniel Drumm makes his brother vow to visit his mentor, Papa Jambo, who, in turn, becomes Jericho's guru. Studying under the houngan elder, Jericho

Revival!

Both *Strange Tales* and Jericho Drumm live again. Cover to *Strange Tales* #169 (Sept. 1973) by John Romita, Sr.

LEN WEIN

becomes the ultimate houngan. That's when Papa Jambo summons Daniel's spirit from the dead and before he passes away, fuses it to Jericho's. Now known as Brother Voodoo, Jericho, channeling his brother, goes after a priest claiming to be the god Damballah. Assisted by Daniel's spirit, Jericho removes Damballah's wangal artifact, causing Damballah's snakes to turn on him and on his cult army. Brother Voodoo becomes Haiti's houngan supreme, using an expansive mansion as his headquarters. He places the wangal piece in a safe, with its combination known only to Brother Voodoo and his man-servant Bambu.

And with a gradually approaching DUM! DUM! DUM! sound, a brand-new black superhero was born.

FROM "DOCTOR" TO "BROTHER"...

The old story goes that, back at the dawn of the Bronze Age in the early 1970s, Marvel publisher Stan Lee was the engine driving Marvel to hop on board the horror-and-occult bandwagon to compete with DC Comics. He told his second-in-command, Marvel editor-in-chief Roy Thomas, that he wanted a wolfman book and he got one with *Werewolf by Night*. He told Thomas that he wanted a voodoo-tinged practitioner of black magic, and Thomas suggested "Dr. Voodoo." With his flawless instincts, Lee hit just the right note: No, it would be "Brother Voodoo." And the rest, as they say, is…

Wein came aboard shortly after this idea was hatched.

"It was serendipity," Wein says. "I wasn't involved in that conversation. Roy asked me to write the book and I did. I started to do the research on voodoo back when you had to buy books [before there was an Internet]."

Deep within the Marvel Bullpen, the feature's writer and the art director fleshed out the concept visually.

"[John] Romita and I designed the character," Wein says. "We talked about the sense of the character. I designed the 'V' in the circle on the forehead in John's office." Romita echoed that "V"-shape in the white garment slashing across Drumm's sinewy, bare chest.

In conjuring up this bold, new character, Wein drew inspiration from an unlikely archetype devised by syndicated cartoonist Lee Falk.

"I also took a little from the Phantom, the Ghost That Walks, Wein says. "He never dies."

Like Drumm blowing onto an inanimate doll figure of pins and straw, Romita added his deft, streamlined sense of design to breathe life to the barefoot character, dressed in green, skin-tight pants with fringes around the shins, and draped in a cape baring the orange-and-gold coloration of fellow occult anti-hero Son of Satan. A necklace made of predatory animal fangs and a spiraling gold armlace around his right bicep cap off this compelling figure, his visage rendered stern and serious via the skunk-stripe shock of white hair running through his cropped Afro. The intensity emanating from the Wein/Romita-designed character is unavoidable.

Then the character was handed over to the master of atmosphere, penciler Gene Colan, to draw the book's interior. With his well-honed penchant for capturing the creepy and eerie horror superheroics,

The Walking Dead

Glimpses from Brother Voodoo's origin story from *Strange Tales* #169: (top) original art to page 30, courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*), and (bottom) the concluding panels of the issue, with Drumm suiting up for supernatural action. Written by Len Wein, penciled by Gene Colan, inked by Dan Adkins, and colored by Glynis Wein.

221B AT DC: SHERLOCK HOLMES AT DC COMICS™

by John Trumbull

After the final issue of DC Comics' **The Shadow** *in 1975,* writer Denny O'Neil and artist E. R. Cruz teamed up the following month for the adventures of another hawk-nosed crimefighter, one who predated Lamont (The Shadow) Cranston: Sherlock Holmes!

How did writer and editor Denny O'Neil first get the assignment? "Somebody in a suit and tie asked me if I wanted to do it. I no longer remember who." As a Holmes fan, O'Neil was happy to get the job. Was *Sherlock Holmes* a way to keep the creative team behind *The Shadow* together? O'Neil doubts it: "Not likely that the powers-that-be would have worried about keeping a team intact. Most likely: The *Shadow* team happened to be available for the *Holmes* job."

Cover artist Walter Simonson, also a Holmes fan, enjoyed the chance "to do a costume cover instead of a superhero cover. It was kind of fun to do something that was then out of the ordinary." Did Simonson model his Holmes after any specific version? "I don't think I had any particular person in mind, other than trying to capture the look of the character. Watson, I think that was a total fabrication! [*laughs*] As un-generic a head as I could manage!"

DC's *Sherlock Holmes* one-shot (Sept.–Oct. 1975) adapts two of the most famous Holmes stories of all: "The Final Problem" and "The Empty House," the tales where Sir Arthur Conan Doyle killed off, and then resurrected, his most famous creation. Both adventures are adapted into one 18-page issue, allowing for only nine pages per story. As O'Neil recalls, "I think the mashup allowed for more action."

CHAPTER ONE: "THE FINAL PROBLEM"

The issue starts off with a bang—the first five pages contain no less than three attempts on Holmes' life. The opening splash shows Holmes barely dodging out of the way of a two-horse hansom cab—an incident only mentioned in passing in Doyle's original story (interestingly, when the 1980s Jeremy Brett *Holmes* television series adapted "The Final Problem," it also started with Holmes nearly being run over by a hansom cab).

