

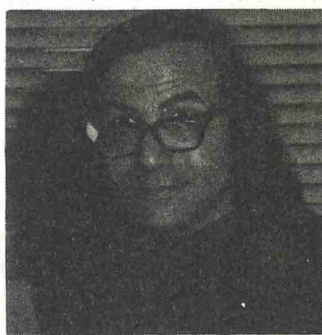


The Foom interview:

Steve Gerber

Conducted by
David Anthony Kraft

Articulate, bursting with ideas and opinions, Steve (Baby) Gerber is an absolute wonder to interview – even at 5 o'clock on a muggy Monday morning. He was born 20 September 1947 in St. Louis, Missouri, and graduated from St. Louis University in 1969 with a major in Radio-TV Communications and a minor in Creative Writing. Steve stands six feet tall, has black hair, brown eyes, and is nearsighted ("extremely – which may also account for some of the opinions



expressed in this interview," he admits anxiously.) Despite a pronounced distaste for melodrama in his scripting, he nonetheless persists in living a very melodramatic life. He can't help it; it's an unconscious compulsion. Gerber is also paranoid, and at one point attempted to pass this feature off as an interview with a Life Model Decoy. Gifted with a talent for the weird and offbeat, Steve is the driving force behind that feisty little fowl, Howard the Duck. And now, let's let Steve speak for himself...

FOOM: What kind of childhood did you have?

STEVE: Dull. Well, not *really* dull. I got involved with some pretty strange escapades from time to time. I grew up in a middle-class suburban community, went through the same school system my whole life, lived in the same house from the time I was born until the time I was 22 and married, and then moved into another dwelling. I don't think there was enough instability in the events of my life; any instability was internal. After awhile, with that much sameness in one's existence, if some variety or even some danger doesn't creep in occasionally, and the person is at all a thinking person, I believe he starts to go insane. And, really, that's what happened to me, I think, at some point. I reached a crisis where rebellion became

not something fashionable, not something even governed by any particular principles, just something I had to do in order to keep my mind alive. My home had become an anaesthetic, and it was like I was living under that anesthetic, just listening to the voices of my mother and father and brothers and sisters and the television set, which was on constantly, and receiving no new input, so I got involved in the whole hippie culture, but without any deeply-felt commitment. I was a participant/observer, one step back from everything. Close enough to touch, and close enough to get hurt a couple of times, but never fully committed to it. I spent a lot of time in Gaslight Square, which was St. Louis' one-block Greenwich Village, and came in contact with people who were doing drugs and doing the whole flowers and

beads thing, and I was involved with the protest against the Viet Nam War. But I was always too academic, too conscientiously critical, to throw myself into it totally. There seemed to be a certain shallowness of philosophy, somehow, and beyond that, even, there was a lot of violence associated with that culture, at least by the time it got to St. Louis in '67 or '68. It was the hippie scene, but it was mixed with the bikers, the Hell's Angels types; also, there was still a decided residue of grease, because St. Louis is kind of a half-breed city. It's sort of Southern, and sort of Midwestern, but it really isn't either. There's a tendency to violence among people in that area of the country, there's no way around that. The easiest way to solve an argument is, y'know, to fight it out, because they don't like to mess with words.



FOOM: Isn't that a correlation to the standard solution in comic book stories?

STEVE: Yeah, it is. It is. I found most of those people, incidentally, to be fascinated with comic books at the time. I loaned my entire *SPIDER-MAN* collection to a houseful of hippies for awhile, and they avidly read through all of them, about a hundred issues.

FOOM: When did you first decide to become a writer — and why?

STEVE: I knew I was going to be a writer, back when I was about five years old, because there didn't really seem to be much else worth doing. That's it. It's the only profession I could think of that looked like it would hold any interest for me.

FOOM: So how did you get into comics?

STEVE: I found out about comic books from watching television. The first con-

tact I ever had with comic books in any form was the *Superman* TV show, and I was utterly fascinated by it. Then, when I found out there were printed stories about this guy, I became interested in those, too, and that led to *Batman*, and that led to the original *Captain Marvel*, and that led to about twelve years of reading things, y'know, right up through the first issue of the *FANTASTIC FOUR* and so on. I got into the business as a result of meeting Roy Thomas and corresponding with him for about ten years, off and on, through one of Julius Schwartz's letters pages in an early issue of *Hawkman*.

FOOM: But you're both from St. Louis?

STEVE: Roy's from Jackson, Missouri, which is about 120 miles south of St. Louis, so we saw each other infrequently, and when he moved to Arnold to teach at Fox High School, we saw each other more frequently. Arnold is almost a suburb of St. Louis. And after he went to New York — first to work for National for about a week, and then to Marvel — I came up to visit him for a couple of weeks over vacation the year I graduated from high school. Met Stan for the first time during those two weeks, and then some seven years later I had

