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ISSUE #16, JULY 1997
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G'WAN! SQUEAL YER HEAD OFF!!
YOU RAT! YOU DIRTY RAT! YOU WON'T GET AWAY WITH THIS!!
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What girl could resist a (slightly modified) offer like this one from Justice Traps The Guilty *#2?*

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

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A custom drawing, circa 1967, that Jack did for his personal bound volume of S&K crime comics.

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Kirby's Mean Streets

The Lower East Side of Jacob Kurtzberg, by Jon B. Cooke

"You can take the man out of the city, but you can't take the city out of the man." I don't know who first said that, but it fits when it comes to Jack Kirby. The New York City area he grew up in, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, always has a way of showing up as a setting in his stories. Whether as Suicide Slum of the Guardian, Yancy Street in the *Fantastic Four,* or even Armagetto in *Mister Miracle,* Jack hardly disguises the streets of his youth, giving us a snapshot of a brutal, harsh, even nightmarish place, though sometimes throwing in a wink of nostalgia. And we know that many of his most beloved characters – Scrapper of the Newsboy Legion, Ben Grimm, and Scott Free – are really from those mean streets; they're simply embellished reflections of the pugnacious artist who envisioned them.

Anyone who met the man will tell you what a gracious, giving and kind gentleman Jack Kirby was – but what everyone knows from his work is that he was also angry as hell and tough as pavement, and it was the Lower East Side that made him that way. To know the man, I figured, you've got to understand where he comes from.

So I searched for his old neighborhood. I looked for it in his interviews, on maps, through talks with old buddies, in cultural history books, via cyberspace, and, finally, on the very sidewalks of the big city itself. Overall, I had little to go on. Jack didn't mention specific addresses in interviews, but through his words, and the shared experiences of others who grew up in the real "Suicide Slum," I got a picture I hope isn't too far from the truth.

Home

On August 25, 1917, Jacob Kurtzberg was born to recent Austrian immigrants, Rosemary and Benjamin, into one of the most densely populated places in the world, the Lower East Side – a density of nearly a quarter million people per square mile. His parents came to America along with nearly two million Jews, many escaping persecution and economic hardship in Europe, at a time when the US welcomed immigration to fill industry's need for cheap labor – and most of these new Americans settled, for a time at least, in the Lower East Side.

Jack portrays his youth in "Street Code" from Argosy *Vol. 3, #2.*

Born on Essex Street, Jacob moved with his family a few blocks away into a Suffolk Street tenement house. The average tenement building contained "20 three-room apartments... arranged four to a floor, two in the front and two in the rear. They were reached by an unlighted, ventilated wooden staircase that ran through the center of the building. The largest room (11' x 12' 6") was referred to in plans as the living room or parlor, but residents called it the 'front room.' Behind it came the kitchen and one tiny bedroom. The entire flat, which often contained households of seven or more people, totaled about 325 square feet. Only one room per apartment – the 'front room' – received direct light and ventilation, limited by the tenements that *[hemmed]* it in. The standard bedroom, 8' 6" square, *[was]* completely shut off from both fresh air and natural light..."[1] Rent for their Suffolk Street flat was, according to Kirby, $12 a month.[2]

Poverty was a fact of life. Benjamin Kurtzberg worked in a factory as a tailor. "The immigrants had to make a living," Jack said. "They had to support their families, and they did it on very little, so we had very little..." Everyone who could work, did work to put food on the table; so young Jacob raised what he could, whether by hawking newspapers ("I was terrible at it... and I'd throw 'em away."[2]), or running errands for journalists, to help make ends meet. "The Depression was in full force, and whatever you brought home counted... whatever you brought into the house made it that much easier for *[my mother]* to buy food."[2] (The national crisis truly hit home when Ben became unemployed at a crucial moment in Jacob's life, as Jack was newly enrolled as an art student at the Pratt Institute. Whether his father lost work due to Italian sewing-machine operators – non-unionized and cheap labor – or the highway's access to cheaper production costs in the country is not known, but it was a sobering time.)

The Street

It was the culture of the street that defined the neighborhood, and the boy Kurtzberg had an eyeful. "It wasn't a pleasant place to live; crowded, no place to play ball," Jack said. "You became a toreador at an early age, just dodging the ice wagons."[2] The streets were also filled with pushcarts, itinerant peddlers, and every type of humanity imaginable. Overall the district was diverse, home to a eclectic mix of neighborhoods: The East Village, Chinatown, Little Italy, Astor Place, and Knickerbocker Village, though the area between Delancey Street (true home of the Yancy Street Gang?) and Houston was predominately Jewish. (The area continues the immigrant tradition after recent decades as a Puerto Rican enclave, and today, as a Dominican neighborhood.)

The violence of poverty was everywhere, but not everyone lived in hopeless despair. Kirby-idol and fellow Lower East Side tough guy Jimmy Cagney put it this way: "Though we were poor, we didn't know we were poor. We realized we didn't get three squares on the table every day, and there was no such thing as a good second suit, but we had no objective knowledge that we were poor. We just went from day to day doing the best we could, hoping to get through the really rough periods with a minimum of hunger and want. We simply didn't have time to realize we were poor, although we did realize the desperation of life around us."[4]

The desperation was played out amongst the city kids by scrapping. "Fighting became second nature," Jack said. "I began to like it." Gangs had been a fact of life in New York since the Revolutionary War. A 1900 "East Side Boy" described three kinds of gangs: "The really tough gangs... meet at corners to make trouble." Another kind "hang around a corner to flirt with girls and amuse themselves with people who pass by." And lastly, there's "just a social gang, formed chiefly for the purpose of playing games... especially baseball."[7] "Jakie" Kurtzberg was part of the Suffolk Street Gang. "Each street had its own gang of kids, and we'd fight all the time," Jack said. "We'd cross over the roofs and bombard the Norfolk Street gang with bottles and rocks and mix it up with them."

"Our heroes were great fighters, soldiers or strongarm hoodlums who were top gangsters," a Hard-Knocks alumni, Samuel Goldberg, explained. "Wrongly, we tried to emulate them... we were continually at war between ourselves or with gangs from other districts that were of different races and religions. The Irish gangs came from the East Side Waterfront. They invaded our district with rocks, glass bottles, clubs and all sorts of homemade weapons. Battles would rage in streets, vacant lots, and even in some parks."[5]

The Lower East Side turf belonged to celebrity gangster Charles "Lucky" Luciano, the mastermind behind Murder Inc., a heinous organization Jack recalled in the unpublished *In the Days of the Mob* #2. City homicides peaked as crime gangs reorganized along Lucky's plan. Local son Meyer Lansky saw Prohibition as an opportunity and formed a gang with Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel, the "Bugs and Meyer

John Garfield and Lana Turner in The Postman Always Rings Twice.

Tough Times, Hard Guys, & Gun Molls!

A look at Simon & Kirby's Golden Age Crime Comics, by R.J. Vitone

"In a word, it was *tough*!"

Jack Kirby, from Greg Theakston's The Jack Kirby Treasury *Vol. 1, when asked about his childhood*

TOUGH! That was Jack's simple way of describing his youth. The simplicity belies the harsh reality. He was born August 28, 1917, amid the teeming cultural melting pot of Manhattan's Lower East Side. "It wasn't a pleasant place to live; crowded, no place to play..." he said in Mike Benton's *Masters of Imagination.* To escape, he read classics of literature from the local library. *Tarzan of the Apes, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Treasure Island, The Three Musketeers, Robin Hood*; all these and others like them helped his mind to soar over the slum's rooftops. His imagination was fired by the grind-em-out pulp magazines of the era as well: Colorful covers, a handful of spot illustrations, and endless lines of words that ran page-to-page, issue-to-issue, month-to-month. These were the paperbacks of the time, and even at ten, fifteen, and twenty cents each (which must have been a small fortune to a Depression-era teenager), Jack managed to amass a stack that he kept most of his life.