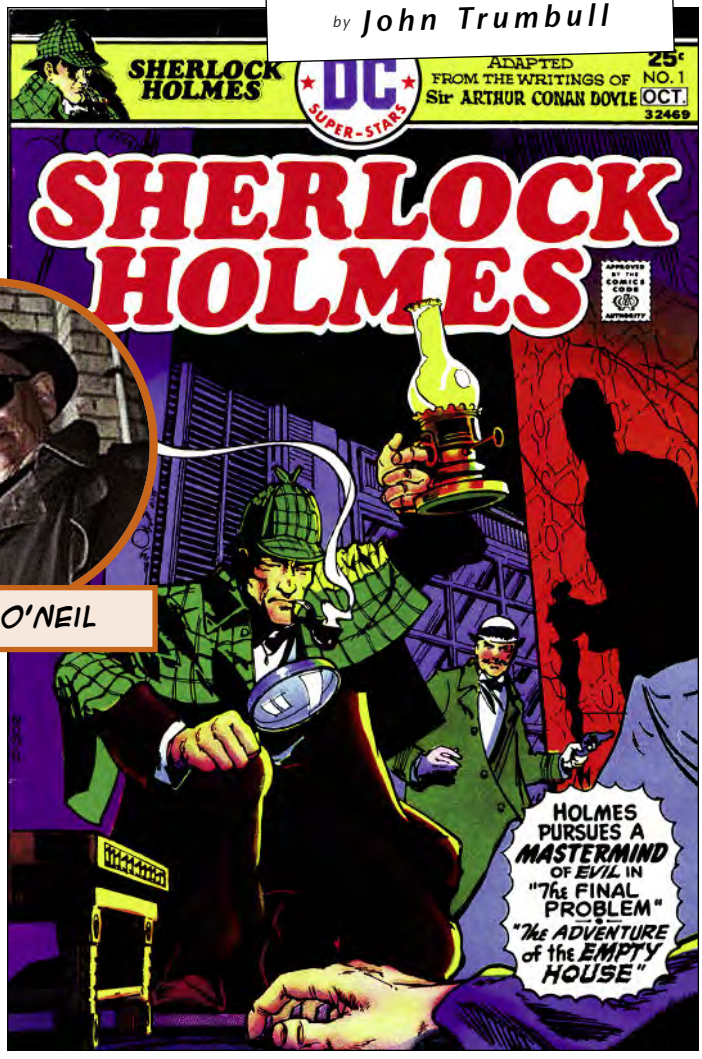
The last of the three assassination attempts occurs within 221B Baker Street, as Holmes' deductive abilities swiftly expose a fake client sent to kill him. Holmes explains to Dr. Watson who is behind the attempts on his life: the insidious Professor James Moriarty, "the organizing power behind the London underworld," who will soon be brought to justice thanks to Holmes' efforts.

DENNIS O'NEIL

The breakneck pace continues as Holmes and Watson travel to Switzerland while the police close in on the professor. At Reichenbach Falls, Watson is lured away from Holmes, and Moriarty reveals himself to the Great Detective. Holmes struggles with the professor at the edge of the falls and they start to topple over into the raging waters below!

CHAPTER TWO: "THE EMPTY HOUSE"

Chapter Two, "The Adventure of the Empty House," begins with the murder of the Honorable Ronald Adair, who is shot in front of a constable with no sound of a gunshot heard. Dr. Watson is called in on the case by the police, much as he was in the Jeremy Brett



Darknight Detective

Walter Simonson's cover to DC's one and only issue of *Sherlock Holmes*, #1 (Sept.–Oct. 1975). Note that interior artist E. R. Cruz's rendition of the title star appears in the banner above the logo.

FlashBacks!

1st ISSUE SPECIAL

It Was No *Showcase* (But It Was Never Meant to Be)

by Jack Abramowitz

DC's original* Showcase *ran a decade and a half, from the late 1950s until the early 1970s. In that time, this highly esteemed tryout title spawned numerous successful series. The Silver Age revivals of the Flash, Green Lantern, and the Atom all launched in *Showcase*. Lois Lane's long-running series debuted in *Showcase*. The Challengers of the Unknown, Adam Strange, Rip Hunter, the Metal Men, the Creeper, and Hawk and Dove all got their start in *Showcase*.

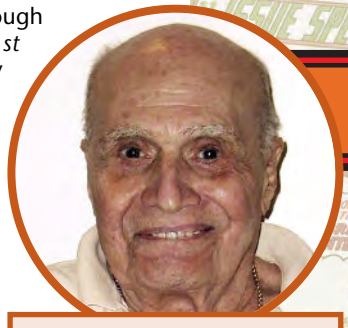
The original run of *Showcase* ended in 1970, after 93 issues. It was briefly revived in 1977 [see article following—***ed.***], and the series' name has been used by DC for a number of other projects since then, including a currently running reprint series of trade paperbacks, *Showcase Presents*.

All-in-all, *Showcase* is a celebrated name in DC Comics history, a renowned title whose characters populated an exciting era.

1st Issue Special? Not so much.

WHO'S ON FIRST?

You see, in 1975–1976, during the hiatus of *Showcase*, DC launched what was ostensibly a new tryout series with the unwieldy name of *1st Issue Special* (*FIS*, for short). *1st Issue Special* introduced a number of one-shot turkeys, including some of Jack Kirby's most bizarre creations at DC. Some of DC's lesser luminaries were also spotlighted, though series never materialized. All told, *1st Issue Special* launched only one truly successful title in its 13-issue run.



CARMINE INFANTINO

It seems, however, that *1st Issue Special* was never intended as a tryout series. Gerry Conway, who wrote the series' last three issues (and who edited those, plus #9) explains:

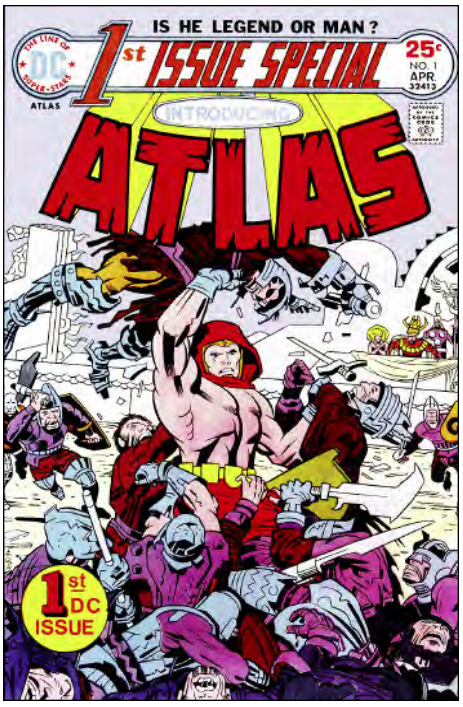
"The whole premise behind the *1st Issue Special*s started, I believe, because [publisher] Carmine [Infantino] wanted something for Jack Kirby and, later, me to do. He came up with this rather brilliant notion that first issues sell better than subsequent issues, so why not put out a magazine that's entirely first issues?

