

- » Reviewing the early days of Timely-Atlas Comics
- » Reliving the beginning of the Marvel Age
- » Walking through the founding of the Avengers

Chapter 1

The Coming of the Avengers!

Okay, True Believers! When did Marvel Comics begin?

Some say that the Marvel Age began in November 1961 with the launch of *Fantastic Four #1*. Others will argue that their origins were over two decades earlier, in *Marvel Comics #1*, released in October 1939. Well, in this particular case, both sides are correct. In 1939, the seeds were planted for something that would start to germinate in 1961 and, over time, would bloom into the fantastical interconnected narrative we know today as the Marvel Universe. As we take a trip down the merry Marvel memory lane, we'll look at some super heroes you know and some you may have never heard of, how the Avengers were formed, where they live, and how they function. Fasten your seatbelts — you're about to go on a wild ride!

The Timely-Atlas Eras

Timely Comics was the brainchild of magazine publisher Martin Goodman. Marvel Comics issue one, shown in Figure 1-1, featured several tales. Most notable were Carl Burgos' and Bill Everett's stories, as they gave birth to two of the pillars of the Golden Age of comics, the android Human Torch and the scion of Atlantis, Namor the Sub-Mariner.

Shortly after that, just as America was on the cusp of taking part in World War II, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby would create the most iconic character of the Timely era, the patriotic hero Captain America. Although many other heroes would be brought to life under Timely, these super-hero tales came to a grinding halt during the 1950s.

In 1951, Goodman began his own distribution company, Atlas Comics. This creation would ultimately allow for a more varied line of books (crime, horror, romance, and more). However, Goodman would face two of his biggest challenges in the middle of that decade. The first would be the McCarthyist witch hunts brought about by the book *Seduction of the Innocent*. Its author, psychiatrist Fredric Wertham, determined that comic books had a negative effect on children. The heavy censorship brought about by Senate subcommittees investigating Wertham's claim led to another major disaster for Atlas.

The shrinking market, which took out many of Goodman's competitors, began to affect his company as well. The final comic bearing an Atlas logo was released in 1957, followed shortly by a transition to the name Goodman Comics under the Independent News umbrella. The other arms of Independent News saw success. Goodman Comics did not. That was until Stan "The Man" Lee saw an assist from Jack "The King" Kirby and began the Marvel Age.



© 1939 Timely Comics. Story and art by various artists.
Cover art by Frank R. Paul.

FIGURE 1-1:
The android Human Torch makes his fiery debut.

The Marvel Age

A slew of anthologies featuring tales of fantasy (*Journey Into Mystery*), horror (*Strange Tales*), and science fiction (*Tales of Suspense*) set the stage for two creators to change how people viewed super-hero comics. The combination of stunning visuals by artist Jack Kirby, along with the layered characterization by one of Goodman's editors, wordsmith Stan Lee, helped *Fantastic Four #1*, shown

in Figure 1-2, kick off the Marvel Age with a bang in November 1961. The book was groundbreaking in that it featured characters who bickered and didn't always get along. It also featured at least one hero whom the public perceived as a monster. The mind-blowing designs and layouts by Kirby made fans come back for more every month. More top-notch creators, such as Steve Ditko, Larry Lieber, Don Heck, and Joe Sinnott joined the fray.



What followed was the creation of Marvel's Thor, The Incredible Hulk, Ant-Man and the Wasp, Iron Man, Spider-Man, the X-Men, and many more. Between 1961 and 1963, some of your favorite characters in animation and live-action were born on the four-colored page. Yet, to the editor-in-chief and one of the heads of this creative brain trust, something was missing, something that was inspired by their distinguished competition, no less.



Story and art by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-2:

A scientist, his adventurous wife, her hot-headed brother, and their gruff pilot friend went into space and came back transformed into something fantastic.

Bringing the Pieces Together: The Avengers Assemble

The Marvel Age was partially a response to DC Comics' resurgence in 1956 and their successful revitalization of The Flash and Green Lantern. DC eventually brought their heaviest hitters together in their all-star team-up book, *Justice League*.

Not to be outdone, Goodman sought to have a similar team book with a lineup of Marvel's biggest stars at the time. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby understood the assignment. Along with inker Dick Ayers, colorist Stan Goldberg, and letterer Sam Rosen, Lee and Kirby created *The Avengers*, shown in Figure 1-3, which debuted in September 1963 (the same month that *X-Men* #1 launched).