Movies provided more escapist fare. Just going to the theater with family and friends was fun. But on the screen, a whole new wonderful universe of imagery unfolded: War movies, westerns, musicals, horror films, and more each week! "The Warner Brothers brought me up!" Jack told Theakston, and he was only half-kidding! The hard-edged studio look that Warners' pictures employed must have appealed to the street kid in Jack. There was plenty of "New York" there, too. Stars like Jimmy Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, John Garfield, and Humphrey Bogart snarled their way to the top in dozens of melodramas. Often their characters came from the streets. Often they died in the gutter. The message was clear: Crime may pay for a while, but in the end, look out! The cliché in most of these films went that, in order to get out of the ghetto, most kids had to pick up a pair of boxing gloves, or a gun, or a crucifix. Kirby picked up a pencil and started drawing. He got out.

Years later – a war later, hundreds of published comics pages later – Kirby "returned" to those streets.

Late in 1946, with the abortive *Boy Explorers* and *Stuntman* behind them, the Simon & Kirby team had moved to Crestwood Publishers with what Joe Simon called "...the best deal we ever had!" They began a variety of projects there, including their first fully-blown crime strips. (While crooks and thugs had been comics story staples since the start, few titles had been built around the crime theme. Book-length *Dick Tracy* newspaper strip reprints and publisher Lev Gleason's excellent *Crime Does Not Pay* comics, which began in 1942, were some of the few to fill the void.) With new pages to fill, Jack and Joe turned to crime. *Treasure Comics* #10 (Dec. '46) contained a six-page Kirby crime tale called "Tomorrow's Murder."

A few months later, Crestwood (under a "Prize Publication" slug) issued *Headline Comics* #23 and *Prize Comics* #63, both with new S&K crime stories. Almost simultaneously in early 1947, Hillman revamped *Clue Comics.* The stage was set. A new era in Jack Kirby's career had begun.

Headline #23 is notable for its content: Over forty pages (including cover) of top-notch S&K that paves the way for future issues. "The Last Bloody Days of Babyface Nelson" follows the gun-crazy last blasts of a doomed killer – seven dynamic pages full of tommy guns and car chases. "The Doctor Is Missing" is a period piece set in Boston during the 1800s. Done up in fine style with some slick visual touches (one panel shows the reflection of three men talking in a mirror), it ends on the gallows. "The Bear Skull Trail to Death" is a tale recounted by (occasional) narrator "Red Hot" Blaze to the editor of *Headline Comics.* Billed as "A True Tale of Double-Murder in the Okefenokee Swamplands," the story builds to an obvious end. A trademark double-paged spread opens the next story, a featured "Crime Thru The Ages" novelette – the career of Guy Fawkes, whose crime against the King of England resulted in conspiracy, torture, and death, as well as a national British holiday. Every year, poor Guy Fawkes is burned in effigy! The issue closes with a Kirby classic. "To My Valentine" is bylined by "Red Hot" Blaze, and opens with this caption: "In the Roaring Twenties, guns, bullets, and thugs ruled Chicago with a grip of steel..." From there we follow the trail of a thug on his way to an infamous event. We watch the St. Valentine's Day massacre occur, shown in a dramatic two-thirds-page panel, then wrap up the saga with some swift revenge, and a moral message from "Red Hot" Blaze (whose hair color changes from story to story): "The mad days of the St. Valentine Massacre are gone! It is up to all of us to be ever vigilant. To keep that bloody chapter closed!" Finally, a 5-page filler, "Killer in the Kitchen," invites the readers to match wits with a Scotland Yard inspector and prove the guilt of a murderous couple.

Do you get an idea of the overall sweep of that great package of material? Can you imagine how many directions this series could go

Prize Comics *#63 and* Headline *#23; Simon & Kirby's initial forays on each title.*

Hollywood tough guys: Richard Widmark and Victor Mature in Kiss of Death.

A "Glass World" Full Of Criminals

Post-War Simon & Kirby Comics Noir, by Tom Morehouse

The years following the end of World War II were full of changes in American popular culture. In his *History of Narrative Film* (W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1981) author David A. Cook states: "After the elation of victory had passed... disillusionment and cynicism came over the nation which had at least as much to do with America's image of itself as with the distant horror of the war abroad." When they saw American motion pictures for the first time since before the war, French film critics coined the term *film noir* (literally "black film") to describe a mood and darkness of atmosphere in these movies that has much more to do with plot and character development than lighting technique. Grittier subject matter, graphic sexuality, characters who looked and acted like "real" people with all their flaws and desires, anti-heroes who acted like bad guys while they were doing good; after the war, in 1946 and '47, things got even darker! Movies such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice, The Blue Dahlia, Kiss of Death* and *The Big Sleep* thrived upon the unvarnished depiction of greed, lust and cruelty because their basic theme was the depth of human depravity and the utterly unheroic nature of human beings – lessons that were hardly taught but certainly re-emphasized by the unique horrors of World War II. Most of the films of the late Forties take the form of crime melodramas because (as Dostoievski and Dickens knew) "the mechanisms of crime and criminal detection provide a perfect metaphor for corruption that cuts across conventional

Gangland themes played a role in Jack's unused 1950s comic strip proposal King Masters. *Shown here are some of Jack's uninked pencil strips, and one strip inked by Frank Giacoia.*

Will Eisner Speaks!

An interview by Jean Depelley

(In the late Thirties, Jack was looking for new editors as a freelance artist. In 1936, he started with the Lincoln News Syndicate, working on his first comic strips. Two years later, a more experienced Kirby was employed by Will Eisner & Jerry Iger's Art Syndication Company in New York. There, he produced three strips: Diary of Doctor Hayward, Wilton of the West, *and* Count of Monte Cristo *(finished by Lou Fine), published in the first issues of Fiction House's* Jumbo Comics *in 1939, and constituting his first comic book work. Jack left the studio the same year, going from Martin Goodman's Red Circle Company to Fox Features, where he met his long-time collaborator Joe Simon. Little was written about Jack's time in the studio apart from an interview conducted by Will Eisner himself for* The Spirit Magazine *in the Eighties. This interview with the Spirit's father was conducted on January 25, 1997 in Angoulême during the most important French comic convention. I'd like to thank Will Eisner for his time and his kindness. Special thanks also to Gerard Jean (Magazines de France) for the recording.)*

