



JACK
KIRBY

JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR FORTY-SEVEN



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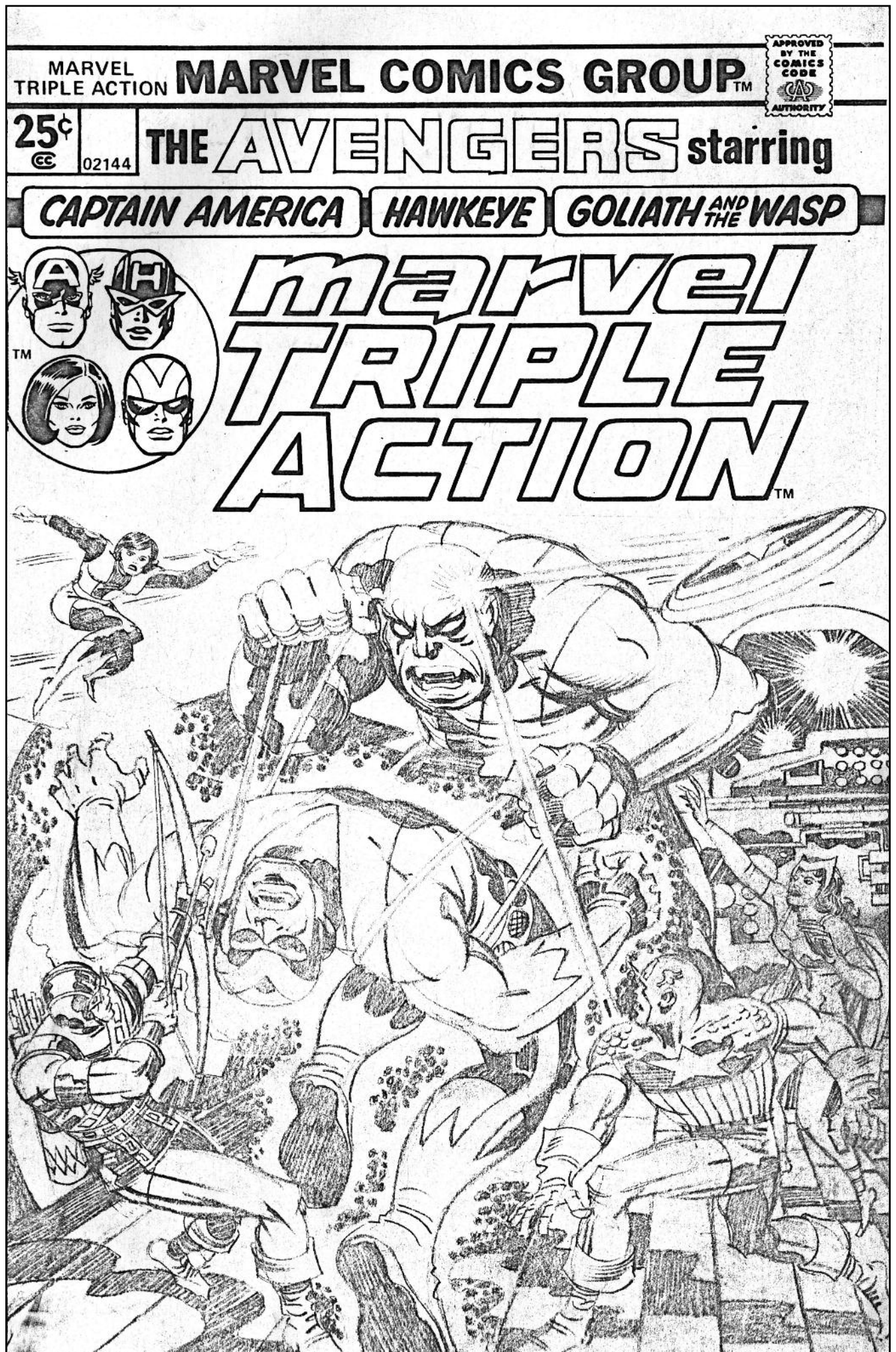
(right) It's *Avengers* redux in these cover pencils from *Marvel Triple Action* #24 (March 1975).