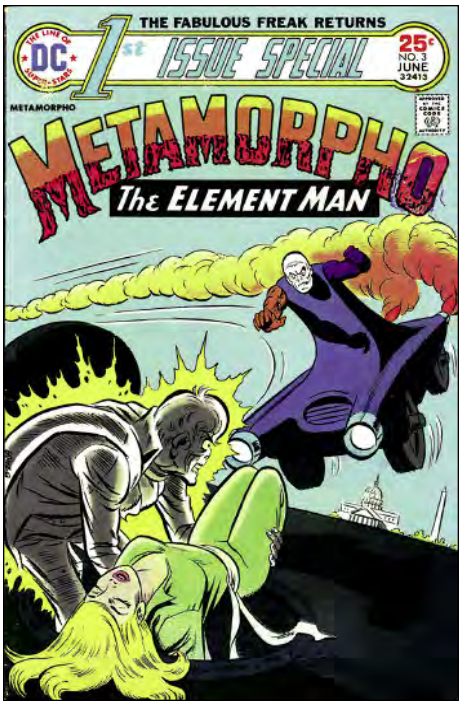
"It was a strange idea, grasping at straws for some way to promote a project or to create some heat around a concept. In many cases, the concepts were created simply to fill the space of another issue for that month, not because we actually were trying to start a new series, although, obviously, we would have liked it if a new series had resulted. Mostly, it was just, 'We have to come up with something for next month—here we are!'

"We used to sit at editorial meetings and [Carmine] would say, 'Who has an idea for *1st Issue Special* next month?' How do you develop a project that has a potential to be a real series within 20 days? You can't. It was not a serious enterprise."

Conway explains the difference between *Showcase* and *1st Issue Special* as follows:

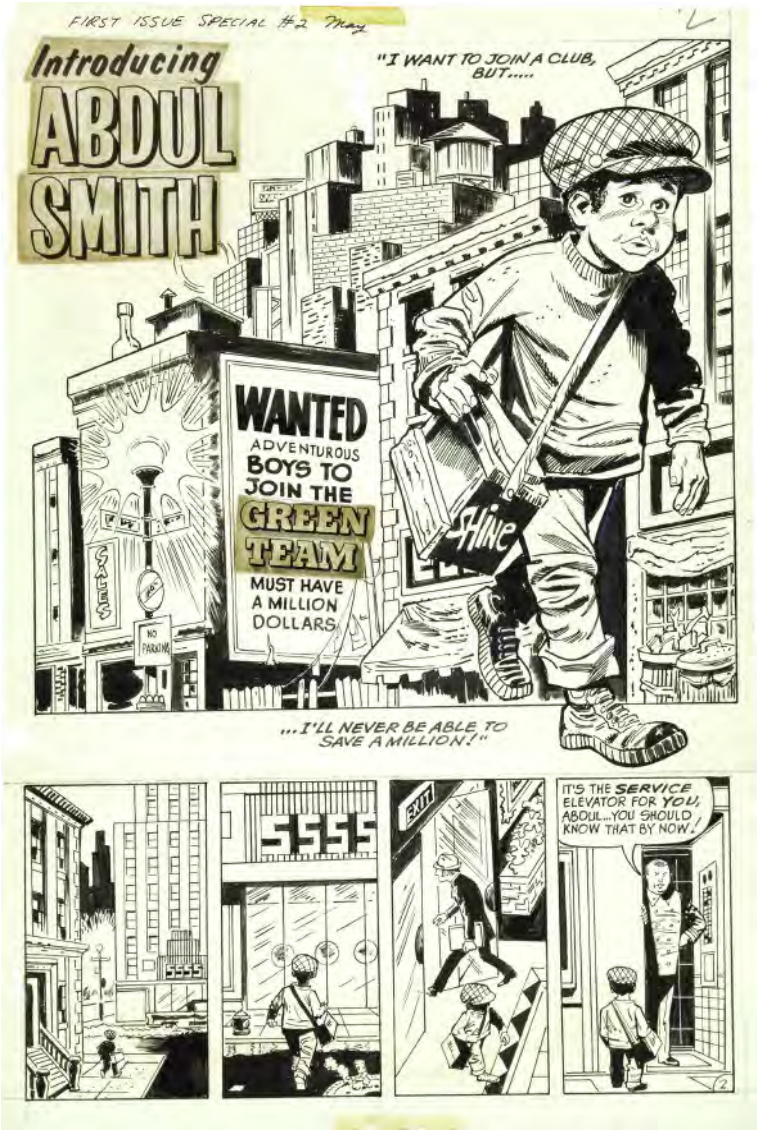
"As an ongoing book, *1st Issue* was never a well-thought-out concept. In comparison to *Showcase* in the 1950s and '60s, *Showcase* produced three issues [of a series] at a time, and it was a bimonthly book, so the publisher could actually get a sense of the concept's potential, creatively and commercially. It took place





Got a Mil to Spare?

(above) *FIS* #1–3's covers: Atlas by Kirby and Berry, Green Team by Grandenetti, and Metamorpho by Fradon. (right) Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*), an original art page by Jerry Grandenetti from the Green Team's debut in *1st Issue Special* #2 (May 1975).



over six months. After the series' second appearance, you knew what your sales figures were and you could start planning to follow up fairly quickly with an ongoing series. But with *1st Issue Special*, unless you actually planned to continue with an ongoing series regardless of sales figures, there was no way to take what you did and springboard it into anything. If you produced an issue and it sold really, really well, you wouldn't know until three or four months later, which meant getting an ongoing series on the schedule would take another two or three months. So it would be six months at minimum between the *1st Issue Special* and the first issue of a regular series, meaning you would have lost any reader momentum or fan following. It would have been pointless."

FROM ATLAS TO THE DINGBATS

A brief rundown of the series:

The first issue (Apr. 1975) featured Atlas, written and penciled by Kirby with inks and lettering provided by D. Bruce Berry. The action occurred in "a time when man was rising out of barbarism." This Atlas is not the titan of myth, but the character demonstrates Kirby's love of the mythic, which he exhibited in such series as *New Gods* and *The Eternals*. A text feature discusses this theme, informing us that "Atlas is but the latest in a long series of visions of the past/present/future/unknown."

The second issue (May 1975) featured the Green Team by Joe Simon and Jerry Grandenetti. This kid group is in the spirit of such teams as the Boy Commandos and the Newsboy Legion, but with one important twist: each of these kids is a millionaire. (A million dollars was still a lot of money then.) Members included

FlashBack

SHOWCASE™ PRESENTS... AGAIN

by Dan Johnson

When* Showcase *was first introduced in 1956, it presented a bold, new concept that revolutionized the industry. What if every issue had the potential to launch the next big hit in comics? That was what *Showcase* strived to do, and for 93 issues, more often than not, it delivered. *Showcase* was the book that launched the Silver Age of Comics and gave fans the Silver Age Flash, Green Lantern, and the Atom, as well as the Challengers of the Unknown, Adam Strange, and the Metal Men, to name just a few.