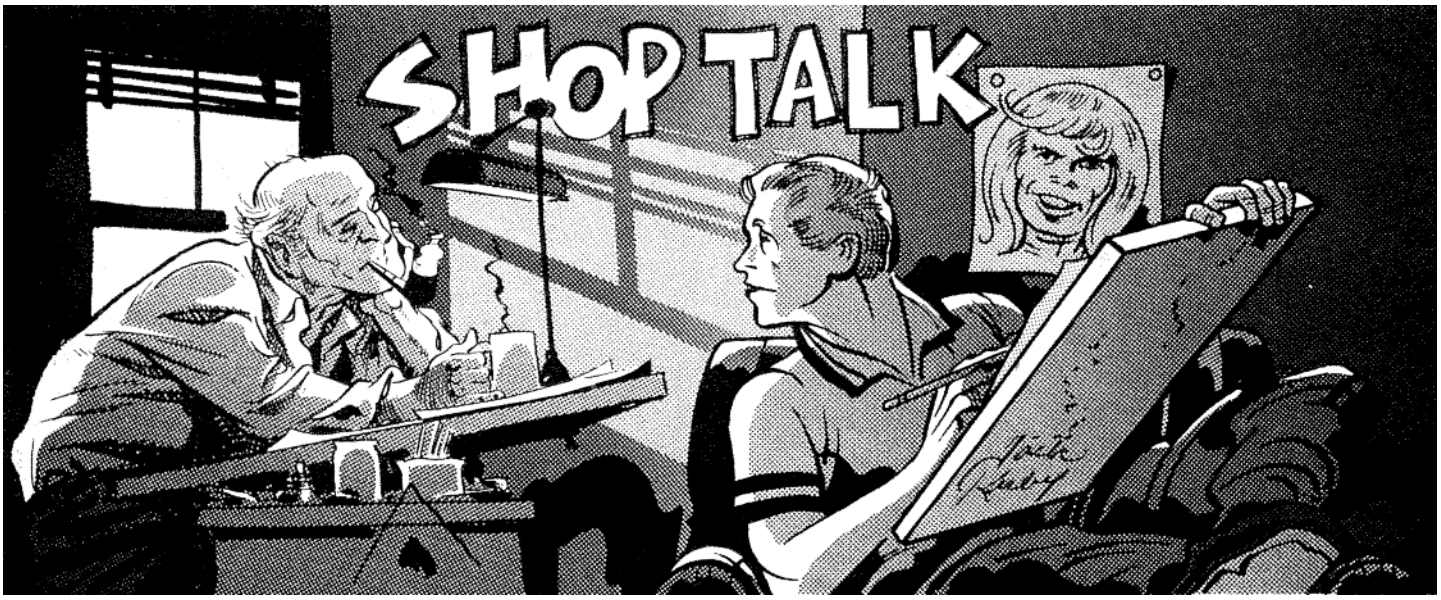
TJKC: In 1938, you created the Art Syndication Company with Jerry Iger. What was the purpose of this syndicate?
WILL EISNER: It was a company that I began with Jerry Iger, who was formally the editor of *Wow Magazine. Wow Magazine* was the first magazine that I did work for. I was a young freelance cartoonist. The magazine went bankrupt. It went out after two or three issues. So, I was out of work. I was very poor because it was still the Great Depression. Jerry Iger was broke; he was out of work, out of a job. But I saw something that was very obvious: You didn't have to be a genius to see that they were looking for new stories, original stories. Up until that time, the magazines that were beginning were using newspaper strips, which they pasted together. Then I said to Jerry Iger, "Something is happening here. Pretty soon, there won't be enough strips, and they will need original material; and I think we can do it." So I said, "Let's make a company."

We had lunch together in a little restaurant. He said, "No, I don't want to do that. Besides, we don't have enough money to start." So I said I would put up the money. It was my money: $15, which paid the rent for three months for a little office, a very tiny office. There was room enough for one little drawing board and a little desk, and that's all. That was why my name was first on the company: It was "Eisner & Iger." I was the financial man, you know! *(laughter)* So, I did all the drawings.

TJKC: How did you meet Jack Kirby at that time?
WILL: Within a few months, the company was successful. It was growing very fast, and we moved to a larger office on Madison Avenue and 40th Street. But you see, in that office we pretended that we had five artists, but actually it was all me! *(laughter)* I did five different stories with different names: Willis Rensie, W. Morgan Thomas, Spencer Steel, names like that. Iger was a salesman. He was not a good cartoonist, but he could do lettering, so he did lettering for me. He would be a salesman, he would go and call on the publishers, and he would say, "We have five artists. These are the names..." *(laughter)* Then we got so much business that we moved to another office, and I began to hire old friends. I went to school with Bob Kane *[at DeWitt Clinton High School]*, so I asked him to come work for me. He was looking for work. And then we began to hire people. Jack Kirby came in one day with a portfolio; he was looking for work. So we hired him and he was good. That's how he came.

TJKC: What other artists were working there, along with Iger, Kane, Kirby, Lou Fine and you?
WILL: Bob Powell. But these names you remember, they were different names! Bob Powell's real name was Stanislav Pavlowsky. *(laughter)* Jack Kirby's name was Jacob Kurtzberg. Bob Kane's was Bob Kahn. I was the only one that kept my own name! *(laughter)*

TJKC: Your production was to be sold to Editors Press Service, publisher of the British magazine *Wag.* Was your work, along with Jack's work, published then or was it first released in *Jumbo Comics* for Fiction House?
WILL: No, the first releases were to magazines that were starting out. The company was what's called a "packager." It's where you put everything together and deliver to the publishers what they call "camera-ready" and they would print it. The publishers who were coming into the business then had no experience with comics. They were all pulp magazine publishers and pulp magazines were dying. They were



An Eisner/Kirby "jam" drawing that accompanied Jack's interview in Spirit Magazine *#39. (top) Will speaks at Angoulême in 1997.*

Jack Kirby Interview

by Juanie Lane and Britt Wisenbaker, conducted on September 15, 1984 with Jack and Roz Kirby at their home, for the Pepperdine University student publications magazine Oasis

JUANIE LANE: Well first off, just in terms of the hero... if you can just kind of give me your personal feelings in terms of the way that the hero has developed through America just in the past few decades.

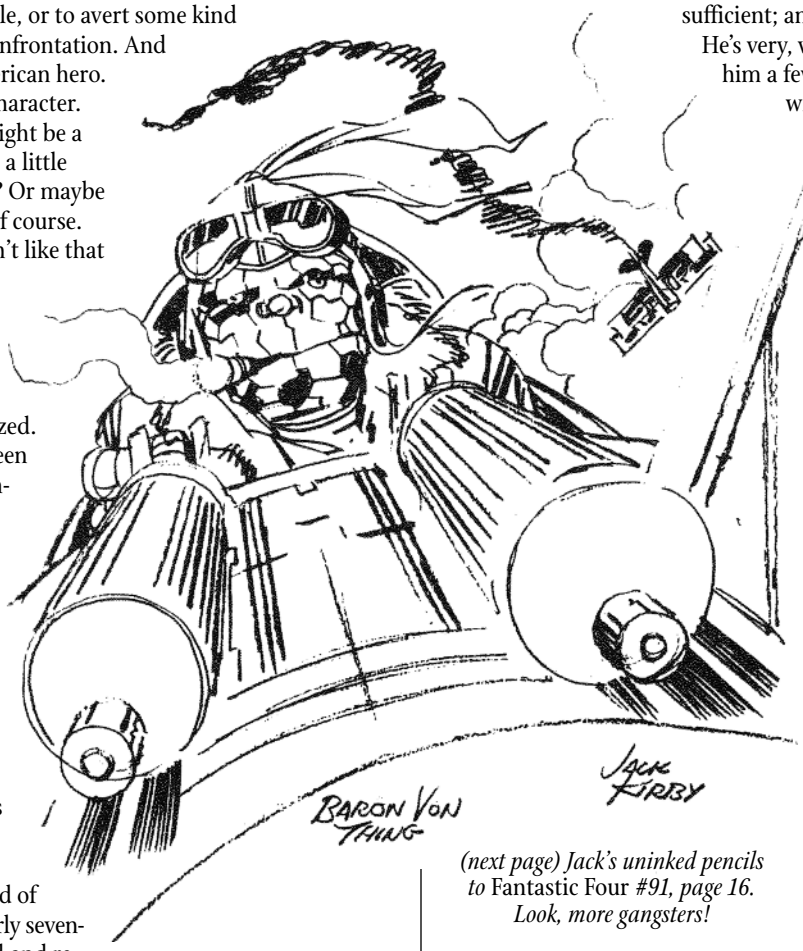
JACK KIRBY: Well, the hero in America is very unique, because he's unlike heroes that have developed in the past elsewhere. The American has a distinct character. It's developed certainly over these hundreds of years, and of course, he's also unique abroad; you'll find that people abroad love American heroes... they love American comics and American movies, because of the kind of forthright characters we are. Of course, speaking about myself I say this reservedly, but the American hero is a guy that comes to the point... a guy that's not afraid to go over the line... he doesn't hesitate. He doesn't hesitate to help people, or to save people, or to avert some kind of danger. He's not afraid of confrontation. And that's the character of the American hero. He's a kind of a spontaneous character.