FIGURE 1-3:
Earth's
Mightiest
Heroes unite
for the
first time.

Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

The first chapter

The inaugural chapter of Earth's Mightiest Heroes featured Loki Laufeyson, the god of mischief, shown in Figure 1-4. At the tail end of a war between Asgard and the Frost Giants of Jotunheim, a youthful Loki, a Jotun himself, was taken in by Odin and raised as one of his own in the royal family of the mythical realm, Asgard. Along with a genius-level intellect, Loki has phenomenal strength and durability, is long-lived, and possesses a vast knowledge of sorcery. Imprisoned on the Isle of Silence for his numerous transgressions against his adopted home, Loki still looked for a way to best his brother, Thor, God of Thunder.

Loki sought to create chaos and pin the blame on the Hulk, the Marvel Universe equivalent of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Courtesy of mental manipulation by Loki, this monster was made to believe that there were explosives planted on a bridge. Surprisingly, the monster had a conscience and tried to take the explosive out. Unfortunately, the monster accidentally destroyed this bridge. A young ally to the monster got wind of what was going on and tried to get the word out to any heroes out there who could intervene.

The Avengers lineup

Before I continue with the story, let's go over the roster of everyone involved.



Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-4: Mischievous thoughts by a mischievous god.

The Incredible Hulk

The monster in question is better known to the world at large as the Incredible Hulk, shown in Figure 1-5. When nuclear physicist Bruce Banner was caught in the heart of a gamma bomb detonation (one that he saved teenager Rick Jones from as the kid wandered onto the test site), Banner was exposed to a massive dose of gamma radiation. The gamma triggered a change within him, initially causing him to transform into a giant gray monster that roamed the desert at night. Over time, symptoms of the mutation evolved. Whenever Banner experienced any sort of rage, he would transform into a nearly eight-foot-tall over half-ton super-strong and completely invulnerable green engine of destruction.



Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

Rick Jones

Rick Jones (shown in Figure 1-6) lost his parents at a young age, and he bounced from orphanage to orphanage. One orphanage in particular had a particularly unsavory administrator, one who smashed Rick's guitar, the sole item left to him by his late father. Jones became a drifter and later a rebellious teenager. Shortly after his sixteenth birthday, Jones took a ridiculous bet to drive out to an Army weapons test site. It was there that he met Bruce Banner, a man who risked his life to save Jones by rushing him to a protective trench before the gamma bomb detonated. From that moment on, Rick felt indebted to Banner.

So, when Loki's machinations attracted the attention of Jones and some of his friends (known as the Teen Brigade), Rick was confident that other heroes could help diffuse the situation before it spread to a densely populated area. Rick's SOS went out to any costumed heroes, several of whom answered the call.

FIGURE 1-5:

Bruce Banner becomes the strongest one there is.

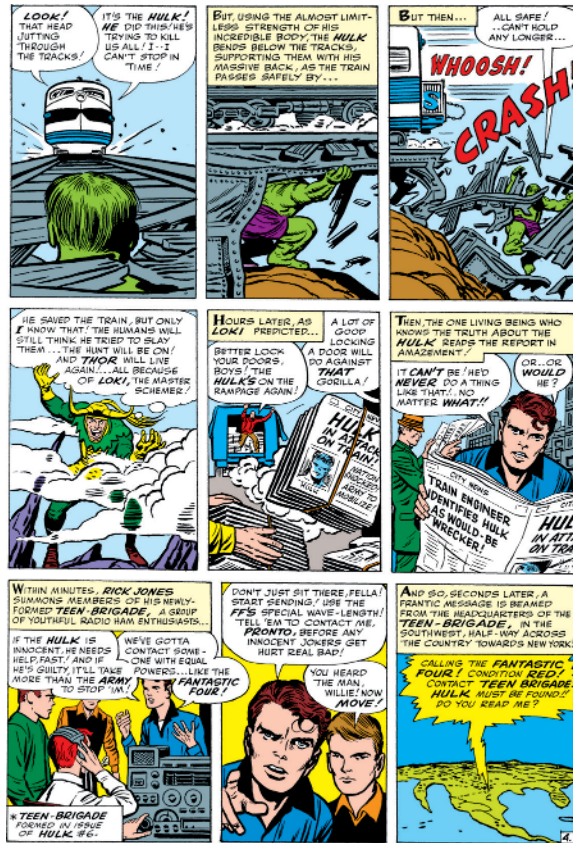


FIGURE 1-6:
Rick Jones
putting out
the call to
any available
heroes.

Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

Iron Man

Tony Stark is the son of Maria and Howard Stark. Their vast fortune comes from Howard's work as a weapons manufacturer and industrialist. Tony was a genius engineer and inventor who had no problem following in his father's footsteps. That was until a consultation for a weapons contract overseas, which led to an explosive device destroying their transport. It also embedded shrapnel dangerously close to his heart.

Taken captive by those responsible for the attack, Tony and another brilliant scientist, Ho Yinsen, were forced to create deadly advanced weaponry. Instead, they constructed one very small and one very huge key to defeating their captors: a

device to keep the shrapnel from entering Tony's heart, as well as a giant suit of high-tech armor to break out of their prison. They would not leave unscathed, as Yinsen sacrificed his life to ensure Tony's escape. Once freed, Tony, as the Invincible Iron Man (shown in Figure 1-7), sought to protect the country and innocents everywhere from dangerous technology in the hands of evildoers. Fortunately for the world (and unfortunately for Loki), Stark was assisted by another brilliant mind in the forming of the Avengers.

Ant-Man

Doctor Henry Pym (shown in Figure 1-8) is a man of many talents, including biochemistry, entomology, and robotics, for starters. After getting his doctorate in biochemistry, he met and married a political dissident from Hungary. They were attacked by the secret police shortly thereafter, and his wife was murdered. After this, Hank tried to figure out a way to battle crime and corruption.

Upon resuming his scientific research, Pym made one of the most remarkable scientific discoveries of his generation when he found a rare subatomic particle. Subjected to certain conditions, these "Pym Particles" would allow objects and even people to shrink or grow. He created a specialized costume and a cybernetic helmet that allowed him to communicate with insects to become Ant-Man. The discovery of the Pym Particle put Hank on the radar of everyone from costumed super villains to the KGB and even inter-dimensional beings. One such being killed Vernon Van Dyne, a scientist and colleague of Pym's. Though Hank was once again rocked to his core by the death of someone close to him, Pym wasn't the only one who sought justice for Van Dyne's death.



Story by Stan Lee and Larry Lieber. Art by Don Heck.
Cover by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-7:

Tony Stark suits up for the first time as the invincible Iron Man.



Story by Stan Lee and Larry Lieber. Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-8:

Hank Pym venturing into an ant hill, with his new discovery, the "Pym Particle."

The Wasp

Janet Van Dyne was a fashion designer and debutante whose life drastically changed when her father was killed. She demanded that her father's colleague, Hank Pym, use his vast intellect to enable her to exact justice. Pym designed a suit (one that the fashionista Van Dyne continuously redesigns), synthetic insect-like wings, bio-electric blasts, or "wasp stings," and Pym Particle-aided size alteration that allowed Van Dyne to become Pym's crime-fighting partner known as the Wasp. Over time, Jan tried to get closer to Hank, but Pym maintained his distance at first. Eventually, they became romantically involved.

Jan proved herself to be a capable hero, and the two adventurers took down many bad guys together, as shown in Figure 1-9. However, in the first issue of *The Avengers*, Loki proved to be a threat that would require more firepower than Pym, Van Dyne, and even Stark could muster.

Thor

Thor, shown in Figure 1-10, is the fabled Norse god of thunder, hailing from Asgard. His immense strength, nigh-invulnerability, and thousands of years of combat experience are all benefits of his Asgardian heritage. His Uru metal hammer, Mjolnir, which allows him to fly, summon lightning, manipulate the weather, and even pierce holes in space-time, was a gift from his father, the all-father and ruler of Asgard, Odin. That would make Thor a prince with duties and responsibilities to his realm.

Nevertheless, Thor's lack of humility and his battle-hungry appetite led to him breaking a treaty between Asgard and another realm. Odin banished his son from Asgard, forcing him to take the form of a mortal surgeon,



Story by Stan Lee and H.E. Huntley. Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-9:

The winsome Wasp debuts as the new partner of Ant-Man.



Story by Stan Lee and Larry Lieber. Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-10:

The son of Odin does battle against an alien armada.