Given the title's track record, it was practically a no-brainer that DC would bring it back in 1977. "To the extent that we had any really long-term plans, it was probably the hope that the title could be the springboard for launching some new titles," says Paul Levitz, who helped edit and write several issues of *Showcase*'s late-'70s revival. "1977 was an expansionary time at DC, and [new publisher] Jenette Kahn was supportive of trying new things," concurs writer Paul Kupperberg. "There were a lot of new ideas being thrown around [at that time. A lot of books came around, lasted a few issues, and then went away. [DC] decided to create *Showcase* for the very same reason it was originally created, to have a place to experiment, and if [the feature] sold, *great*. If not, they were already on to the next idea."

PAUL LEVITZ

THE NEW DOOM PATROL

The first feature to run in the revival was a reboot of one of DC's biggest cult favorites: the Doom Patrol. "[The Doom Patrol] probably was the DC feature that had been out of publication for a while that writer Paul Kupperberg and I liked best," says Levitz, who edited the team's three-issue run in *Showcase* #94–96 (Aug.–Sept. 1977–Dec. 1977–Jan. 1978). "Looking back, I suspect I also favored the idea of featuring a series that hadn't been in *Showcase* the first time around."

Bringing back the Doom Patrol became the job of writer Paul Kupperberg, who Levitz knew would be perfect for the task. "Paul knows two things about me: I love the *Showcase* title and I love the Doom Patrol," says Kupperberg. "When *Showcase* came back, and Paul was editing the first feature, he called me up and asked me how I would like to do the Doom Patrol. I was all over that!"

As longtime fans of the Doom Patrol know, the team sacrificed themselves at the end of their original series' run and were presumed dead to the world. The question

Maid of Might

Cover to the first of Power Girl's three issues of *Showcase*—issue #97 (Feb. 1978), penciled by Joe Staton and inked by Joe Orlando. Staton joined scribe Paul Levitz inside. Today, Levitz writes the New 52's team of Power Girl and the Huntress in DC Comics' *Worlds' Finest* series.

that faced Kupperberg was how to give the fans more adventures without diminishing that terrific sacrifice? "At the time my thought was that these guys died heroically and wonderfully," says Kupperberg. "It's one of the great comic-book death stories, and we felt we should respect that by keeping them dead. We thought of it as [paying] fanboy respect for the original material."

As Kupperberg also points out, a recently successful reboot at Marvel also weighed heavily with the decision to totally reboot the concept. "At the time, John Byrne and Chris Claremont's *X-Men* was starting to be big," says Kupperberg. "Everyone was taking cues from that as well, especially if you had a book that dealt with freaks and outsiders. I was looking for a diverse group. We certainly wanted to have a woman, we wanted to have a minority of some sort, and we wanted to have a robot. Again, I was looking towards that X-Men model. In retrospect, I should have just brought the original team back and explained [their deaths] away somehow. I do regret the changes I made. It was done in the best intentions and youthful enthusiasm. I even apologized to Arnold Drake once for what I did to his Doom Patrol. He was very kind and understanding."

The one original team member who returned was Robotman. The new team members included Celsius, who could generate heat and cold blasts and who was the secret wife of the Chief; Negative Woman, who now possessed the energy being that had once been under the control of Negative Man; and Tempest, who was capable of firing energy blasts from his hands.

Artist Joe Staton joined Kupperberg in bringing the new Doom Patrol to life and was responsible for the team's look. "It was the days before Google, so looking for reference was not so easy," says Staton. " I had a bunch of *National Geographic* magazines that had been my wife's dad's, so I found some articles about India and used some photos there was the model for Celsius."

Staton drew inspiration for Robotman's redesign from one of his more recent projects. "John Byrne and I had both worked at Charlton comics earlier, and his robot character ROG-2000 had run as a backup in my book, *E-Man*," says Staton. "As a joke, I very obviously patterned the new Robotman on ROG. I'm afraid that John didn't find it especially funny, judging by a cover he did for *The Comics Reader* showing ROG looking in the mirror and seeing Robotman."

PAUL KUPPERBERG

The Doom Patrol feature would mark a continuing partnership and friendship between Kupperberg and Staton, as well as a running joke regarding one of the villains in the story, the Cossack. "What marks this job [for me] is the Cossack on the flying horse and my general inability to draw horses very well," says Staton. "Kupperberg made definite fun of my horse and ever since then, when we work together, the first thing I ask him is, 'Are there horsies'? I still can't draw horses."

POWER GIRL

Power Girl took center stage in *Showcase* #97–99 (Feb.–Apr. 1978). Giving Earth-Two's Maid of Might a chance to shine in a solo stories was a natural. "Power Girl was one of the more popular characters in the 1970's *All-Star Comics* run," says Levitz, who wrote Power Girl's *Showcase* outing. "[She] also benefited from the fact that Joe Orlando had initially designed her and was fond of her. At the time, Joe was in charge of DC editorial. Jenette [Kahn, DC publisher] was a fan of my work on *All-Star*, and in particular of how I wrote female characters, so she would have been very supportive as well."

Once again, Staton was asked to do artwork for this feature. "I was the regular guy on the [Justice Society in *All-Star Comics*], so she fell my way," says Staton. "I don't recall there being any mention of anybody else being considered for her stories, and I would probably have been offended if there had been." Besides having Staton pencil this issue, *Showcase* #97 had another especially auspicious honor: "One thing to note is that Paul officially worked for Joe Orlando back then," says Staton. "I would see Joe quite a bit, both in Paul's office and often just to hang with the guy I saw as my link to the glory days of EC Comics.

No Horsies Allowed!

Robotman meets the new Doom Patrol on this Joe Staton-drawn original page from *Showcase* #94.

TIMMY TIME™

by Mark Arnold

During the course of the history of Richie Rich, Richie teamed up with Casper, Little Dot, Jackie Jokers, Reggie, Dollar, Professor Keenbean, Mayda Munny, Gloria, Cadbury, and even the New Kids on the Block.

But there's one team-up partner that befuddles even Harvey Comics scholars: short-lived star Timmy Time.

In the late '70s, after original Harvey Comics founder Alfred Harvey was ousted from his position, the decision was made to increase the number of titles featuring the Poor Little Rich Boy. In the process, some new characters needed to be created and to fill the bill, many characters were teamed with Richie.