A hero somewhere else might be a little more subtle. He might be a little more... well, maybe suave, see? Or maybe debonair. Using corny words of course.

But the American hero isn't like that at all. He's just a guy... like Indiana Jones maybe, or Captain America, or like my own characters, the New Gods, which are coming out now, and they're being publicized. It's the first novel that's ever been done in comics and I've just finished it. And so, it's kind of a great thing for myself because I've done some experimenting in areas... in fact I've always done experimenting in areas that I felt were blank pages in comics and should be filled in. I felt that comics as a medium is a kind of visual literary medium – a kind of bridge between a novel and a film. It's a kind of visual art.

So I did the first comic novel, called the *New Gods.* And of course, I did that back in the early seventies, but now it's being reissued and republicized. And the characters are also being publicized, and you'll see them on Saturday morning TV; all my villains are being used in them. Of course, they're... the villains are like the heroes. They're also aggressive, and they're forthright in their own views. And of course they come in contention with the heroes, and the clashes are spontaneous, yet the effect of these clashes is powerful. And of course the issues are very dramatic. I think that Americans are a lot more dramatic than people elsewhere. They're a lot more, of course, spontaneous. So we see issues in a very dramatic way. We see ourselves in a very dramatic way. I don't think there's such a thing as an invisible American. I think that every American has a good image of themselves, because, possibly, he's had a lot of heroes to look up to.

Remember that Tarzan came from America, Superman came from America, and these are all characters that have had a dramatic in their own way... they didn't arise out of sources... out of sources that were awesome. They arose out of sources that were just dramatic, and perhaps mundane compared to, say, people like Hercules or Atlas or Samson. Tarzan, of course, was an update on all these things, but Tarzan was completely American. He wasn't really English, because although, you know, he has an English background, he's an American in nature. Superman, of course, is all-American. He's a classic. He's an institution, and he's timeless. The hero is always timeless, but he always reflects the character of the culture he springs from. If you have a culture where weather is a prime consideration, you'll find that the hero is a natural force. He's a natural elemental force, probably very mystic. But in America he's not mystic at all; he's got a family, he has a mother and a father, and he's the guy next door who suddenly acquires superpowers. And he skates, and he swims, and he surfs, and he does everything that every American boy does. Actually, he's an all-American character. And of course the people overseas won't see him that way. They don't see heroes in the light of the ordinary average Joe. So they'll see him in some overall overpowering image, where we have no need of that kind of thing. The American guy is self-sufficient; and he's got flaws, he's got virtues. He's very, very human. But of course, you give him a few super-powers... you're dealing with a really wonderful guy. So I pattern my heroes in that kind of way because I'm an American. It's just second nature to me, like any other guy. If you were doing a hero, if you were creating your own hero, well, she'd probably be an all-American girl, or an all-American young man; but with special characteristics. We all think of ourselves in that vein. When we go over to a video game, we go with the notion that we're going to beat this game, okay? And that's inherent in all of us. And we do beat the game.



(next page) Jack's uninked pencils to Fantastic Four *#91, page 16. Look, more gangsters!*

I think Americans are winners. And I think those who think they're not underrate themselves. So my heroes are winners. And of course the evil people represent something with a flaw; something with a conflicting need. My villains are not specifically downright evil; I feel that they're people with problems who inflict these problems on others. And of course, if you do that, you come in contention with these others; and so you've got a story. Sometimes there are no villains at all.

ROZ: On to her next question... *(laughter all around)*

JUANIE: No, that's great. But one thing that I was going to ask is, you know you talked about the American hero as being the normal person in the basic context, with differences. Would you say that's always been true, pretty much throughout time, or is that just more so today?

JACK: No, that's always been true, specifically in Americans. You'll find that the Boston Tea Party was initiated by teenagers, who had never seen George the Third, who had only seen Englishmen as an occupying force, see. So, in order to show their own independence, they indulge in acts in which they risked their lives. That's history. And it's true. And so we developed this specific characteristic, and it

could be found in our origins. And so it's always been that way. You'll find that all our heroes are real people... all American heroes are real people. We go on in that vein because that's the way we are.

JUANIE: How are the heroes affected by time, in terms of the society of the day? For example, it's such a complex society that we have today; how does that affect the normal qualities of a hero?

JACK: All right... the hero is, of course, a product of his own time, but he will continue in the context of being a hero in contending with the problems of his own time.

ROZ: Like Captain America during World War II fought the Nazis.

JACK: Well, Captain America in World War II fought the Nazis, *[but]* we have different problems now; we have more dangerous problems, I think. And a hero today has to contend with these particular problems; he has to contend with people who don't... who might misuse things today that might affect everybody. It's the hero's job – at least it's my hero's job – to see that things continue. Not that they will never change, but that people are able to continue, and possibly improve themselves.

JUANIE: So what kinds of conflicts would you say we have today? I mean that are common to everybody.

JACK: Well, we have personality conflicts, we have national-international conflicts, we have high-tech conflicts.

JUANIE: So you're saying the hero, then, kind of enters into all levels of life.

JACK: Yes he does. In family life, in his individual family life, he won't hesitate to alleviate a problem... for his own people and, of course, his neighbors. He won't denigrate or back away from...

ROZ: I think she's trying to get like, exactly what are they fighting out here? Is that what you're trying to get?

JUANIE: Well, I'm just wondering the kinds of forces, you know; are these forces people or are they institutions, or...

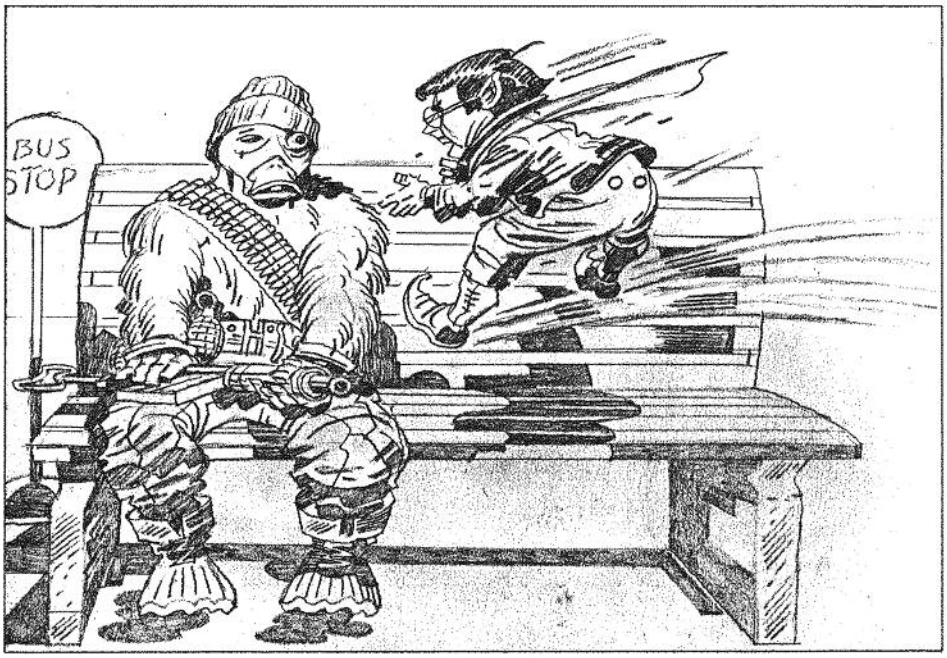
JACK: They're all kinds of stories.

ROZ: Well, now they're worrying about the atomic bombs, and aliens.

