

MARVEL

MUSEUM

THE STORY OF
THE COMICS

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

The Incredible Hulk #1 was released in 1962 – A Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde-like story, where scientist Bruce Banner rushed to save a youth from a gamma bomb and got caught in the explosion, transforming himself into a rampaging beast.

The noble savagery of the Hulk was something that always interested Stan Lee: “I’ve always had a soft spot in my heart for the Frankenstein monster,” Stan would later remember. “No one could ever convince me he was the bad guy. He never wanted to hurt anyone; he merely groped his torturous way through a second life trying to defend himself, trying to come to terms with those who sought to destroy him.”²

Jack Kirby’s brooding pencils managed to capture the energy and horror of an atomic bomb explosion as well as the power and pain of the Hulk himself. Though the Hulk was grey in the first issue, production processes couldn’t keep that colour consistent through the comic, so he was changed to green in *The Incredible Hulk #2*.

The Hulk wasn’t initially as big a hit as the Fantastic Four. Perhaps the comic-buying public wasn’t quite ready, even though he would become hugely popular a few years later. Issues one to five were pencilled by Jack Kirby and issue six was pencilled and inked by Steve Ditko, who suggested that Banner should turn into the Hulk when he was angry, not just at night. After five decades the Hulk is one of the most recognisable super heroes of all time.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Incredible Hulk #1*
May 1962

“Is he Man or Monster, or... Is he Both?” This question is at the

centre of all the best Hulk stories.



THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN

Tales of Suspense #39 introduced Iron Man, the alter ego of industrialist, inventor, weapons manufacturer and playboy Tony Stark, who was captured during the Vietnam War and forced to make an iron suit of armour to escape.

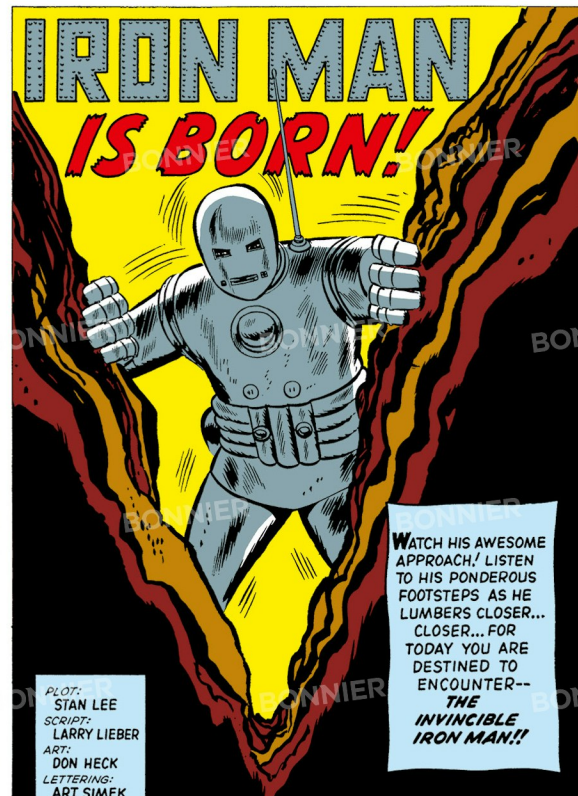
Marvel characters tended to have a fatal flaw and Tony Stark was no exception; a piece of shrapnel was lodged in his chest, constantly trying to burrow its way into his heart – the invulnerability of his exterior suit of armour contrasting with his wounded interior. The first appearance of Iron Man was plotted by Stan Lee and scripted by Larry Lieber; the character was designed by Jack Kirby and the story was drawn by Don Heck. The first time readers saw Iron Man's armour it was a grey affair; but Kirby's initial design was reinvented by Steve Ditko as a sleeker red-and-gold outfit.

As well as battling super villains Tony had to fight his own self-destructive and alcoholic tendencies which would be addressed in the groundbreaking "Demon in a Bottle" storyline. As it is always on the forefront of modern technology, Tony's Iron Man armour has changed more than any other super hero costume. Iron Man's popularity doesn't come from the armour; but because under that armour lies a damaged and very human heart. Iron Man has had space suits, underwater suits, nanotechnology suits, Hulkbuster suits and invisible suits. He has given a suit of armour to his best friend James "Rhodey" Rhodes, who now uses it as he hero War Machine. Iron Man's popularity doesn't come from the armour; but because under that armour lies a damaged and very human heart.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Tales of Suspense* #39
March 1963

Early versions of the Iron Man
armour had a radio antennae on
the shoulder



ANT-MAN AND THE WASP

Marvel already had the biggest heroes in the world, so by 1962 it was time to find the smallest ones. Hank Pym had already appeared in *Tales to Astonish* #27, and *Tales to Astonish* #35 promised readers they would "Gasp in amazement at the return of the Ant-Man!" In a story by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, biophysicist Dr. Hank Pym had previously developed a serum (which he named Pym Particles) that allowed him to shrink to the size of an ant. After being chased around a teeming ant hill, Hank returned to normal size and vowed to put Pym Particles to good use.

Constructing a helmet and suit that allowed him to communicate with ants, he became Ant-Man! Almost immediately, criminals got in the way, and trenchcoated Russians invaded Pym's lab looking for an anti-radiation formula. Hank was locked in his lab, but managed to use his Pym Particles to shrink down and then use an army of ants to save the day.

Ant-Man soon gained a partner in *Tales to Astonish* #44, in the form of Janet van Dyne – the Wasp. When Hank first met Janet he was mourning his first wife, Maria Trovaya. Janet was the daughter of Hank's scientist colleague Vernon van Dyne, and she too suffered a loss when her father was murdered. Seeing Janet's determination to find her father's murderer, Hank took her as a super hero partner, giving her subdermal wings and antennae that would only appear when she shrunk down to become the Wasp. Stan obviously felt that Ant-Man needed some romantic tension, because the two characters did not become lovers for years. The Wasp was a popular addition to the title, but Stan Lee continued to tinker with Ant-Man, giving him the ability to grow in size and renaming him Giant-Man. Janet's sense of style and fashion won many fans'

hearts, and her costume revamps became part of her character. Janet has had more costumes than anyone else in the Marvel Universe, and later became a costume designer for other heroes.

Though they never gained their own title, Ant-Man and the Wasp shared *Tales to Astonish* with a revived and increasingly popular Hulk. Most importantly, Hank and Janet were founding members of the Avengers. Ant-Man and the Wasp have been core Avengers members since the start, and have been involved in most incarnations of the team.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Tales to Astonish* #35

September 1962

Hank Pym's special helmet

allowed him to communicate with

ants and control them!