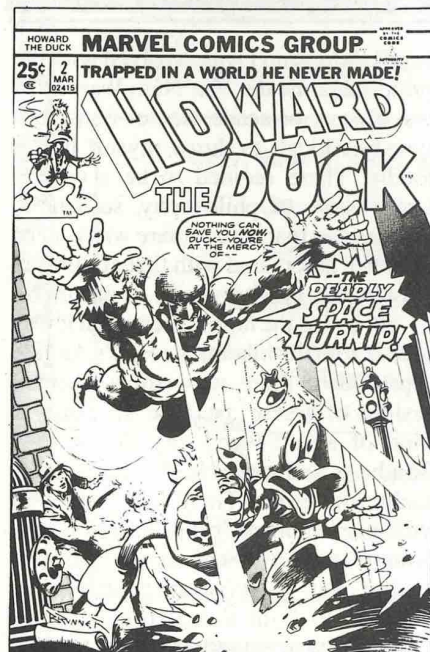
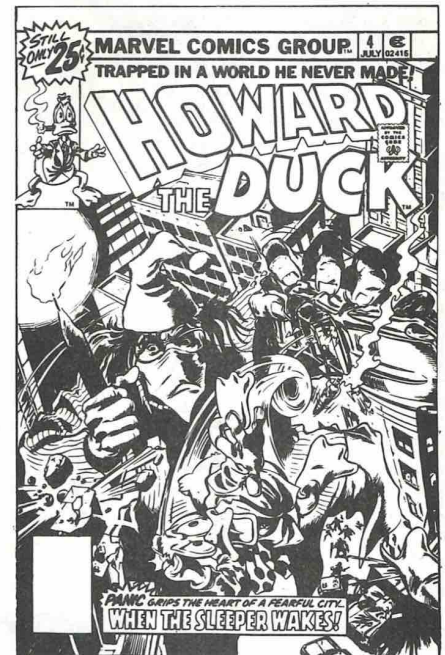
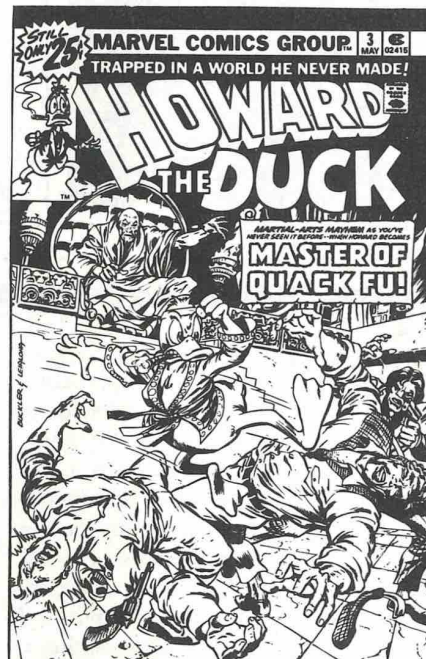
pointed publisher, and they were talking about expanding the line greatly. I was taken on as an editorial assistant, and that's how I wound up working in comics.

FOOM: Do you have any regrets?

STEVE: Do I have any regrets that I left advertising behind? None. Do I have any regrets that I got into comics? No. Do I have any regrets that I've stayed here this long? Oh, reams and volumes! A lot of things have happened since I've been in the business that I regret, I guess, but it's silly to bother with them. That's passed; I'm more concerned about the future.

FOOM: Who are your influences?

STEVE: Stan. Roy. Gerry Conway was very helpful when I got into the business. In terms of other literary influ-

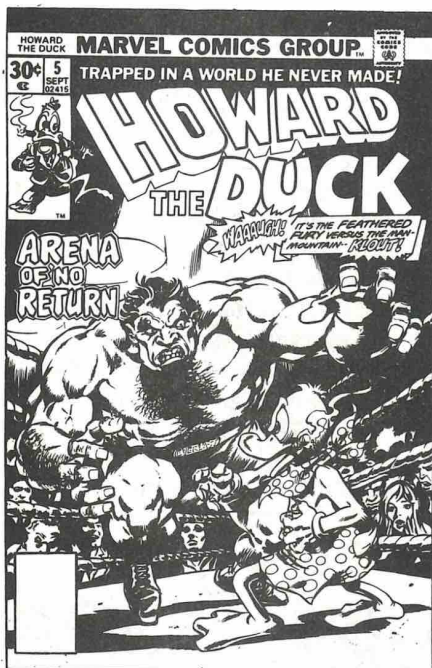


graduated from college and gone through a couple years of graduate school and was working in an advertising agency — and suffocating — and wrote a letter to Roy that said, "Help! I'm dying. Do something!" It came exactly at the time, luckily, that he was promoted to editor and Stan was ap-

ences, it's very strange, because I didn't read much when I was a kid. I'm reading more now than I ever have at any previous time in my life. So essentially I created my writing style out of my own facility with words. I've been told that it resembles various writers' styles; they seem to be, generally, people who have the same background as myself — Jewish home, middle class, growing up in the 40s and 50s, that sort of thing. I find that interesting, 'cause I have almost really no literary background, despite the fact that one of my studies was English and another was Creative Writing and Communication. I really had very few influences in the past. I'm influenced now by everything I read, and consciously incorporate certain aspects of that input into my work, ex-

perimentally. But there's nobody I can point to, really, as a major influence, except possibly The Beatles. Seriously. FOOM: Who do you write for — yourself, the fans, or the editor?

STEVE: None of the above. The stories — generally, at their best — seem to tell themselves. I don't ordinarily start with a particular theme or message in mind. I'll begin plotting a story, and it'll take its own direction, and if it's a *good* story, then it'll be written the way it told itself to me, rather than my trying to shape it in any particular direction. Sometimes, of course, there are conscious things you do with structure and with pacing, and that sort of thing, but the actual events of the story and the particular characterizations and things are generally determined by the story or the interplay of the



characters, themselves.

FOOM: Doesn't that mean you please yourself?

STEVE: Well, let's put it this way: When a story presents itself to me that way, it generally pleases me, it sometimes pleases the readers, and it almost never pleases the editors. (Laughter.)

FOOM: Do you feel any sense of moral obligation to the readers of comics?

STEVE: The same obligation I feel to any other human being — not to lie to them. Beyond that — no. Maybe if you defined "moral obligation" more clearly. Do you mean to educate them, or to uplift them, or what?

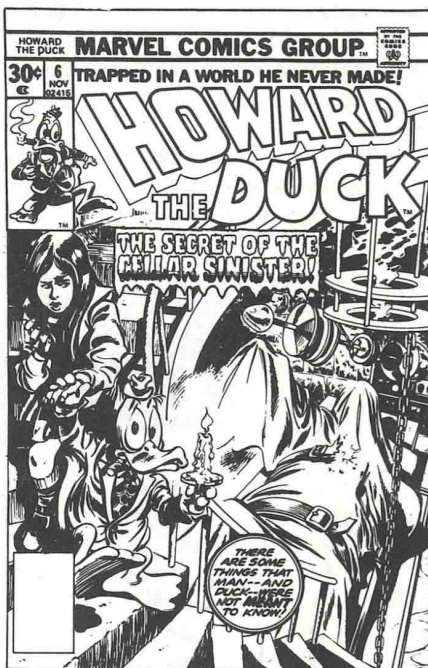
FOOM: Specifically, then, do you think violence is a necessary part of comics?