JACK: All right? They're all kinds of stories. But the hero has to fight them on all kinds of levels. He fights them on a family level, he fights them on the international level. The atom bomb is a consideration. There are people who will tamper with it. And there are people who... we have toxic problems. Toxic waste problems. We have toxic waste that gives off radiation. We have to be careful with this kind of thing. That's a problem we haven't even solved yet. Of course, it's something the hero might tackle.

JUANIE: Would you say that the hero had to contend with all of these things on different levels before? You know what I'm saying?

JACK: Always. Always. We've had commoners and kings. We've had good ones and bad ones. But there's always been a hero to contend with these people. There's always been a hero to contend with problems on a national scale. There's Horatio at the bridge, right? There was El Cid in Spain. And there was King Arthur in England, who actually had a void to fill. Of course they say King Arthur is mythical; he might have been. But there's a gap in English history where the Romans left, and there was no law and order. England was like the Old West in the United States. Who was going to fill that gap? And they say that a character named King Arthur filled that gap, by creating a society with law and order. So King Arthur became a hero of sorts. Of course, he's a mythological hero, but I believe that somewhere there was a real person who helped create law and order in England, where there was none. The Romans



An unused Destroyer Duck *pencil panel.*

created the law and order, but when they left, their law and order went with them. So England needed a hero, and somebody filled that gap. In situations like that, there are problems that rise beyond the common man. I mean, how would you contend with living in a frontier town where there is no law and order? Where you haven't got a Wyatt Earp? Where just anything goes? You have a decent family, and you're making a living in this town, but the town has problems. It's not a personal problem, but it has problems. You have to survive in that town. The hero is a survivor.

JUANIE: Can you help explain how you actually go about creating a hero, in terms of the kinds of things that you try to pull from a specific generation knowing the kinds of needs that people may have in terms of a hero?

JACK: Well, I'm a storyteller essentially. After many years in this type of job, you become, I think, a very, very good storyteller. The only thing I can say about myself is that I'm thoroughly professional because I've been raised in an editorial atmosphere. I began... I was about eighteen years old, I worked for the Fleischer studio in the animation department animating Popeye. Of course, that wasn't the kind of thing I felt I wanted to do. I'm a believer in the individual. I feel that every individual has his own yearnings somewhere in the back of his own mind although it hasn't yet formulated. He knows; he instinctively knows what he'd like to do. If you gravitate towards machines you become an engineer or a mechanic. If you gravitate to storytelling you become a good storyteller, because you want to do your best at it. So, I did my best at it. I felt I could do it without supervision; I'd like to tell the story myself. And so I did, I began doing comic strips, I began doing editorial cartoons. Whatever I did, I put my own individual elements in the story.

ROZ: She wants to know how you create your characters.

JACK: Well, I create my characters out of people. No matter where they are. If it's a war story, my characters will be based on people, so the reader can relate to them. If it's a western story, my characters will be real people. But of course I'm not going to go into realism in the extreme. It's still a story; my object is entertainment, I'm not out to preach or to give my own particular views on any subject. My basic object is to entertain. In a war story, if I had a war story, there would be no enemies. Just people. Having gone through that experience myself, I found that was true. Here I was in a little corner of somewhere as a person, and there I was against people who were also persons – I found out they were persons. And there we were, in a situation that was very dramatic. I've written stories; I've taken just elements of the realism and these stories come across because there's power in these elements. And if there's power in any story, someone will read it.

JUANIE: You said that you're out to entertain and not to preach.

JACK: Oh, yes.

JUANIE: But would you say there's some central theme that you have throughout all your *[stories]*?

JACK: Yes, there is a central theme. And the central theme is compassion. I have as much compassion for my villains as I do for my heroes. And I feel that my villains are really tortured people, just as my heroes may be tortured people in a way. Because possibly my heroes don't like their job. Sometimes they don't like what they do. But they do it. For instance, possibly a hero might sacrifice himself to save an entire village, or to save a company of people, or to save someone personally. He might sacrifice himself. He might undergo... not necessarily physically, even mentally; he might have to undergo lots of stress. A hero will undergo lots of stress; and of course bring lots of stress to himself, and shoulder that stress in the cause of others. You might do that for your mother or your brother or your distant cousin, and of course you would be a hero. Because you would shoulder their problems.

ROZ: She wants to know, too, how you would create a particular hero.

JACK: Well, I'm trying to give you the basis for my heroes.

JUANIE: Well, you said that you use real people as your source to create a hero.

JACK: Not specific people. I use people in general as I know them.

JUANIE: Just individuals throughout your lifetime, but not necessarily, say, a political figure in the past or...

JACK: Oh, no. I believe that belongs in the realm of journalism and not storytelling. *(laughter)*

My people are fictional. I try to create an acceptable atmosphere but nothing more. So the stories are believable. In other words, for you to enjoy the story you have to believe it. If I tell you something that you feel is contrived, you won't read it. I never contrive a story. If I have a setting for it, you'll feel the atmosphere of that particular setting. If the villain is a certain type of person, you'll feel that there is that type of person about. Although he may have the trappings that entertain you, basically, you'll believe that somewhere there's probably a guy like that or a woman of that kind. I won't give you a contrived character that's made of wood, or made of any kind of metal; even if they were they would be people of flesh.

JUANIE: So, do you want these people, the readers, to actually be able to get something from your comics; to actually be helped, to be able to apply something in their life to what you're saying?

JACK: Uhh... no. My only object...

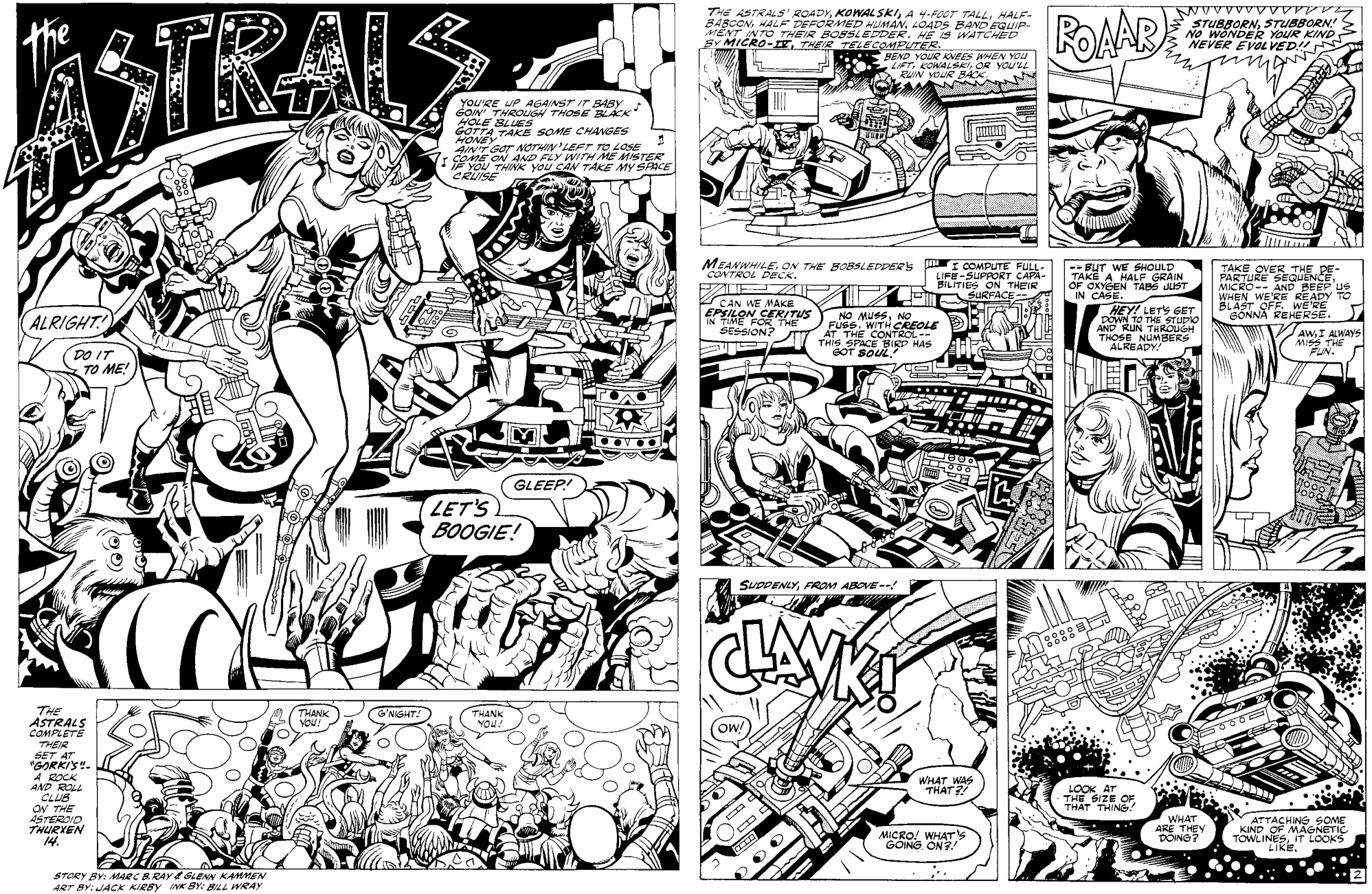
ROZ: Excuse me, hon... tell *[about]* the letter you got from the priest about the gods...