Prior to this, Alfred Harvey had given his four sons a chance to create some new characters, and each one made an attempt with varying results. Son Alan created Komix Kidd, the greatest comic collector in the world, who appeared only in a single-panel ad congratulating Adam Awards, the creation of Harvey's son Adam. Son Russel created Billy Bellhops, who also appeared in this panel and a cover of one issue of *Richie Rich Jackpots* and headlined his own one-shot *Richie Rich and Billy Bellhops*. But what about Timmy Time?

ERNIE COLÓN

Timmy Time began life as Mark Time, a creation of Ernie Colón, who drew many of Richie Rich's adventures. Colón was always a fan of Herge's *Tintin*: "My most important contribution was based on my love for *Les Aventures de Tin Tin*, a hugely successful series about a young reporter who traveled the world in his adventures. Richie Rich was stuck in this mansion and its umpteen-thousand acres, showing his penniless, raggedy-ass friends all his wonderful possessions: huge piggy banks, giant vaults, and dams bursting with cascades of money. I wanted him to travel and have a variety of encounters and get away from the other mainstay—two kidnappers hiding behind a bush."

Colón would volley between comic-book companies due to the pay and his frustration at times with his work at Harvey, ending up doing more challenging material for Marvel. "The first assignment Marvel gave me was *John Carter, Warlord of Mars*," he recalls. "I loved the change and, apart from having to elongate some characters that seemed to have legs like Richie, the stuff didn't look too bad." This project was more in line with what Colón envisioned for Mark.

Somehow, Mark Time was changed to the alliterative Timmy Time, much to Colón's chagrin, and he was also retooled to team up with Richie Rich, or at least be spun off from it, after originally being given its own title. The changes added to Colón's frustration and eventual abandonment of the project.

The resulting sole issue of *Richie Rich Meets Timmy Time* was issued with a September 1977 cover date. The story concerns Timmy the time traveler encountering Richie Rich and his girlfriend, Gloria, on the beach. Timmy has a robot friend named Traveler who transports them all briefly back in time before returning to the present, for no real purpose other than to show Richie and Gloria that they can time-travel.

It's About Time!

Ernie Colón artwork graces the cover to the first (and, it turned out, only) issue of *Richie Rich Meets Timmy Time*. The futuristic spin-off was originally named Mark Time (hey, he coulda been Justin Time…).

ONE-HIT WONDERS

BLINDSIDED TOGETHER

JASON MONARCH CREATOR AND CREATION PLAY THE HAND THEY'RE DEALT

by Douglas R. Kelly

You don't have to tell Dave Lillard that life occasionally imitates art. The Michigan-based writer and publisher of *Jason Monarch* is very familiar with the concept. "I had this idea to take a character who didn't know who he really was," says Lillard, "and suddenly having it all thrown on him, that he's heir to an empire that he never even knew existed. He's taken from his normal, everyday world and thrown into this far-flung action/adventure life that he never expected and is not prepared for."

DAVE LILLARD

While he may not have battled aliens in outer space the way his creation did, Lillard had his world turned upside down just as *Jason Monarch* was hitting the market. He was thrown into a life he never expected, resulting in his book unintentionally becoming a one-shot.

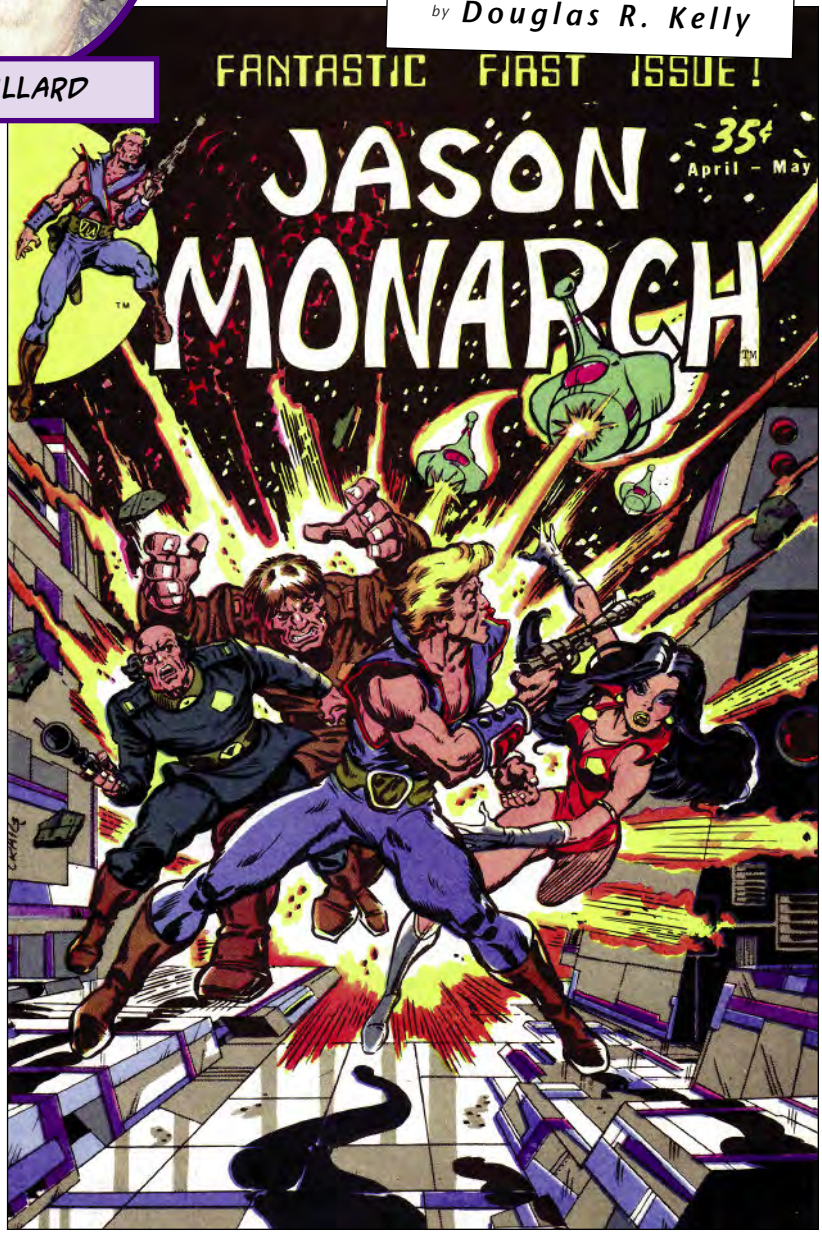
HIDDEN HERITAGE

In the late 1970s, Lillard was noodling with an idea for a science-fiction story. "I had in mind a character who was raised by ordinary people, without the knowledge that his family was not of this earth."