STEVE: I think that, yes, actually violence is a necessary part of comics as

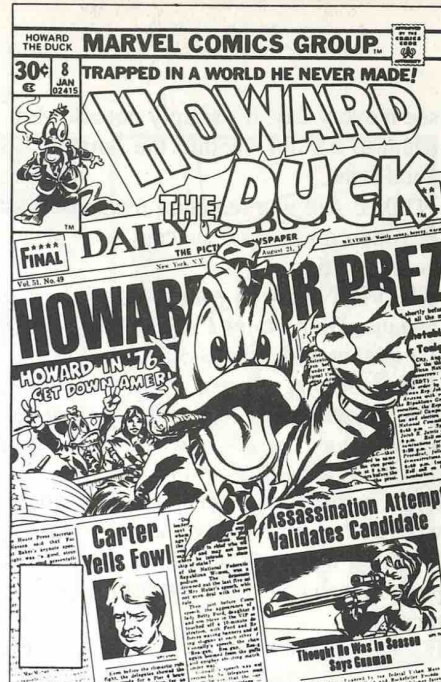
they're structured today, because, y'know, as I define violence that's the Hulk punching the Abomination in the face or Spider-Man wading into a gang of bank robbers and punching them out and tying them up with webs and leaving them for the police. I mean, we euphemize that and call it "action," because nobody *bleeds* in those sequences. I find the hero/villain aspects the duller things about any of the books. I've always been much more interested in the interplay of personalities. I do feel — and this gets back to what I said about a moral obligation — that showing somebody being pounded into the ground, and depicting neither combatant suffering pain from it is lying, in a sense, and so to that extent, y'know, I think that the same moral obligation holds.

FOOM: I remember you were having a crisis of sorts, a year ago, about the violence and whether there was anything positive in the comics.

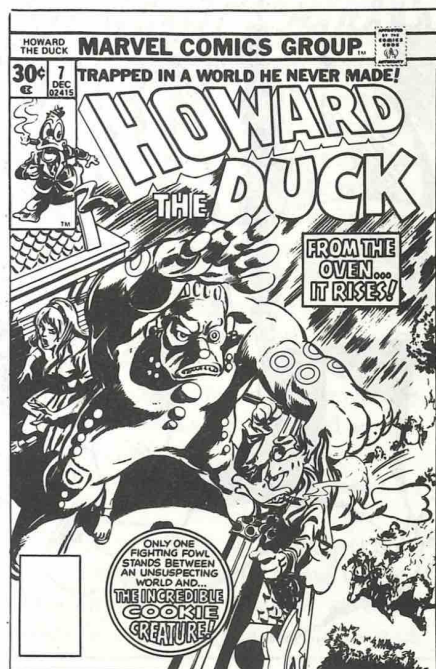
STEVE: I've never completely resolved that crisis. Violence is generally presented as a solution to problems in comics, because, being the illustrated form that they are, they tend to over-simplify, reduce everything to its most basic. Pure



Good vs. Pure Evil, for example, is a conflict which rarely occurs in the real world. It's a set of circumstances that doesn't exist. The way comics are structured now, they teach very positive values and brutal means for achieving them. And readers tend, I think, to take this bizarre lesson seriously, as if it were real. It's why I would prefer, say, to be



doing a strip like *HOWARD THE DUCK* to a strip like ... well ... I could say Spider-Man, but even my own character, *OMEGA*, because with the duck there's a certain amount of unreality presupposed. The creature himself is unreal, and so you can forgive certain other reductivist and retrograde tendencies of the medium. The problem with a strip like *OMEGA*, where the characters are at least pretenses at reality, is that you can never go far enough, you can never show how filthy those streets are in Hell's Kitchen, you can never show the dope dealers in the corridors of the school that James-Michael attends, because the code won't allow it; you can't show what would really happen to somebody if they got beat up as badly as John was beaten up by Nick and his hoods, because even though those kids



see it every day, it's simply not allowed because it's not "within the bounds of good taste."

FOOM: Are you reaching for anything beyond commercial success with your comic writing?

STEVE: I question your wording there, because I don't think I'm reaching for it; I think I would like to achieve it, but it's not conscious effort most of the time. There are times — like the kung fu story in the Duck book — where I have a particular message I want to get across, and I wanted to do that in a way that would be commercially viable, because I wanted the book to sell and get into people's hands so that they would see the message.

FOOM: Is there anything you think *shouldn't* be depicted in comics?

STEVE: No. Absolutely not. I don't think there's any aspect of life that people shouldn't know about. Ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance is a trap; the less you're aware of, the more easily you can be deceived and seduced. I don't think there's *anything* that shouldn't be presented in comic books, no matter how horrible or, for that matter, how lovely. I wouldn't say comic books should *only* present the negativistic side of things that cannot be depicted presently; there are an awful lot of positive things, too, that we can't show in comic books.

FOOM: Do you find that the production schedules allow for a proper gestation period?

STEVE: Sometimes, yes, and sometimes, no. Sometimes a story will come to you in five minutes, and other times it

takes five weeks. In the first case, of course, they allow for it; in the second case, they don't. Sounds like I'm equivocating on every question you ask. (Laughter.)

FOOM: How was Howard the Duck created?