JACK: Yes.

ROZ: ...that's part of what she's asking.

JACK: There are people who want to analyze my characters, okay? And I had one character who was given to the king; I had an evil character who gave his son...

ROZ: Darkseid.



Here is a previously unpublished 4-page story Jack did sometime around the late 1970s. From what we've been able to piece together, it appears "The Astrals" was the idea of Glenn Kammen, a promoter for a Chicago radio station. In the wake of Star Wars, he conceived of doing a science-fiction give-away comic starring two of the DJs who worked at the station. He contacted Jack, who penciled the story, which was inked by Bill Wray. But Kammen decided against publishing the finished story, reportedly because he felt Jack's female characters didn't look sexy enough.

S&K's Flying Fool

by Lou Mougin

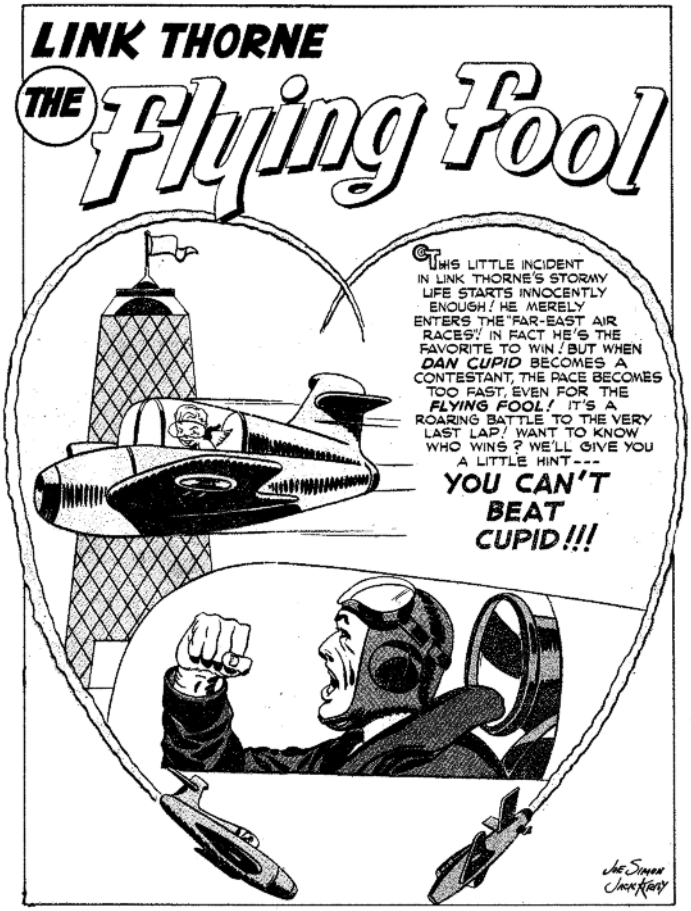
One of the best strips to run in the *Airboy Comics* of the Golden Age was "The Flying Fool" in its Simon and Kirby incarnation. Joe and Jack worked extensively for Hillman Comics in the late Forties on crime, romance, and even funny-animal books, but this neat and short- lived little effort is my favorite of their Hillman work.

Link Thorne, a.k.a. The Flying Fool, debuted in *Airboy* Vol. 3 #8 (Sept. 1946). He was a troubleshooting pilot in the *Wings Comics* tradition, but he had little to distinguish him from much of the high-flying competition. After three unremarkable exploits drawn by Frank Giacoia, the Fool was shelved. Editor Ed Cronin must have asked Joe and Jack to do something with the strip after its initial crash. So, after a three-month hiatus, S&K rolled The Flying Fool out of the hangar again. This time, Link Thorne won his wings with gusto!

The first splash of Kirby's initial Flying Fool strip showed Link on a stepladder, painting the logo for the strip on a sign, with a note below it: "Will fly anything, anywhere, anytime – if it's worth my time –" He was facing a red twin-prop plane and surrounded by some curious Chinese. S&K had set his adventures in the Orient, and it made for a colorful, Caniffesque background.

It also provided him with one of his most winsome supporting characters: Wing Ding, Link's longsuffering Chinese secretary and Girl Friday. Wing, sheathed in silk, was pounding a typewriter when three tough guys walked into Thorne's office. The tallest of the three told Wing that they had come to offer Thorne "a golden opportunity!"

At that point, Link appeared and put in his two cents' worth: "Okay! I'll go for a golden opportunity... if there's enough gold in it!" Thorne, in jodhpurs and jacket, was told by his visitors that the new job would require working for Riot O'Hara. Since Riot was a competitor, he turned them down flatly. The hard guys came up with a solution: Riot would take over Thorne's outfit, and Thorne would be on her payroll. And Thorne gave out with a big grin.



Airboy *Vol. 4, #7; a bit of S&K "tuff love" (see next page).*

At that point, Wing Ding reached up and grabbed a surplus US Army helmet and ducked behind her desk, lamenting, "Oh, poorly paid me!" A second later, one of the toughs was sent flying backwards right over her desk. Thorne took care of the other two with some knee action. The first hood, recovering, pulled a gun on Link. Wing Ding let fly with her helmet and tagged the baddie on the noggin. "Oh, Mister Thorne! This is most unfortunate occurrence!" moaned Wing Ding, looking upon the three fallen gangsters. "Office now resembles morgue!"

After thanking Wing, Thorne muttered, "I've got an appointment with Riot O'Hara!" After buzzing one of the planes at her private airport, the Flying Fool landed, made his way to O'Hara's office, and just avoided getting hit by an unlucky customer who came flying through the glass portion of the door. Thorne wasn't lucky enough to dodge O'Hara's next punch, delivered with brass knucks. When he woke up in the office, he was faced by a ravishing redhead. "That clout was a mistake, Thorne!" she apologized. "It was meant for an incompetent dolt I'd tossed out of my office! I'm Riot O'Hara!" Riot, who lived up to her name, was obviously based on Maureen O'Hara. She gave Link a chance to sign over his airline "before I break you!" Link drew a big X over the entire paper, and dared her to do her worst. She threw him out, and promised to do just that.

