

This month: Mighty Marvel Memories!

Tales to Astonish, by Peter David and John Estes

Strange Tales, by Kurt Busiek and Ricardo Villagran

Tales of Suspense, by James Robinson and Colin MacNeill

Older (or more learned) comics fans may remember that Marvel Comics once lived off science fiction/mystical/horror anthology comics like *Strange Tales*, *Tales to Astonish* and *Tales of Suspense*. When Marvel found its niche in the early sixties with super-heroes, these books began to feature characters like Doctor Strange, Giant-Man (Hank Pym) and Iron Man. All those titles are long since cancelled or renamed after their stars, but Marvel recently issued a three-book tribute to those old comics, featuring each title's stars in present-day tales together. It's fun stuff, with high-quality production values: fully painted artwork in a prestige form at (square-bound heavy paper stock), plus acetate outer covers (a la *Marvels*) that superimpose the cover text on the cover illustration (so readers can view the cover illustration text-free by flipping back the outer cover).

Tales to Astonish is the lighter literary snack of the two books I've read, featuring *TTA* alumni Hank Pym (mercifully in between costumed identities), his ex-wife the Wasp, and the Incredible Hulk. It's one of those great, incongruous but strangely effective team-up tales with all sorts of charming quirks: Hank Pym in his "scientific adventurer" persona (which beats his recently resumed Giant-Man alias any day); Pym and the Wasp reunited as partners in peril; and their chemistry with the newly intelligent but still violently unpredictable Hulk. It's also uniquely nostalgic to see this trio in action since they made up three fifths of the original *Avengers* team way back in 1963, making this story a reunion of sorts.

The story itself chronicles the heroes' efforts to recapture a mythologically deluded serial killer who is possessed by Loki, Norse god of mischief. The bogus "Loki" and his

attempts to remake Norway in his mythological image make for a compellingly dark, surreally allusive atmosphere, and David's script is characteristically sharp (though the dialogue's often a bit too pat, and David's trademark snappy patter is sometimes intrusive in such a dark tale as this). Estes's moody painting gives the book a visual fantasy punch that elevates *Tales to Astonish* beyond mediocre comic book fare.

Strange Tales, on the other hand, has its strength firmly rooted in the story rather than the art: this is no slight to Villagran, who turns in highly detailed paintings without sacrificing the story's myriad atmospheric nuances (I especially like his interpretation of the Thing); however, Kurt Busiek steals the show with this remarkably clever (and very strange) tale of stories within stories within stories (and so on). It's a mystical tale of the power of storytelling, and through it Busiek somehow manages (without unseemly contrivance) to incorporate virtually all the significant *ST* alumni: super-spy Nick Fury, super-heroes the Human Torch and the Thing (and their Indian chief buddy Wyatt Wingfoot), super-sorcerer Doctor Strange, and even one of those great old BEMs (Bug-Eyed Monsters) that used to be *Marvel's* bread-and-butter before the company went super-heroic. *Strange Tales* is a highly intelligent, surprisingly fun amalgamation of period pieces with a unifying narrative continuity and an eclectic all-star cast. It's great reading for any illustrated fiction fan, but especially for comic book history buffs.

-- Sean McQuaid

And then there's this...

Ever since last year's wonderful *Marvels* mini-series proved that the silver age of comics still had incredible marketing potential, Marvel's been trying to keep the cash coming in. And they've been going about it in their tried-and-true fashion: producing a seemingly endless array of books 'in the style of

that completely miss the mark in terms of story and quality. Case in point...

Tales of Suspense is the third of a series of books based on *Marvel's* old *Tales* books. Those books, published in the sixties, were the proving ground for many enduring characters like the Thing, Hank Pym, and Iron Man... a place to prove themselves before graduating to a new series. This book, on the other hand, is a poor attempt to sell to the retro-*Marvel* market. *Tales of Suspense* stars Captain America and Iron Man in a tale of... odd melancholy.

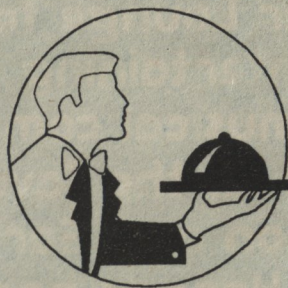
The setup is simple. A crack mercenary named Beck is recruited by an ultra-secret terrorist organization whose shock troops bear a striking resemblance to Iron Man and whose leader is an old German Nazi scientist who just happens to be an old nemesis of the Captain. Can you feel the obvious plotting tonight?

As the two heroes investigate the group, they look at each other a lot and tag-team us with griping about how jealous they are of each other. Cap muses that he's not much of a superhero without powers, and Iron Man worries that he's useless outside an armour suit. They manage to put aside their angst long enough to discover that neither one of them really needs armour or powers to be a hero and fight evil. There's a bunch of confused stuff about sleeper technology and global terrorism thrown in, but it's the horribly repetitive angst that kills it.

The most obvious sign that this is a *Marvels* cash-in is the painted artwork by MacNeill. I've never even heard of the guy, and after eyeballing his stiff painting over badly hidden pencils I doubt we'll be seeing him again. Yuck.

Sorry to all you painted comic fans out there, but this really isn't worth the \$10. You have been warned.

-- Trent Drake



RESTAURANT RETROSPECTIVE

THIS WEEK...
EVERYTHING KOOL

THIS EXPANDED ICE CREAM SHOP IS LOCATED IN THE Ellen's Creek Plaza on North River Road. I was initially attracted by their exotic flavours of soft-serve ice cream-- such as Pina Colada, as opposed to the usual Vanilla or Chocolate. I discovered that their treats rival those of Dairy Queen in quantity, quality, and price.

Why am I reviewing ice cream in the dead of winter? Because that is not all this restaurant offers. The menu has been expanded to include burgers, fries, sandwiches, and the like. The food is good, there is lots of it, and the prices are great. They feature student specials as well as their daily specials such as chicken nuggets, fries and a pop for \$3. The daily specials are all around \$3.50 and include pop. This makes for a cheap filling lunch. I ordered the chicken burgen platter and couldn't finish

it. The fries with the works (hamburger, onion, mozza cheese, gravy and peas) were piled so high the plate was invisible. This is a meal on it's own.

The staff are very friendly, and the interior is bright and cheerful. You can eat in, or take out. Call in orders are welcome, and the truly desperate student can charge it to their Visa. However, you will have to endure some guilt pangs after you eat that fudgy dessert because you will be immediately faced with the Diet Center next door.

For your next outing, give this new enterprise a try. It is worth the long walk to North River road, trust me. I give them 4 out of 5 cookies for fulfilling my student values of good food, and lots of it.

Aldera Chisholm

Rating System

5. Better than Mom's home cooked!
4. Your stomach will thank you.
3. Better than the cafeteria.
2. Only if you are really hungry.
1. Stay home and eat KD