The first and only issue of *Jason Monarch* was cover-dated Apr.–May 1979, published by Lillard's Omnibus Publishing Company. Although the cover was in color, the interior was printed in black and white. "It was just a matter of money," says Lillard. "I really wanted to go color [throughout], but I didn't have the money [to do that]. At that time, it was much more expensive than it is today."

The main story, a 16-page entry penciled and inked by Jim Craig, focuses on Jason Monarch, a grad student at a small college on the shore of Lake Michigan. Things get started with Monarch being abducted from campus and taken to see "the boss," who turns out to be his grandfather. Monarch doesn't recognize the man, nor does he believe, at least initially, what the old man tells him about their family.

It seems that Monarch's parents died in an accident when he was very young. The three of them were traveling together at the time the accident occurred. The old man tells Monarch that although he survived the accident, he doesn't recall his early childhood due to the trauma. The old man escorts Monarch down to a huge cavern containing all kinds of technology and, to Monarch's shock, tells him that the starship housed in the cavern is a part of the legacy left to him by his father. The old man introduces him to the ship's captain, a beautiful woman to whom Monarch is immediately attracted.



Too Bad It's Not in 3-D, Man

3-D Man (in *Marvel Premiere*) artist Jim Craig teamed with writer Dave Lillard for Omnibus Publishing Company's *Jason Monarch* #1 (Apr.–May 1979). This cover is the only color interpretation of the characters and their story. Cover colors by Craig.

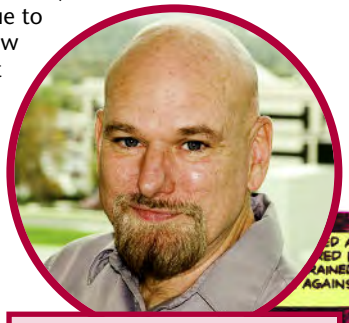
ONE-HIT WONDERS

Swashbuckled and Hornswoggled

THE ALL-TOO-BRIEF CAREER OF THE SWASHBUCKLER

by Chris Franklin

My mom would often bring a stack of comics for me home with her, stopping at the local drug store on her way from work. One such time she picked up *Detective Comics* #493 (Aug. 1980). My five-year-old self was a bit puzzled as I flipped through the thick Dollar Comic. Some guy I'd never seen before was working with Batman: a man in a red, full-face mask, laced vest, gauntlets, and carrying a staff. This wasn't *The Brave and the Bold*! Batman never teamed up with anyone in *Detective*! Who was this guy? Why was there a floating head of that cowboy guy from *World's Finest* in this story? What was the deal?



CARY BURKETT

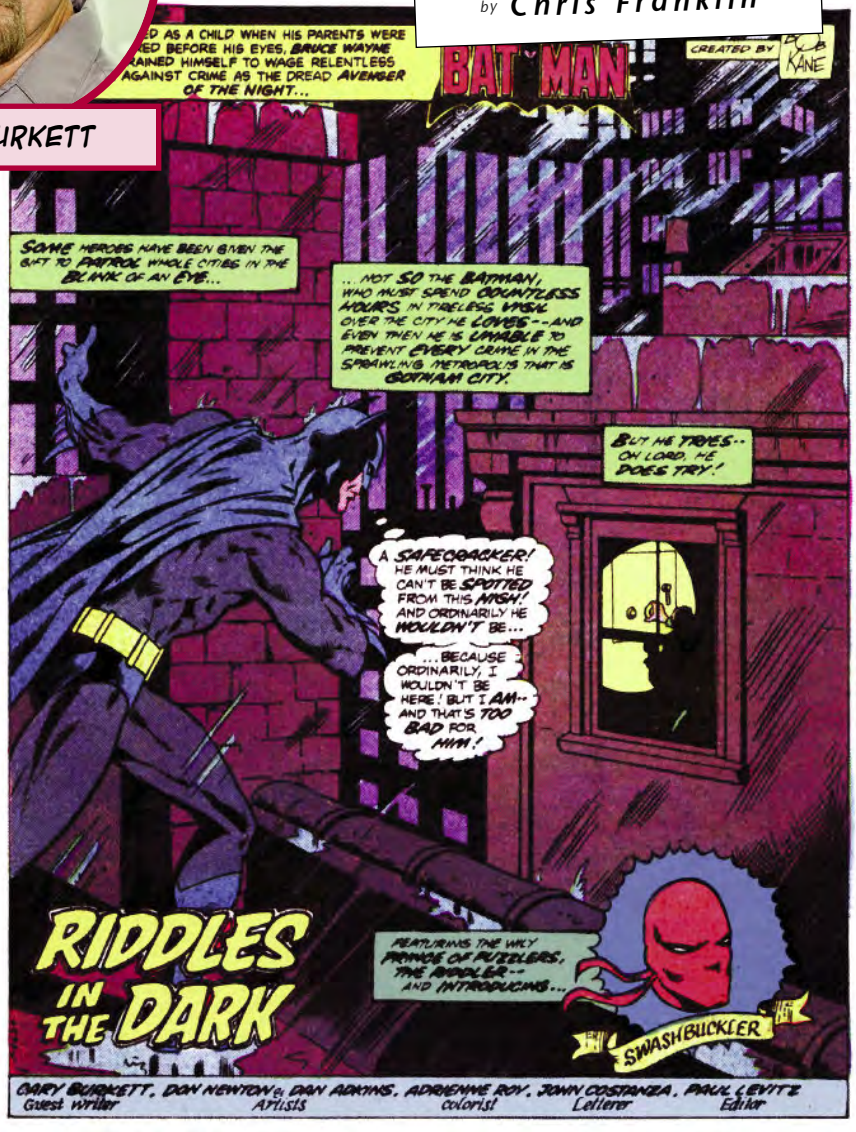
Since I couldn't read as of yet (remember, I was just five), my mother read the issue to me. I learned that this guy was a new hero being introduced for the first time—named the Swashbuckler. In "Riddles in the Dark" by Cary Burkett, Don Newton, and Dan Adkins, Batman faces his old enemy, the Riddler, following him from Gotham to Houston, Texas. There he meets the Swashbuckler, who introduces himself as the nephew of the Western-themed crimefighter known as the Vigilante (the floating cowboy head I mentioned). Swashbuckler aids Batman in nabbing the Riddler by the story's end.