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THE NEW JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

ISSUE #47, FALL 2006



by John Morrow,
editor of TJJC



As 2006 comes to an end, everyone at TwoMorrows is gearing up for a record-breaking '07, as the House That The Jack Kirby Collector Built is readying a ton of exciting new publications, and reaching out to new customers and markets in an effort to bring new life to comics fandom anywhere we can! I can't begin to tell you about all the exciting, top secret stuff we're working on (stay tuned to www.twomorrows.com for announcements), but it's requiring me to

GIMME A BREAK!

spend a lot more time on boring old "business stuff," and leaving less time for fun things like TJJC. So as much as I wanted to get issue #50 out in time for next summer's San Diego Comicon, I'm going to play it smart, and take the rest of 2006 away from TJJC to do such exciting tasks as revamping our online ordering system, upgrading our comput-

ers, and just dealing with the day-to-day tasks that are required whenever a business is on a growth spurt like we are. (Hey, I may even find some time to actually take a vacation that doesn't involve a comic convention... I know: *Blasphemy!*) But don't worry; after this short break, come the beginning of January 2007, I'll get right on issue #48. The end result is a longer than normal space between this issue and next, but it's needed. So please be patient; I've got the next few issues all planned out, and #49 should be shipping just in time for San Diego 2007. Then, with what I've got planned for #50, it may take a little extra time to get that one done, too. But be brave, Kirbyites; I promise it'll be worth the wait(s)! (As I write this, I just got the final cover art for #50 in my e-mail box, and man, it's a doozy!)

In the meantime, there's so much Kirby stuff out (or about to be) that you won't be lonely. For starters, get your fix of Kirby pencils art by checking out the pencil archives now available at the Jack Kirby Museum and Research Center (www.kirbymuseum.org). Join now!

Shane Foley noticed that in the new *Essential Thor* Vol. 3, they printed the original, uncorrected version of the cover of *Thor* #148 (and others!). We see why Stan changed it—Kirby's focus for Thor seemed a little uncharacteristically off. (Regarding uncorrected stuff by Jack, Shane also noted that the original art for the cover of *FF* #85 was for sale recently. Evidently Kirby's art had the sleeping Four gritting their teeth, but the published version was changed.)

Those of you who think we've been too hard on Vince Colletta at times should take a look at the January issue of *Back Issue* magazine (#20). Longtime comics inker Bob McLeod (who recently took on the job of helping our newest magazine *Rough Stuff*, which shows layouts, roughs, unused pencils, and inks from top artists throughout comics history), thought it was time for an article on Vinnie, determining whether he really *was* the worst inker in comics history. To see his findings (including some nice Kirby art), don't miss it!

And lastly, next Spring (coinciding with the release of the *Fantastic 4* movie sequel), Marvel will be publishing a special version of the "Lost" Lee/Kirby story that ran in altered form in *Fantastic Four* #108. This project started when Marvel's Tom Brevoort asked me to update my article about the story (which ran back in TJJC #9) for *FF Masterworks* Vol. 10. Since the Kirby family was to receive a payment for use of Jack's pencil art, I agreed. Since then, Tom thought it'd be cool to get Stan Lee to dialogue the reassembled original version, and we've tracked down copies of Jack's pencils for most of the published pages. So the issue will feature two versions of the story: One modern, with inks by Danny Miki and Richard Isanove, and one classic, with Joe Sinnott inks. This is an inspired project, and the Kirby family will receive what is likely the best page rate for any Kirby story ever published. I encourage you all to go out and buy it when it ships next year. (And best wishes to our pal Joe Sinnott, as he helps wife Betty recover from a recent health problem. All of Kirbydom's prayers are with you both.)

Lest you think I'm letting everyone else do all the Kirby stuff while I'm taking my brief breather, I will hint that I'm in negotiations for a really exciting Kirby-related project that, if it sees the light of day, will be something any reader of this mag will cherish. I can't say any more yet, for fear of squelching it, but I'll have a full report here if, and when, I can spill the beans!

And just like the theme for issue #50, don't bother asking me what it is: I ain't tellin'! Now enjoy this issue, and let me rest! ★



(above) Note the changes to the cover of *Thor* #148 (Jan. 1968).

(right) Joe and Betty Sinnott. Photo by Dewey Cassell.

Thor TM & ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.



