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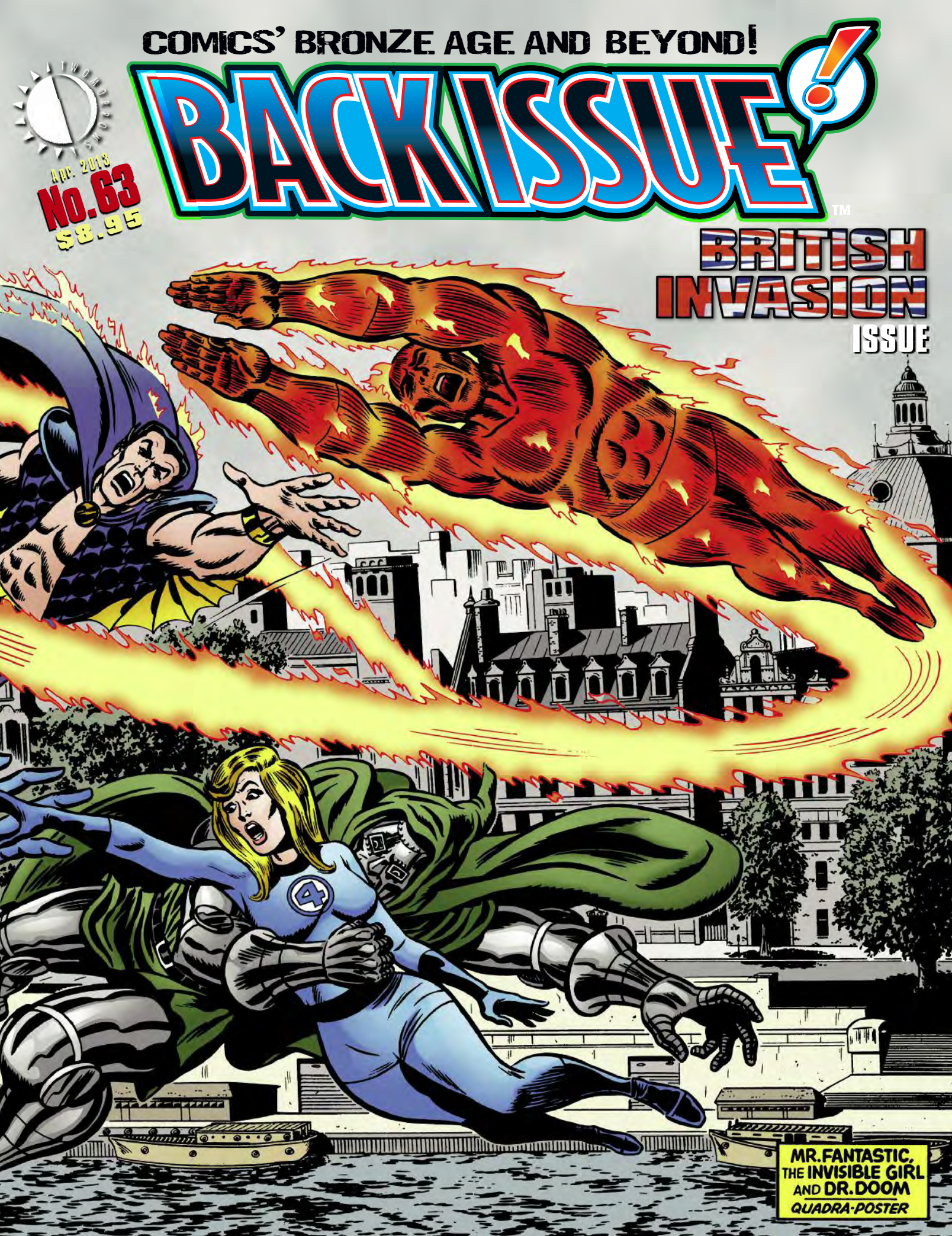

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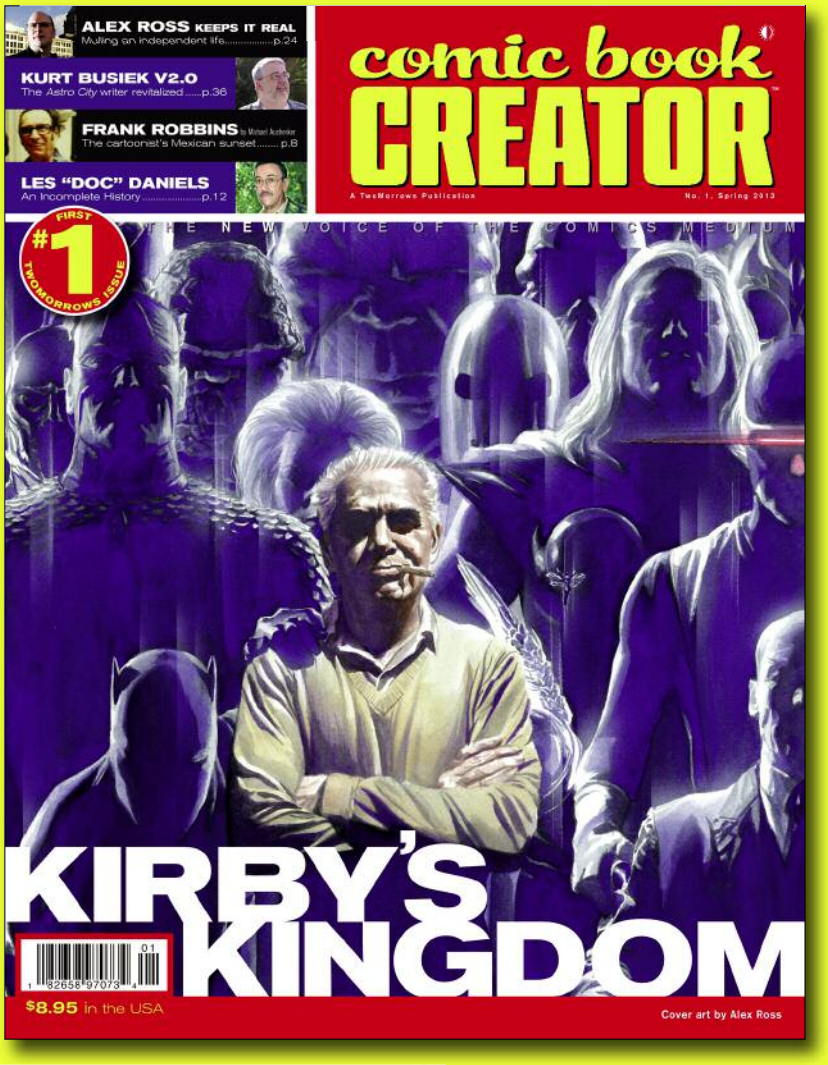

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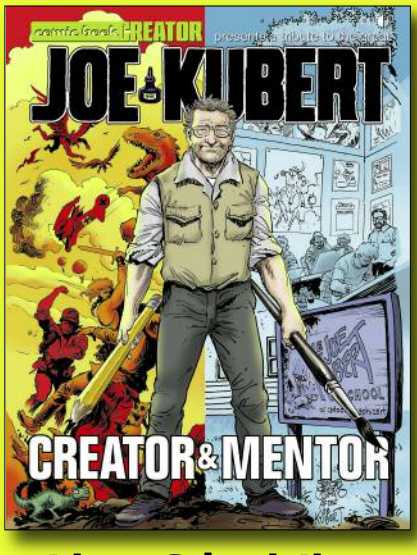

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Rob Kirby
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BACK ISSUE
Comics' Bronze Age and Beyond!

British Invasion Issue!

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Detail from the cover of *Captain Britain* #1 (Jan. 1985). Art by Alan Davis. TM & © Marvel Characters, Inc.

THE MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVEL UK!

(or: How the Second Battle of Britain was Won)

by Rob Kirby

In the post–war years, Marvel Comics had gradually been building an international presence through the licensing of its strips to foreign publishers. Since 1951, various British companies had been making good use of this treasure trove, but it was all very scattershot. Suddenly, in the midst of a huge expansion in America in the early 1970s, Marvel suddenly put an end to this and began planning its own invasion with a line of comics created especially for the UK domestic market. The big puzzle has always been why they did this, and until very recently answers remained elusive.

There was undoubtedly a financial gain to be had through advertising and the reach that publishing directly in the UK would grant Marvel, and with Marvel head editor Stan Lee being such an Anglophile, he would have been well aware that their stories didn't require any major translation (bar the odd Anglicisation) to be intelligible to a British audience. But neither of those reasons alone seemed enough. There had to be more to it than that, and there was … although it's taken me nearly two decades to finally uncover why the invasion happened!

WHY MARVEL INVADED BRITAIN

I grew up with "British Marvel," but this was a fan nickname and was never used officially. Throughout the 1970s they were Marvel Comics International, and from 1979 became Marvel Comics Ltd., complete with a new logo surrounded by the British flag. They didn't use Marvel UK as a company logo until later in the 1980s. I'd eagerly clambered on board back in early 1976 after seeing Spider-Man's origin story on television that previous summer. I eventually found a new-style copy of *Super Spider-Man with the Superheroes* and was hooked by it, so much so that I continue to buy the UK comics to this day; a perspective that then gave me an unusually complete overview when I decided to index the bulk of their output back in 1990.

I'd become curious, you see, as to what hadn't been published over here and wanted to purchase any missing US stories that caught my interest. It was a lot of fun, but it did seem a shame to have generated such a huge pile of notes just for a want list. With nothing at all about Marvel UK in print, and precious little about US Marvel back then, either, it wasn't long before I decided to develop my initial work into a book. Obviously, I've only been able to touch on some of the topics that are covered in far more detail over many paragraphs, pages, and even chapters in my book *From Cents to Pence – The Definitive Guide to Marvel's British Comics* (1951–2011), but it's my hope that this feature will suitably whet your appetite and encourage you to explore the company further.

Marvel had previously had some presence in Britain, and since 1951 various UK publishers from

EIC in the UK

(above) The Thing pitches for a six-pack of posters sold through Marvel UK titles. (inset) Then-Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter visits the Marvel UK offices in 1987. (left to right) Wilf Prigmore, John Tomlinson, Richard Starkings, Spider-Woman (Wendy King), Dave Hine, Kev Hopgood, James Hill, Mike Collins, Jeff Anderson, Shooter, John Gatehouse, Tim Perkins, Stephen Baskerville, Ian Mennell, Simon Furman. Photo courtesy of Michael Aushenker. Thanks John Tomlinson for identifying the depicted parties. Special thanks to Steve White and Rob Kirby.

Strato to Thorpe and Porter, Len Miller, Alan Class, and latterly Odhams had all published various stories from the back catalogues of Atlas and Marvel. But apart from Odhams' late-1960s line of Marvel-orientated "Power Comics," this abundant source of strip material was merely treated as a cheap and cheerful reservoir for filling up the pages of a comic while keeping the costs of production and origination as low as possible.

What is far less well known is that black-and-white hard-copy prints used by the publishers were being supplied by an American company called Transworld Feature Syndicate. Understandably, few people knew anything about how they operated, never mind how extensive their involvement with Marvel was as the catalyst igniting their eventual British explosion in 1972. And this mystery might have remained so had the name Raymond Wergan not leapt out at me from the pages of *The Times* newspaper one Saturday in 2011. I'd long ago exhausted the few leads I had in trying to locate a Ray Wergan who's been involved with Transworld in London, so I quickly sent an email to the editor of their Feedback column, hoping they might pass a message on. When a new email marked Marvel UK popped up a few days later, I knew my hunch had been correct, and it heralded the start of a continuing correspondence!

IT'S A TRANSWORLD

To begin with, there were actually two separate businesses sharing the Transworld name, along with a network of subsidiary offices spread across the world. Originally set up by Ida Landau in the late 1940s, by the early 1960s the New York-based Transworld Feature Syndicate Inc. was being run by her lawyer son Albert. Initially "handling comics, teenage magazine stories and pictures, as well as fiction illustrations for women's magazines," Wergan tells me that by the turn of the 1960s they were targeting the growing comics market too. "One of Al Landau's clients was Martin Goodman

Back in the Paste-Up Days

Original letters page to *Avengers* (1st Series) #44 (July 20th, 1974). Courtesy of Rob Kirby.