2: *Tales to Astonish* #36

October 1962

The relative size of Ant-Man allowed Jack Kirby to produce some incredible visual effects.



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2

CAPTAIN AMERICA

Stan had already teased readers about a possible return of Cap in *Strange Tales* #114 in 1963, where the Fantastic Four's Johnny Storm met a circus performing Captain America who was revealed to be villain the Acrobat in disguise. Letters flowed in; fans wanted the real Captain America back. The *Avengers* #4 showed that Cap had fallen from a plane in the final days of World War II and had been frozen in a block of ice ever since. Steve Rogers was now a fish out of water, trying to understand the 1960s society which was fundamentally different from the wartime nation that he had left. Readers could catch up with the modern-day Captain America in *The Avengers* then read new World War II adventures by Stan and Jack in *Tales of Suspense*, including a retelling of Cap's origin.

Rather than seem like a relic of a different age, Steve Rogers became a useful way of looking at contemporary ideas. Captain America addressed race relations in America when the comic introduced the Falcon, one of the first African-American super heroes, and for a while the comic was renamed *Captain America and the Falcon*. Steve has always had a powerful moral code, taking on everyone from Iron Man to the President and not backing down.

Penciller Gene Colan knew exactly what made Cap great when he started drawing him: "Captain America represented this country's image of what a hero should be," said Colan. "I [knew] in my heart it was not so much his words or actions, but what he stood for I respected."⁴

KEY TO PLATE

I: *Captain America* #117
September 1969

In 1969 Cap was joined by the bird, Redwing, Sam Wilson, and his



BLACK PANTHER

Debuting in *Fantastic Four* #52 in 1966, the Black Panther appeared in comics several months before the political movement of the same name. T'Challa was one of the earliest black super heroes in comics, and was the first with any powers. To put this in context, the Voting Rights Act which guaranteed African-Americans the right to vote, had been passed one year earlier in 1965.

T'Challa was the king of the fictional African nation of Wakanda, a technologically advanced utopia where the scientific inventions surpassed even those of Reed Richards. Jack Kirby was the master at creating visually astounding science fiction environments, and his Wakanda is a precise jungle of advanced wires and cables – everything in the nation is joined together like the motherboard of some giant computer. Black Panther teamed up with Captain America a few years later in 1968 when T'Challa brought Steve Rogers to Wakanda to battle Baron Zemo. That same year Black Panther came to New York and in *The Avengers* #52 he joined the Earth's mightiest heroes, and has been involved with the team in some way ever since.

Black Panther writer Reginald Hudlin explained the importance of the character: "For black readers, the unprecedented nature of the character was shocking... The idea of a black super hero who was a king of a kingdom with incredible wealth and scientific genius that somehow perfectly balanced its own cultural legacy with the best of the Western World... Captain America represented the best of the American Spirit. The Black Panther represented the best of the African Spirit."⁵

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Fantastic Four* #52
July 1966

T'Challa fought the Fantastic Four in his first appearance, and nearly beat them.



BLACK WIDOW

When Black Widow first appeared as an Iron Man villain in *Tales of Suspense* #52 in 1964, she wasn't a super hero, but a spy. She was under orders from her Russian superiors to team up with the Crimson Dynamo to destroy Stark and a Russian defector named Professor Vanko – Natasha failed to kill Stark but Vanko died in a fight with the Crimson Dynamo. "Madame Natasha" reappeared several times as a femme fatale character, playing on Tony's weakness for beautiful women. She even convinced Hawkeye to attack Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* #57, several months before both characters became heroes instead of villains.

"Even though she started as a villainess and I later tried to make her a heroine, I've always secretly suspected that she was more interesting as a wicked woman than a law-abiding lady," explained Stan Lee. "But she was fun to write about because I could always keep the reader guessing as to whether to like her or loathe her. Although, as far as I'm concerned, the lady was too lovely to loathe no matter what she did."¹⁶

Black Widow finally got a costume and weapons in *The Avengers* #29 but she was still trying to kill Iron Man and the Avengers. Thankfully, her love for Hawkeye meant that she was able to break her Russian conditioning and defect to America in the following issue. Natasha wouldn't officially join the Avengers until *The Avengers* #111, many years later.

The Amazing Spider-Man #86 saw Black Widow adopt the red hair, black catsuit and wrist-shooters look that has defined the super hero ever since. While Natasha has no superpowers she has extensive KGB espionage and combat training, along with an extensive set of spy gadgets and weapons. For several years Black Widow teamed up with Daredevil and for 16 issues Daredevil became *Daredevil and the Black Widow*. Natasha and Matt Murdock eventually

parted ways, and she has been a key member of the Avengers ever since.

The Avengers is a team of human and conflicted heroes, often struggling to do the right thing and to listen to the voices of their better angels. Black Widow's story has always been about mistakes, forgiveness and repentance – there are many Avengers who have made poor choices in their previous lives, and there is nothing more heroic than striving to be a better person.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Amazing Spider-Man*

July 1970

when she fought Spider-Man, trying

#86

Natasha's current outfit was debuted

to get the secret to his powers.



THE AVENGERS

By the end of 1963, it was time to pull everything together. In "The Coming of the Avengers", Thor's evil brother Loki frames the Hulk for a crime that he did not commit, so Thor, Iron Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp all join forces with Hulk to clear his name. For readers this really did feel as if all their favourite heroes were coming together for the first time.

Stan Lee explains why he thought the Avengers worked so well together: "Iron Man's alter ego, the wealthy industrialist Tony Stark, was a natural leader. Don Blake, in the persona of Thor, Son of Odin, provided the necessary colour and contrast as well as a fabulous sense of fantasy. Henry Pym and his lady-love, Jan, were totally different from the others that they rounded the team out beautifully. As for the Hulk, any group of do-gooders that included a not-so-jolly green giant would never have a dull moment."⁷

Part of the thrill of the Avengers came from the team's ever-changing roster. The Hulk left the team, but returned to join forces with Namor to fight the Avengers in the next issue. Captain America filled the Hulk's place in the roster from issue #4. Membership of the team was stable until *The Avengers* #16 when every member except Captain America left the team. Cap recruited former villains Hawkeye, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch to fill the Avengers' ranks. Over the next few years the roster would expand to include Black Widow, Black Knight and Black Panther. As the Avengers grew, so did the scope of their adventures. The Avengers were bigger than the world.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Avengers* #1
September 1963

In the first Avengers issue Loki framed Hulk for a crime he did

not commit.