STEVE: As a joke. It was the only sight gag I could think of to top Korrek jumping out of the jar of peanut butter in *FEAR #19*, I told Val to have a duck come waddling out of the bushes. I didn't mention the cigar; the cigar was Val Mayerik's creation. So was Howard's clothing. I just told Val, "Don't make him look too much like Donald, and for God's sake, don't dress him in a sailor suit." Because I included Howard's dialogue for that particular sequence of panels — "Clam up, buddy, you don't know what absurdity is," etc. — I think Val drew the kind of duck who might deliver that line. That's where the cigar came from, and that's where the kind of tacky suit and the rumpled hat came from, and the minute I saw it, without even knowing what the duck's name was (we didn't name him 'til next issue), I knew we had something more on our hands than just, y'know, a four panel gag or something. He was a very real character from the very beginning, and the easiest one of the characters in that whole sequence of bent-out-of-shape-reality stories to write. It was a good indication there was substance there.

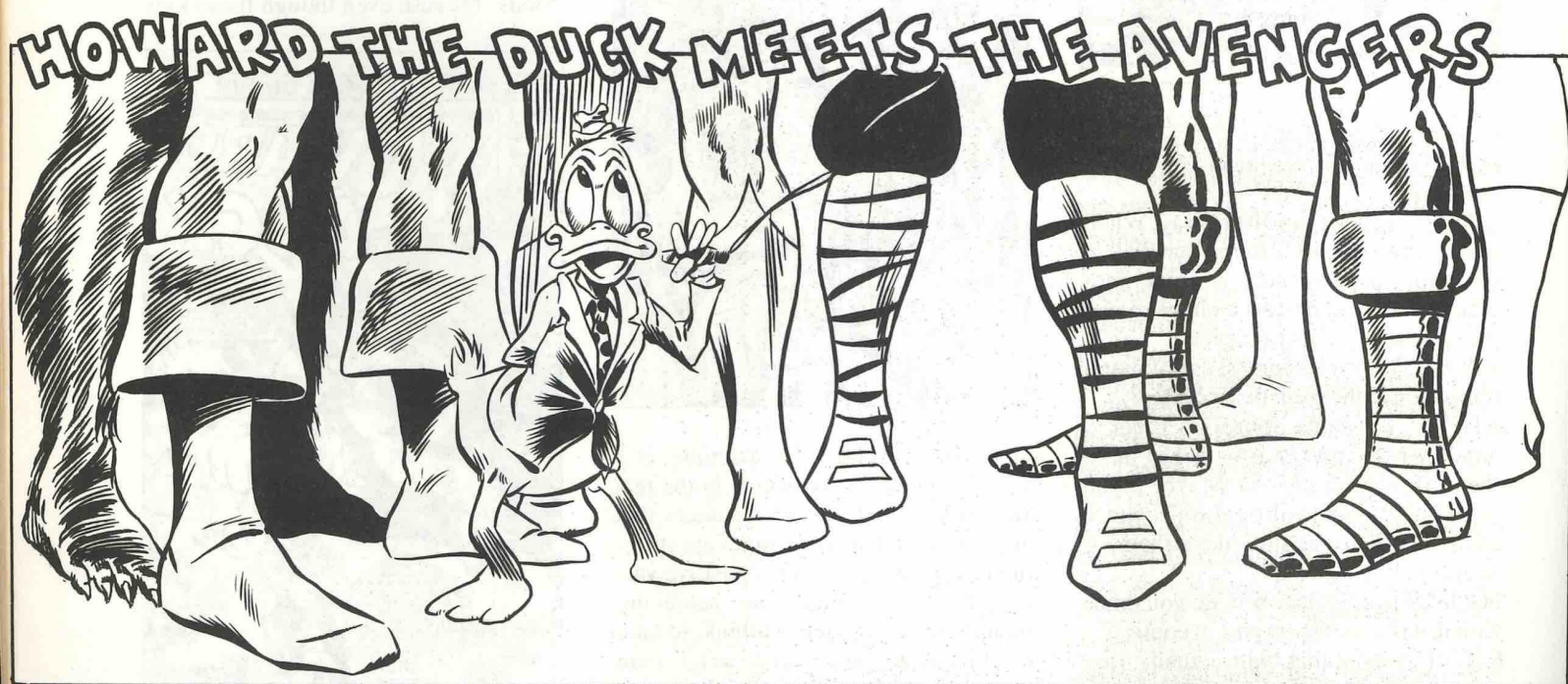
FOOM: Did you abandon Howard at that point, or did you think about him in terms of future stories at all?

STEVE: I was asked to abandon him. They were afraid that the appearance of the duck in the Man-Thing storyline was going to spoil the mood of that book, and so I killed him off about halfway into *MAN-THING #1*. My own feeling was that I wished he could be brought back, but I truly felt he was lost, and I figured the readers would probably not respond to this at all. Everytime you try to do something a little outrageous — or, at least, at *that* time — something outside the normal bounds of Marvel reality, you got letters protesting and saying, "Why are you being silly with our funny books?" (Laughter.) "Don't you know funny books are supposed to be serious!" And this time must have been the exception that proves the rule, y'know. People were taken with him immediately. The office was flooded with letters; there was the one wacko who sent a duck carcass from Canada —

FOOM: Yeah, I remember that.

STEVE: — saying, "Murderers, how dare you kill off this duck?" There was the incident at a San Diego Comics Convention where somebody asked Roy, I believe, who was speaking there, whether Howard would ever be coming back, and the entire auditorium stood up and applauded. Stan was being asked about it everywhere he went on the college circuit. It was decided as a result of those incidents to give Howard another shot in the *GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING* book, as a back-up feature, and the response to that led to his getting his own book.

FOOM: How much of Howard is actu-





Val Mayerik
& Sal Trapani



Frank Brunner &
Steve Leialoha



John Buscema
& Leialoha



Gene Colan
& Leialoha

ally you?

STEVE: Howard is my conscience. It's more like he behaves, generally, the way I would *like* to behave. He's a lot nosier than I am, and a lot more demonstrative, and a lot more sarcastic, usually, than I am. I went through a period like that, I guess, during my college days, but Howard is still like that. A lot more caustic.