US EDITORS ON THE UK COMICS

1972–1974 – Jim Salicrup
1974 – Mark Hanerfield (for a matter of weeks helping Marvel out of a jam, and it's thought that it was Mark who suggested converting the Killraven stories for the *Planet of the Apes* weekly to use)
1974–1976 – Duffy Vohland
1976 – David Warner
1976–1978 – Larry Lieber

US ASSOCIATE EDITORS ON THE UK COMICS

1972–1974 – Tony Isabella
(preceded by one or two interns, and then by Steve Gerber, although none were ever credited in print)
1974 – Len Wein
1974 – Pete Iro
1974 – Scott Edelman
1975–1976 – Jay Boyar
1976 – Duffy Vohland
1976–1977 – Bob Budiansky
1977–1978 – Danny Fingeroth (who continued to have an involvement with the UK comics, after production shifted over completely to the UK under the aegis of Dez Skinn in late 1978, as their New York liaison man)

This focus continued to a lesser degree thereafter until the demise of *FOOM* with #22 in the autumn of 1978. A final, British-produced edition was mooted in 1979, and sadly #23 was never produced.

With a foothold firmly established in Britain, Marvel could now start selling readers exclusive merchandise just as they did back home. This kept a succession of part-time employees increasingly busy throughout the rest of the decade dispatching back issues, prizes to competition winners, new issues of *FOOM*, and a variety of books, T-shirts, and posters, as well as several different series of (pin) badges and clothing patches, too.

As more British weeklies were introduced, so the demand for creative help increased to handle the rapid turnaround of artwork required for covers (for those weeks when a US one wasn't available), recap pages (to preface the latter segments of serialized stories), and poster pages ("pin-ups"). Original American covers from one of the supporting strips in a comic were rarely pressed into service by the UK weeklies.

Fortunately, with no shortage of talent waiting for their chance to break into the industry, and an impressive roll call of graduates heeded the call, including Jim Starlin and Al Milgrom (sometimes collectively credited as Gemini, a pun on "Jim-and-I" coined by Milgrom); the equally prolific Ron Wilson and Pablo Marcos; and other future names such as John Romita, Jr., Dave Hunt, Keith Pollard, Mike Nasser, Carl Potts, Bob Budiansky, and Dave Wenzel. [***Editor's note:*** An interview with Starlin regarding his Marvel UK work follows in this very issue!]

Of course, the newbies didn't have it all their own way, with the work of such established professionals as John Buscema, Gil Kane, John Romita, Sr., Neal Adams, Larry Lieber, and Carmine Infantino also gracing the interior pages and covers of the British comics during their first decade. Lieber once told me that after he became editor, and later a regular UK cover artist, he was more than happy to hand out assignments to anyone who needed the extra work.

THE EXPANSION BEGINS

By 1973 the success of *The Mighty World of Marvel* had spawned a sister title as Spider-Man swung across into *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* (1st Series) (#1 dated: February 17th, 1973), which Robert Menzies looks at in greater detail later in this issue. Incidentally, these "series" designations are mine, as an aid to distinguishing between continuing series that featured different titles over the years, and different series featuring the same character (in 2013, for instance, *The Astonishing Spider-Man* is now his eighth UK series, sharing that title with two preceding volumes).

By now London was in desperate need of a production artist to help with the increased workload that a second weekly comic was bringing. Quite by chance, freelance artist Alan Murray (previously an advertising

Make Room for FOOM

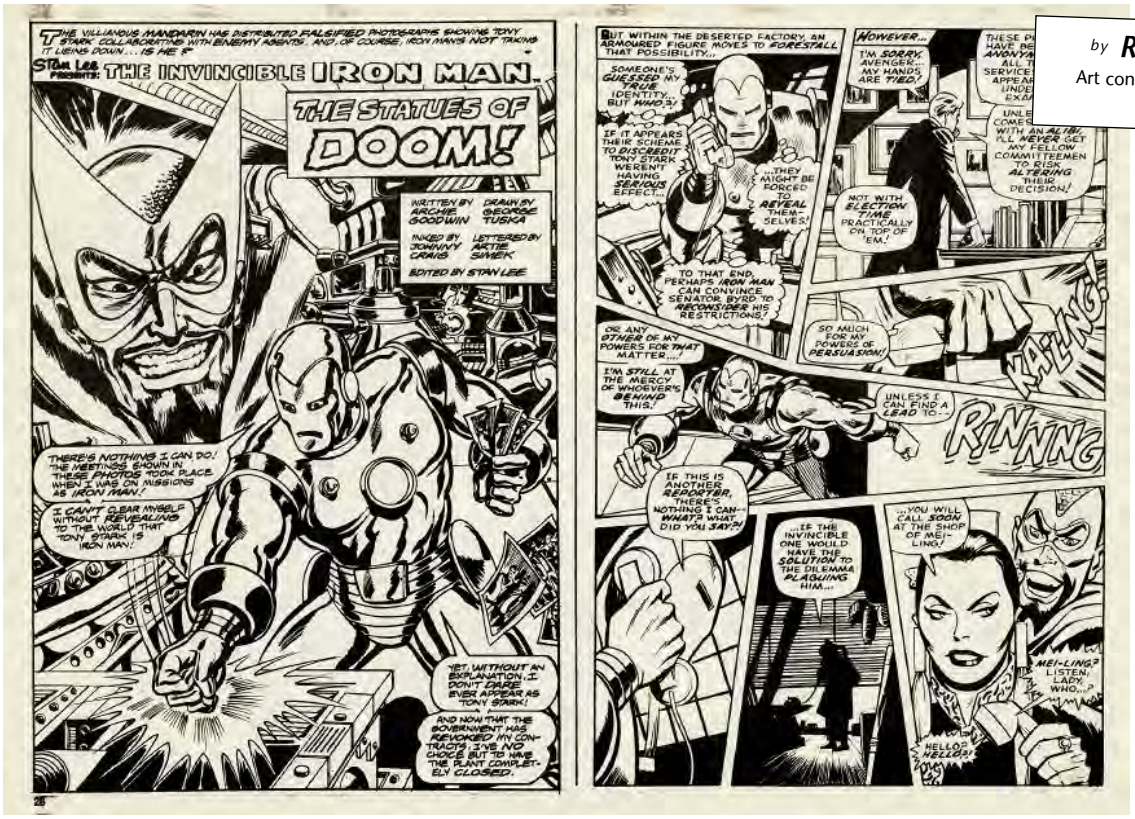
(top) Mighty Marvel Mailbag art, and (center) a FOOM advert from *MWOM* #22, courtesy of Rob Kirby. (bottom) Original cover art, by Ron Wilson and Mike Esposito, from 1973's *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* #41. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

FlashBack!

THE LAUNCH OF THE TITANIC FORMAT:

MARVEL UK'S LANDSCAPE COMICS

by Robert Menzies
Art contributions and caprions provided by the author.



A Look Inside

An example of the standard interior layout of a landscape comic. This page from *SSM* #164 has a recap image not present in *Iron Man* vol.1 #10.

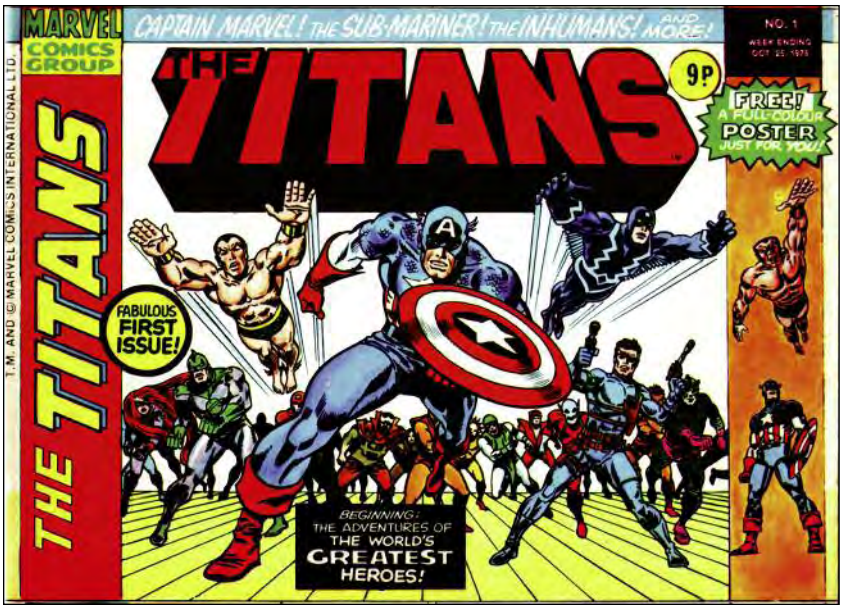
For most British children during the 1970s, an original US Marvel comic book was as rare as a quiet day in the life of Peter Parker. Thankfully, as Rob Kirby has explained in this issue's previous article, Marvel UK produced a flotilla of weekly anthologies that reprinted Silver and Bronze Age classics from the Marvel Comics library.

One of these titles was *Spider-Man Comics Weekly* (*SMCW*). Initially printed in the standard portrait format, with one page of *SMCW* equal to one page of an American monthly, *SMCW* remained that way until it adopted the distinctive landscape format in early 1976.

This new orientation first involved rotating a UK comic book 90 degrees onto its side. Then, each page of art was reduced to roughly A5 size so that two pages would fit side-by-side onto one page of the new format. Previously, the pages of art in a British comic book were printed at a larger size than the American editions to accommodate the traditional magazine-sized pages of a British comic (8" x 11"/20.5 cm. x 28 cm.). Now, the reverse was the case, and the British art was now smaller. Effectively, for a 1p increase in price to 9p, the amount of reading had doubled without changing the number of pages.

The identity of the person who first suggested the landscape format is a mystery, as is the reasoning behind its introduction, although it was certainly discussed during the weekly transatlantic conferences between Marvel's New York and London offices. It is distinctly possible that its introduction may have been influenced by the then-current economic situation. Britain was in the midst of a recession, and a bumper, value-for-money comic would have seemed more palatable to parents tightening the purse strings and to kids limited to one comic per week (like this writer). The grim financial backdrop was acknowledged in the comics themselves. In a *Spidey* letters page from May 29th, 1976, the editor said that reducing the weeklies from seven to six was "forced upon us by the present economic cloud that most of the world is passing through."

As it happened, the title that introduced this innovative format was not *SMCW* but an entirely new creation, *The Titans*. Shoehorned into the first issue of *The Titans*, released in October of 1975, were the Inhumans; Captain America; Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.; Sub-Mariner; and Captain Marvel. Even allowing for the fact that these stories were divided into episodes of six to eight pages, this was an incredible cast for one comic. Unsurprisingly, the new orientation soon became known as the "Titanic" format.



Early the following year, *SMCW* #156 (February 7, 1976) had this enigmatic announcement: "Coming next week, BIG NEWS of a Super Spidey Sensation!" The following issue revealed all:

> Move with Marvel as the Comic revolution continues! As the mighty *Titans* reaches its fifteenth great issue, it gives momentum to the comic revolution it began. The unique titanic format has been acclaimed by Marvelites all over Britain and spread the name of Marvel far and wide!
> Now Spider-Man swings into line with a brand-new comic, assembling the most awe-inspiring array of super-heroes ever!
> The power-packed punch of the Thing!
> The god of thunder—Thor!
> The mystical world of Dr. Strange!
> The technological genius of Iron Man!
> All in the greatest-ever Marvel weekly, combining the format of the Titans with the magic of Marvel's mightiest heroes!
> The New Spider-Man Comics Weekly featuring the Super-Heroes is available next week.

This rather noisy proclamation, from issue #157, was just the first page of three whole pages of promotion. Even if we were to cynically dismiss the largely positive feedback in the *Titans*' letters pages as dishonestly selective, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that the early sales figures for *The Titans* were very healthy. If not, then why replicate an unsuccessful format? When Martin Forrest appealed in *The Titans* #19 (February 28th, 1976) for all British Marvel titles to be released in the landscape format, he received the following reply: "Well, you're far from being the only Marvelite to suggest we switch to the Titans format for all our mags, which is why we are going ahead with our plan to re-organize *Spider-Man Comics Weekly*."

It is likely that Marvel saw the excellent early sales of *The Titans* and then decided that the new format could boost the circulation of *SMCW*. However, it is possible that even before the debut of *The Titans*, Marvel was thinking of adopting the "Titanic" orientation for Spidey's title. It may even have prompted its creation. There were mixed feelings about the new format in Marvel's London offices and this may have been a compromise solution. Rather than blindly risk a top-selling title, Marvel may have created a new, and expendable, title to test the waters. If these speculations are true, that would mean that as soon as the first encouraging sales figures came in, Marvel was ready, willing, and able to relaunch *SMCW*.

Whatever the exact circumstances may be—and with what we know of how the New York end of the British division operated, this does not incline an impartial observer into thinking that they were the greatest forward-thinkers in publishing history—the new incarnation of Spidey's title bore little resemblance to its past form. Firstly, *SMCW* absorbed another failing Marvel anthology title, *The Super-Heroes*, to be renamed *Super Spider-Man with the Super-Heroes* (*SSM*). (One cannot help but wonder if the pairing of the adjective "super" with Spidey's name was a bit of a cheeky dig at DC, which had no comparable presence in Britain.) The largest and most prominent change, of course, was in format. To employ another term used by letter writers, the Wall-Crawler's comic had been "Titanized."