STEVE DITKO

In many ways, the reclusive Steve Ditko was the polar opposite of the bombastic Stan Lee. Steve came from a small town in Pennsylvania, while Stan was a New Yorker. Stan's stories included liberal ideas, while Steve became more enamoured of Ayn Rand's objectivist and libertarian ideas. But something about the alchemy between these two men created the most popular super hero the world has ever seen.

Born in 1927 in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, Steve loved comics from an early age, collecting Prince Valiant comics and sharing them with his father as a child. As soon as he was able, Steve moved to New York, studying under Batman artist Jerry Robinson at the Cartoonists and Illustrators School. Steve's career in comics was nearly cut short when he contracted tuberculosis in 1954. When Steve had recovered, Stan Lee was impressed with his work and gave him regular offbeat science fiction short story comics. Stan used the "Marvel Method" of writing, where he would give the artist brief plot outlines, and let them block in the artwork as they saw fit.

Steve's art style was like no one else at the time. He spent hours studying, and would keep books of reference material by his work desk so that he could draw everything exactly right – from the folds in a woman's dress to the shape of the gun in an alien's hands. Stan and Steve were working on *Amazing Adult Fantasy* – the title chosen to make readers feel sophisticated. Stan wanted a new hero, but one who felt new and exciting, an ordinary teen who would resonate with Marvel's growing teenage readership. He already had a name... Spider-Man!

KEY TO PLATE

I: *Amazing Adult Fantasy* #14
July 1962

Steve Ditko and Stan Lee worked together for years before the birth of Spider-Man.



SPIDER-MAN

Stan Lee first asked Jack Kirby to create Spider-Man. Stan wanted a young, relatable super hero, but when Jack produced pages about a boy who found a magic ring that gave him spider powers, they just weren't quite right. So Stan approached Steve Ditko.

Steve wanted this comic to be faithful and accurate to teenage life. Peter Parker wasn't a strapping Kirby-like super hero, he was a slight figure who often slunk into the shadows. *Amazing Fantasy #15* (renamed from *Amazing Adult Fantasy* for its final issue) told the story of Peter Parker, a bookish teenager who was bitten by a radioactive spider, giving him incredible powers. At first Peter used his powers to make money, but when a burglar that he could have stopped killed his uncle Ben, Peter vowed to become a hero. The story ends with the final panel reminding us that "With great power there must come – great responsibility!"

Publisher Martin Goodman wasn't sure about the character who would later become Marvel's most popular hero, and only agreed to include Spider-Man because this was the last issue of a cancelled comic. "We were about to discontinue our *Amazing Fantasy* series," wrote Stan Lee. "That meant nobody would care what stories I put into it, because it would be the last issue anyway." Martin Goodman soon changed his mind when sales of the comic shot through the roof, and by early 1963 Spidey had his own regular title – *The Amazing Spider-Man*. One of the many things that fans loved about Spider-Man was his humanity. Peter Parker was a regular Joe who had problems with money, health, family and dating – as well as the responsibility of being a super hero.

Steve Ditko's artwork was like nothing else. As Stan wrote years later: "His layouts and drawings set the unique style for the strip, a style that would last for many years to come, a style that made Spidey utterly distinctive among comic strip creations. His sense of pacing, his flair for action scenes, and his

ability to make the most outlandish situations look totally believable after he had drawn them gave the early Spider-Man stories an impetus that helped keep them rolling until this very day."⁸

Steve's thin, anxious Spider-Man felt like a real teenager – there were lines of genuine worry on Peter Parker's face. Steve Ditko loved to constantly push the envelope, drawing Peter Parker a supporting cast of realistic but disturbing characters, including the boorish J. Jonah Jameson and the frail Aunt May. In 1966 Steve Ditko left Marvel, passing the art duties to John Romita Sr., who would draw Spider-Man for the next few years. Steve had already ensured his legacy; his creations would live on for decades, growing and shifting as they found generation after generation of readers.

KEY TO PLATE

1: The Amazing Spider-Man #19

December 1964

Spider-Man was very much part of the Marvel Universe and was friends with the Human Torch.

2: The Amazing Spider-Man #33

February 1966

Coming towards the end of Ditko's run, The Amazing Spider-Man #33 is seen as one of his

most emotionally powerful issues.



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DOCTOR STRANGE

In 1963 *Strange Tales* #110 introduced Dr. Stephen Strange, an arrogant surgeon who damaged his hands in a car crash and then studied to become a practitioner of the mystic arts. Doctor Strange lived in the Sanctum Sanctorum, which, like most Marvel locations, was found in New York City.

Doctor Strange never saw the popularity of Spider-Man, and at first was kept to five-page stories at the back of *Strange Tales*, with Doctor Strange's surname coming from the name of the comic. Stan felt that he needed something a little more, later he would write: "I love catchy phrases. It wasn't enough to call him Doctor Strange. I had to add 'Master of the Mystic Arts' to the title."⁹ Stan was perhaps not sure about Doctor Strange at first, worrying that he would be too hard to understand. He needn't have worried, as the character would soon find an audience.

The relatively loose working arrangement of Stan's "Marvel Method" of scripting allowed Steve the creative freedom to explore the mind-bending concepts introduced by the character. Doctor Strange traversed psychedelic landscapes filled with precise, rippling details.

While Doctor Strange was never the runaway success that Spider-Man was, he found his own audience and grew in popularity over Ditko's run on the title and beyond. The character was especially popular on college campuses and became a sort of counter-culture mascot, even appearing on the cover of Pink Floyd's second album *A Saucerful of Secrets*, released in 1968.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Strange Tales* #122

July 1964

While other heroes fought more

conventional villains, Doctor

Strange battled metaphysical

opponents like Nightmare, the

Lord of Dreams.



DAREDEVIL

In 1964 *Daredevil* introduced lawyer Matthew Murdock who was blinded in a childhood accident which gave him other, advanced senses. *Daredevil #1* was written by Stan and drawn by veteran comics artist Bill Everett, with Jack Kirby pitching in on character design. The first issue of *Daredevil* bursts with action and excitement, with Everett's pencils giving Matt Murdock a lithe, athletic feel. *Daredevil #2* was pencilled by Joe Orlando, an artist and editor who had been working on EC's horror comics and MAD magazine. Wally Wood (another EC veteran) took over from issue #5 and gave Daredevil his distinctive red costume in issue #7.

Daredevil was very much part of the connected Marvel Universe. He was constantly interacting with other characters – Ben Grimm pops into his office for legal advice in the second issue, and Daredevil battles Spider-Man villain Electro in the same comic. The Marvel Universe felt like a living, breathing thing, with stories branching off in different directions, then meeting up again.

