

MARVEL

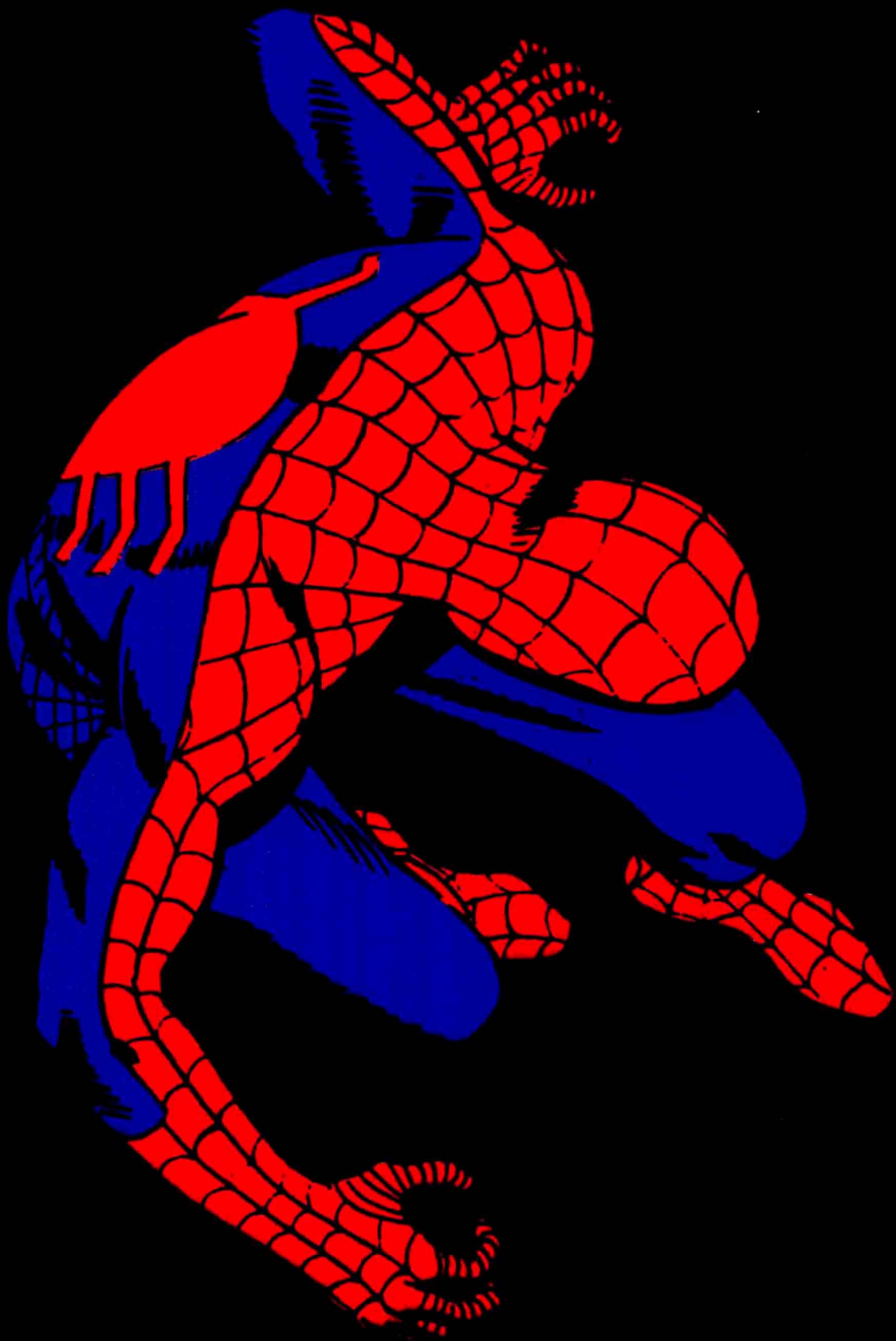


THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR UNIVERSE

MARVEL: THE CHARACTERS
AND THEIR UNIVERSE







MARVEL
CHARACTERS
IN THEIR OWN
UNIVERSE



MICHAEL MALLORY

MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.
HUGH LAUTER LEVIN ASSOCIATES, INC.

