

Wired, Street Cred, December 1997

Marvelously Tooned

Say you're the average alternative comics fan: frantic to get your hands on the latest Eightball or Acme Novelty Library, lap up irony like it's ambrosia, and hate all the codpiece-centric Batman sequels. Chances are you'd no sooner buy Marvel Comics than read Juggs on a school bus. But here's the comic world's dirty little secret: the majority of fans and cartoonists started their obsession at the corner pharmacy, reveling in thinly plotted exploits of tights-wearing superheroes.

That's the beauty of Coober Skeber, an anthology that stars only Marvel characters (some highly obscure) in a completely unauthorized set of adventures. The stories and artwork range from stilted to stunning, but the sort of exuberance that comes from a brief dip back into adolescent obsession runs throughout.

Dr. Strange endures existential angst in an alternate plane reminiscent of a Wassily Kandinsky painting. Peter Parker suffers the tortures of the damned in high school, at the hands of the popular, preppy Fantastic Four teens. Moon Boy loses his ally Devil Dinosaur to a missile and becomes a clock-punching wage slave. Spiderwoman experiences a pheromone problem that recalls Patrick Suskind's *Perfume*. There's even a facsimile of the obligatory Twinkies ad adorning every back cover of those pharmacy finds; this one stars the now-forgotten Mole Man. For the reader, this is an odd experience, like feeling another person's nostalgia for something you, too, once loved. Nonetheless, it's great to see the Silver Surfer teamed up with the Man-Thing in one of those endless combinations that so delighted Marvel writers.

To most small comics publishers, the mere thought of a lawsuit by juggernaut Marvel Comics inspires insomnia and heavy drinking. But Boston comics maven Tom Devlin is virtually demanding a copyright-infringement suit by publishing Coober Skeber. The cover puckishly reads "Marvel Benefit Issue," while the credits page requests, "Please send all cease-and-desist orders and summons to Highwater Books." So buy one now, before Marvel's legal eagles put the kibosh on the comic in a cartoon version of that infamous *Negativland-U2* flap of a few years back.

- Marc Spiegler

Coober Skeber: US\$4. Highwater Books: +1 (617) 628 2583, email myp@world.std.com.