How the first issue plays out

FINDING THAT ROBOT WAS THE GREATEST THING THAT EVER HAPPENED TO THIS SHOW! WE'VE BEEN SOLD OUT EVERY NIGHT THIS WEEK!

HARD TO BELIEVE HE'S ONLY A ROBOT... HE'S SURE **LOOKS REAL**! BUT HE **COULDN'T** BE **NOBODY** COULD BE STRONG ENOUGH TO DO WHAT **MECHANO** DOES!

WOW! LOOK AT 'EM **NOW!**

...THEY THINK I'M ONLY A MECHANICAL MAN! AND AS LONG AS THEY GO ON THINKING IT, I'M SAFE!

BUT UNNOTICED BY THE HULK, ONE TINY ANT WATCHES HIS ACT... AND THEN...

AT LAST! ONE OF MY ARMY OF ANTS HAS SEEN AN IMPOSSIBLE-POWERFUL PERFORMER IN A LOCAL CIRCUS! IT **COULD** BE THE HULK!

WE'LL GO AHEAD AND GIVE THE ANTS THEIR ORDERS! **IRON MAN** WILL FOLLOW BEHIND US!

HE'S **HIDEOUS!** IF **WE** HAD GONE INSTEAD OF THAT DREAMY **THOR!**

DON'T YOU EVER THINK OF **ANYTHING** EXCEPT...

QUIET! THERE'S THE CIRCUS NOW! I'VE GOT TO BEAM SOME INSTRUCTIONS AHEAD TO THE ANTS!

DIG DIRECTLY BELOW THE REE-FORMER! WEAKEN THE GROUND! CAUSE A CAVE-IN! **QUICKLY!**

WITHIN MINUTES... UGH... WHA...??

Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

After a pitched battle with rock trolls and Loki duplicates, as seen in Figure 1-12, Thor dragged his adopted brother back to Earth to prove the Hulk's innocence. Seeing up close how destructive the Hulk is and how dangerous radioactivity is to fragile humans, Loki attempts to channel that energy and direct it at his enemies.

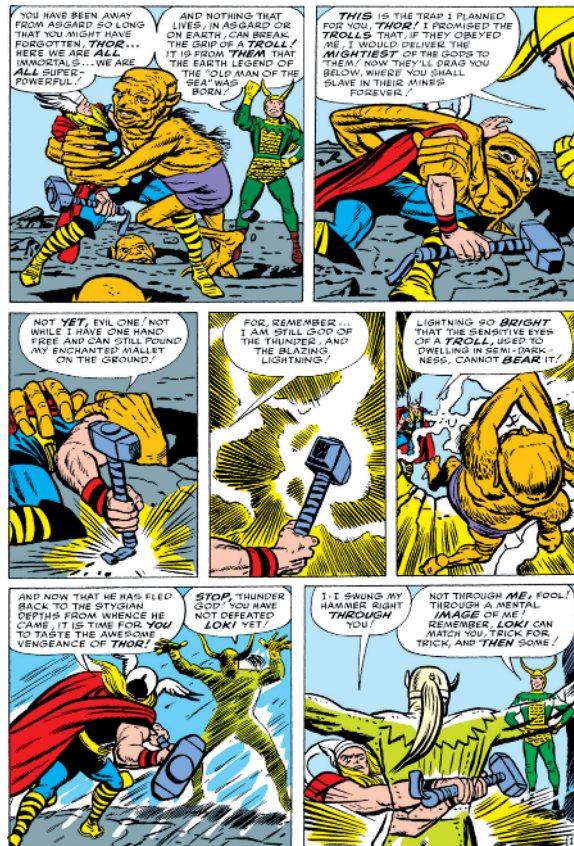


FIGURE 1-12:
A troll pays the toll for confronting the God of Thunder.

Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

However, Ant-Man and Wasp use a hidden trap door and contain the trickster god in a lead tank, as shown in Figure 1-13. Seeing how well they all worked together, the group named themselves the Avengers. Their roster would be far from set in stone, however.