Stan Lee was surprised to find a new audience for the character; writing years later: "Among my most treasured memories in connection with Daredevil are the many letters we've received over the past years, letters from people associated with organisations which aid the handicapped, and particularly the blind. These letters have told of the warm reception given to Daredevil's adventures by handicapped readers, readers who feel they have finally found a hero with whom they can empathise."¹⁰

Over the years creators like Frank Miller, Kevin Smith and Brian Michael Bendis have used the character to discuss issues of faith, death, celebrity and forgiveness, perhaps in ways they couldn't with other super heroes.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Daredevil #1*
April 1964

The first issue of Daredevil promised readers another hero

in the style of the hugely popular Spider-Man.



FABULOUS FLO STEINBERG

Marvel was growing into something bigger than anyone could have hoped. Stan Lee couldn't handle everything on his own, so in 1963 he hired Florence "Flo" Steinberg to be his "gal Friday" – a cross between a PA, a secretary, and a fixer. Flo was a 24-year-old History major who had only recently moved to New York – she didn't know a great deal about comics when she started, but for \$65 a week she was willing to learn.

Marvel Comics at the time was essentially Stan Lee. Marvel was published by Martin Goodman's Magazine Management company, and Stan kept a one man office. Writers like Mario Puzo, Mickey Spillane and Bruce Jay Friedman were all employed as Magazine Management staff writers at one time, all of them wondering about the excitable comics editor who could often be seen jumping on the furniture as he was dictating plots to secretaries. Production manager Sol Brodsky kept the ship running, but Flo was the second full-time Marvel Comics staff member.

Flo soon became indispensable to Marvel. Her wide range of duties included taking notes from Stan, chasing down artwork from artists, replying to every single reader letter, sending artwork to the Comics Code Authority, and also stopping unwanted visitors from entering the Marvel offices. Often she would tell children trying to sneak in that yes, this was where Spider-Man lived, but he was out stopping a robbery at that moment. Marvel received over a hundred letters from fans a day, and Flo made sure that they were all opened and answered.

Flo was such a ubiquitous presence at Marvel that it wasn't long before Stan started referring to her in the letters pages, always as "Fabulous Flo

Steinberg". *What If #11* from 1978 even has Flo as a character in the Jack Kirby written story called "What if the Original Marvel Bullpen Had Become the Fantastic Four?", with Flo taking the place of Sue Storm to Stan Lee's Reed Richards.

In 1968 Flo Steinberg left Marvel to work in independent comics, but eventually returned to Marvel in the 1990s as a proofreader, where she worked (at least part time) until her death in 2017.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *What If? Vol 1 #11*

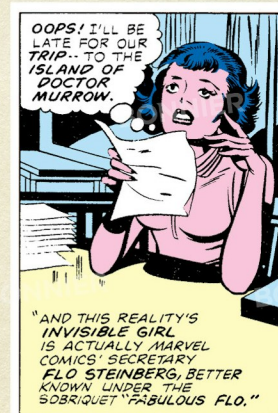
1 October 1978

Everyone in the Marvel Bullpen got their own nickname, and "Fabulous Flo" was no exception.

2: *What If? Vol 1 #11*

1 October 1978

In an issue of *What If?* comic, Jack Kirby drew the Marvel Bullpen as the Fantastic Four.



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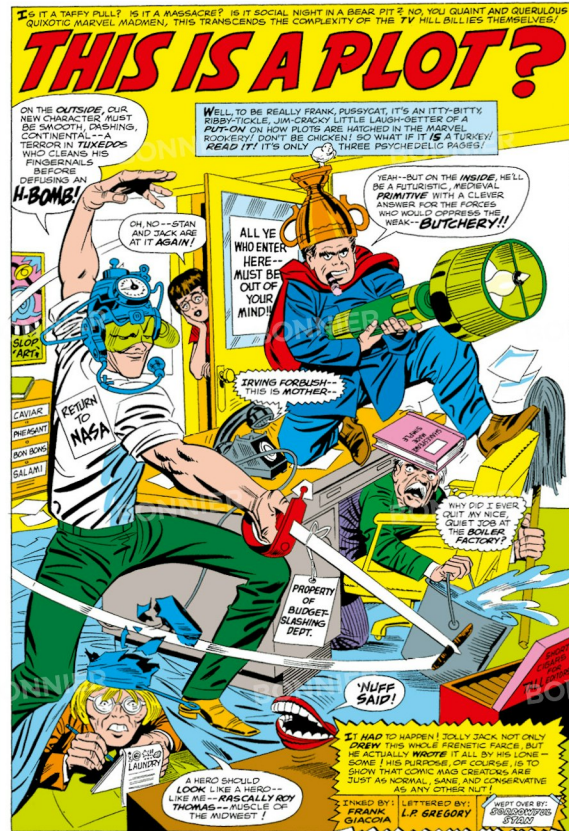


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Roy followed in Stan's footsteps, and Stan began to trust him enough to let him loose on the Marvel stable of characters. Roy's first super hero comic was *Iron Man*, and before long he was writing *The Avengers*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Doctor Strange* and *The X-Men*. In 1972 Stan Lee became publisher of Marvel, so Roy took his place as editor-in-chief, still writing flagship title *The Fantastic Four* as part of his other duties. Roy left Marvel in 1980, but has continued to work for Marvel on various projects ever since.

Jack Kirby wrote and drew this parody of the Marvel Bullpen. Roy Thomas can be seen in the lower

left of the image.



THE MERRY MARVEL MARCHING SOCIETY

Stan knew that the most important thing for Marvel Comics wasn't the super heroes or the large list of titles – it was the fans. Marvel Comics had a column called "Bullpen Bulletins", where Stan would update the readers about the latest titles and news of the Marvel writers and artists. Even though at first he was the only regular member of staff (joined by Sol Brodsky as a freelance production manager and later by Flo Steinberg), he made the Marvel Bullpen sound like a bustling hive of ideas.

Everyone had nicknames from "Smilin' Stan" (or "Stan the Man") to "Jolly Jack" (or "King Kirby"). Bundles of mail poured in every day, but every letter was answered by "Fabulous Flo Steinberg". In 1964 the Merry Marvel Marching Society (also known as the MMMS) was formed. For \$1 members would get a letter, a membership card, a certificate, a badge, a notepad and a record of "The Voices of Marvel". The Merry Marvel Marching Society grew to be so popular that it almost became a full-time job just to process all the applications.