During *SSM*'s all-too-brief "Titanic" period—a mere 70 issues between February 1976 and June 1977—almost all the greatest artistic talents of the

Mayday!

(left) This *SSM* #164 image by occasional cover and centerspread artist David Hunt is a swipe of the top panel from page 17 of *ASM* #115. Original art courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (below) Centerspread from *SSM* #186. Art by Jeff Aclin and Duffy Vohland.

continuity, and not limited to who was featured in the comic itself. Headliners like Spidey and the FF were joined by surprise guests, including horror characters and the obscure Woodgod. In one astonishing example the content was uncensored: Marshall Rogers' image of the Punisher messily executing criminals, from issue #180, predates the ultra-violence of Garth Ennis' Punisher by decades. An explanation for all this randomness is the possibility that the artists, or at least some of the more famous ones, had free rein to draw whatever characters or situation they wished. Early in the new format, Herb Trimpe was asked to do a poster (see article by Neil Tennant, of the Pet Shop Boys, in *SSM* #164) and he chose to do a "history of warfare" military scene of aircraft and cavalry that appeared in the following issue. It would appear that Frank Hampson was likewise given *carte blanche*.

Regrettably, while they were undeniably bold images, these posters were generally of a fairly poor standard, although some—especially later ones—are very fine indeed, in part because the oddly elongated shape of the art space lent itself to some rather impressive cinematic effects. Most of these posters did not carry any credits, although familiar names like John Buscema, Gil Kane, Herb Trimpe (he illustrated a second poster depicting the Hulk), Tom Palmer, and Dan Adkins did make signed appearances. (The Kane DD centerspread, incidentally, later saw print in Marvel's fanzine *FOOM*.) The editors were usually considerate enough to use the back of the posters for letters, bulletins, and adverts. That some of this "lost" art is by great artists sadly no longer with us makes it all the more pleasing that these gems are seeing the light of day again.

The centerspread's finest moment—actually, fortnight—came during the hot summer of 1976 when *SSM* and *The Titans*, another reprint weekly, crossed over to create the staggering four-part "Quadra-poster" (or "Quad-poster") that has been used as the cover to this edition of *BACK ISSUE*. Even British fans have never seen this Larry Lieber (layouts)/Ron Wilson (pencils)/Dave Hunt (inks) masterpiece in glorious color and, for me, it is easily this edition's highlight. [***Editor's note:*** And let's not forget the Quadra-poster's newcomer, Glenn Whitmore, who colored this amazing image for our cover!]

Today, the "Titanic" format is regularly described in overly negative terms such as "controversial" and "bizarre." This perception stands largely unchallenged, despite the fact that most evidence and common sense points to the format being popular: "ITEM! The final figures aren't quite in yet, but it sure looks like our latest sensation, 'Super

Jigsaw Jim Starlin

The Untold Story of How the American Artist Helped Marvel Crack the British Market

by **Robert Menzies**

Conducted on July 1, 2012 at the Glasgow Comic Con 2012 in the Macintosh Church, Glasgow. Art contributions and captions provided by the author.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the career of Jim Starlin has been thoroughly mined. *He has, after all, been the subject of many articles, interviews [even in this magazine, most notably in* BACK ISSUE *#34 – **ed.**], and even a hefty autobiographical retrospective. Nevertheless, you'd be mistaken. Incredibly, there is one important area of his work history that has never been reprinted and has been almost completely forgotten about—even by Starlin himself.*

So, what was this art?

In the 1970s, early in his career with Marvel, Starlin produced a series of covers and other art to be used exclusively in the pages of the newly launched British reprint comics: in total, 27 covers, one back-page poster, and a jigsaw puzzle (hence my reworking of the old nickname "Judo Jim Starlin" in the title). The only locations you will find any reproduction of this lost art are a few scattered websites dedicated to British comics. This omission from his work history is all the more remarkable when you consider that Starlin was at the vanguard of Marvel's huge success in Britain.

But let's back up a little. To the astonishment of British fans, Jim Starlin visited both Scotland and England over the summer of 2012. He appeared first at the annual Glasgow Comic Convention, Saturday, June 30 and Sunday, July 1, 2012, before then attending the London Film & Comic Con, Friday, July 6 to Sunday, July 8. Mr. Starlin's unexpected trip to the United Kingdom presented me with an ideal opportunity to speak to him about this forgotten art.

– Robert Menzies

ROBERT MENZIES: ***Thanks for agreeing to this interview, Jim, to discuss the little-known cover work that you did for the British market.***

JIM STARLIN: Glad to be here.

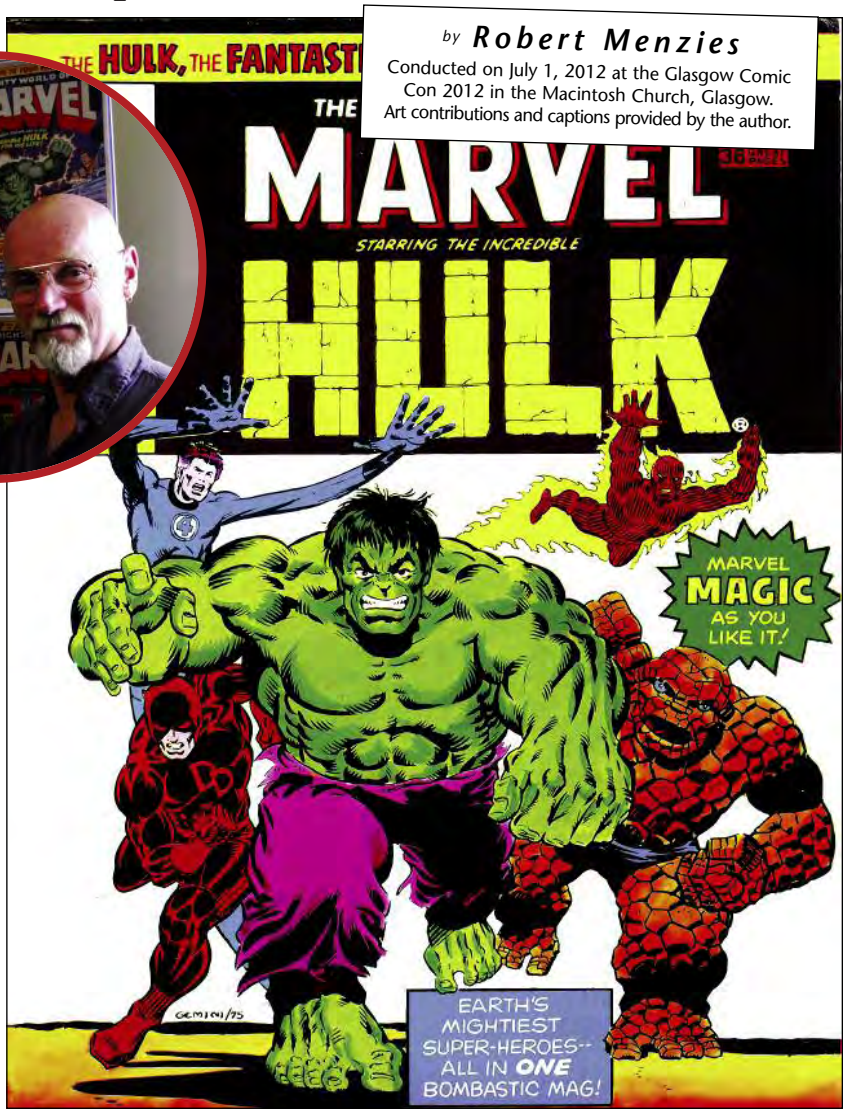
MENZIES: ***I'd like to begin with some background information to set the scene. Your arrival at Marvel coincided with a huge expansion of Marvel titles and the arrival of a new generation of creators. It also coincided with an attempt by Marvel to break into the British market with a new title called*** **The Mighty World of Marvel.**

The experience of a Marvel fan in America and his/her equivalent in the UK was very different at this time. At the start of the 1970s, the US editions of both Marvel and DC titles were very hard to find and there were no reprint titles. Basically, Marvel had little or no presence in most of Britain.

However, in late 1972, Marvel launched **The Mighty World of Marvel (MWOM)** ***and distributed it throughout the UK.*** **MWOM** ***reprinted early Spider-Man, Hulk, and Fantastic Four stories. This was the game-changer for Marvel in the UK. In much the same way that the success of the Fantastic Four's comic led to the creation of Spider-Man, Hulk, X-Men, the Avengers, and so on, the success of*** **The Mighty World of Marvel** ***led to a number of other British titles and Marvel's dominance of the UK superhero marketplace. All of those titles came from the success of*** **MWOM.**

STARLIN: I was never really aware of that.

MENZIES: ***Well, you are absolutely central to the whole success of Marvel in Britain because you were the first regular cover artist. John Buscema drew the cover to #1, and then you were the regular cover artist from #2 until 26. The first time readers of that era saw a Marvel image, it was probably your art they were seeing.***



Starlin Smash!

This striking image for the cover of Marvel UK's *Mighty World of Marvel* #160 (Oct. 25, 1975) has no relation to the issue's reprinted tale that was taken from *The Incredible Hulk* #162 (Apr. 1973). Jim Starlin, on seeing this image among a selection of his cover (photo inset), says: "This is my favorite. Of those, that's the one I like the best. It showed some actual drawing ability!" This art became quite familiar to British fans as a slightly altered version was used to advertise the UK annuals for Christmas 1976. Pencils by Starlin, inks by Al Milgrom.

MWOM *#3 (Oct. 21, 1972)*

Art: Pencils by Starlin, inks by Joe Sinnott

Starlin's second cover for British Marvel had no connection to the internal art that reprinted parts two and three from *The Amazing Spider-Man* #1 (Mar. 1963). The original cover to *ASM* #1 was presented as an internal pinup. Note Spider-Man's right hand.

STARLIN: I gotta tell you, these were just time-fillers for me. It may have changed things, but these were the things I did when I was waiting to get jobs I really wanted to do. I really wanted to do the interior stuff, I wanted to tell stories. These covers are the things you do to get to do what you really want. You know, I was waiting to get ahold of *Iron Man*, and I always figured I would become the permanent writer/artist on *Iron Man*. That was my ambition.

MENZIES: ***That didn't exactly work out…***

STARLIN: [*laughs*] No, I got fired from my second issue! Stan [Lee] hated it; he thought we made Iron Man look bad. But then Roy [Thomas] gave me *Captain Marvel*, so it all worked out in the end.

MENZIES: ***I have with me all of your attributed British cover art. I consulted with Rob Kirby, an expert on British comics, and he was able to complete my list and provide me with scans for the few original issues I'm missing. I'm not sure if you've seen this artwork in a long time…***

STARLIN: Not since probably then, at the time.

MENZIES: ***I suspected as much. It has never been mentioned in other articles or your hardback book.***

STARLIN: The weeklies, they would give us four or five [covers] to do at a time.

MENZIES: ***Oh, right.***

STARLIN: Yeah, so they would say, "Hey, we need these things for this issue," so I would lay it out. I would maybe, out of the five, pencil completely one of them, or two of them, and then I would farm the other ones out to [Allen] Milgrom, [Bill] DuBay, or Jimmy James. They were all available and the covers usually had to be done pretty quickly.

MENZIES: ***I hadn't realized that Milgrom was at Marvel that early. I thought there was a bigger gap between your arrival at Marvel and his.***

STARLIN: He was working as Murphy Anderson's assistant [at DC] for a time when he first got there.

MENZIES: ***Those other names I've never heard before…***

STARLIN: Bill DuBay tightened some of these covers up. He didn't do muscles very well … and so he was just sort of faking it. [Jimmy James] did a couple of these [covers] but he never got much work [at Marvel]. I have a feeling [*MWOM*] #24 is his.

[***Editor's note:*** Editor/writer/artist Bill DuBay (1948–2010) is best known for his work at Warren Publishing. His other clients included Pacific Comics and Archie Comics' superhero line, plus Marvel Productions Ltd. and other animation houses. Artist Jimmy Janes has a range of Marvel and DC credits. He is best known for his early-1980s' work on *Legion of Super-Heroes* and will be included in *BACK ISSUE* #68, our Legion issue.]

MENZIES: ***I really like the Hulk figure [on* MWOM *#24]. It's strong and muscular.***

STARLIN: Yeah, well, the legs are a bit wrong. I mean, those muscles don't really go there [*pointing to Hulk's right thigh*]. I obviously sketched them in and [James] did it himself.