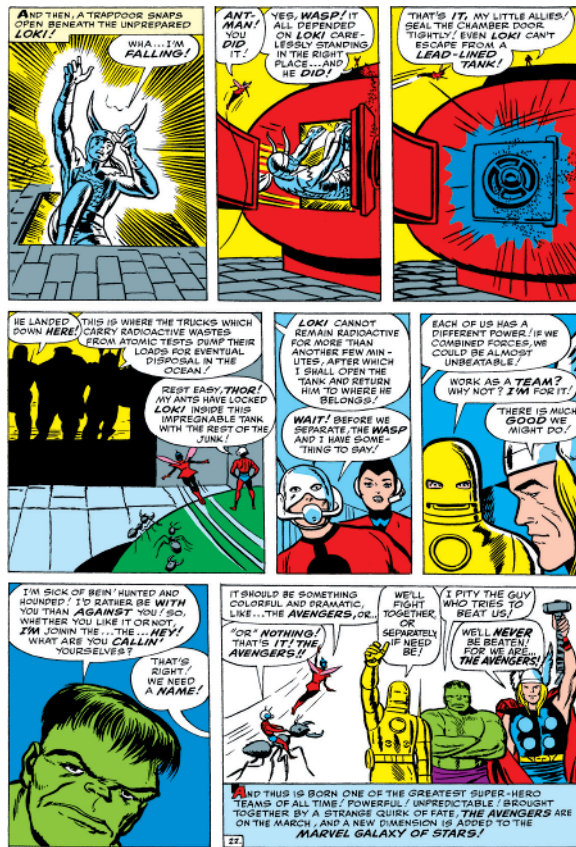


FIGURE 1-13:
Loki taken down by the brilliant mind of the diminutive Ant-Man.

Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

The Avengers' Earliest Adventures

Issue two of *The Avengers* marked the debut of their headquarters, in the form of Avengers Mansion, at 890 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. This was previously the Stark family home and was donated to the team by Iron Man. This issue also had the team take on an alien known as the Space Phantom (see Figure 1-14). This species can take on the appearance of anyone they choose, and the person whose visage they take on gets shunted into an interdimensional nexus known as Limbo. The creature plays the Avengers against one another, and though the Avengers defeat it in the end, the entity is successful in creating mistrust among the team, causing the Hulk to quit.

Issue three saw the remaining Avengers and Rick Jones try to bring the Hulk back before he got into any trouble. Trouble definitely found him in the form of Namor the Sub-Mariner (see Figure 1-15), an ally to humanity during World War II. Yet, today, he was an enemy sworn to destroy the surface world for their constant pollution of his oceans. Namor sought to bring the jade giant to his side as an ally. Then again, their mistrust of each other, as well as Hulk mysteriously changing back into Bruce Banner and Banner fleeing with Rick Jones, caused Namor's plan to go awry, so he fled the scene.



Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-14:
The Space Phantom can take the form of anyone, even an Avenger.



Story by Stan Lee. Art by Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-15:
Namor and the Hulk together spell trouble for the Avengers.

As issue four opened and the team continued hunting for Namor, they stumbled upon the frozen body of another icon from World War II, who disappeared just before the war came to a close.

A Living Legend Joins Their Ranks: Captain America

In 1941, an underprivileged orphan from Brooklyn, New York, named Steve Rogers, tried to enlist in the Army. On the one hand, he was deemed physically unfit for duty due to a plethora of health problems. On the other hand, a military scientist named Abraham Erskine saw the heart and spirit within Steve and convinced him to volunteer for Project Rebirth. Rogers was given a biogenetic Super Soldier serum, which transformed him into an Olympic-level athlete and more. Not wanting to rely on firearms, Rogers was issued a shield, one that would later be made of an adamantium/vibranium composite, making it wholly indestructible and able to be used in a variety of offensive ways. The U.S. government adorned him in a red-white-and-blue uniform and turned him into a patriotic symbol. Rogers became Captain America (see Figure 1-16), the ultimate fighting machine against the Nazis.



© 1940 Timely Comics. Story and art by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby.

FIGURE 1-16:

Captain America takes the fight to the Axis powers.

On one fateful day, Rogers and his best friend, Bucky Barnes, were sent on a mission, one that left Barnes dead in a fiery explosion and Rogers sunk deep into the ocean, where his body eventually wound up in a block of ice.

Decades later, he was found by the newly formed Avengers in issue four, the Super Soldier serum having kept him alive all these years. Awakening to a world vastly different from his own and still haunted by the death of his best friend, Rogers put his personal issues to the side to resume the good fight, now with his super-powered allies, the Avengers.