FOOM: What's your opinion of the state of comic books today?

STEVE: I think they're atrophying. As things are I think kids are changing, and the books aren't changing nearly fast enough to keep pace with them. We're reaching a very limited segment of people — people who are deeply into a kind of fantasy that bears almost no relation to reality — and I don't think most kids are like that anymore. I think that has a place in their lives, but if you take a look at the changes in children's literature, Jesus, they've outdistanced the comics by light years in terms of the subject matter that they're treating. I'm not sure if, according to the provisions of the code, we're even allowed to do a story about a broken home, or about the effects of divorce on a child, or any of the things that really *matter* in a kid's life. If you mention that to many comic book writers now, they look at you as if you're crazy. "That's terrible, that's heavy stuff, the kids don't want to read about that." Well, that's bull, y'know? They're assuming because a story treats a serious subject it can't be entertaining. That assumption

indicates to me a too-narrow definition of entertainment, and also (paradoxically, when considered in terms of this medium) a lack of imagination as to how those subjects could be treated. I think there's very little imagination in comics right now.

FOOM: Whose fault do you think that is?

STEVE: I don't think anybody gets off clean on this. The code has a lot to do with it. The fear of the publishers to enact changes in the code or abolish it altogether. The limitations of the writers, most of whom are really not educated in the learning processes of children. And, of course, everybody for that same failure of imagination — for not being able to see how something like that could be accomplished.

FOOM: You keep mentioning children. Do you think the readership consists of children?

STEVE: Primarily, I know it does. Children and adolescents. I mean, of course, there are older readers, but there again, I'm afraid a very specific and limited kind of older reader. We tend to attract the same sort of readers who become Trekkies and Satanists. That's a gross over-generalization, but I sometimes worry that very few of our older readers are what could be called — *normal*. By the same token, I don't want to give anybody the misimpression that *I'm* normal. I think it's okay to be crazy. I think very few people, really, in 20th Century America aren't *slightly* neurotic, in some fashion or another, and I'm

not even sure that the most common neuroses are the best, *ie* that what we consider normal is in any way desirable. But what I'm afraid of is that many of the older readers we attract are not just interestingly out of step, or marching to a different drummer, but stumbling around blindly to no beat at all. I'm not *sure* about that — I know it doesn't apply universally — but I think, in large part, it may be true.

FOOM: Don't you think there's a certain amount of the "youth culture" that crosses over from rock music and movies — media freaks, in general?

STEVE: Yeah, and I think those people probably account for the inapplicability of that general statement, but I don't think those people are going to be with us for long, because the innovations are coming too slow. Most of the people in comic books right now were comic book fans, growing up, and I've always had this theory that certain of these people, to a greater or lesser extent, grew up with minds that could be approved by the Comics Code Authority. They could have that seal stamped on their foreheads. They don't understand any of the more complex or sophisticated forms that came into existence in the 60s. Comic books have stayed in the 50s, since the 50s.

FOOM: Exactly what do you *mean* by that?

STEVE: I'm talking about subject matter — *content* — not style. Stan's method came into effect as a matter of expediency. The whole renaissance in rock



Teen Angel faces off against the fearless fowl in a flight of fantasy by Wenzel & Vohland.

music took place in the 60s, the whole renaissance in film took place in the 60s, there was a whole cultural upheaval. Everything was turned upside down during the decade — except comics, which although they expanded their horizons slightly, mostly because of Stan, pretty much stayed the same in terms of what was acceptable as *subject matter* for comic books. Stan found new ways of treating that old subject matter. He could make an alien race a lot more interesting than the Kryptonians, for example, evolve different kinds of culture and just look at things with a much more cosmic perspective than a lot of the earlier writers could. But there was this incredible change — the whole “psychedelic” thing, for lack of a better word — going on in the 60s that most of the writers of comic books, I’m afraid, because they were so deeply into comic books, as fans, missed entirely.

FOOM: In most other fields, a writer is expected to write from experience, whereas comic book writers...

STEVE: Their primary experience is comics. In fact, that’s even true of me to a large extent. What happened was, at about age 15 or 16, I got very fed up with fandom, because I could no longer read the fanzines. They were written in a foreign language, using all sorts of strange abbreviations and truncated forms, and I couldn’t tell an LoC from a TBG from an XYZ, after awhile. It was a completely other language, y’know, and when they stopped using English and got into that sort of bastardized argot, I just gave up. I’ve always had a great loyalty to the English language, even though this interview doesn’t show it. Actually, a couple of things *have* changed in comics. For awhile there, until Gerry was instructed to bring Gwen Stacy back into the *SPIDER-MAN* book, we really had people convinced that unexpected things could happen in the books again — that characters *could* die, that the ending of every story was *not* predictable. I think we’ve since eviscerated that believability again, too; we’re right

back where we started. In terms of predictability, comic books have reached the stage now where you know, say as on *Star Trek* when Kirk took down Sulu, Spock, and two security guards as part of a landing party, who was going to get “offed.” (Laughter.) We’re really at that point now, and I think some drastic changes have to be made.

FOOM: Do you think comics are relevant?

STEVE: No, I don’t. I use the word relevance in the broadest sense. I don’t think they have anything to do with people’s lives. I’m not even sure that the comics provide a real and necessary escape anymore.

FOOM: Isn’t there a conflict between escapism and relevance?

STEVE: I have never been a big fan of escapist literature, as ridiculous as that sounds. The things I liked about the comics, particularly about Stan’s comics in the early ’60s, was the fact that by comparison to the Mort Weisinger *Superman* comics of the same era, there

was so much reality. It’s what changed the whole shape of the comics industry to begin with — the fact that the heroes began to have personalities, they began to have problems, Spider-Man was enmeshed in an on-going financial crisis. When those elements became commonplace, it seemed like the next step should have been to intensify the reality a little bit. But that never happened.