MWOM *#4 (Oct. 28, 1972)*

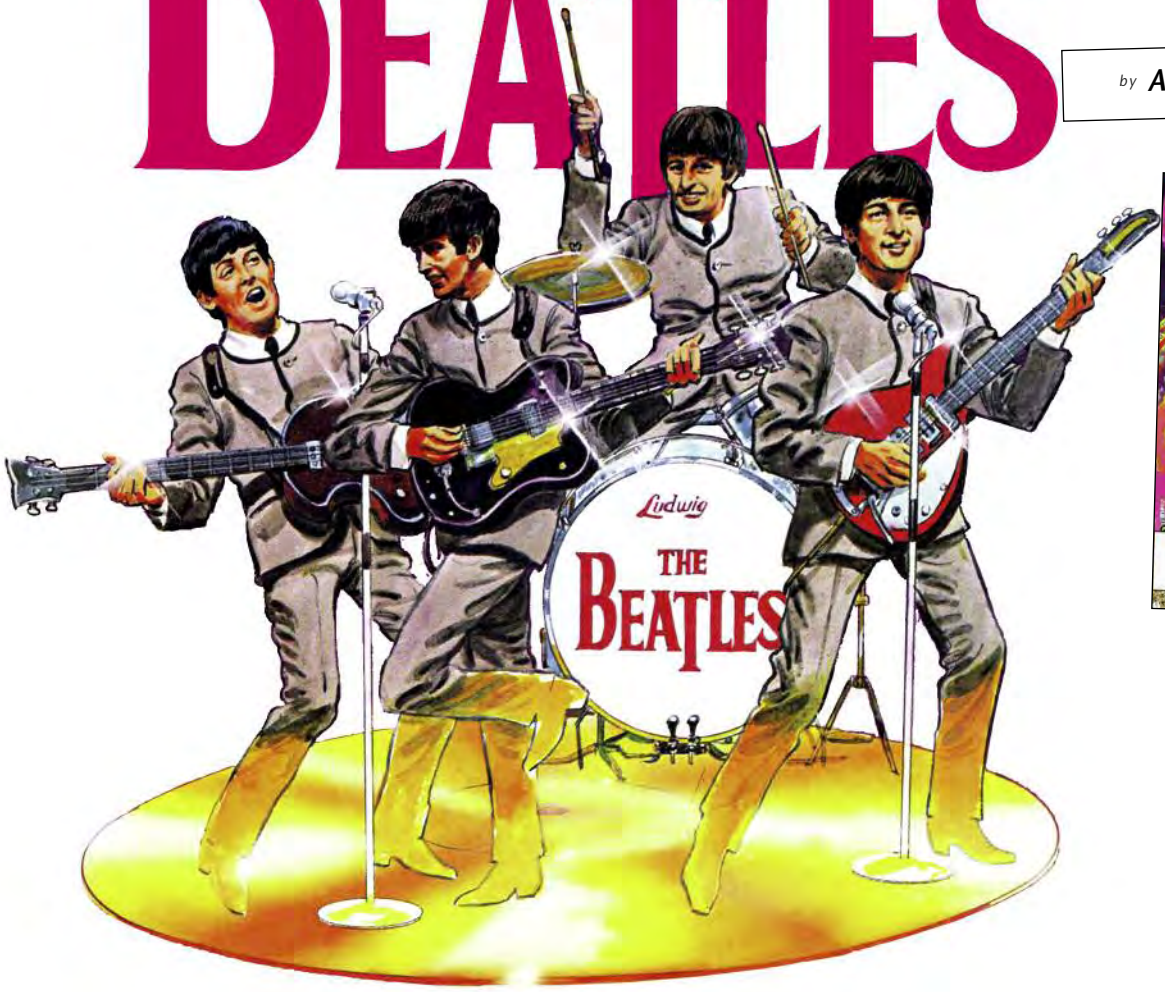
Art: Starlin and Joe Sinnott

Starlin's bold reinterpretation of the cover to *Amazing Spider-Man* #1. The second story from that classic issue—"Spider-Man vs. the Chameleon"—is reprinted inside.

COMIC BOOK BEATLES

Backstage PASS

by Alan J. Porter



Fab Four
Detail from Tom Palmer's cover to *Marvel Comics Super Special* #4 (1978), *The Beatles Story*. Full cover shown above.

In our world of comics, the most famous foursome is arguably the group made up of Reed, Susan, Johnny, and Ben. Yet there is another equally fantastic—or should I say, fab—foursome that has a long, if somewhat on-again, off-again relationship with sequential art, for John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr are no strangers to the world of the four-color printed page.

The connection between The Beatles and comics dates back to the group's early days and has been an almost constant presence throughout the days of Beatlemania and on into their solo careers.

Even before he started writing songs, the ten-year-old John Lennon's creative outlet was producing hand-drawn comics, copying the style of the weekly tabloid style comics that dominated the British newsstands in the 1950s. While John's "The Daily Howl" may have copied the style of the regular comics, his own particular sense of humor was already apparent in the spot illustrations and articles.

When John discovered Elvis in 1956, he also made a connection with another lover of the comics medium, for Elvis was one of the earliest serious comic-book collectors, with a particular penchant for comics featuring Captain Marvel and his various spin-offs. In fact, Elvis' trademark hairstyle was a copy of Captain Marvel, Jr. [***Editor's note:*** See *BI* #27 ("Comic Book Royalty") for the Elvis/Captain Marvel, Jr. story.]

But while Elvis was a self-proclaimed comics fan, none of The Beatles has ever publicly acknowledged any particular passion for the medium. Yet the clues are there, scattered through their songs and their movies.

COMICS IN THE BEATLES' MUSIC AND MEDIA

John's love of absurd and irreverent comics surfaced during the filming of *A Hard Day's Night* when it was John who suggested that the favorite reading material of their roadie, "Shakey" (played by John Junkin), should be *MAD* magazine.

During the same movie, in the dressing room scene, Paul grabs a makeup artist's sheet, drapes it over his shoulders, and does his own Captain Marvel impersonation, complete with a shout of "Shazam!," the magic word that gave the Captain his powers.

The good Captain also gets a mention in the lyrics of "The Continuing Saga of Bungalow Bill" from the *White Album*, the only fictional character to get a name-check in a Beatles song.

The movie connection doesn't stop with *A Hard Day's Night*. In *Help!*, the music stand on Paul's rising cinema organ is covered with DC Comics, mainly *Superman* and *Jimmy Olsen* issues from the quick glance you get.

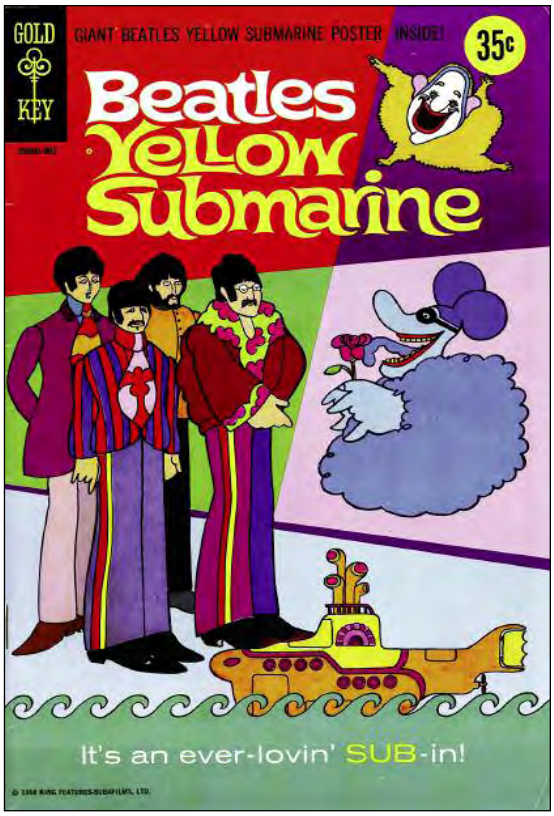
During John's first appearance in the animated *Yellow Submarine* movie, he is surrounded by pop icons including comic-book characters the Phantom and Mandrake.

John's comic-book connection continued after his move to the US, when in 1975 he was contacted by Marvel Comics editor Roy Thomas about appearing in some of their books.

Roy tells *BACK ISSUE* that he'd seen John and Yoko going into the building where Marvel was then housed, because *National Lampoon*

We Love Them Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!

From the Silver Age, (left) Dell Comics' one-shot *The Beatles* #1 (Sept.–Nov. 1964), a fan mag in comics form published during the year the Lads from Liverpool invaded the USA, and (right) *Yellow Submarine* (1968), a Gold Key one-shot by writer Paul Newman and artist Jose Delbo adapting the Beatles' Peter Max-inspired animated movie.



was a couple of floors away, and they did a couple of "Foto Funnies" for the satire magazine.

Thomas continues, "Around the middle of 1975, I decided to see if John was agreeable to appearing in a Marvel comic. The idea was that he'd be in a few panels, as a character in a crowd, I believe. In response to my letter, I got a phone call from a rep of his and was told he was amenable and would I like to meet with him. I said yes, and we made a tentative agreement to set something up soon.

"Alas, a couple of weeks later, my father had a heart attack back in Missouri and went into the hospital, where he stayed in intensive care for a couple of weeks before passing away," says Thomas. "I was back and forth to Missouri, and somehow the moment passed and I never followed through on it, to my regret."

In one of those strange coincidences that seem to punctuate The Beatles' story, when John and Yoko first moved to New York in the early '70s, their first business offices were set up at 1700 Broadway. Today those same offices are occupied by the editorial and production staff from DC Comics and *MAD* magazine.

Paul McCartney has also made comics connections in his post–Beatles career, most noticeably with the song "Magneto and Titanium Man," a song named after two Marvel Comics bad guys, from the *Venus and Mars* album performed by Paul's band Wings.

ROY THOMAS

THE BEATLES IN COMICS

While The Beatles themselves appear to have an apparent love for the medium of comics, the comic-book creators have a definite affinity for the Lads from Liverpool.

As icons of pop culture, The Beatles have appeared in numerous comics over the years, from cover shots to cameos to spoofs, and in some cases as guest-stars in the most improbable stories.

But what makes The Beatles different from other pop and rock groups is that their comics appearances aren't just confined to the years when they were at the height of their fame, but rather have continued on a fairly regular basis for over nearly 50 years.

During the early days of Beatlemania, many publishers looked for any excuse to put the loveable Mop Tops in the magazines as a way to attract buyers and increase sales. In several instances, The Beatles never even appeared in the stories printed inside. Of the 60 US comics published during the 1960s that featured The Beatles, 12 had them just appearing on the cover, and for most of the others it was just a brief appearance in a couple of panels or as a cameo.

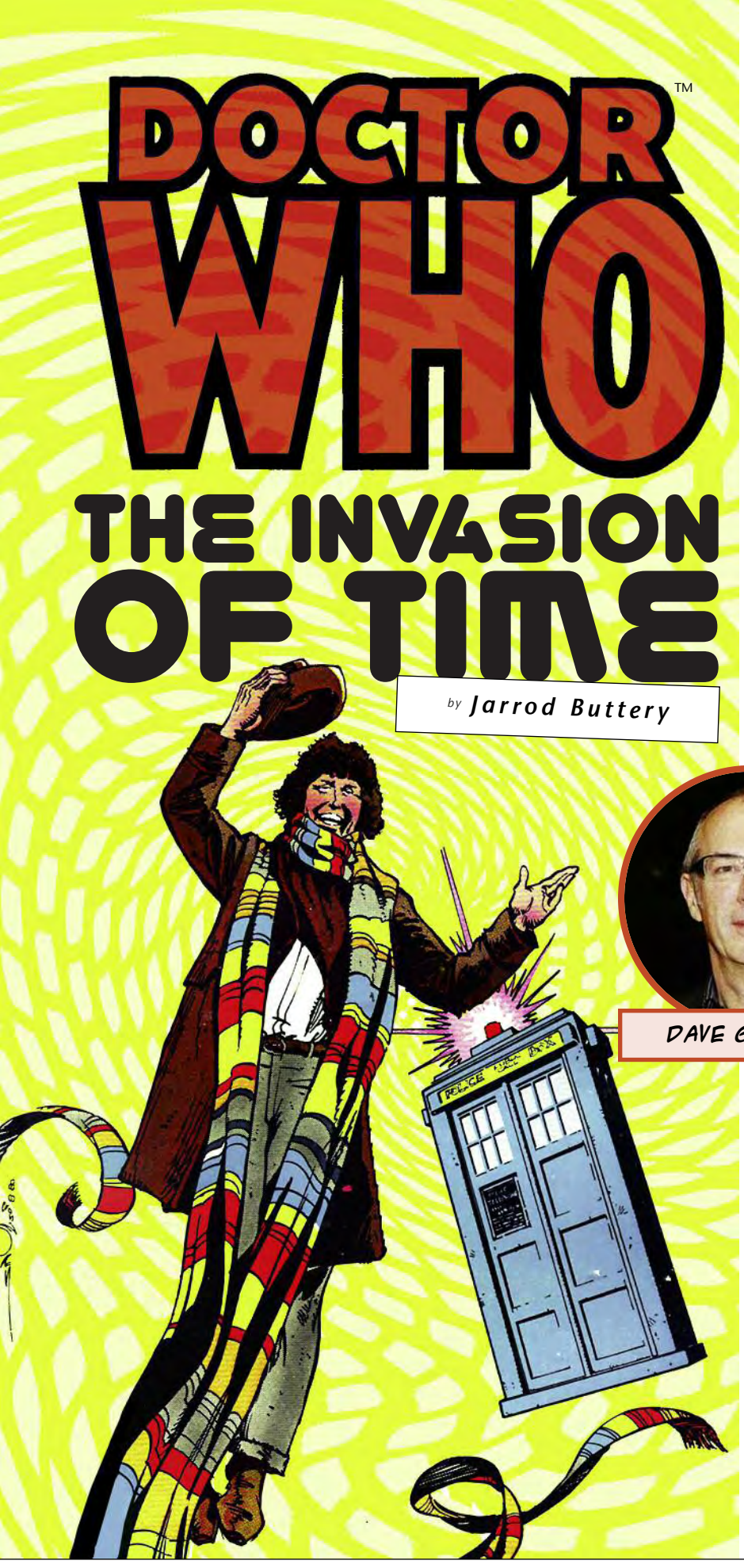
One of the earliest US Comics to feature The Beatles was a "biography" published by Dell Comics in 1964. For the next four years, a comic would appear every couple of months on average with some Beatles connection. Perhaps the strangest were when The Beatles met various superheroes. At DC Comics, the British Invasion and the "Mop Top" craze was satirized in the pages of *Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen* (#70, 1964), while over at hipper, trendier Marvel Comics, the boys appeared as themselves, hanging out with the other Fantastic Four and even getting invited to a superhero wedding as guests (*FF Annual* #3, 1965).