As Marvel was growing so quickly, continuity mistakes were bound to slip into the comics, but Stan's genius was making a game of it. Readers who wrote in with errors (and an explanation for why they occurred) would receive a "no-prize". Originally, it was just a mention in the letters pages. Later, Marvel would actually send an envelope with the words "Congratulations! This envelope contains a genuine Marvel Comics NO-PRIZE which you have just won!" which was, of course, empty inside.



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KEY TO PLATE

1: **Fantastic Four King-Sized
Special #5**

November 1967

The Merry Marvel Marching Society members (referred to here as MMMSers) were soon part of Marvel comics.

THE X-MEN

Introduced in 1963, the X-Men were heroes who were hated and scorned just because of the way they were born. Stan wanted to call the comic *The Mutants*, but the name was changed to *The X-Men* after Martin Goodman told him that no one would understand the word "mutant".

Created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, the X-Men were a group of teenagers brought together by Professor Charles Xavier. Led by the ever-serious Cyclops, the team consisted of the acrobatic Beast, the winged Angel, the frosty Iceman and the telekinetic Marvel Girl. The X-Men's main nemesis was Magneto, a mutant with the power of magnetism. Magneto believed that mankind and mutants could not coexist, and humans must be wiped off the face of the Earth, while Professor X wanted humans and mutants to live together peacefully.

The battle between the non-violent Professor X and the militant Magneto could be seen in terms of the struggle between Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Similarly, the fact that the mutant gene manifested itself at puberty was seen by some as a way to explore LGBT issues. Magneto was revealed to be a survivor of Nazi concentration camps, giving a damaged humanity and a background to his battle against prejudice. "Mutants in the Marvel Universe have always stood as a metaphor for the underclass, the outsiders; they represent the ultimate minority,"¹² explains X-Men writer Chris Claremont.

By the end of the 1960s, however, sales of *The X-Men* were flagging, and while writer Roy Thomas and artist Neal Adams tried to revitalise the comic with new characters like Havok and Polaris, the greatest danger to *The X-Men* was reader apathy. Sales dwindled and from 1970 *The X-Men* became a reprint title, reusing old issues. But the X-Men were about to mutate.

KEY TO PLATE

I: The Uncanny X-Men #1
September 1963

The first issue of *The X-Men* pitted a group of superpowered

teens against Magneto, the master of magnetism.



TO ME,
MY X-MEN!

THE ALL-NEW, ALL-DIFFERENT X-MEN

Giant-Size X-Men #1 was a massive mutation for the X-Men. In 1975 writer Len Wein and artist Dave Cockrum started almost completely from the ground up, reimagining the team and the dynamic. When the original X-Men are captured by Krakoa the living island, Professor X and Cyclops bring an entirely new team together to save them.

The X-Men were no longer white students; they were now a diverse group of adults from all over the world. Some were completely new heroes – like Storm from Africa, Colossus from Russia, Nightcrawler from Germany and the Native-American Thunderbird – while others like the Sunfire, Banshee and Wolverine (from Japan, Ireland and Canada respectively) had been seen in previous Marvel comics.

Something about this team was incredibly compelling, and readers flocked back to *The X-Men*. Stan Lee summed it up: "It's almost impossible to read a few issues of *The X-Men* without feeling that each and every one of the mutant heroes has become a close personal friend, because they all have their own distinctive personalities that make you feel you know them, understand them and care about them."¹³

"From the ashes of the past grow the fires of the future," claimed the first page of *Giant-Size X-Men #1*, and writer Len Wein had no idea how right he was.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Giant-Size X-Men #1*
May 1975

The new team revealed here
would breathe new life into
the X-Men.



DARK PHOENIX AND BEYOND

Writer Chris Claremont was joined by artist John Byrne, and the spark between the two creators translated directly into sales, *The Uncanny X-Men* became one of Marvel's highest-selling comics. Perhaps the most shocking story of their run is "The Dark Phoenix Saga". Jean Grey had recently been given incredible powers as the Phoenix. "Chris [Claremont] had a story in mind where Phoenix was going to slowly ... be corrupted by her power and become a great danger," recalled editor-in-chief Jim Shooter in a later interview. "It was going to be a permanent change in her character – she was going to become evil."¹⁴

Chris Claremont and John Byrne created a story where the Phoenix murdered a planet of people and was depowered by the Shi'ar; but it didn't feel as if Jean was being sufficiently punished. After a long discussion it was decided: the Phoenix had to die. This was a huge deal – Jean Grey was a Stan Lee creation, and her death made it feel as if anything could happen.

In 1991 a companion title was launched, titled simply *X-Men*, which was written by Chris Claremont and drawn and co-plotted by Jim Lee. The new *X-Men #1* still holds the Guinness World Record for the best-selling comic book of all time.

Former *X-Men* editor Louise Simonson knew what made the comic work, saying: "If there is a theme to these *Uncanny X-Men* issues, it is transformation. This idea ... like a repeated melody, is one of the things that has made *X-Men* stories so effective, affecting and impossible to ignore."¹⁵

KEY TO PLATE

I: *The Uncanny X-Men*
#135

July 1980
Phoenix versus the X-Men.



WOLVERINE

Wolverine's first appearance in *The Incredible Hulk* #181 (technically, he appears in the final panel of issue #180) in 1974 did not provide many clues for how incredibly popular the character would become. Veteran Marvel artist John Romita Sr. designed the character, while penciller Herb Trimpe and writer Len Wein created the first issue. In the issue, Wolverine is an agent of the Canadian government, a scrappy mutant with unbreakable, Adamantium-laced claws. Readers would learn in later comics that he had heightened senses, Adamantium bones and a mutant healing factor.

Logan returned in *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 in 1975 and was part of the new ongoing X-Men team. It wasn't until Canadian artist and co-plotter John Byrne joined the team that Wolverine was given more of a backstory. Soon he was popular enough for his own comic, which often featured other X-Men including Kitty Pryde.

Logan's origins were initially vague and mysterious – a Canadian government agent known as Weapon X, he was unable to remember much of his past. In 1991 the "Weapon X" story in *Marvel Comics Presents* by Barry Windsor-Smith filled in the details about the shadowy government programme that added Adamantium to Logan's bones and turned him into a brain-washed killer.