The rest of the story detailed how Riot's rather wimpish aide, Johnny Blair (whose name was probably taken from the "Johnny Blair in the Air" strip from *Captain Midnight*), conked Riot over the head during a flight to show he could pilot her plane, found out he couldn't, crashed it on a mountain, and necessitated Thorne coming to save his rival. After making a risky mountaintop landing, Thorne rescued Riot and took off with her in his plane. "I don't see how you can miss, Thorne!" said Riot, in an uncharacteristically gentle mood. "I hate to say this... but you're a good pilot!"

"I wonder if that build up is another approach to getting my airline?" asked Thorne, steering his plane as Riot laid her head on his shoulder. "Or aren't you as tough as you pretend to be?" Fat chance, Link. Riot was tough... but she had a soft spot for the Flying Fool.

Simon and Kirby piloted the Flying Fool through seven hard-knuckled outings (*Airboy Comics* Vol. 4, #5-11). The stories were laced with tough-guy heroics, airborne adventure, humor, romance, and a little pathos. They were impeccably paced, and made the other strips in the book almost standstills by comparison. One funny outing appeared in Vol. 4 #8, when Link encountered an Amish aircraft inventor. Aaron Grumm was taught by his hulking big brother Mordecai that flying was a sin, but he risked eternal punishment (or so he thought) by designing a hot new plane and giving it to Thorne. Mordecai appeared, cold-cocked Thorne, and dragged his brother back to their dairy farm... but not before he smashed up the plane with his bare hands. Inevitably, Link had a follow-up encounter with Mordecai, and knocked him flat. The Amish bully picked himself up and admitted, "You are the first man with enough courage to smite me, Link Thorne... I admire your courage!" In tribute, Mordecai allowed Aaron to continue with his airplane-building, and sent Thorne a big crate with a cow inside, which slurped him in the last panel.

But the most memorable of the Flying Fool stories has to be "The Face In the Storm" (*Airboy Comics* Vol. 4, #10, Nov. '47). It opened with a fascinating splash of Thorne in a plane, beholding the face of a beautiful woman in a thundercloud. A quote from Lord Byron compared a stormy night to the light in a woman's eye. After this intro, we fade into another stormy night, with Wing Ding and Link looking out their office window. When Link commented, "A storm in China can reveal many things to a man," Wing smiled and commented, "When Flying Fool cannot fly, he tell ghost stories, is so? Is perfect set-up, o' handsome employer! Outside, howling, noisy storm! Inside, lights are low! Wing Ding foresees next cue! So, give out, o' grounded eagle! Wing Ding paid to listen!"

Welcome To Dead Center!

The Western Saga of Bullseye, by R. J. Vitone

"When the legend becomes fact, print the legend!"
– *from John Ford's* The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance

Jack Kirby's vision of the Old West was as romanticized as his view of Suicide Slum from the Newsboy Legion strip. His imagination was fed by the flood of grind-'em-out "B" westerns that Hollywood relied on through the Thirties. In most, stalwart, jut-jawed heroes from Gene Autry to Roy Rogers to John Wayne galloped through endless dusty passes to head off hordes of less-than-noble redskins and assorted owlhoots. Showdowns at high noon climaxed with the roar of six-shooters. Often the honor of a comely damsel was at stake. It didn't matter. The guy in the white hat usually rode off with his trusty ol' hoss and a toothless Walter Brennan/Gabby Hayes sidekick at the end anyway. For the movie-hungry public, this was great entertainment. For Jack Kirby and a young generation of comic book creators, it was unforgettable imagery. When he became a comics pro, he drew on those images to enhance his work. Two of his first published strips were Westerns. *The Lone Rider* (a syndicated comic strip reprinted in *Famous Funnies*), and *Wilton Of The West* (reprinted in *Jumbo Comics*). While he and Joe Simon teamed in the early '40s to help develop the explosive super-hero market, Jack's western "reference library" was filed away.

When Jack and Joe formed their self-owned publishing house in 1954, a western was one of their first titles. *Bullseye, Western Scout* hit the stands with a cover date of August, 1954.

Simon & Kirby's company Mainline lasted only about a year, with its run of titles bridging the gap between the pre-code/code era. While they produced nothing dramatically new over this period, most of their books were as seminal to comics lore as any they had done before. In fact, over the lifespan of Mainline (Nov. '54 to Nov. '55), Jack and Joe would publish just about any comic genre you could think of. For Crestwood Publishing they did super-hero (*Fighting American*) and horror (*Black Magic*). For their own company they did war (*Foxhole*), love (*In Love*), crime (*Police Trap*), and western (*Bullseye*). They even found time to make a little comedy (*From Here To Insanity*) for Charlton. This would be an amazing display of versatility for *anybody*! For Jack and Joe, it was just business as usual.

And what a biz! Working out of studios in their respective homes and an office at Harvey Publishing, they assembled a crack team of revolving comics pros to crank out a steady stream of pages. It was the Ford "assembly line" concept on bristol board: Do it fast, do it right, do it well. Some were friends, or even friends of friends, but that didn't cut any slack. "We went through a lot of artists, " Jack said later. "There was a high turnover... most of them just could not do the work..." Joe Simon put it flatly: "If they didn't know what they were doing, they weren't working for us!" It's a delirious image: Jack hunched over his drawing board, smoke from his cigar billowing into the tiny room – a pause, and another penciled page (layout or finished) is tossed to a waiting artist or inker; Joe Simon on the phone, making deals as he points out details to a writer, letterer, or production assistant. Inked pages would be thrust back under Jack's nose, and he'd pick up a brush to "polish up" the product in order to maintain that famous S&K house look. Somehow, deadlines were met, and from this "controlled chaos," dozens of finished pages flowed to the waiting printers.

Bullseye rolled off of this frantic production line. Over its seven-issue run, at least three other artists would work on the title, but in the end, it was Jack Kirby who set the tone.

"HE NEVER MISSES!" promised the first issue's cover. In swift S&K fashion, the lead story introduced most of the elements that would form the basis for the entire series. The outpost town of Dead Center is wiped out by Yellow Snake and his renegades. Only grizzled old scout Deadeye Dick escapes with his infant grandson. Later, they return to the ravaged settlement and set up homesteading with Long Drink, a retired Sioux Indian scout. As the years pass, the boy learns the best of his guardian's frontier skills. He also earns the nickname Bullseye. (We never do learn his real name.) But Yellow Snake returns, and Deadeye dies in a treacherous ambush. A legend is born that day, as the enraged child battles the Indians to a standstill and scars Yellow Snake forever. In revenge, the chief brands Bullseye's chest with a target symbol, to show where his spear will one day claim the boy's life!

The second story starts where the first ends, as Bullseye and Long Drink mourn their lost friend. When Bullseye travels to nearby Long Horn Junction for supplies, he saves a timid wagon peddler from some town toughs. His magical gunplay silences the crowd, but the crooked town Mayor sees an opportunity. He frames the youngster with crimes his own gang commits. The now masked and costumed youth becomes Bullseye, the outlaw. In time-tested comics tradition, he assumes the role of Panhandle Pete as a secret identity, using the now-departed

Despite some Kirby touches (left), Bullseye's origin in #1 was mostly drawn by other artists (right).

Frank Miller Interview

by Jon B. Cooke

(One of the leading creators in mainstream comics, Frank Miller was outspoken in his support for Jack Kirby in the King's fight to get his art from Marvel Comics during the 1980s, and was given the honor of delivering a eulogy for Jack at the funeral. Miller's creative achievements are widely celebrated, from the revitalization of Daredevil, Ronin, *the radical updating of the Batman mythos in* The Dark Knight Returns, *and memorable collaborations with David Mazzuchelli (*Daredevil: Born Again, Batman: Year One*), Geof Darrow (*Hard Boiled, Big Guy*), and Bill Sienkiewicz (*Daredevil: Love & War, Elektra*). Frank has, since 1992, devoted much of his writing and drawing energies to the series* Sin City, *a crime comic published under the Legend imprint by Dark Horse. He was interviewed via telephone on April 25, 1997.)*

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: When did you first get exposed to Kirby's work?
FRANK MILLER: I first saw Kirby's stuff when I was probably about nine years old. I'd been reading comics since I was six, which was when I decided I wanted to do them. Then one day one of my brothers showed me *X-Men* and a Kirby *Fantastic Four,* and I entered a whole new dimension.