UNDER THE COVERS

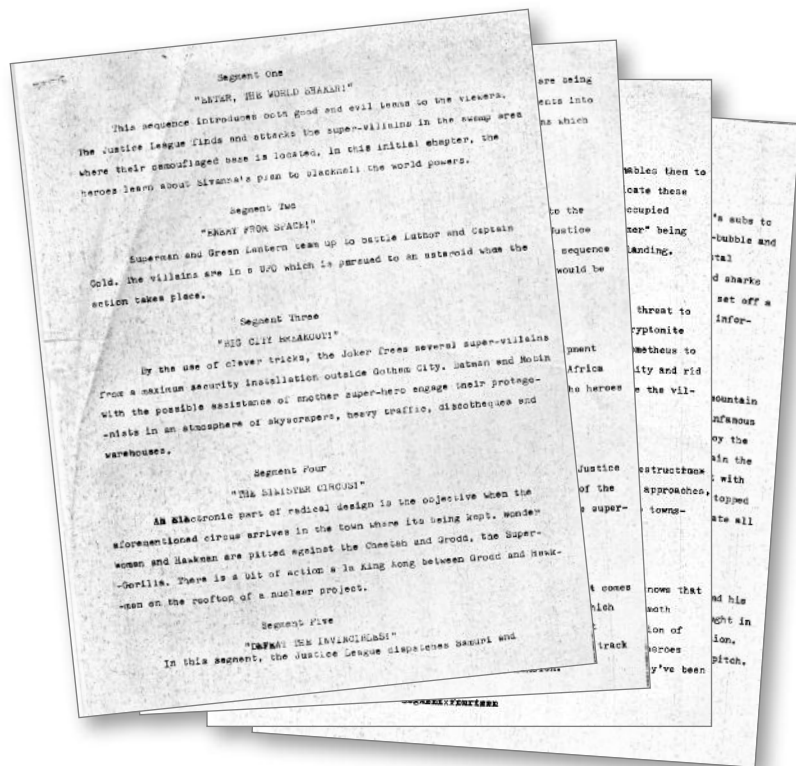
Our front cover this issue is a piece Jack did for the *Marvelmania* merchandise catalog, circa 1969. It was sent to members of the ill-fated Marvel fan club, and to hear Mark Evanier and Steve Sherman's comments about the company, not many customers got much more than the catalog! Inks are by Kirby himself, with new colors by Tom Ziuko.

Our back cover this issue is art for a poster that DC Comics sent to comics shops to promote the first *Super Powers* mini-series in 1984. Inks are by Mike Royer, and the original colorist was some guy named Ziuko (weird coincidence, huh?). This is a great rendition that has Jack drawing a lot of DC characters for the first time, and it's fun to see how they disguised a certain Lord of Apokolips.

by John Morrow

What a cool surprise it was to discover the below, unused (as far as I've been able to determine) 4-page plot for some kind of a DC Super-Team project!

This was in a batch of Kirby photocopies, and the typewriting looks to be from Jack's machine. But the question is, what project was this for? At first glance, you'd think it was possibly the original plot for DC's first *Super Powers* mini-series, perhaps planned for sixteen parts (or perhaps four issues with four chapters each). However, the word "viewers" in the first sentence makes me think this was more likely meant for the *Super Friends* cartoon show (or the *Super Friends: The Legendary Super Powers* version of its final seasons). With Jack having worked in animation (and even doing some storyboards for *Super Friends*), perhaps he was asked to kick out a plot as DC prepared to revamp it to tie-in with the *Super Powers* mini. But I don't recall Sivana ever appearing on the cartoon, or in the comics, so it's a safe bet this was never actually used. If anyone knows different, please write and let us know (like I have to ask!). ★



Segment One
"ENTER THE WORLD SHAKER"

This sequence introduces both good and evil teams to the viewers. The Justice League finds and attacks the super-villains in the swamp area where their camouflaged base is located. In this initial chapter, the heroes learn about Sivana's plan to blackmail the world powers.

Segment Two
"ENEMY FROM SPACE!"

Superman and Green Lantern team up to battle Luthor and Captain Cold. The villains are in a UFO which is pursued to an asteroid where the action takes place.

Segment Three
"BIG CITY BREAKOUT!"

By the use of clever tricks, the Joker frees several super-villains from a maximum security installation outside Gotham City. Batman and Robin with the possible assistance of another super-hero engage their protagonists in an atmosphere of skyscrapers, heavy traffic, discotheques and warehouses.

Segment Four
"THE SINISTER CIRCUS!"

An electronic part of radical design is the objective when the aforementioned circus arrives in the town where it's being kept. Wonder Woman and Hawkman are pitted against the Cheetah and Grodd, the Super-Gorilla. There is a bit of action a la King Kong between Grodd and Hawkman on the rooftop of a nuclear project.