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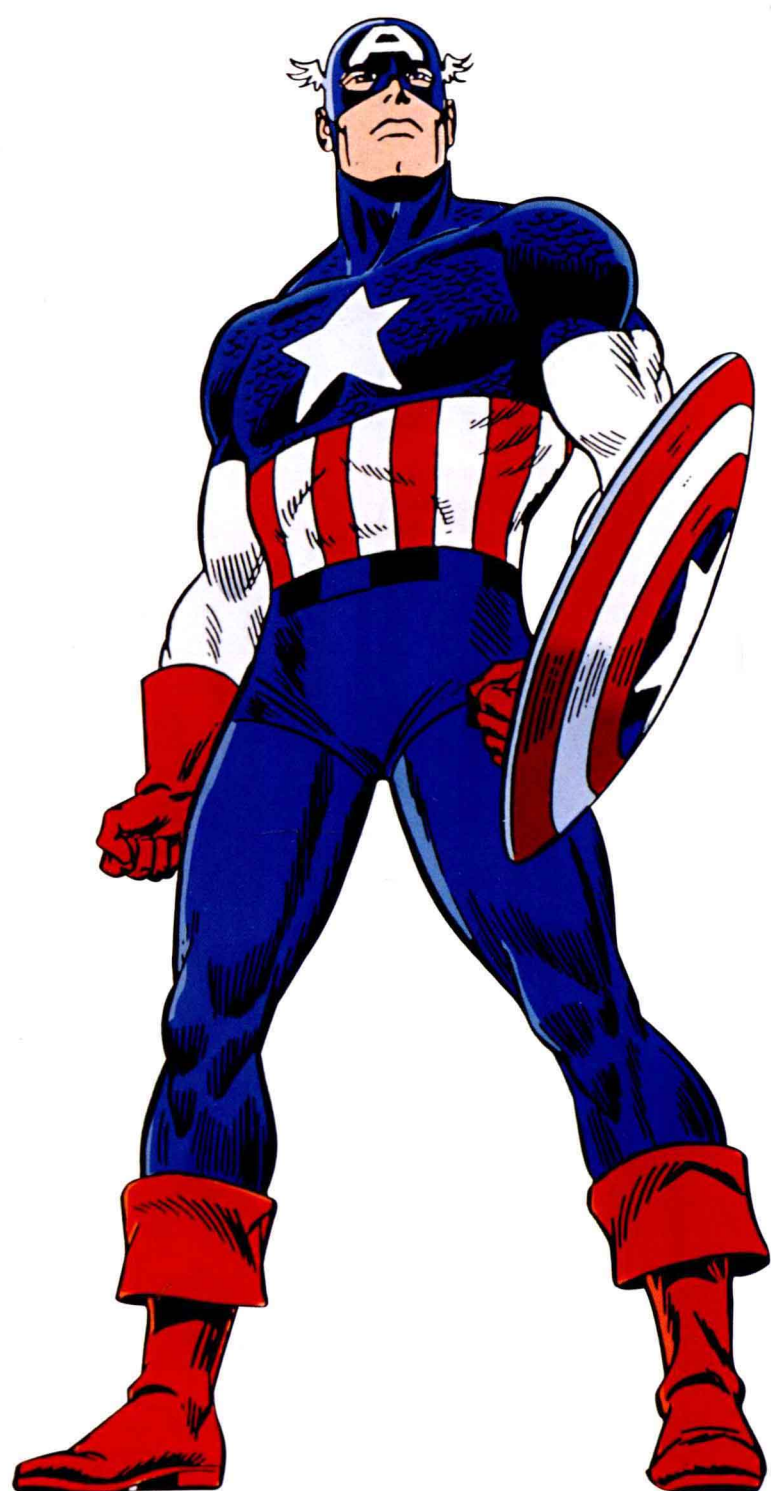
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THE TWO OF N



IRON MAN MARVEL



ME HEAVY CLOTHES, IN WHICH I NEARLY SUFFOCATED, THEY FED ME SOME OF THEIR FOOD. WHAT IT WAS, I DIDN'T KNOW, BUT IT MADE ME VIOLENTLY ILL ~ THE COMMANDER TOOK PITY ON ME, AND, ALTHOUGH I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HIS LANGUAGE, TRIED TO COMFORT ME WITH WORDS...