After the breakup of the group in 1970, interest in The Beatles as a way to sell comics waned. Perhaps the only notable example of this period is a Batman story in which the "Paul is dead" hoax is used as a plot device. (*Batman* #222, 1970)

In 1977, Marvel launched a new magazine-sized publication under the *Marvel Super Special* title. Each issue was designed to showcase stories and concepts that didn't fit into the standard Marvel offerings of the time. It was launched with the notorious *KISS* comic that proudly proclaimed it to be "printed with KISS blood," a true rock-and-roll start for the new book. The next two issues featured an extended Conan the Barbarian story and an adaptation of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

But in the fourth issue, *Marvel Super Special* returned to its roots with a spectacular Beatles issue, *The Beatles Story*.

For many Beatles collectors, this is regarded as THE Beatles comic to own. It is often referred to as the best pictorial telling of the Beatles story. Written, and largely produced, by David Anthony Kraft (for whom it was clearly a labor of love) with interior art by George Pérez and Klaus Janson—all under a wraparound poster cover painting



BEYOND Capes!

The British Invasion didn't just refer to creators. **Doctor Who*, the longest-running science-fiction program in the world, debuted on British TV on November 23, 1963.*** Early attempts to broadcast the show in America failed, and it was not until some Tom Baker episodes were sold to PBS in 1978 that the show was screened widely. Marvel's involvement commenced soon after...

CROSSING THE POND

In 1972 Marvel UK was formed to reprint US comics in a weekly black-and-white British format. Initial sales were strong, but the weekly distribution soon ate away at Marvel's inventory (which was barely a decade old in the early '70s). Sales and interest began to decline. Dez Skinn, publisher of *Starburst* magazine, was commissioned to write a report on the overall state of the UK comics market. Impressed with the report, Stan Lee asked Skinn to head Marvel UK. Amongst other initiatives, Skinn launched the phenomenally successful *Hulk Comic*, which was closer in tone to the TV show than the US comic series. This success provided clout when Skinn approached the BBC about a *Doctor Who* magazine.

A lifelong fan of the cult British TV show, Skinn was eager to publish a weekly *Doctor Who* magazine, but the licence was held by someone else. Britain's *TV Comic* had been publishing a weekly *Doctor Who* comic strip since 1964.

However, when *TV Comic*'s licence expired in 1979, Skinn prepared a mock-up magazine and a proposal for the BBC. "I'd had a terrifically successful launch with *Hulk Comic*," Skinn tells *BACK ISSUE*, "which got me on a national primetime BBC1 documentary, sandwiched in-between pieces on Walt Disney and Mary Quant. It was only a few days after transmission that I took the *Doctor Who Weekly* mock-up into their offices. Absurdly, the head man in licensing told me later he'd been a bit scared of me, having seen me on the TV, so he'd agreed to my ideas straight away. Madness."

Skinn contacted Dave Gibbons with a proposal: "Dez Skinn, whom I'd known for many years, called me up," remembers Gibbons. "He'd had the quite brilliant idea to do a weekly *Doctor Who* magazine. It was going to be part features and part comic strip, having five pages of comics per week. He wanted his art director, Paul Neary, to pencil the stories and for me to ink them. That didn't really appeal to me because it would only be about half a week's work,

Hats Off to America!

The Good Doctor arrives at the House of Ideas in *Marvel Premiere* #57 (Dec. 1980). Detail from the cover, with art by Walter Simonson.

so I told him that I'd like to do the whole thing. I did some samples of Tom Baker which Dez seemed to like—Tom was quite easy to draw with all that curly hair, big nose, double chin, and extreme expressions. The other thing that I think was a bit of a brainwave on my part was that I happened to know that Pat Mills and John Wagner had unsuccessfully pitched some *Doctor Who* stories to the BBC. They were the guys who really founded *2000 AD*, but I never really had the chance to work with them. I thought if I could get them to write the *Doctor Who* strip then I could work with them, and also probably Dez would think that it was a pretty good idea that he'd sort of poached a couple of *2000 AD*'s top writers. I suggested this to Dez, and I spoke to Pat and John as well, and everybody seemed very happy with the arrangement—including me!"

TOM BAKER

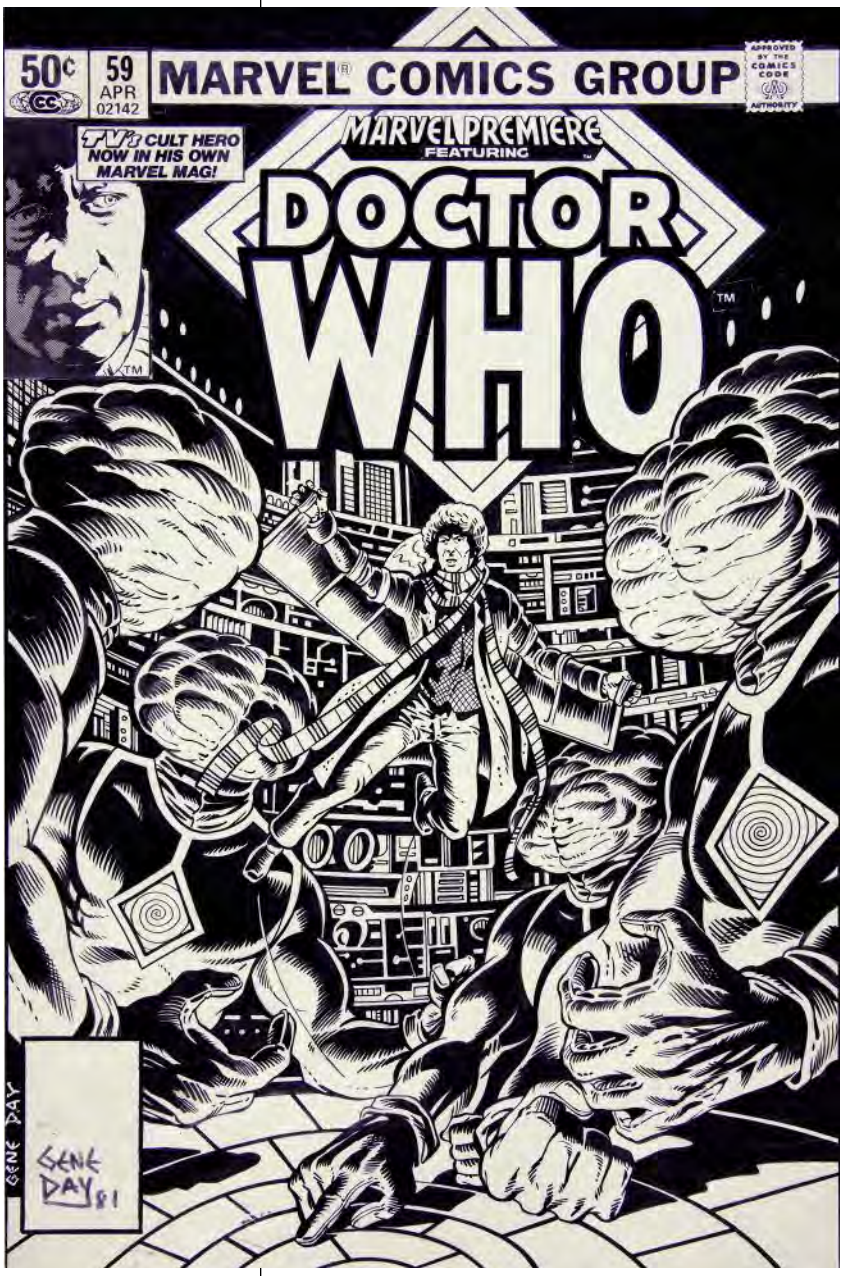
Skinn called the pair and proposed a use for their unused material. *Doctor Who Weekly* debuted in October 1979 and "The Iron Legion" was serialized in issues #1–8 (Oct. 17 –Dec. 5, 1979). "Yes, some stories were originally pitched as ideas for the BBC," confirms Mills. "John and I would work out the stories together and then write them separately. In fact, another one we dreamed up, 'Space Whale,' was accepted, paid for, and scheduled, but didn't ultimately appear. Instead, I adapted it as a *Doctor Who* audio play—one of three I wrote over the last four or five years." Mills was asked if any changes were needed to convert the stories to a comic-book format? "No, no significant rewriting for comics other than they could be more visual."

Gibbons elaborates: "Pat wrote 'The Iron Legion' and 'The Star Beast,' and John wrote "The City of the Damned" and "The Dogs of Doom." Pat would tend to write quite descriptive scripts while John's scripts were very terse, giving you the information you needed but not elaborating beyond that. I actually liked the variety—they're both excellent scriptwriters and I was very pleased and happy to be able to work with both of them."

"The Iron Legion" featured the then-current Fourth Doctor, Tom Baker, travelling alone. "Companions changed far more frequently than Doctors and we had basically no advance information about *anything* from the BBC," explains Skinn. "But equally, they left us alone to do what we wished. I'd hate to have saddled Pat Mills and John Wagner with a need to follow BBC continuity, so the less we had to do with their characters, the better!"

Superstar Cover Artists

(left) original cover art signed by artist Gene Day for *Marvel Premiere* #59 (Apr. 1981), courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (right) Frank Miller and Terry Austin's cover graced Doctor Who's second Marvel outing, in *MP* #58 (Feb. 1981).



WARRIOR® MAGAZINE and the British Invasion

by Ian Millsted

DEZ SKINN

Of the comics creators in the vanguard of the British invasion of the mid-1980s, nearly all produced work within the pages of* Warrior *magazine. When the magazine was launched in early 1982, Barry Windsor-Smith, Steve Parkhouse, and John Bolton (at Marvel Comics), Paul Neary (at Warren), and Brian Bolland (at DC) had managed to break into American comics. By the time of the magazines' demise in 1985 they had been followed by the likes of Dave Gibbons, Alan Moore, David Lloyd, Steve Moore, Jim Baikie, Alan Davis, and Cam Kennedy.

Whether *Warrior* was a more significant showcase for new talent than *2000 AD* or the Marvel UK is impossible to say with certainty, especially as many creators worked for different companies simultaneously (for example, Alan Moore and Alan Davis worked on *D.R. and Quinch* for *2000 AD*, *Captain Britain* for Marvel UK, and *Marvelman* for *Warrior*), but there is certainly some evidence to suggest that a credit in *Warrior* could lead to more lucrative work at Marvel or DC.

