

Comic Column

by Sean McQuaid

The period extending from the late nineteen-thirties to the early nineteen-fifties is generally referred to by comics historians as the Golden Age of Comics. This rather glowing description stems from the fact that this era saw the comic industry's first major boom, with Superman sparking a craze for costumed heroes that spawned countless crimefighters in thousands of comics that were eagerly devoured by kids and servicemen alike. One of the bigger names among the comic publishers was Timely Comics, a second-stringer outfit whose output wasn't always of the highest quality, spawning many forgettable characters and a handful of memorable ones. Of them all, only three made it really big before super heroes fell out of fashion in the fifties. These three were the patriotic adventurerer Captain America, the Atlantean warrior Namor (then better known as the Sub-Mariner), and the flaming android called the Human Torch (not to be confused with the flaming juvenile delinquent who's hung out with the Fantastic Four for the last few decades). These three have all long since returned to publication, and Timely has long since become better known as modern-day publishing mega-giant Marvel Comics, named in fond recollection of the old *Marvel Mystery Comics* wherein Namor and the Torch first made their homes. A more substantial connection to Marvel's past is currently on display in a new four-issue limited series from Marvel Comics: *The Invaders*, a super-heroic team adventure set in the nineteen-forties.

Apart from its company name, Marvel seldom acknowledges its comic book roots, leaving its legions of lesser-known Golden-Age oddballs to languish in obscurity. The only well-known Golden-Agers are Cap and Namor, both of whom have their own modern-day comic series (Captain America spent most of the decades following World War II in suspended animation in an iceberg(!) and was fished out in modern times by the Avengers, who inducted the miraculously youthful Cap into their ranks...as for Namor, well, Atlantean mutants seem to age even more slowly than the original cast of *Star Trek*). The original Human Torch is also still floating around (androids apparently being exempt from aging), though he was re-

cently forced into retirement by being stripped of his powers (probably to avoid readers confusing him with the firmly established Human Torch imitator of Fantastic Four fame). Apart from Cap, Namor, and the Torch, though, the Golden-Age Marvel characters have been largely forgotten in recent years.

One of Marvel's few Golden-Age revival periods came in the nineteen-seventies, when Golden-Age aficionado and World War II buff



Roy Thomas created the Invaders, a super-team inspired by the short-lived and painfully-named *All-Winners Squad* (appearing in the late forties in *All-Winners Comics* #19 and 21 and consisting of Captain America and Bucky, Namor, the Human Torch and Toro, the Whizzer, and Miss America; Thomas later justified his continuity tinkering by saying that the Squad was the post-war reorganization of the wartime Invaders and its sister teams). The Invaders membership included Cap, his sidekick Bucky (who, as revealed in *Avengers* #4, had been blown to Bucky-bits in the same misadventure that landed Captain America in suspended animation), the Human Torch, his sidekick Toro (who later

settled down into married life but was lured out of retirement as an adult long enough to be killed at the hands of the villainous Mad Thinker), Union Jack (a modern-day creation of Roy Thomas, a World War I veteran and British equivalent of Captain America), the Mighty Destroyer (a European-based Nazi-smasher from Golden Age comics who was revealed to be the son of Union Jack, whom the Destroyer soon succeeded as Union Jack II), and Spitfire (a super-swift British heroine and another invention of Thomas). The group debuted in *Giant-Size Invaders* #1 and graduated to their own regular series, which lasted almost three-and-a-half years before its cancellation, even spawning two spin-off groups: the Kid Commandos and the Liberty Legion (Thomas was inordinately fond of concocting alliterative group names).

The Kid Commandos were the youth wing of the Invaders, consisting of Bucky, Toro, an energy-powered Oriental-American gal named Golden Girl, and a black youth whose dubious ability to spin at superhuman speeds inspired his costumed identity as the Human Top (the Top was actually based upon an obscure nineteen-forties character of the same name). One wonders if the criminal element could make up its mind as to whether to run or laugh in the face of this quartet.

The Liberty Legion, considered the homefront-based "sister team" of the mobile Invaders, consisted entirely of minor Golden-Age characters rescued from obscurity by Thomas. They included the Patriot (basically Captain America without a shield), Red Raven (a guy raised by bird people and gifted with a bright, red winged body-suit that allowed him to fly), the Blue Diamond (an anthropologist who unearthed a mysterious, huge blue gem that blew up in his face and somehow imbued him with diamond hardness and strength instead of chopping him into hamburger), Miss America (the group's token female, a Supergirl-type who was revamped by Thomas as having no powers other than flight, presumably to facilitate the inevitable damsel-in-distress routines), the Whizzer (a yellow-clad, super-swift crimefighter who got his super-speed from, of

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