I was too young to completely grasp the concept of a "First Appearance," but there was something undeniably cool about being in on a character's introduction. I assumed Swashbuckler would show up again soon, maybe in his own series in *Detective*. The title soon shifted back to a normal-sized comic, with only Batman and Batgirl remaining, so no Swashbuckler there. Maybe he'd end up in *The Brave and the Bold* and team up with Batman again? Nope. Over the next five years or so I kept expecting him to show up *somewhere*.

When DC Comics started both *Crisis on Infinite Earths* and *Who's Who* in 1985, the buzz was that these two series would feature nearly everyone who ever appeared in a DC issue. They came close. But guess who they left out? Long-forgotten characters like Automan received *Who's Who* entries, but no Swashbuckler. I knew then that this character I met in my formative years was never coming back.

It's ironic that the character's lone appearance would feature the Riddler. The Swashbuckler was an enigma himself. Why the one appearance? Why Houston, Texas? Why the Vigilante?

The one man who knows those answers is the character's creator, and the story's author, Cary Burkett:



Introducing … Swashbuckler

Detail from the splash page of *Detective Comics* #493, featuring the sole appearance of writer Cary Burkett's Swashbuckler. Art by Don Newton and Dan Adkins, with colors by Adrienne Roy.

MARVEL'S OFFBEAT '80s ONE-SHOTS

THE NO-PRIZE BOOK, THE FUMETTI BOOK, AND THE GENERIC COMIC

by Joe Rausch

During the first half of the 1980s, Marvel Comics—under then-editor-in-chief Jim Shooter—was willing to take chances. Big chances.

The company had just moved from Madison Avenue to larger offices on Park Avenue South, and the influx of young, new editors, writers, and artists fostered a creative environment in the Marvel Bullpen. Many of the company's most memorable runs on comics like *Daredevil*, *Thor*, and *Iron Man* happened in the first half of the decade.

But the Bullpen's editors—and Shooter—were more willing to publish a variety of strange, unique, and offbeat one-shot issues that have not been seen since, and three stand above the rest for their irreverent nature.

THE MARVEL NO-PRIZE BOOK

In late 1982, Marvel produced *The Marvel No-Prize Book* #1 (Jan. 1983). The No-Prize "award" was originally given out by staff to readers who spotted continuity errors in early Marvel books, but evolved to awarding readers who could best explain why those continuity errors were not, in fact, errors at all.

Organized by Jim Owsley, *The No-Prize Book* highlighted many of Marvel's earliest production blunders and was, itself, an intentional production blunder, with the cover art printed upside-down.

Described by Shooter on his personal blog as having a sense of humor that was "outrageous" and "scandalous" before Owsley even warmed up, the book included 59 errors from throughout the company's comics until that point. Highlights included the reference to Peter Parker as "Peter Palmer" in *Amazing Spider-Man* #1 and Reed Richards with two left hands in *Fantastic Four* #88.

ANN NOCENTI

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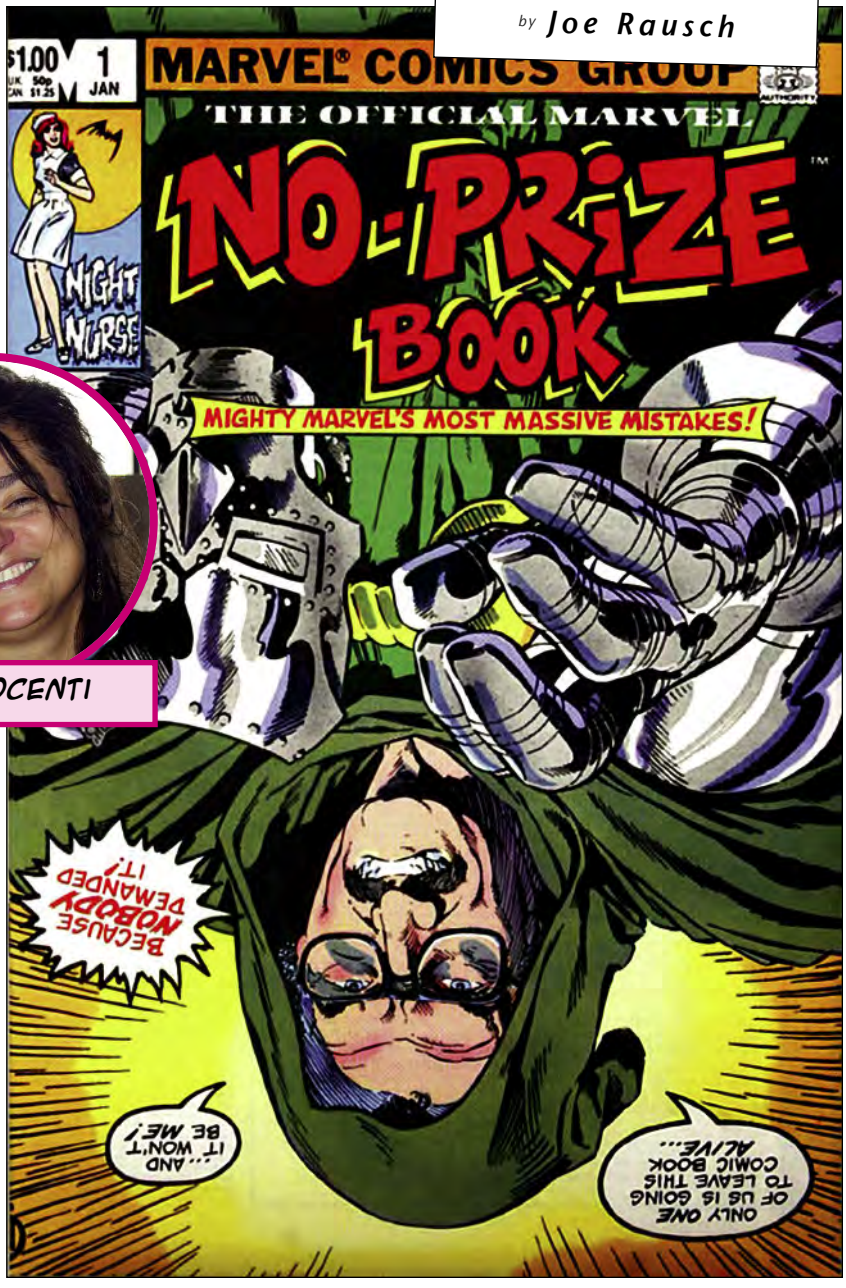
"There was this fun spirit to Marvel Comics back then," says Ann Nocenti, more recently the writer of DC Comics' *Catwoman* and *Katana*. "There was this sense of, 'Yeah, what the hell, let's do it!' if an idea sounded interesting."