Warrior was an anthology title in what would be described in the US industry as magazine format: i.e., 8.25" by 11.75" and black and white behind a full-color cover. Each issue contained roughly five or six stories, mostly continuing serials but with occasional standalone strips. The anthology format was far and away the most common and popular format in British comics, and even as late as 1982 there were many weekly anthologies. The most successful tended to have a key spine character around which other strips would rotate. Examples included *Judge Dredd* in *2000 AD*, *Roy of the Rovers* in the eponymously titled football (soccer)-themed weekly, and even *The Four Marys* in all but a handful of the 2249 issues of the girls' comic *Bunty*.

"YOUR FIRST ISSUE IS ALWAYS THE WORST ISSUE"

Warrior #1 (Mar. 1982) launched with *Laser Eraser & Pressbutton* as the cover feature but with *Marvelman* as the first story inside the magazine. At the time, *Laser Eraser & Pressbutton* was perhaps the more likely candidate to emerge as the spine feature with its dark-humor science fiction being closest to the type of strips that were popular in *2000 AD* at the time, whereas *Marvelman* was a superhero feature which was a genre that had never taken off in British comics in the way they had in the US. *Marvelman*, however, created by

Warrior Summer Special 1982

Steve Dillon cover art depicting: (flying) Marvelman and Big Ben; (on foot, left to right) V, Caed (from "The Spiral Path"), Warpsmith, Raiko (not actually featured in *Warrior* until #18), Axel Pressbutton, and Myrta Mystralis.

Mick Anglo for publisher L. Miller Ltd., had enjoyed fair success in the late 1950s and very early 1960s.

Dez Skinn, who had previously worked for publishing giants IPC as well as Marvel UK, was the editor, and effectively publisher, of *Warrior* through Quality Communications Limited (he also owned a comic shop in London, which will become relevant later). Being an independent title meant there were certain advantages when it came to starting up the magazine. As Skinn explained in an interview in the 16th issue of *Warrior*: "Usually, the editor gets minimal advance warning to come up with a new title to fill a gap when two comics are about to merge. We had our characters well thought out in advance. None of this throw the ideas together, replace the 'bottom tow' in several months until you get the formula right. We had to get the formula as right as we could before the biggest cost … printing." Dez elaborates to *BACK ISSUE* on the beginnings: "I'd built up a team of reliable contributors over the years, from IPC through to *House of Hammer*, *MAD*, *Doctor Who Weekly*, and Marvel, so I first turned to them. These included Steve Parkhouse, Dave Gibbons, Steve Moore, David Lloyd, John Bolton, Brian Bolland, and Steve Dillon. But I spent the best part of a year refining it simply because your first is always the worst, as you've had the least experience of the title, but it's the issue you're judged by. There was no real sales plan. I knew comics could work from having produced such for other people. I just felt it was about time we did one for ourselves! With a heady cocktail of altruism and idealism, I thought if we did a good job it would reflect in sales. I guess the plan was to throw a load of copies out across the UK federated news trade, hold my breath for a month, and hope not too many boomeranged back as unsolds."

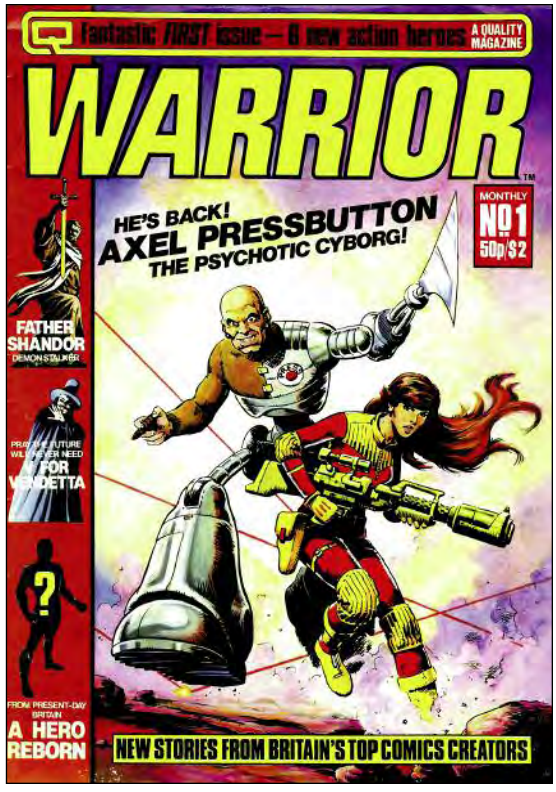
The first issue of *Warrior* had seven separate stories. The first eight pages were given over to Marvelman from writer Alan Moore and artist Garry Leach, both of whom were new to the group of creators Skinn had built up over the years. "Alan Moore had produced a two-page humor strip for me," Skinn explains, "for *Frantic* (Number Two in a field of One, as I subtitled it). But it wasn't very memorable and I don't think I'd met him back then (c. 1979), as he's physically quite memorable. In fact, I discovered later he'd been a buyer of my old fanzines in the late 1960s. But I wouldn't say I knew him, any more than any other reader and very occasional contributor.

"When the two Steves (Parkhouse and Moore) both turned down writing a superhero strip for *Warrior*, Steve Moore suggested his pal Alan would die to write it," Skinn continues. "I didn't know if he'd be up to it, never having worked regularly before and not very impressed with the work I had given him, so I agreed on spec. That is, if I didn't like his treatment and first script, there wouldn't be a kill fee."

As for the choice of artist for *Marvelman*, Skinn says, "I'd offered the strip to Dave Gibbons and Brian Bolland first, as they'd both had some experience of drawing superheroes through the Nigerian *Power-Man* comic that their agent, Bardon Art, had got them. But neither of them fancied it. Somebody suggested Garry Leach, another name I didn't know. I was shown a *Dan Dare* strip in an old annual as samples of his style. I found it terribly overworked, possibly through lack of confidence, but with nobody else up for it, I gave him the job. So the lead strip was in the hands of two relative newcomers, a brave or

That's One Psychotic Cyborg!

(left) From *Warrior* #1 (Mar. 1982). Art by Steve Dillon, script by Steve Moore (under the pseudonym Pedro Henry). (right) *Warrior* #1 cover by Dillon.



EYEWITNESS TO THE BRITISH INVASION

by Robert Greenberger

Bolland's Spirit of '76

Before he broke in across the pond at DC, Brian Bolland (in foreground of cover) riffed on *JLA* #1's cover in this British Comicon 1976 convention booklet cover. Art courtesy of Dave Smith.

Ever since I read George Perry and Alan Aldridge's* The Penguin Book of Comics *[first edition: 1967], I knew there were comic books produced overseas. I recognized they were produced at different sizes, released on varying frequencies, and aimed at various audiences. I was first introduced to the Philippine artists thanks to DC's recruitment of "cheap" talent from the south. They populated DC's 1970s war, Western, and mystery titles before seeping into the superheroic fare. At much the same time, and for the same reasons, Jim Warren also gave us the great Spanish artists as he added color sections to *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Vampirella*. It was certainly eye-opening for a young reader to suddenly see all these different styles employed to tell stories. (It's where I first discovered the incredible work of Esteban Maroto, whom I was honored to work with years later on *The Atlantis Chronicles*.)

In time, I began to see some of the British weeklies, notably the first two months of Marvel's entrée into the field in the early 1970s. They were reprints of the 1960s early Marvel Universe stories, but in keeping an eye on them, it also exposed me to some of England's homegrown talent.

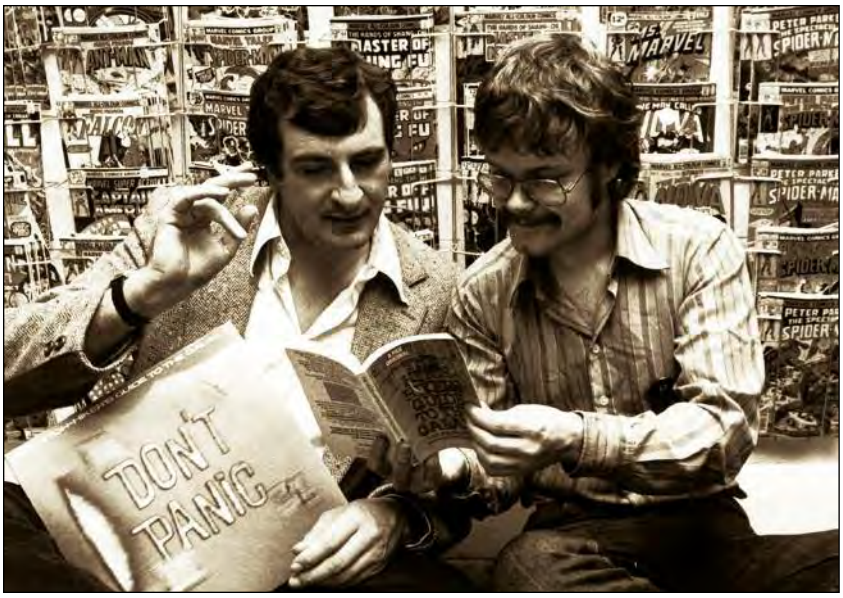
"SOME GUY NAMED BRIAN BOLLAND"

During the summer of 1980, before joining Starlog Press, I was working as a summer employee at DC Comics. Thanks to the keen-eyed staff there, I was made aware of *2000 AD*, the great British weekly that featured all sorts of dystopic characters. I recall Jack C. Harris showing off a *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* cover by some guy named Brian Bolland. He was apparently a Brit, and a huge GL fan. Joe Staton, then penciling the series, had met Brian and suggested he do some covers, so his work on *Green Lantern* #127 (Apr. 1980) was a harbinger of things to come. His cover work on the monthly led to the miniseries assignment, paving the way for a fresh influx of talent.

As Bolland explained in *Comics Interview* #19 (Jan. 1985), he and Staton met at a UK convention and they agreed to swap assignments. Bolland took on the cover while Staton drew an installment of *Blackhawk* (not the Quality/DC hero) for *2000 AD*. "I got a wonderful feeling of fannish delight from doing the DC characters with whom I'd grown up," Bolland enthused with a sentiment that his brethren would repeat in interviews throughout the 1980s.

The artist recounted how he had visited the DC offices for four consecutive summers in the hopes of getting work. During his first visit, he received a tour by Paul Levitz, who didn't know who he was. His second visit went better since a few of the staff had seen *Judge Dredd* by then. The third summer was entirely different as he was wined and dined, wooed into working for them on what became *Camelot 3000*. "The year after that, I was appearing at conventions and having to promote *Camelot 3000*," he said.

Bolland recounted how he met writer/editor Len Wein at the World Science Fiction Convention, Seacon, in 1979, and even then there was talk of poaching the British talent for the American comics, but it took a while for that to become a reality.



2000 AD, largely written by Pat Mills and John Wagner beginning in 1977, was a different sort of comic and one American fans were totally unprepared for. As the direct-sales market was growing, Nick Landau and Mike Lake had a UK distribution company and attempted exporting the weekly series to American shops. Nick recently told me they would bag up four issues at a shot, sending them over as a monthly installment, but fans weren't biting.

Lake and Landau, though, took their distribution experience and founded Forbidden Planet, one of the pre-eminent science-fiction and comic shops found in Europe or America. The London store's success led to a chain of shops that finally crossed the Atlantic. Additionally, they founded Titan Books, which would play a key role in paving the way for British talent to come to America.

But first, Landau landed a job as editor at *2000 AD* after a brief stop editing IPC Magazines' *Action*. It was at *2000 AD* where Landau launched some of the best-remembered *Judge Dredd* serials including "The Cursed Earth." It was there he got to know and work with many of the country's premier creators, so in 1981, when director Ridley Scott came looking for talent to help imagine his take on Frank Herbert's *Dune*, he was able to recommend Brian Bolland, Dave Gibbons, Mike McMahon, and Kevin O'Neill. As it turned out, veteran artist Martin Asbury hit it off with Scott and went to work for him on the never-to-be-realized adaptation, although it gave Asbury a career as a storyboard artist.

It was around that time that Joe Orlando and Dick Giordano took a trip to England in 1981 to see the talent for themselves. Landau, by then done with editing and launching his own Titan Books company, played guide, introducing the executives to the talent, a role he would play again and again.

"I had grown quite chatty with Dick and to a good extent, with Joe," Landau recalls. "I seem to recall Dick reaching out to me and then sitting with Dick and Joe when they got over here. I was telling them my Ridley Scott story and they were interested, and I was happy to provide introductions."

It was at this time that Titan Books licensed the rights to collect the *2000 AD* stories in a series of albums that pioneered the collected-edition market in the UK more than five years before DC did the same domestically with *The Dark Knight Returns*. Titan cut a deal with Phil Seuling's Seagate Distributors to bring the albums to America, which was the first chance most readers had to meet Judge Dredd, Nemesis, Harlem Heroes, and other characters while reading the early works from Wagner, Mills, and a newcomer, Alan Moore.