FOOM: The readers probably expect me to ask your future plans for Howard.

STEVE: I get asked that a lot, particularly at conventions. People really don’t understand that I don’t have Howard plotted ten issues in advance, and I wouldn’t tell anybody what was going to be in those ten issues if I did. I stopped reading *The Comic Reader* when I was a fan, in fact, because I didn’t want to know what was happening in the damn books before they came out. Y’know, what’s the point of reading them, then? You can just read the synopses, and then put away the books on your shelf, and you don’t have to bother with them.

Since then, I and several other writers have, I think, wisely refused to give out the endings to any of the stories to TCR. They were upset about that at first, I think, but later came to understand why we were doing it. We wanted to put that element of surprise back in it, even for the fans.

FOOM: What about *OMEGA*? How far in advance do you have that plotted, since it seems to have more of a master structure?

STEVE: It has a definite direction. It does not have incidents plotted out all the way through issue #100 or anything like that. We know where it’s going; we know where James-Michael is going; we know certain things about which characters are going to be introduced into the strip and what part they’re going to play. In some ways, it’s the most calculated strip I’ve ever done, and largely that’s because of Mary’s predisposition toward structure. We know who the teachers are, for instance, that we have introduced into the story. Ruth and

Amber were specifically introduced to play off each other in a particular way and create a particular kind of confusion in James-Michael. Richard Rory is going to be coming into the strip — maybe even will be, by the time this interview is published, and he’s going to provide the male figure that’s been missing from James-Michael’s life since his parents were killed. We do know, even though we’re probably not going to reveal it for quite awhile, what the relationship between James-Michael and Omega is. So all that stuff actually is “plotted” in that sense. The concepts are all there; exactly how they’re going to take shape, I don’t know.

FOOM: How do you, and Mary Skrenes collaborate?

STEVE: It varies. We plot the books together, generally, just bouncing ideas back and forth off each other. Then, after the panel descriptions have been done, which Mary generally does, either she will sketch in suggestions of dialogue, from which I’ll work toward the final

The Foom interview:

version of the dialogue, or sometimes we just split up the pages and she'll do whole pages and I'll do whole pages. Most of the time I write the captions; Mary is responsible for an awful lot of the dialogue. It's an interesting collaboration. It changes on every issue. FOOM: How does your present work

differ from things you've done in the past?

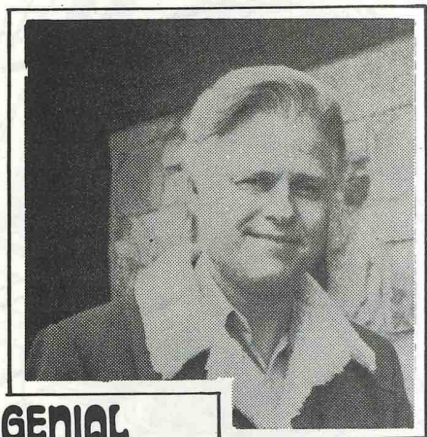
STEVE: It's a lot better. Have you ever read my Sub-Mariners? (Laughter.) I've gained a certain mastery of the medium since then, y'know. I came into comics, and the first few stories I did—true to the theory of beginner's luck—were not bad, and then by my sixth or seventh story, things really began to get crappy,

and stayed that way for about a year while I learned what the hell I was doing. It's been a steady climb ever since then. You can almost date it from the issue Bob Brown took over *DAREDEVIL*. Things have been getting steadily better with occasional, inevitable dips, of course, since then.

FOOM: Do you intend to continue in your present mold, or are you con-

About The Artists:

by Roger Stern.



GENIAL GENE COLAN

The only problem with Eugene Colan is that he is just *too* damn good as an artist. Look at a job by Colan—any job—and you will find a degree of professionalism, quality, and style that rivals the biggest guns of the comics industry. The verve and atmosphere of his work shines throughout some eighty issues of *DAREDEVIL*, over fifty issues of *TOMB OF DRACULA*, and numerous old *IRON MAN*, *SUB-MARINER*, and *CAPTAIN AMERICA* strips that old-time readers still recall with a wistful smile.

But if Colan is such a great artist, why is it that we so rarely hear his name mentioned when award time rolls around?

Because—like we said—the man is simply *too* good.

A typical letter to a magazine like *TOMB OF DRACULA* will go on and on about a particular issue's story and subplot developments, and then—almost as an afterthought—will add "Gene and Tom (Palmer) did their usual great job." It's that "usual great job" that has paradoxically stolen some of the limelight which Genial Gene so richly deserves. It's just that readers have gotten so used to getting such a

fine quality of art from Gene, that their raves of appreciation have become somewhat tempered with an edge of familiarity. But if his public might be a bit recalcitrant at times about praising his art, Colan's colleagues are far from it.

"I don't believe what that man can do," says long-time *DRACULA* writer, Marv Wolfman. "Gene's a real miracle worker! No kidding, he can draw anything. I sometimes wish we could shoot the art directly from his pencils, because so few inkers can really do him justice."

"Gene's stuff is really fine," agrees artist Allen Milgrom, "but he's really hard to ink. I mean, I've only done a couple of ink jobs over his pencils—some covers—and I was really only satisfied with one of them. Gene tends to work in tones rather than in lines; he's such a good artist, and he puts so much work into his pencils, that it's really tough to do them justice in the inking. An inker really has to work at it. I personally think that some of Gene's best work is the stuff he's done in wash for the black-and-white magazines."

The quality of Colan's work is something that John David Warner, editor of Marvel's black-and-white magazines, is fully in agreement with. "I've got this *BLADE* story on file that Gene did himself—and in wash—that's just beautiful, but it sits in the drawer because I don't have a book to put it in. It's really a shame, too, because Gene's stuff is so hard to ink, and this wash-job really shows the depth of his work. One of the reasons that *TOMB OF DRACULA* always looks so great is that Tom Palmer is so successful at translating Gene's pencils to inks with the use of zip-a-tone and a fine pen line."

