

COMIC COLUMN

by Sean McQuaid

As is the case with most pop culture mediums, comic books have seen their fair share of comebacks. Many popular current comic books star characters whose books were once cancelled: for example, *Green Lantern*, *Namor*, *Spectre*, *Doctor Strange*, *Demon*, *Incredible Hulk*, *Silver Surfer*, and many others. A particularly strong trend in the past few years has been the revival of books, characters, and concepts from the nineteen-seventies. Marvel Comics in particular has often struck gold with such seventies revivals as *Cage*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *What If*, *Deathlok*, *Warlock*, and, of course, *Ghost Rider* (a failed seventies book that is currently among Marvel's biggest hits and supports two spin off books: *Spirits of Vengeance* and the seventies reprint series *The Original Ghost Rider Rides Again*). The seventies cupboard isn't bare, though, as this month Marvel is reviving one of the most fondly remembered and long-running series of the seventies: *The Defenders*, who survived for an impressive one hundred and fifty-two issues before their cancellation in the early eighties. It's like seeing the Village People put out a new hit single. Everything old is new again...but that doesn't necessarily mean it's better. In fact, Marvel's new *Secret Defenders* series thus far leaves a bit to be desired.

For those unfamiliar with the Defenders, they were a team who made their debut in the early seventies as a three-issue try-out in *Marvel Feature*, which led to the team gaining their own series shortly thereafter. Their gimmick was that they were a "non-team": no official membership, no headquarters, no relationship with legal authorities, no rules, no regulations...no team. The group was really just an informal alliance of heroes who agreed to band together when they are needed "...to battle MENACES that threaten the security-or the very LIFE - of the planet EARTH!", as the introductory blurb on their title page proclaimed each month. The original Defenders were heroic types who didn't fit in well with groups: Doctor Strange, the reclusive surgeon-turned-sorcerer who specialized in battling mystic menaces; Namor the Sub-Mariner, the temperamental Atlantean prince who had been known to declare war on the surface world if he wasn't defending it from some other threat; and

the Hulk, the dim-witted, green-skinned powerhouse whose volatile temper led him to engage in aimless mass destruction at least as often as he beat up bad guys. The three misfits first got together to face the world-threatening menace of Yandroth (not a typo), with Doc Strange masterminding the operation after recruiting his two reluctant cohorts to supply the muscle.

At the conclusion of that adventure in *Marvel Feature* #1, Doc Strange suggested that they be ready to band together as Earth's "Defenders" again should the need arise. The Hulk and Namor were unenthusiastic, but agreed to pitch in against such later crises as the dread Dormammu and Xemnu (and you thought Yandroth's name was silly). After three issues of *Marvel Feature* the Defenders were a bonafide albeit loose-knit team, and they were awarded their own regular series.

Over the years the books went through many ups and downs, and the membership was constantly changing. Other heroes and heroines who regularly hooked up

with the Defenders would include the Silver Surfer, the Valkyrie, Nighthawk, Son of Satan (Hellstorm), Red Guardian (Starlight), Clea, Hellcat, Cage, Devil Slayer, Gargoyle, and the Beast, to say nothing of the dozens of "casual" members who worked with the Defenders at one time or another...just about every major character in Marvel continuity, everyone from Cap-