THE MARVEL FUMETTI BOOK

At the time, Nocenti was part of that new Marvel talent wave and—along with Louise Jones [Simonson]—oversaw the production of *The Marvel Fumetti Book* #1 (Apr. 1984). Designed to mimic the popular photo-novel comics from Europe and South America, the issue consists of 18 short stories involving



"Lest We Should Goof..." Michael Golden art and Stan Lee as Dr. Doom grace the cover of *The Marvel No-Prize Book* #1 (Jan. 1983).

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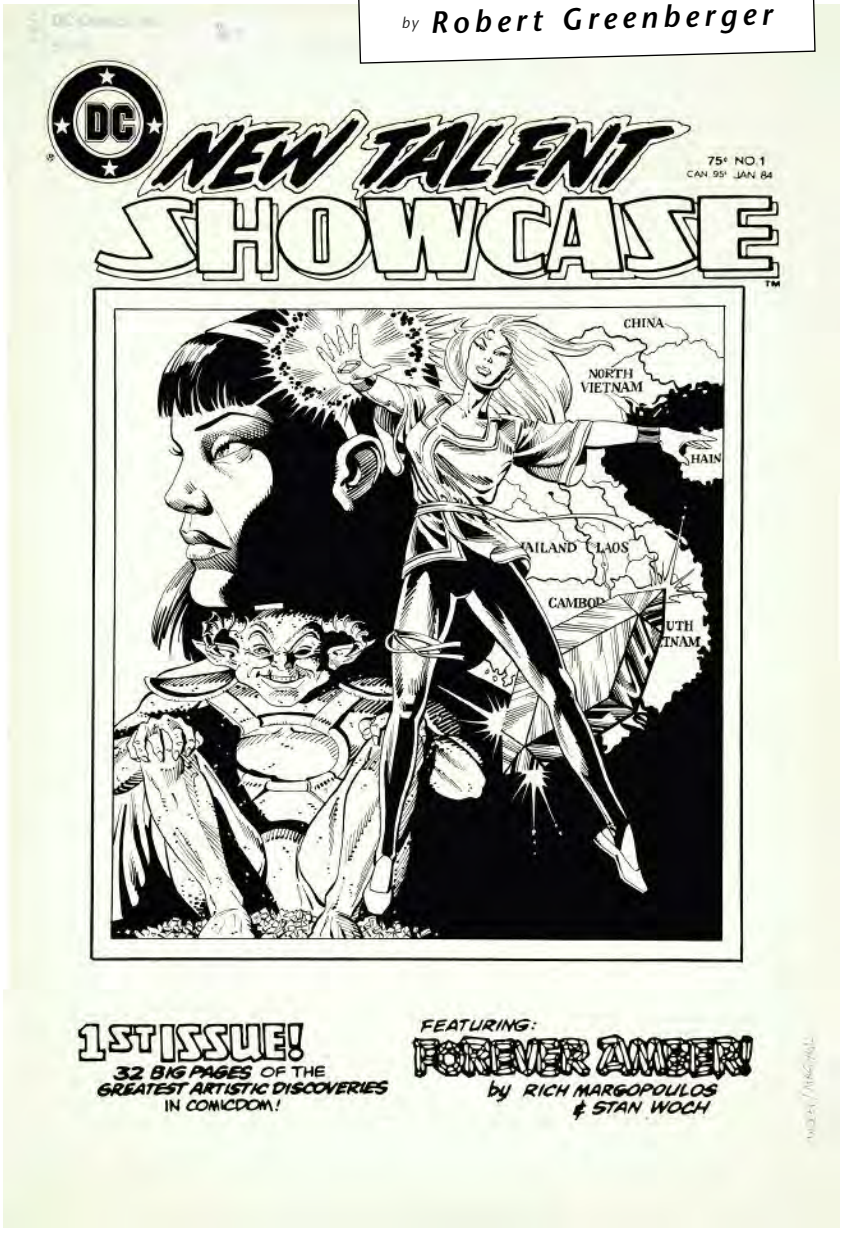
NEW TALENT and BONUS BABIES

DC Comics' attempts to find and train the next generation of writers and artists worked better than you may recall

by Robert Greenberger



FlashBacks

By the late 1960s, fans were champing at the bit to get their foot in the door and produce work for the comics they loved reading and collecting.

Some got lucky when Charlton Comics had a contest and writers Roy Thomas and Dave Kaler made their first professional sales. Others were invited by editors Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz to pitch stories, and letterhacks Cary Bates and Mike Friedrich made the leap to from fan to professional.

In 1968, newly arrived DC Comics editor Joe Orlando revamped *House of Mystery*, while down the hall, Dick Giordano, fresh from Charlton, launched *The Witching Hour*. Initially, Joe and Dick used existing talent, but within a year they began to feature newcomers including Marv Wolfman, Gerry Conway, and Bernie Wrightson. Together, they opened the doors for a new generation of talent.

During the 1970s, the anthology titles were where readers would find the first work from newcomers as they learned the ropes. When Joe Kubert established his comic art school, he struck a deal for his students to produce backups for *Sgt. Rock*, letting even more get a moment in the spotlight. Stephen Bissette, Rick Veitch, Tom Yeates, and Timothy Truman all made their debuts in these short tales.

It should be noted that in 1981, one non-DC tryout book was the George Wildman-edited *Charlton Bullseye*, which lasted just ten issues. As described in the publisher's initial press release in 1980, an artist had arrived at the Charlton offices and offered to have them publish his work for free "in hopes of establishing enough pro credits to impress the Big Two." Inspired, Charlton decided to create a title that would exclusively serve that purpose. Charlton would publish pro-quality work for free, returning original art after publication and allowing creators to retain copyright to their original characters (while Charlton retained copyrights to any of their characters that were used). Each contributor received 50 comp copies of the issue in which *their* work appeared.

NEW TALENT SHOWCASE

By 1980, though, DC's anthology titles were featuring regular series (i.e., I …Vampire in *House of Mystery* and G.I. Robot in *W*
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