Just what kind of training goes into the making of such an artist? We contacted Gene at his New Jersey studio for the answer.

"Well, my influences were the usual ones: Alex Raymond, Milt Caniff, and Noel Sickles... and, of course, Hal Foster. But I got most of my practical training thanks to the late Syd Shores. Syd had a studio, and we turned out work for the old *Timely/Atlas* line."

It was for that precursor of the present-day Marvel Comics line that much of Gene's early work was produced, although he also turned out work for such companies as Fiction House, Ziff-Davis, Ace, National, and Quality. There was even a story for the late EC comics line. And the work Gene did ran the gamut of everything from science fiction to westerns, from war stories to weird monster stories. Yes, and even to humor and romance comics.

"I always enjoyed the romance stories," says Gene. "They were simple stories—and, sure, there was a lot of formula in most of them—but they were fun to do. For the most part, though, I've always liked the adventure strip. Give me something with a little action to it, maybe even with a little bit of the old mystery or supernatural flavor to it... like *DRACULA*."

And certainly, it is his work on *TOMB OF DRACULA* and on *DOCTOR STRANGE* for which Gene is most widely known. So, with a background that includes both slam-bang acrobatic super-heroes and the Lord of Vampires—with a reputation for turning out art that has at times been described as moody, brooding, and hauntingly realistic—isn't it just the slightest bit odd for Gene Colan to be delineating the adventures of a cigar-chomping duck?

Perhaps.

"Oh, but I love drawing *HOWARD!*" exclaims Gene, his normally soft voice becoming insistent. "It's really a kind of off-beat comedy adventure, if you get what I mean. There's all the usual action and excitement of a

templating any big changes?

STEVE: Two answers to that. One, I don't contemplate writing comics forever. Two, I don't want my next strip to be another Howard the Duck. If I do create another comic book series, it's going to be something different, probably totally a 180° polar opposite of Howard. The Howard book and the Omega book debuted at about the same time,

and I'm glad that one was a serious series and one was a funny series. (I'm not sure which was which, though.) I don't wanna keep doing the same things over and over again. I don't want people to expect the next Howard the Duck from me. I'm trying, really, to stay one step ahead of the office, and just give them what they don't expect each time. People forget that I live with that duck on

a day-to-day basis, y'know, and I almost wish he'd go away and let me alone! (Laughter.) It's like, I love him dearly, but I don't want to spend all my time thinking about it. I'm really more interested in The Next Project now than I am in the duck, in a lot of ways.

FOOM: What is your next project? Do

continued

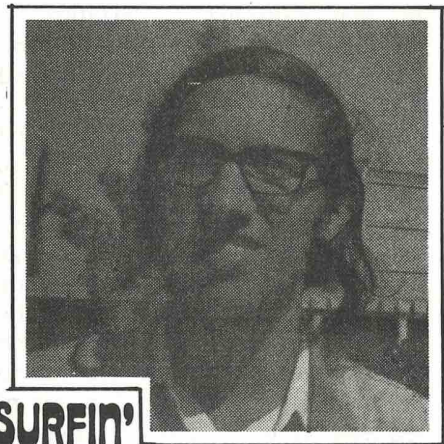
super-hero strip, but with this underlying air of comic relief that's always present."

Or as someone else has said, "I mean, he's a *duck*!"

And as far as Genial Gene Colan is concerned, he's going to keep drawing HTD until they cart him away.

And wouldn't it be something if such a peerless penciler finally got the praise he so richly deserves, thanks to an anthropomorphic fowl?

That would be *too* good to be true.



STEVE LEIALOHA

Night falls in the San Francisco Bay Area, and the fog settles in over the region like a blanket, as a lone figure bends over his drawing board. Carefully, he applies his ink to a series of penciled pages as the clock ticks on. And, while the so-called normal people toss about in their beds, the tall fellow at the board pauses between brush and pen, allows himself to stretch and yawn once or twice, and then — chuckling a bit, perhaps — returns to his work. It is midnight in San Francisco, and Steve Leialoha is inking the Duck.

So how does a tall, bearded young man of some twenty-four summers wind up inking the adventures of

America's most fantastic fowl? After all, it's not the most usual form of employment. One might expect him to be occupied by something more prosaic — like, say, playing bass in a rock band. Well, as a matter of fact, although he *does* play bass in a rock band, Steve Leialoha is also possessed by that special sense of wonder that typifies the strange breed of humanity known as comic book people. And, as is the case with many of us folk, Steve's involvement with the medium stems from an old childhood attachment.

As a matter of record, the art of Steve Leialoha first popped into comics-related print back in the mid-sixties in the pages of a couple of New York-based fanzines, *Super-Adventures* and *Stories of Suspense*. (For those of you interested in the "Isn't it a small world?" school of coincidences, both of those fanzines were produced by Marvelous Marv Wolfman.) After several issues of illustrating the escapades of such characters as "Janah the Space Viking," Steve drifted away from the world of fanzines, although he continued to enjoy comics and polish his art. "My influences in those days were mainly Gil Kane and Carmine Infantino," says Steve, "especially when they were inked by Murphy Anderson. Of course, there have been a lot of other influences since then, but those three were the first big ones."

After that early splash in the fanzines, the name of Leialoha was not to be heard of again in connection with comics for nearly a decade — not until the mid-seventies. It was then that the loose grouping of people known as the Marvel Bullpen West came into being. In actuality, Marvel West was just an odd conglomeration of writers, artists, letterers, and other such types who had grown tired of the Big Apple and packed it all off to the somewhat calmer climes of the Bay Area. Of that group, it was Alan Weiss who first encoun-

tered Leialoha.

"I had heard about all of these comic book people moving into the area," Steve explains, "and then one day I ran into Al and showed him some of the samples I was working up. He liked 'em, and he told me that I ought to go up and see Jim Starlin."