~x~



OF COURSE I HAD TO, FREQUENTLY, FOR WE SUB-MARINERS CANNOT LIVE OUT OF WATER FOR LONGER THAN FIVE HOURS AT A STRETCH ~ AND MANY OF US CANNOT LIVE EVEN THAT LONG...

WELL, AS TIME WENT ON, THE COMMANDER AND I FELL IN LOVE, AND WERE MARRIED BY THEIR OWN RITUAL ~ AND ALL THE WHILE I WAS GIVING SECRET INFORMATION BACK TO OUR PEOPLE....."

WE CANNOT WIN, MASTER- THEY ARE TOO MIGHTY!



"AND THEY WERE TOO MIGHTY, FOR EVEN AS OUR ARMY ASSEMBLED FOR THE FIRST COUNTER-ATTACK, THERE CAME A TERRIBLE BOMBARDMENT FROM ABOVE - WHICH DESTROYED ALL BUT A MERE HANDFUL OF US!"



AND SO, MY SON, IT HAS TAKEN US TWENTY YEARS TO BUILD UP A RACE TO AVENGE THE BRUTAL HARM DONE US THEN ~ NOW, SINCE YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE OF US LEFT WHO CAN LIVE ON LAND AND IN WATER, AND WHO CAN ALSO FLY IN THE AIR, AND BECAUSE YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH OF A THOUSAND EARTH-MEN, IT IS YOUR DUTY TO LEAD US INTO BATTLE! YOU HAVE BEGUN WELL, BUT YOU MUST USE STRATEGY AND GREAT CARE ~ GO NOW TO THE LAND OF THE WHITE PEOPLE!



AND SO NAMOR, THE AVENGING SON, FACES THE SURFACE MEN OF THE WORLD, IN WHAT PROMISES TO BE MORTAL COMBAT!



Bill Everett
4-39

THE WORLD OF MARVEL

TWENTIETH CENTURY GODS

When early astronomers turned their gazes to the majesty of the night sky, they projected upon the stars images of the gods, goddesses, and fantastic creatures that inhabited the mythology of their culture. For these ancient peoples, it was a way of defining their universe. If that process were for some reason to take place today, the constellations would not bear such classical names as Andromeda, Hercules, or Cassiopeia, but would most likely be named Spider-Man, Hulk, and Wolverine.

In ages of so-called enlightenment, mythology becomes increasingly fictional, and no fictional form so perfectly fits the mold of mythology as comic book stories. Like classical mythology, comics offer colorful, larger-than-life figures—some of whom represent all that is good while others represent all that is evil—interacting in the world with normal men and women, battling opponents on a level far above the mortal realm. The need for such stories in our lives seems to be a constant of the human condition. And in the twentieth century, no entertainment company entity has been better at fulfilling this basic need than Marvel Comics.

For forty years now, the world has been under the spell of the Marvel Universe, which is not so much a parallel universe to our own but a larger, greater universe that encompasses an enhanced version of our reality, set against other worlds created not by physical laws, but by the forces of imagination. Taken on a surface level, the Marvel Universe is an immensely complex matrix of time and space that encompasses the stories of thousands of characters and manages to interweave them into a single, solid quilt (John Romita, one of Marvel's greatest artists, calls these travail-filled character paths "convoluted journeys"). While the character mythologies established by other comic book publishers tend to operate as a series of linear sagas that rarely interrelate, the Marvel Universe is as far reaching and comprehensive as the known universe. There are far fewer than six degrees of separation from one Marvel character to any other.