Landau notes that Giordano and Orlando were in the UK just before Moore came to preeminence in the

A Hitchhiker at Forbidden Planet

(top) Courtesy of *ForbiddenPlanet.com*, this 1980 photo shows (left) Douglas Adams, creator of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and (right) UK comics distributor and editor Nick Landau during an appearance by Adams at London's legendary Forbidden Planet shop. (bottom) Brian Bolland's cover to DC's *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* #3 (July 1981).

Pro 2 Pro

THE STRANGE WORLDS OF Peter Milligan and Brendan McCarthy

by Roger Ash

The first time I recall seeing a comic by Peter Milligan and Brendan McCarthy was in their anthology title from Eclipse,* Strange Days *#1 (Nov. 1984), *which also included work by Brett Ewins. The book featured "Freakwave," a post–apocalyptic story in which the Earth was mostly covered with water and a wandering surfer simply called the Drifter faced the maniacal Captain Roaring, and "Paradax!," the story of a slacker who finds a miraculous superhero costume in the hollowed-out center of a book. Both stories were wildly different from each other both in tone and style, and were like nothing I had seen before. I was (and still am) deeply into 2 Tone-era ska and New Wave music, and they somehow managed to capture that sensibility on the printed page. I was hooked. From then on, I eagerly awaited any work they did together, from the two-issue* Paradax! *(1987) series at Vortex; to DC/Vertigo's* Shade the Changing Man *(beginning in 1990), which featured Milligan's writing and McCarthy cover art; to* Skin *(1992) from Tundra, the story a thalidomide skinhead in the UK; to their phantasmagorical Indian fantasy epic,* Rogan Gosh *(1994), which was printed in the US by DC/Vertigo.*

In July 2012, I had the pleasure of interviewing Milligan and McCarthy about their work together, including some stories that US readers may be unfamiliar with.

– Roger Ash

ROGER ASH: ***I believe your first work together was on "The Electric Hoax" (1978). How did you come to collaborate on that?***

PETER MILLIGAN: Brendan was working on the strip—for *Sounds*, I think—and he asked me to come on board. I think it was just about the first comic-book writing I'd done. I was experimenting with some words and images and was writing, but I didn't really know how a comic strip worked.

BRENDAN McCARTHY: I had sold a weekly strip to the music paper *Sounds* and it was taking me longer to write it than draw it… So I asked Pete to help out, and he quickly got into the flow and handled the writing very well. And as he was better at it than me, I thought it logical that he should become "the writer."

ASH: ***That's a strip I don't know very well. What was it about?***

MILLIGAN: Brendan, what *was* it about? How I saw it, on one level it was a metaphor for restless punk youth searching for meaning and discovering that actually there is no meaning.

McCARTHY: It wasn't about anything much, other than a wade through a miasma of punk characters and abstract postmodern smart-arsery. Our approach at that time was influenced by punk and glam and psychedelic *music*, rather than aping film clichés—which is why our stuff reads differently to the comics produced today.

Strange Days *House Ad*

This Eclipse promo features two of *Strange Days*' features: Paradax by Milligan and McCarthy and Johnny Nemo by Milligan and Brett Ewins.

The Sword is Drawn! Alan Davis' Excalibur®

by Jason Shayer

London Calling

Meggan, Captain Britain, Phoenix, Shadowcat, and Nightcrawler. Detail from the cover of *Excalibur* #1 (Oct. 1988). Art by Alan Davis and Paul Neary.

FlashBack

Alan Davis has been a driving force in the comic-book industry for over 30 years and his enriching presence has had a profound effect on Marvel Comics' X-Universe. Davis' entry into the US market was subtle, working quietly from within, and then taking off as the regular penciler for the X-Men spin-off title, *Excalibur*. That venture allowed him to integrate Marvel UK characters into the Marvel Universe proper, like Captain Britain and Meggan, along with his rogues' gallery, the Crazy Gang, and Gatecrasher and the Technet.

DAVIS INVADES THE X-UNIVERSE

Davis' first North American work was on DC Comics' *Batman and the Outsiders* in 1985. From there, he moved on to *Detective Comics* where, after only six issues, internal politics forced him off the book in the middle of the *Batman: Year Two* storyline.

ALAN DAVIS

He then took on assignments with Marvel Comics, testing their corporate waters drawing a couple of X-Universe annuals and a fill-in on *Uncanny X-Men*. *New Mutants Annual* #2 (Oct. 1986) was my first exposure to Alan Davis, and it blew me away. The fun aspect to Davis' artwork was a refreshing change to the darker and grittier tones of the late 1980s.

Davis' fill-in art for *Uncanny X-Men* #213 (Jan. 1987), which was part of the "Mutant Massacre" crossover event, stood out in particular. His fluid and versatile art style was perfect for the quiet moments focusing on the lovely Betsy Braddock and then juxtaposed with the amazing fight sequences between Wolverine and Sabretooth. Davis' art was so clean and smooth, and seemed to relax your eye as you took it all in.

Despite having worked in British comics for years, having his work published in North America required some adjustments. "When I started at DC on *Batman and the Outsiders*," says Alan Davis, "the instructions were to use less black and rendering. And to draw smaller noses on women. When I moved over to Marvel, the rule was black and rendering should only be on one plane.

"The only element of what might be termed 'culture clash' was in the attitudes to sex and violence," he continues. "In the 1980s, the British attitude to sex was more liberal than in America, while the reverse was true for violence. In an episode of *Harry 20*, for *2000 AD*, I had to draw a guy being shot, then dragged away. He was facing the shooter when he went down, but as he was dragged away I showed a smoldering patch on his back. This was considered too violent and edited out. The women I drew at Marvel were edited on occasion—I never understood why—but the strangest edit concerned the character Joyboy. His navel would always be removed. Nobody ever told me not to draw the navel but, as far as I recall, it was always whited out."

DRAWING THE SWORD

"I began figuring what could I do with the X-Men who weren't going to be in the 'Fall of the Mutants' [crossover event], like Kitty and Nightcrawler," writer Chris Claremont stated in an interview in *Amazing Heroes* #134 (Feb. 1988), "because I knew if I didn't do anything with them, other people would leap forward like rabid wolves to heist them. Alan [Davis] and I had been talking over the idea of doing something together—a graphic novel, a series, or some such."

The pairing of Alan Davis and Chris Claremont was a natural fit. Back in 1976, Claremont created Captain Britain with Herb Trimpe and wrote his original tales, while Davis had drawn the title and designed his new modern look. Alan Davis restored my faith in the X-Men franchise of the late 1980s. I was heartbroken that my favorite X-Men team had imploded in the wake of the "Mutant Massacre" crossover, but Claremont and Davis' *Excalibur* recaptured that sense of action, adventure, and fun of the early 1980s' *Uncanny X-Men*.

CHRIS CLAREMONT

Building on their existing relationship, Claremont and Davis put out the *Excalibur Special Edition* in late 1987. This comic wasn't your usual four-color fare, as it stood out on comic-store shelves with its impressive 64-page, squarebound, bookshelf format.

Davis' artistic versatility was in fully display as he aptly handled a broad cast of characters and provided fun, innovative page layouts. The cast of characters all complemented one another, with Captain Britain as their leader, Nightcrawler as the second-in-command, Shadowcat as the computer geek, Meggan as the shapechanger and emotional heart of the team, and Rachel their powerhouse, wielding the power of the Phoenix Force.

Each character struggled with the emotional weight of the death of the X-Men during the "Fall of the Mutants" crossover. Captain Britain had been hit particularly hard by the death of his sister, Betsy Braddock, also known as Psylocke. The story brought together all of these characters as they were in the same geographic area with Kitty and Nightcrawler, recuperating from their injuries on Muir Island near Scotland.

What brought them together as a team was a Claremont plot dangler from *The Uncanny X-Men* #209 (Sept. 1986), where a mortally wounded Rachel Summers was lured by Spiral into the Mojoverse, where she was held captive. Upon her escape, Opal Luna Saturnyne the Omniversal Majestrix, responsible for order in this sector of reality, saw the Phoenix as a significant threat and dispatched Gatecrasher to apprehend her. Of course, that brought Gatecrasher and the Technet into conflict with our heroes. And at the same time, Phoenix had escaped from the clutches of Mojo who had, in turn, unleashed his Warwolves on her. So that set up a great series of events and conflicts.

What was so great about this issue was the additional conflict from within this group of heroes. Nightcrawler argued with Brian about the nature of being a superhero and the heavy cost the X-Men had paid. In the aftermath of the climactic battle, the heroes banded together to honor the memory of the X-Men and to keep Professor Xavier's dream alive.

Almost a year later, the first issue of the *Excalibur* regular ongoing series was published (cover-dated Oct. 1986). It was great to have Nightcrawler, Phoenix, and Shadowcat back in regular action again after almost a two-year hiatus.

From an interview in *Marvel Age* #60 (Mar. 1988), Davis revealed: "The main difference in *Excalibur* will be mood. There is a sort of tongue-in-cheek aspect of it. It's also much more—not silly, but in a peculiar way, we take the adventures one degree further into the absurd. Things that happen with *Excalibur* couldn't really happen with the *X-Men*, even though some of the same characters are the same. It's really a case of taking the same characters and placing them in a much more interesting and different setting."

Davis' workload in those first ten issues was impressive, as he not only drew the 22 pages for each issue, but he designed and drew most of the covers and the back covers, which were poster-quality pinups.

THE COSMIC COMEDY

"It was designated as 'the cosmic comedy,'" Alan said in an interview with *Amazing Heroes* #193 (Aug. 1991), "I think by Ann Nocenti when she was the editor. It was originally explained to me that *Excalibur* was going to be 'the X-Men in Britain,' then suddenly it was 'the cosmic comedy.' It's hard work matching that label, but it's something I can live with. I think that people perceive an element of comedy in my work anyway. I don't consciously put it there, but it's inherent in my nature and shows through in the work."

Davis' influence was clearly seen as he worked the humorous side of *Excalibur*'s characters and designed memorable covers for that book. The early covers captured the fun that Davis and Claremont had on the title.

"This was again due to [editor] Terry Kavanagh," Davis says. "Marvel had decided *Excalibur* would have a separate identity from the other X-books and promoted it as a cosmic comedy—which flew in the face of the growing movement for gritty realism at that time. I had

New X-Men

(left) An undated pencil illo by Davis of Nightcrawler, with Colossus and Storm. Courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*). (background) Cover to 1988's *Excalibur Special Edition*.

drawn a sketch for the first issue which was a straight group shot. Terry asked could I make it funny. My only idea was to squeeze in the Warwolves at the bottom of the cover, mocking Excalibur's heroic pose—oblivious to the proximity of the villains they are pursuing. Not particularly funny, but I was uncertain to what degree of humor was appropriate for a superhero title.

"For the second issue, I drew a standard superhero action shot, as it appeared in print, but larger and the center of the page, with the comedy element, partially as it appeared in print, but much smaller and heavily cropped at the cover edge," Davis says. "Terry told me to shift the focus onto the humor and push the action into the background. When I proposed the Juggernaut cover for issue #3 (Dec. 1988), the reaction was unanimously that I had nailed it, which I took to mean—make the covers a single-frame gag! Issue #4 (Jan. 1989) immediately challenged that, because there weren't any big dramatic scenes in the issue because it was pretty much a setup for issue #5 (Feb. 1989) and beyond. In desperation I drew the janitor image and wrote text—my first writing work for Marvel—which read as published except for the last line. I had written, '…you'll need to wait for next issue for that.' After that I was given a free hand with the covers, and I had a terrific time."

In their second year on the title, Claremont and Davis kicked off an ambitious story arc called "The Cross-Time Caper." Originally planned as a nine-issue storyline, "The Cross-Time Caper" would be derailed by fill-ins and a biweekly publishing schedule through the summer of 1990. During this storyline, Claremont and Davis hit their mark in terms of the entertainment and zaniness. Traveling through a variety of parallel worlds allowed them to have a lot of fun depicting the exotic and madcap versions of Excalibur.

"I started to get more comfortable working the Marvel way and with Chris' densely layered, stream-of-consciousness plots and how much freedom they gave for me to take the ball and run," says Davis. "Chris' plots always nailed the story and characters while allowing plenty of opportunities to throw my ideas into the mix—especially during the 'Cross-Time Caper.' So when Chris asked for the team to be chased by Indians, I threw in a lot of other weird stuff to suggest something more interesting and complex than a chase had occurred. This is also true for the 'Munster' castle with green flamingo and Captain Britain duck, and the Carmen Miranda Kitty and Kapitain Russkie. Chris and I were basically having fun trying to top each other."

A FRESH TAKE ON NIGHTCRAWLER

One highlight during this story arc was a two-issue story spotlighting Nightcrawler at his swashbuckling best. The cover of *Excalibur* #16 (Dec. 1989) was a beautiful homage to the pulp science-fiction and fantasy tales, but also captured, in one image, the essential qualities of the story and characters, in particular, Davis' take on Nightcrawler.