TJKC: So you really witnessed Kirby at his height in '65.
FRANK: Well, I place Kirby's height in the '70s. He had so many heights, it's like talking about the Alps! I remember seeing *Fantastic Four* and the *X-Men,* first through friends passing them around, and finally going out and haunting the drugstores myself – of course, back then, there weren't any comic book shops.

TJKC: So what were your favorite Kirby comics?
FRANK: Jeez, there were so many. I loved the general sense of weirdness and alienation in the *X-Men.* But I suspect that for me, the transforming stuff – the stuff that showed me that comics could go much further than I thought they could go – was everything from the Galactus Trilogy onward in the *Fantastic Four.*

Some of Frank's gritty, black-&-white crime work from Sin City.

TJKC: Did you follow his work over to DC?
FRANK: Oh, yes. As a matter of fact that was about the time I was losing interest in comics, and when I saw a cover of *Jimmy Olsen* by Jack Kirby, I said, "This I gotta see." For me, I have to say, the Fourth World stuff is my favorite.

TJKC: So you followed the Fourth World even as you were dropping other comics?
FRANK: Comics go through periods where they grow stale and then they get interesting again, and it seems that when they got interesting decade after decade was usually because Jack was around.

TJKC: Why were you losing interest in comics? General adolescence?
FRANK: There was always the discovery of girls. *(laughter)* Various social things like that, but also comics come and go as being interesting or not; fallow periods and very rich periods. In the '70s, what became interesting was when Neal Adams was taking off, with all his wild stuff – and when Jack came to DC.

TJKC: Were you disappointed with the books' cancellation? What was your reaction?
FRANK: Furious, but what could I do?

TJKC: Did you stick around for *Kamandi*?
FRANK: Oh, I stuck around for the works.

TJKC: To me, I see a Gil Kane influence in your figure work, and increasingly a lot of Eisner and Krigstein. But only with *Dark Knight Returns* do I see an overt Kirby influence. Did you think about Kirby at that time? What was his influence on your work?
FRANK: That's kind of like asking a musician if he's influenced by Beethoven. The work is so seminal that I think it affects everybody who has come along since. I think that *Sin City* owes more to Kirby than *Dark Knight* does because the use of shape is much bolder. But I can see what you mean, because the figure work was much more Kirbyesque in *Dark Knight* – so blocky and chunky. To me, he's just a constant influence – always has been. He had a rather manic, citizen-on-the-street view of what was going on with all these grand characters that brought an immediacy that really hadn't existed ever before. It's easy to talk about his explosive power because that's what people understand most about Kirby, but his virtues went far beyond that – into the concepts, into the various genre he either reflected or brought about himself; so many more subtle values he brought to storytelling. He had a way of drawing things wrong that looked so right. Reality didn't look right anymore. When you see a drawing by Jack Kirby of someone holding a pipe, it looks like the way someone should hold a pipe, even though it isn't a way someone holds a pipe! It's fascinating!

TJKC: Increasingly, you were looking at the work of Hugo Pratt and Alex Toth?
FRANK: Hugo Pratt, Vereccia, Muñoz, all kinds of folks – I love to drop names, it makes me sound really smart – and, of course, Eisner and Johnny Craig – my two huge, most abiding influences. I looked at everything I could get my hands on.

TJKC: When you first came to New York, you first sought the advice of Neal Adams?
FRANK: Neal ran almost a halfway house for comic book artists; an advertising studio where people would do commercial work. He would offer advice, counsel, instruction and work for people. Back then in the late '70s, it was very, very difficult to make a living doing comic books. The page rates were so low, there were no royalties, and it really was pretty dreary pay. Neal helped a lot of us get along by providing us with work that would pay better, even though it was less than creatively satisfying. He also was very generous of his time with me. I would come in every few months with another stack of pages, and he would tell me one more time to give up for all time because I had no prayer, and he would do the same thing again the next time!

TJKC: And yet you persisted and finally even moved to New York.
FRANK: Yeah. Well, it was either that or going back to driving trucks, which I wasn't very good at.

TJKC: Did you consider going to Joe Kubert's school?
FRANK: I've never been a good student. Sometimes I wish I had gone to art school and stuff, but I barely got out of high school. I was so eager to become a professional, so I had to learn on the job. It's been the only way to make a living.

TJKC: Jack pretty much drew what was asked of him for a number of years. If super-heroes sold, he drew super-heroes. If love comics were in order, well, he invented them. He did westerns, war, etc. You seem very enamored with crime stories. What keeps you in the crime genre?
FRANK: I have to answer that at two different directions at once, if you don't mind. First, I grew up reading crime stories, everything from Mickey Spillane to Raymond Chandler to Dashiell Hammett. It's always been my favorite kind of fiction. So naturally, I wanted to do comic books that were like that. I grew up not knowing the wealth of great crime comics that had been done in the past. But I loved comic books, and I loved crime stories, so the next logical thing was to do comic books about tough guys, beautiful women, and great cars. I got more encouraged when Warren Publications started re-releasing *The Spirit,* which I had never seen. This was just before I became a professional. They were just mind-expanding. The brilliance of that work is still staggering. Eisner's gone on to bigger and better things since, but still, even that young, he was producing stuff of extraordinary depth and quality. And as time passed, I got to study Johnny Craig and, in particular, his *Crime SuspenStories* for EC Comics. I became more and more convinced that crime comics were what I most wanted to do.

Jumping back in time, when I first showed up in the late '70s at Marvel Comics, DC, and Gold Key, I waltzed in, not having read any comic books in years, and showed them all my samples. My samples were all stuff like *Sin City,* and they all looked at me like I was completely insane because they didn't publish anything like that. A nineteen-year-old's arrogance. It took me a while before I got the freedom to do what I really wanted to do.

TJKC: You're from Vermont – the country – and yet you tell stories about dark, urban violence; this film noir kind of setting? Why?
FRANK: (laughter) You know the old phrase "Write what you know"? I don't entirely agree with it. I think you should write where your mind takes you. I can testify that I never shot anybody. I've been through some things but certainly not as extraordinary as my characters have been through. But I was always compelled by stories of the city where people are pressed close together, and tested by one another constantly. Someone else might want to do stories about something like, say, marriage, which is another case where people are packed together and tested by each other. Any romance story is essentially that. Different venues attract different people. I've always had a violent imagination and it's kind of like asking Stephen King why there are so many monsters in his stories. His answer is the perfect one: "That's the kind of stories I come up with." Also, I can now say, after living twenty years in the two biggest cities in the country: I know whereof I speak.

TJKC: You say that *Sin City* owes a lot to Kirby in its approach.
FRANK: You don't look into the eye of the sun and forget it. He really is the most profound genius to ever work in the field. There's Before Kirby and there's After Kirby, and the two eras are just not the same. Everyone since Kirby has had to absorb and interpret his work. He was that good. You mentioned Gil Kane earlier, whom I did study to beat the band. He helped me understand dynamic anatomy by his example. Gil has often remarked that much of what he did was to intellectualize and analyze Kirby, to take what Kirby had done – by seeming intuition or by divine gift, whatever it was – and turn it into something that

Jack's splash page from In The Days Of The Mob *#2, which Frank was kind enough to ink for this issue's cover.*