One of the more interesting things about this fantastic realm is that it completely coexists with our own real world. Spider-Man and The Fantastic Four, for instance, have not set up shop in some stand-in metropolis that serves as metaphor for a major American city. Instead they live and work in Manhattan, appearing against the same recognizable landmarks that are seen every day by the city's real inhabitants. One of the most dramatic moments in the entire Marvel canon, the climactic and deadly showdown between Spider-Man, his love Gwen Stacy, and the evil Green Goblin (recounted in *Spider-Man* issue #121), takes place atop a tower of the Brooklyn Bridge.

The two worlds are even connected by their appreciation for comic books. As early as 1941, in the first issue of *Captain America*, President Franklin D. Roosevelt himself is depicted ribbing two military leaders who are confessing their failure to contain enemy espionage. "What would you suggest, gentlemen?" the commander in chief asks. "A character out of the comic books? Perhaps The Human Torch in the army would solve our problem!" An interesting parallel occurs some twenty years later, in *The Fantastic Four* issue #4, when Johnny Storm, a.k.a. The Human Torch (albeit a different Human Torch than the one mentioned by FDR) would recognize a heavily disguised Sub-Mariner, suffering from amnesia, after having read one of his old comic books. As time went on, Marvel would become renowned for such touches of self-satire, even to the point of placing the comics' creators themselves into the action, as with the cameo appearances by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in *The Fantastic Four* #10 (January 1963), who are confronted in the Marvel offices by mega-villain Doctor Doom.

The expansion of the Marvel Universe has been in part a result of the unique nature of comic books themselves. With the exception of television soap operas, no other entertainment format continues along not simply for years, but for decades, constantly challenging its creators to come up with new angles, new twists, and



Johnny Storm recognizes Prince Namor through reading Sub-Mariner comics. From *The Fantastic Four* #4 (May 1962).



Universes collide as Stan Lee and Jack Kirby (faces carefully hidden) are confronted by Doctor Doom himself, who coyly exposes his ruined face, in *The Fantastic Four* #10 (January 1963).

new roads down which to take the characters. As a result, a character's backstory is open for continuous embellishments, additions, even outright reversals. It is safe to say that when Marvel's creator-in-residence Stan Lee sat down and conceived *The Incredible Hulk* four decades ago, he could not predict the kind of complex psychodrama that future comic book writers would put the character through. On the other hand, without the groundwork laid down by Lee in the early days, these later permutations would have been impossible. Characters must be born with strength before they can develop flexibility.

The characters that inhabit the Marvel Universe have ceased to be simply comic book characters, and have become pop culture icons, figures so deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness that it is startling to realize that many of them have only been around for the last thirty or forty years. They are as much a part of Americana as Paul Revere and Buffalo Bill.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MARVEL COMICS

The company that would become known to the world as Marvel was formed in 1932 by a young (then only twenty-two) entrepreneur named Martin Goodman, who started up a publishing house to turn out pulp fiction magazines, an immensely popular form of escapist entertainment in the early part of the century. Goodman's publications included the titles *Marvel Science Stories*, a science-fiction magazine, and *Marvel Tales*, which leaned more in the direction of fantasy and horror, but the bread and butter of the company—which was then identified as Red Circle—were Western and detective magazines. In 1938, however, the world of escapist publishing was set on its ear by a character created specifically for the fairly new format comic books: a fellow in blue tights and a cape called Superman. Before long, Goodman moved into the field of comic books.

Goodman's first effort, published in October of 1939, was prophetically called *Marvel Comics* and

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MARVEL COMICS

OCT.

This Month

"THE HUMAN TORCH"

"THE ANGEL"

"SUBMARINER"

"MASKED RAIDER"

Featuring
KA-ZAN
THE GREAT
12 PAGES
OF JUNGLE
ADVENTURE!

ACTION

MYSTERY

ADVENTURE