Davis' depiction of Nightcrawler within this story pulled him out from the shadows and set him up as more of a dashing rogue, much like Nightcrawler's idol, Errol Flynn. Nightcrawler had been humbled by his injuries, but had also matured and gained confidence, so much so that he acted more like the team's leader than Captain Britain did at the time. No longer was Nightcrawler concerned with his appearance and the reaction it might garner—instead, he accepted who he was and expected everyone else around him to do the same.

Issue #16 was perfectly tailored to Nightcrawler's swashbuckling personality, with space pirates,

"The Cosmic Comedy"

(left) Alan Davis' sense of humor made his *Excalibur* covers stand out amid a sea of much darker fare. Cover to issue #2 (Nov. 1988). (below) Detail from #3's cover, featuring Juggernaut. Inks by Paul Neary.

THIS MAGAZINE IS NOW UNDER MARSHAL LAW

DEFLATING AND DEFEATING FRAGGIN' SUPERHEROES

by Jerry Boyd

The grim-and-gritty attitude of the 1980s exploded in comicdom's lap and was … lapped up voraciously! Times and heroes had changed. Some movie critics who'd denounced Clint Eastwood's *Dirty Harry* film reassessed the anti-hero and cheered him on in the '80s when he delivered magnum force to the vicious lowlifes he encountered on the screen.

In the world of comics, the Punisher was Marvel's guy. He meted out a final judgment and penalty to his foes. Frank Miller's aging Batman used rubber bullets but a similar mindset toward criminals.

Mighty Marvel had established the successful beginnings for its overseas market in the 1960s in England, but two decades later, British fans and creators were ready to turn a more cynical and detached eye to costumed demigods that appeared to be such models of perfection. Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill were two such creators, and their takes on masked, mysterious men and women would be unprecedented in the art form—simultaneously hilarious and unnerving, and all the while redefining grim-and-gritty.

HOW DO THINGS BECOME LAW?

Pat Mills tells me, "I've never related to mainstream costumed superheroes, although I like other varieties such as those featured in the British TV series *Misfits*. They're excellent! I believe there's an American version in the works. I guess what doesn't appeal to me is the way they're usually so elitist either in their powers or their personal backgrounds or both. So Marshal Law is an antidote to this.

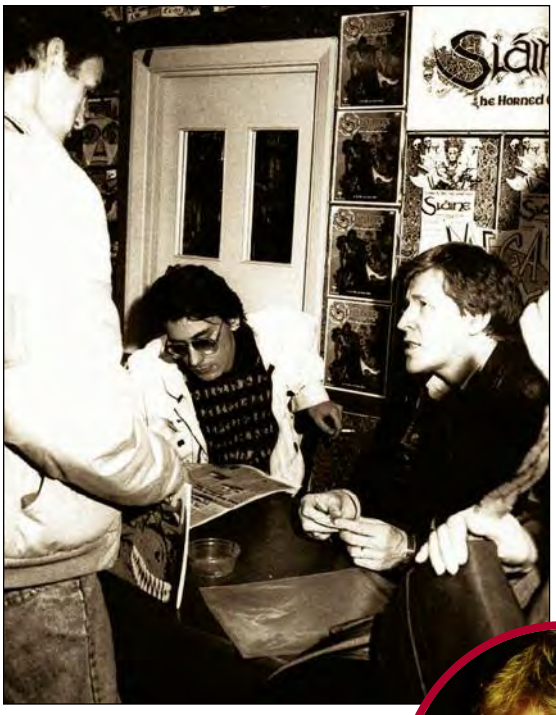
"Kevin [O'Neill] had visualized a character that looked—to me—like a superhero hunter and that was something I felt supremely qualified to write, because of my negative views," Mills continues. "I'm also fascinated by the concept of heroes, and I think the word is debased both in the news media and popular culture. This means we don't respect genuine heroes, but think an Air Force pilot dropping bombs on civilians or a superhero blasting them with a laser beam is a hero. They're both symbols of power, rather than true heroes."

Kevin O'Neill adds, "Marshal Law began as a name and rough costume design that I sent to Pat to see if he was interested in developing the idea for the new creator-owned line at Marvel—Epic Comics, run by the brilliant Archie Goodwin. We continued our sense of drama, satire, and black comedy on *Marshal Law*, but the mood of it was also affected by the then-recent *Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*—reinventions of the superhero genre."

Marshal Law #1 (Oct. 1987) begins in the devastated ruins of San Francisco. The once-beautiful metropolis is delineated with few trees/shrubs or anything approaching a pleasant atmosphere. This futuristic hub is called San

Marvel Uni-versus

Marshal Law demolishing the House of Ideas. Detail from the cover art of *Amazing Heroes* #182 (Aug. 1990), submitted by Jerry Boyd. Art by Kevin O'Neill.



PAT MILLS

Futuro, a sad result of a mega-quake caused by the tidal pull of the planets on the San Andreas Fault. Worse, a nearby nuclear power plant went off soon afterwards. Worse still (if you can believe that!), war broke out in South America and the US had decided to use super-scientific advantages by manufacturing superheroes to go in and fight it. This feat was manufactured through a unique process engineered by a Dr. Shocc (a strange little doctor with a "sinister East European accent"). Natural talents dormant in man were awakened … new ones could be "bred in."

However, some of these veterans returned home quite disturbed, with homicidal tendencies. And with their abilities and powers, San Futuro could be an extremely scary town to inhabit. Who keeps the law? Marshal Law is that man, a darkly clad cop, authorized by the city police commissioner to keep the anarchic gangs of super-doers in check. This our hero does with a passion.

Mills explains the Marshal's reason for being: "At first we were thinking in a *Mad Max* direction, but once we saw him as a superhero hunter, everything fell into place. Although there's a strong element of satire in *Law* toward well-established popular-culture icons, it's actually a secondary element. The prime element is usually a political or crime scandal using superheroes as a metaphor to make it particularly entertaining." O'Neill sees the city of San Futuro this way: "I was fascinated by the image of San Francisco from films and television. As a kid, Steve McQueen in *Bullitt* with that brilliant hill-jumping chase hardwired into my mind the streets of San Francisco. It had Alcatraz! When Pat and I were doing research, we found the city's roots as a Barbary Coast hellhole—also the great earthquake, San Andreas Fault, seismic shifts … all gave us great material to develop our San Futuro besides the ruins of the old city of San Francisco, now overrun by gangs and the dispossessed. Also, our creating our own fictional city to play with seemed very much part of our *2000 AD* roots as well as contributing to the whole Metropolis/Gotham City fictional superhero geography of America. We just looked at it with jaundiced post–WWII British eyes."

Along with *Mad Max*, there was another prominent influence. Pat notes, "I think when Kevin and I were working on *Judge Dredd* … that gave us insights into how a future cop could be portrayed." Marshal Law had his world (of problem people) and was ready to dispense justice!

THE KILLER ELITE!

In the six-part miniseries that introduced Marshal Law (going from Oct. 1987–Apr. 1989), the wasteland of San Futuro witnesses the terror of a sinister self-loathing villain called the Sleepman. He's killing young women dressed up as Celeste, the lovely/sexy companion to the Public Spirit, the most beloved of superheroes. His powers had been engineered before the quake or war and his reputation was impeccable. An uncontrollable superhero is clearly

Flashback

(left) Pat (seated on right) talks to a fan at an English comics store in the 1980s. Photo courtesy of Pat Mills. (right) San Futuro is a dangerous place to be! This opening splash (from *Marshal Law* #1) of the ruined city speaks volumes about Law's beat.

Travels with FOR VENDETTA

(with apologies and thanks to John Steinbeck)

by Jim Kingman

OFF MY Chest

Rose Almond loved her husband, Derek. At his funeral, she reflected on their relationship. He had been an abusive partner, going so far as to point an unloaded gun at her head. As chief of the Finger, the secret police/military branch of the Head, the ruling fascist government of Great Britain in the post–apocalyptic world of 1997, Derek had been under great pressure since the mysterious anarchist designated as Codename: V blew up the Houses of Parliament and executed members of his force. When Derek confronted V with the unloaded gun (which, in haste he had failed to load), V promptly killed him, leaving his wife a widow with no pension and in despair. At his funeral, she knew her life would have to change.

Adam Susan loved his computer, Fate, but she cheated on him, and had been cheating on him for some time. Broken-hearted, he left their home, and went down to the streets of London to establish a more open relationship with the people he ruled. He was a proud fascist, and oppressed all forms of freedom, but now his love was gone, subverted by V and turned against him. As he sat in the back of his limousine, he pondered his life and his loss and decided it was time to be more accommodating to his people. It was time for a change. He reached his hand out to the masses. Rose Almond was waiting for him. She raised the loaded gun she had purchased and blew half of Susan's head off. In the midst of great upheaval instigated by V, the fascist government had finally completely toppled.

V for Vendetta is about change—change in the individual and change in society. Everyone and everything introduced in *V for Vendetta* changes during the course of the story, some for the better, some for the worse, some morally, some fatally. V, anarchist (self-proclaimed)/terrorist (proclaimed by the government), also changes at story's end, but his true transformation comes well before the story's beginning, and it is his vendetta that is the catalyst impacting all.

"Dystopian" is a key word tossed around a lot in critical circles about *V for Vendetta*, and with good reason. The series is set in a late 1990s England rocked years earlier by near-nuclear holocaust where the populace now lead dehumanized and fearful lives ruled by Norsefire, the arrogant and fascist few. "Freedom" is a dirty word—just ask Susan, proud fascist; but freedom does live in the mind and cause of V, a man who knows that sustainment of freedom requires more than one individual encouraging anarchy behind a Guy Fawkes mask. It's an idea that must take root, be nurtured, allowed to grow then blossom, and carry on. That is V's purpose, but in the story's first act he would undertake a more personal vendetta.

THE VENDETTA

The time frame for *V for Vendetta* is just over a year, 370 days to be exact, from November 5, 1997 to November 10, 1998. The story opens with the pre-recorded "voice of Fate" announcing current news and weather conditions from loudspeakers installed throughout the streets of London, while 16-year-old Evey Hammond prepares for her first night out as a prostitute. *V* ends on a desolate English highway outside of London at night, with the former Inspector Eric Finch quietly walking away from a city that has descended into anarchy, both their futures unclear. In-between is The Villain, Victims, Vaudeville, Violence, Vicious Cabaret, Vengeance, Valerie, Various Valentines, Vindication, and Vincent, and those are just ten of the 40 chapter titles across three books. While Evey and Finch are the strongest of a strong cast of supporting characters, this is V's story all the way.

ALAN MOORE

Book One, "Europe After the Reign," deals with V's personal vendetta against those who apprehended and experimented on him at Larkhill Resettlement Camp (i.e., concentration camp) with severe acts of destruction (i.e., blowing up Parliament, and the statue of Justice atop the Old Bailey building) conducted to suggest a larger picture.

Evey represents the masses. She has been told by a fascist regime what to do, how to do it, when to do it. Her life is nothing but following orders. It's not enough to survive, and to do that she decides to prostitute herself, and in so doing changes her life.

V rescues Evey from a task force of Fingermen, who have busted her for prostitution and are on the verge of raping her. From a safe distance atop a nearby building, V recites to Evey a portion of the English folk verse "The Fifth of November." ("Remember, remember! The fifth of November, the Gunpowder treason and plot; I know of no reason, why the Gunpowder treason, should ever be forgot!") This is followed by the explosion that destroys the Houses of Parliament. What Guy Fawkes could not accomplish with gunpowder 392 years before, V appears to pull off with ease. The fireworks that follow capture the attention of a suppressed populace. V's vendetta, well underway in secret, has now gone public.

Susan is notified of the incident and hours later confers with the top men of the departments under him: Almond of the Finger; Conrad Heyer of the Eye, the surveillance branch that monitors the populace; Brian Etheridge of the Ear, the audio surveillance branch; and Finch of the Nose, the regular police and criminal investigations branch. Susan is not happy that a masked terrorist has made the ruling party vulnerable.

In his Shadow Gallery, V listens to Evey's story involving the war and its aftermath, and how it affected her family, as already his vendetta has escalated. For some time he has been secretly and discretely executing any Camp, whe turns his in the fasc

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Larkhill whe cialists wer up was exp

V's super-intelligence, along with enhanced strength, is a result of constant injection to a hormone drug called Batch 5, a pituarin/pinearin mixture. His powers are uncanny, to the point where I'm

Anarchy, Act One

The final page of the first "V for Vendetta" installment from *Warrior* #1 (Mar. 1982). Script by Alan Moore, art by David Lloyd. Image courtesy of Ian Millsted.