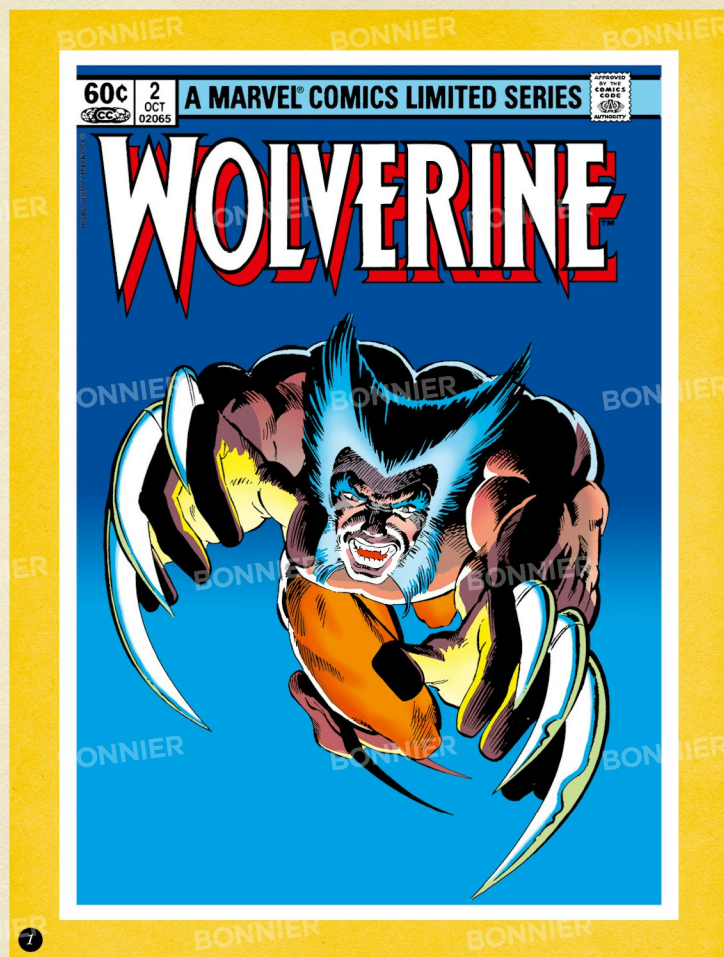
In 2001 *Origin* went back even further into his past – Wolverine was actually born James Howlett, the sickly son of rich Canadian farm owners (though possibly the illegitimate son of the groundskeeper, Thomas Logan), who fled his home after his mutant powers manifested themselves.

Wolverine's complex and tortured nature has evolved to make him one of Marvel's most interesting tough guys, and has made him one of the most popular super heroes in the world.

KEY TO PLATE

I: **Wolverine** #2
October 1982

In this story Wolverine's journey
to Japan revealed secrets from
his past.



THE PUNISHER

A former marine, Frank Castle first appeared in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #129, waging a one-man war on crime after his family was killed by underworld hitmen. "I needed a disposable character to be front-and-centre for a one-issue confrontation with Spider-Man," explained writer Gerry Conway. "The early 1970s were a dark time, with vigilantes on the street, and corruption in high places. I thought it might be fun for Spider-Man to face a modern vigilante who'd been manipulated by [bad guy] the Jackal into believing Spidey's negative press."¹⁶

Frank Castle's distinctive death's head emblem was initially much smaller in Gerry Conway's concept drawing, but art director John Romita Sr. asked for it to be made much larger, and in artist Ross Andru's finished pages it covers the Punisher's entire chest.

The Comics Code Authority at the time had very strict guidelines about heroes killing people, so the Punisher initially used a non-lethal "concussion rifle", and carried guns that fired special "mercy bullets". His non-lethal ways didn't last long, and soon he was gunning down bad guys without a second thought.

Frank Castle was a new and different type of comic character; a tortured anti-hero who was on a much darker and more personal mission than many of the heroes at the time. He has had several comics of his own, including *The Punisher*, *The Punisher: War Zone* and *The Punisher: War Journal*. In 2003 the series *Born* by Garth Ennis and Darick Robertson told the story of Frank's time during the Vietnam War, and how the seething violence of the Punisher was always just below the surface of Frank Castle.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Punisher* #1
July 1987

The Punisher has always been one of Marvel's most extreme

characters, an unstoppable force in his war against crime.



CAPTAIN MARVEL

The Captain Marvel name is a torch that has been passed to several characters in the Marvel Universe, each with widely different backgrounds. The first Marvel hero to carry the name was an alien called Mar-Vell, who came from a race known as the Kree. Created by Stan Lee and Gene Colan in 1967, Captain Mar-Vell soon rebelled against his Kree superiors and became Earth's protector. The character was revamped several times over the next decade, before dying in Marvel's first original graphic novel: 1982's *The Death of Captain Marvel*. Written and painted by Jim Starlin, whose father had recently died of cancer, the graphic novel is a powerful exploration of death, loss and acceptance.

Monica Rambeau was the second character to take the name Captain Marvel. A strong, confident black woman, in her first panel we see Monica setting off Peter Parker's spider-sense because of her extraordinary powers. A former New Orleans harbour patrol lieutenant, this Captain Marvel was transformed into a being of energy when she smashed a villain's energy disruptor. Monica joined the Avengers and eventually became team leader. After problems with her powers, Monica gave up the Captain Marvel name, becoming Photon then Pulsar and later Spectrum.

Carol Danvers had been part of the Marvel Universe for nearly as long as Mar-Vell himself. In Mar-Vell's second appearance he met Ms. Danvers, who was head of security on the Cape Kennedy missile base that happened to be holding a giant alien robot. Carol disappeared from comics for a while after being caught in a Kree device called a Pysche-Magnetron, but returned in 1977 in her own title and with new powers. *Ms. Marvel*, written by Gerry Conway with art from John Romita Sr., was designed to be at the forefront of the feminist movement; Carol Danvers is now a magazine editor working for J. Jonah Jameson, splitting her time between battling bad guys and fighting for equal pay.

Ms. Marvel was intended in some way to open up the male-dominated comics industry to women. "Almost without our intending it," explained Gerry Conway, "this book was a sign at the bottom of the treehouse that said, in the mildest possible way, 'Girls Allowed'." ¹⁷ Ms. Marvel joined the Avengers, and became a semi-regular guest star in *The Uncanny X-Men* during Chris Claremont's run. Carol gained new powers, a new look and a new super hero name: Binary. After she lost these powers she took on the name Warbird, before reverting to Ms. Marvel.

In 2012 Marvel launched a new *Captain Marvel* comic written by Kelly Sue DeConnick with art from Dexter Soy. Carol took on the Captain Marvel name after being encouraged to honour her mentor Mar-Vell by Captain America.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Captain Marvel #1*

May 1968

The first Captain Marvel (real name Mar-Vell) was friends with Carol Danvers.

2: *The Amazing Spider-Man*

The Avengers' leader.