Starlin, as it happened, was in the market for a good, California-based inker to help in the production of his WARLOCK book. "It's funny! Two strips I'd always wanted to work on were WARLOCK and DOCTOR STRANGE, and there I was, working with Jim on WARLOCK!"

One thing led to another, and when the first issue of HOWARD THE DUCK came out, it was Steve Leialoha who was holding down the honors as embellisher. So what's it like to put the finishing touches on the far-flung adventures of a misplaced duck? "Oh, it has its moments," says Steve. "I really enjoy working with Gene Colan. I've heard other people say that he's a hard artist to ink, but I find his stuff pretty easy, myself. I guess it's all a matter of your point-of-view. His pencils have a lot of gray tones, as opposed to bold line-work, and I like that. As an inker, it gives me a lot of leeway in what I do, and I don't feel so restricted in adding my own touches to it."

As for the future? Well, Steve has some new works planned for Mike Friedrich's STAR*REACH magazine and, of course, there's always music and the band—but what about Leialoha at Marvel?

"Well, it looks like I'll be working with Gene and Marv soon on DOCTOR STRANGE. And ... well, I've always wanted to ink some of Gil Kane's pencils. Now that I'm working for Marvel, I'd like to do that ... even if it's just a cover."

Meanwhile, there's the Duck ... and the fog. And the normal people have no idea just what they're missing!

The Foom interview:

you plan to diversity in your writing, moving into other fields?

STEVE: I already am, yeah. You know about the book I'm trying to put together on comics. There's a novel I want to write about the comic book business. A collection of short stories I'm working on. I'd like to get back to film, radio and some of the other things. There's the project that Mary, Jim Salicrup and I are working on, *Dione Belmont*. There's another really silly project that I have in mind for anybody who wants it, called *Meatball*. I'm setting up my own production company, although I don't exactly know what Steve Gerber Productions is going to be, yet. We produced the Duck button. I'm thinking about doing an underground.

FOOM: How will your underground work differ from your overground?

STEVE: I was going to say the plots might be more complex, but I'm not really sure about that when I remember that ten-issue *DEFENDERS* "bozos" epic. I don't know if they could get much more complicated than that. The pacing of the stories would probably differ a lot, because I wouldn't have to have a fight scene every three pages. I think there would be a certain freedom of language that you don't have in the code-approved comics, or even in the black-and-whites, and I think that's primarily where it would differ—in the subject matter, the pacing, and the language—because I don't have most of the complaints with the Establishment comics that most of the other underground artists do. It's like, I've found very little of real entertainment value in most of the undergrounds; they tend to be as repetitive in their own way as the overground comics do in theirs. I refuse to say anything about ground level comics. (Laughter.)

FOOM: So, tell me, Steve—what do you do in your spare time?

STEVE: My what? (Laughter.) There's no such thing.



Compiled by Reliable Ralph Macchio

It's a time of unprecedented upheaval here at mighty Marvel, with the establishment of a new system of individual editors—*Conway, Kirby, Thomas, Warner, Wein* and *Wolfman*—under the aegis of executive editor, *Archie Goodwin*; but, through it all, the spirit of innovation which has stamped this Bullpen as the most dynamic in comics history endures amidst the

turbulence, thanks to the loyal legions of Marvel madmen everywhere. It's to you folks, who are ever ready to participate in the explosive Marvel experience, that we really owe a sincere salute. *Excelsior!* And now, let's take a sneak peak at what's coming up in the most marvelous group of comic magazine titles in history—specially organized here according to editor...

GERRY CONWAY

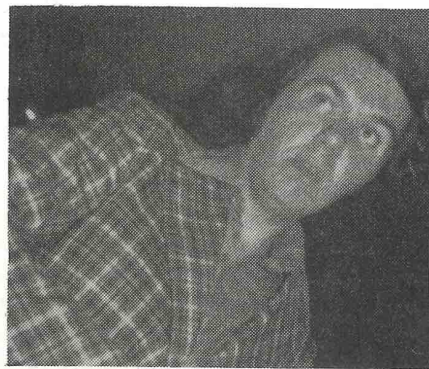
[Editor/Writer: AVENGERS - CAPTAIN MARVEL - DAREDEVIL - DEFENDERS - GHOST RIDER - IRON MAN - LOGAN'S RUN - MS. MARVEL - SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN.]

One of Marvel's most talented and prolific scripters has returned to the fold! We're speaking of none other than Gallopin' *Gerry Conway*, who's back with a plethora of new ideas and directions that'll knock ya from here to Yancy Street. First on the list is our fearless new female sensation—*MS. MARVEL*—written by Gerry and drawn by *John Buscema* and *Joe Sinnott*, to begin on a monthly basis, with the pandemonium first issue due to premiere soon. *Ms. Marvel* is none other than *Linda Danvers* of *CAPTAIN MARVEL* fame, who'll be entering the ranks of super-doers in a most unique

manner that you must not miss—believe us! The fantastic first ish features the menace of the *Scorpion*, which signals a storyline dominated by that awesome organization of mechanized menace: *A.I.M.*! And watch out for a new villainess named *The Fox*. Gerry summed up his concept of *Ms. Marvel* most succinctly: "My idea is that there should be a female super-hero and she should be just as cool, together, and powerful—and, of course, as much her own person—as any male super-hero." All the members of the supporting cast have not been finalized yet, but we can tell you to be looking for a certain hip-talkin' redhead from a certain amazing *Spider-Man's* book—*Mary Jane Watson*! *Ms. Marvel* will also be popping up in the *AVENGERS*, the *DEFENDERS*—or both.

Using that last line as a convenient segue device, let's talk about Gerry's plans with regard to those aforementioned super-groups—

A number of people will be making comebacks in the power-packed pages of the *AVENGERS*,



Merry Gerry

Department