

Silver Surfer rides the wind

by Gunnar Blodgett

The Silver Surfer, despite his superficial simplicity of character, is among the most essentially complex personages in the Marvel Universe. He's been labeled everything from a "Jesus Christ Surrogate" to "a galactic crybaby of embarrassing proportions", and in a sense is described by a synthesis of all those labels. Besides being just about the most powerful character this side of the Andromeda Galaxy, the Silver Surfer, born Norrin Radd, is one of the longest-winded as well.

In a sense, Radd is archtypical of Marvel's characters. Like Spider Man, the Hulk, the Black Widow and Ms. Marvel (to name just a few), the Silver Surfer is a loner, with little or no attachment to normal earthly existence. He's also a philosopher, though, in the tradition of Spider Man, Daredevil, and others who just can't avoid questioning the ultimate meaning of breakfast while in the midst of heated battle.

Finally, like most solitary Marvel heroes, the Silver Surfer finds himself alienated by the people whom he fights for. On his home planet of Zenn-La, which he originally saved from the planet-sucking Galactus, he is considered a magnanimous traitor, flying the byways of the cosmos without

concern for his home planet. He earned this reputation when he abandoned Galactus in favour of Earth, thus compelling his former master to return to and destroy Zenn-La.

On Earth, Norrin Radd is regarded much the same. Most Terrans see him as a being who appears from space to wield impossible power in incomprehensible battles, then disappears again without a word. It seems to them that the Surfer is an omnipotent, god-like figure; unbound by earthly necessities and a bit arrogant when confronted. Consequently, very few people were actually disappointed when, at the end of a mission, the Surfer flew off into his solitary sunsets.

This image is, of course, a bit slanted. Norrin Radd is the most humanitarian of nonhumans, observing and reflecting for hours upon the niceties and irrationalities of human nature, often finding himself completely appalled by the inherent barbarism. Yet, just as often, he finds himself seduced by the ultimate nobility of Terrans, and it was this seduction that precipitated his rebellion against Galactus when the Earth seemed doomed.


Further, the Surfer's solitude is understandable in light of the

consequences of his heroism. The fruits of his rebellion on Zenn-La were the loss of his homeworld and his lover. The result of his defense of Earth is his imprisonment of this tiny planet. The pain of this sentence is manifest each time the Surfer turns his board skyward in another attempt to breach the barrier, then, inevitably, is thrown back at the brink of success.


On the other hand, there is only so much bitching one can take about the unfairness of one's plight and about Norrin Radd's "beloved Shalla Bal", the girl he left behind. Perhaps the Surfer is in some way responsible for his negative image because he refuses to grow up and face the reality of his situation and as such, actually becomes the "cosmic crybaby". His ineffectiveness as an intergalactic diplomat is partially a self-fulfilling prophecy on his part.

Yet this conclusion is both facile and uncognizant of the true complexity of Radd's character. The Silver Surfer has learned and changed since beginning his study of the human condition. This study has brought his own character closer to that condition, and if there is any hallmark characteristic of human nature, it is the stubbornness that Norrin Radd is nurturing in his exile.






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