Annual #16

January 1982

Monica Rambeau was the second Captain Marvel, and later became



1



2

GHOST RIDER

The concept for Ghost Rider was initially pitched by writer Gary Friedrich as a revamp for the Evel Knievel-themed *Daredevil* villain The Stuntmaster. The idea of a demonic motorbike rider was decided by editor-in-chief Roy Thomas to be too cool to be a bit-part villain, so artist Mike Ploog was put to work to draw a new hero called Ghost Rider in 1972's *Marvel Spotlight* #5. Johnny Blaze was a daredevil motorcycle stuntman who had made a pact with the devil. Over the years he has gained powers beyond his burning head and vehicle – perhaps his most striking is the Penance Stare, which forces the victim to endure all the pain that they have caused other people.

Johnny Blaze fought supernatural evil in his own comic for several years, using his supernatural abilities to punish the wicked. Johnny Blaze's soul had been bonded with the demon Spirit of Vengeance called Zarathos, and after a long battle Johnny was finally able to rid himself of the curse of being Ghost Rider.

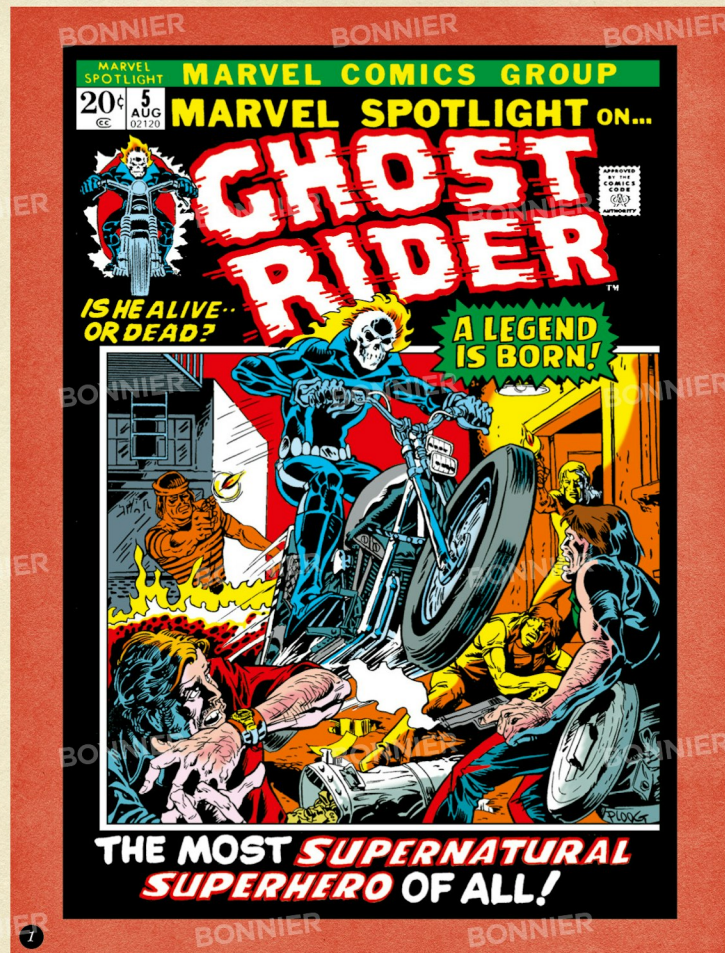
Various other characters have been Ghost Rider. Danny Ketch took the role for most of the 1990s, a young man who gained his powers when he touched the glowing gas cap of a mysterious motorcycle. Danny's powers were much the same as Johnny's and it was later revealed that the two were long-lost brothers. More recently Robbie Reyes, a Mexican-American high-school student, has taken on the role. Reyes' Ghost Rider drives a car instead of a motorcycle and has a polished metal flaming head instead of a floating skull.

Ghost Rider is a dark and powerful hero. He always manages to maintain an air of supernatural mystery, his demonic face hiding all human emotions.

KEY TO PLATE

I: *Marvel Spotlight* #5
August 1972

Ghost Rider allowed Marvel to
tell darker, supernatural stories



BLADE

Due to changes in the Comics Code Authority, horror comics started to come back into fashion in the 1970s, bringing hordes of werewolves, vampires and monsters back to the newsstand. Marvel was never a company to miss out on a trend, and launched *The Tomb of Dracula* in 1972. A vampire comic needed a vampire hunter, and Blade was introduced in *The Tomb of Dracula* #10, written by Marv Wolfman and pencilled by Gene Colan. Blade is initially presented as a street-talking warrior – his bandolier of stakes is held over a green leather jacket and he sports an afro and yellow wraparound sunglasses. Gene Colan's pencils give Blade a tough, physical look. "Maybe you're hot-stuff back in Transylvania, but nobody messes around with Blade – the Vampire-Slayer!" he taunts Dracula in his first appearance.

Blade, real name Eric Brooks, was born in 1929 in London and had dedicated his life to finding the vampire that had killed his mother. Due to the unnatural circumstances surrounding his birth, Blade was born with an enzyme in his blood that made him immune to vampire bites and mind control.

Blade reappeared in the 1990s as part of Marvel's *Rise of the Midnight Sons* crossover, sporting a new look but with the same determination for killing vampires. The afro and wraparound shades were gone, but the leather jacket and fearless sneer were still very much present. Now a member of the supernatural Nightstalkers team, Blade's weapon of choice was a specially treated samurai sword.

Blade's abilities were changed in *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* #9 in 1999 when he was bitten by Moribus, the living vampire, which gave Blade increased strength and turned him into "the Daywalker", a vampire who can come out during the day.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Tomb of Dracula*
#10

July 1973
Blade's look has changed over

the years, but his no-nonsense
attitude to vampires has not.



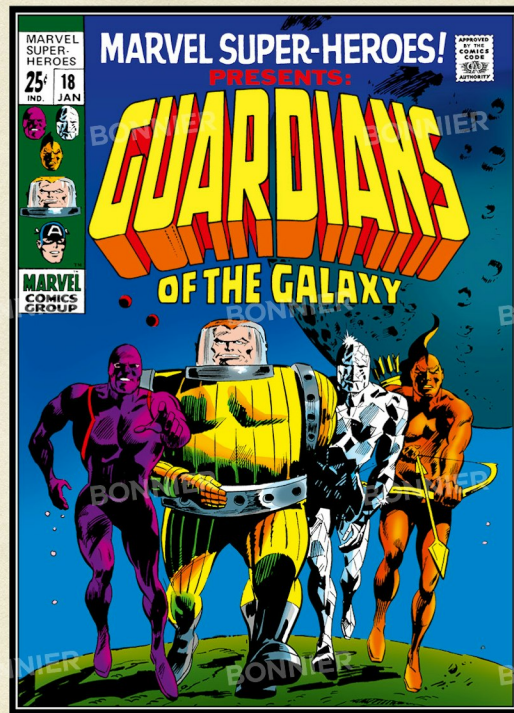
THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

The first Guardians of the Galaxy team was introduced by writer Arnold Drake and artist Gene Colan in *Marvel Super Heroes* #18 in 1969, and were a time-travelling group of warriors from the 30th century. Charlie-27 from the planet Jupiter; Martinex from Pluto and Yondu from Centauri-IV joined Earth astronaut Vance Astro to fight evil aliens called the Badoon.

Meanwhile, Groot first appeared in *Tales to Astonish* #13 in 1960, a Lee-Kirby monster-of-the-week. Peter Quill, Star-Lord, was a cocky astronaut first seen in *Marvel Preview* #4 driven to avenge the death of his mother by Badoon soldiers. Rocket was originally conceived by Bill Mantlo and Keith Giffen in *Marvel Preview* #7 in 1976. Drax and Gamora were both members of the Infinity Watch, a team formed to keep the Infinity Stones in check. Drax the Destroyer was once a human named Arthur Douglas, transformed after his family was killed by Thanos. Gamora was the adopted daughter of Thanos, but Drax and Gamora learned to work together as teammates.

These five characters were not brought together until 2008 as part of the “Annihilation” saga. Star-Lord, Groot, Rocket, Gamora and Drax share a love of adventure, the need for justice and an inability to fit in anywhere else.

Writers Dan Abnett and Andy Lanning call them “a hard-hitting, proactive team prepared to jump headlong into the flames and make sure that future cataclysms... get headed off at the pass. It’s a dirty job, but somebody’s gotta do it. Those bodies are the Guardians of the Galaxy.”¹⁸



1

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Marvel Super-Heroes* #18
January 1969

The first Guardians team included
Charlie-27, Yondu, Martinex and
Major Vance Astro

THANOS

Thanos has long cast a shadow over the Marvel Universe. Created by Jim Stalin, Thanos was first conceived as a galactic tyrant bent on domination, but was later revealed to be in love with the personification of Death itself.

In *The Invincible Iron Man #55*, Thanos is a member of an alien race known as the Titans. He describes himself as "Thanos the First", and only wants power. It isn't until later that Thanos' infatuation with Death is revealed, making him a much darker and more complex character.

For many of his early appearances he was locked in battle with either Captain Mar-Vell or Adam Warlock, a synthetic humanoid who was created to be the perfect man. For someone who worships Death, Thanos values his time with the living and has had a lot of different allies over the years. He adopted Gamora, the last of a species called the Zen-Whoberi, and trained her to be an assassin. Though Thanos was not particularly paternal to Gamora, his methods were undeniably effective.

Thanos later brought together a superpowered cosmic team called the Black Order. The team consisted of Proxima Midnight (the mistress of hand-to-hand combat), Corvus Glaive (her husband and Thanos' second-in-command), Black Dwarf (a giant with impenetrable skin), and Ebony Maw (powerful in mind-control). The Black Order were one of the most powerful forces in the galaxy, nearly impossible to defeat.

As a character Thanos has moved from being a simple intergalactic tyrant to something more sinister and disturbing. The reason that Thanos scares so many heroes is that they know he will not be finished until every last being in the universe is dead.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *Marvel Two-In-One*
Annual #2

December 1977
Thanos is powerful enough to

take on anyone in the Marvel
Universe.



THE INFINITY STONES

The Infinity Gems (later known as the Infinity Stones) were slowly introduced to the Marvel Universe, starting with the Soul Gem. In *The Thanos Quest* Thanos discovered that the Infinity Stones are powerful artefacts older than time itself. Thanos first tried to bring the Infinity Stones together in *The Avengers Annual #7* with the express intention of destroying every single star in the galaxy, but was stopped by the Avengers, Spider-Man and the Thing.

The Stones were collected and hidden by galactic beings known as the Elders of the Universe, but Thanos tracked them down once again. Thanos' biggest achievement was to collect all the Infinity Gems and wield them in a specially constructed Infinity Gauntlet. With this incredible power he was able to remove half the life from the universe in the blink of an eye during *The Infinity Gauntlet* saga – despite every single Marvel hero (and cosmic being) coming together to try to stop him. Eventually Thanos was undone because of his cruelty. He had kept the space pirate Nebula as a disfigured, zombie-like pet, and while Thanos was distracted Nebula was able to take the gauntlet from him and restore the balance of the universe.

The reason that the Infinity Stones work so well as a concept is that they are a reflection of the best things about Marvel stories. Marvel comics have great power; they are grounded in reality, they jump between different times and spaces, they feature some of the greatest minds around, and most importantly – they have soul.

KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Thanos Quest #2*
January 1990

Very few people are strong
enough to be able to control the

Infinity Stones.



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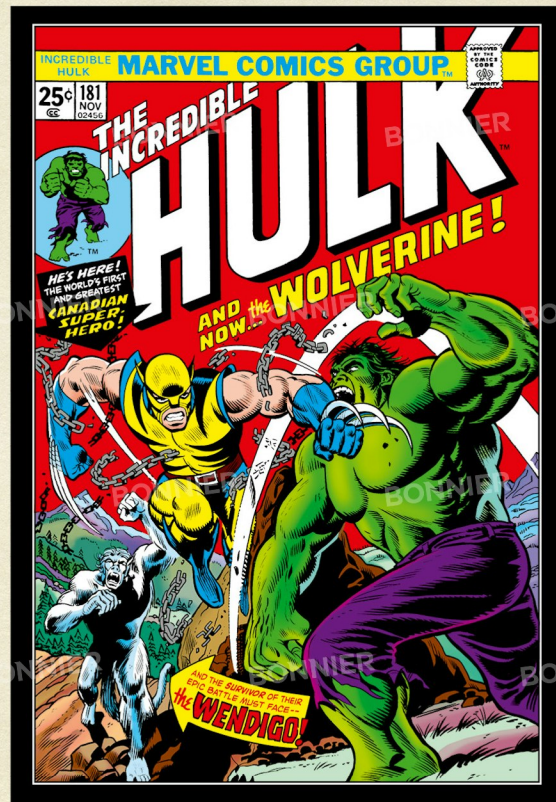
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KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Incredible Hulk* #181
 November 1974

In his first appearance Wolverine
 fought the Hulk and battled
 Wendigo.



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KEY TO PLATE

1: *The Avengers Annual* #1
September 1967

The original Avengers members
would often return to the team

in further adventures.

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