Segment Five
"DEFEAT THE INVINCIBLES!"

In this segment, the Justice League dispatches Samurai and Black Vulcan to a secret Institute where recruited mercenaries are being trained, through a

bizarre series of mental and physical treatments into super-assassins. The villains who run this school employ weapons which provide spectacular action.

Segment Six
"THE DEADLY DEEP!"

An undersea drilling operation that effects an entrance to the giant cavern of the crystal mountain spurs a clash between the Justice League and the super-villains. Aquaman would be featured in this sequence with aid from one of his League members. Super-subs and weapons would be heavily stressed.

Segment Seven
"SAFARI TO NOWHERE!"

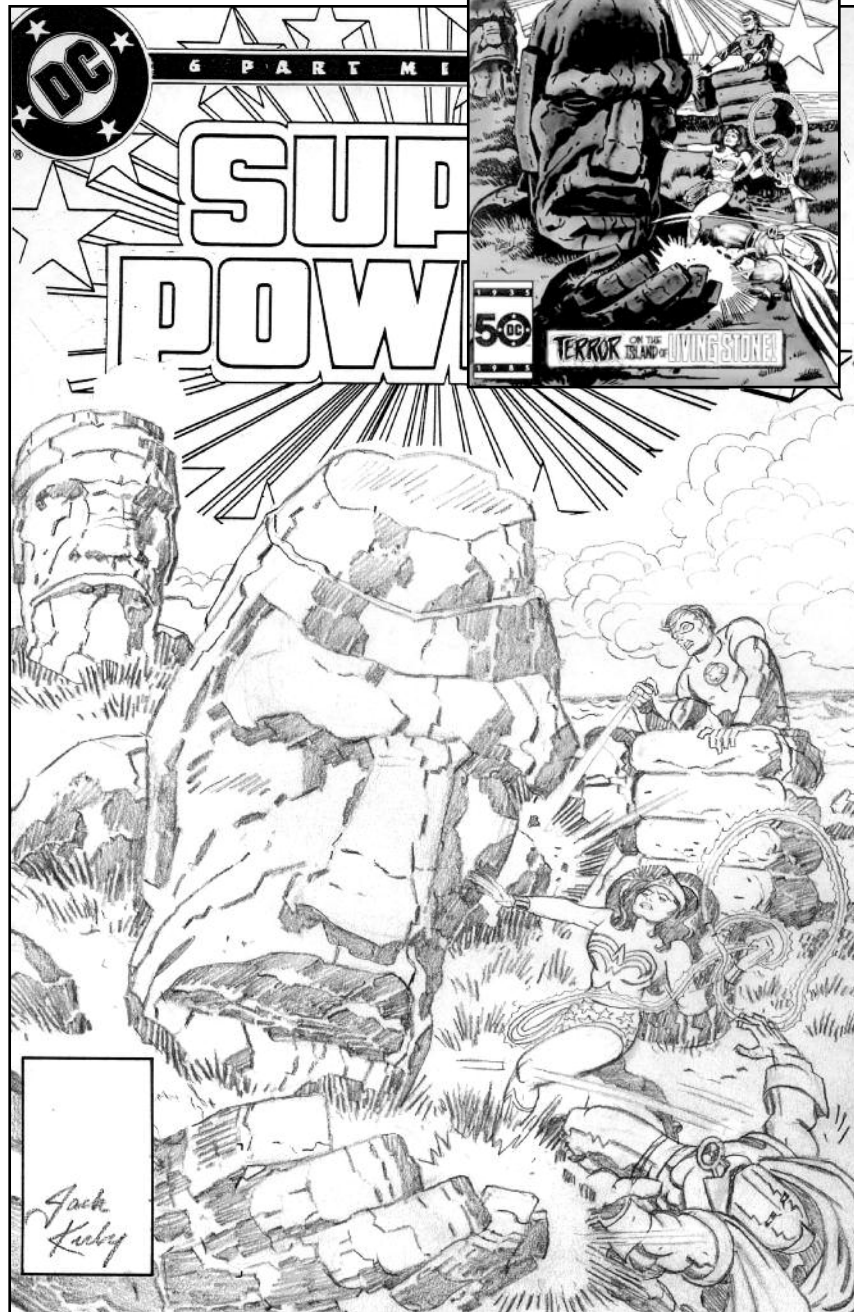
In order to track down the factory which is producing equipment for the evil "Earthquake Plan", the super-heroes send a group to Africa to find and attack the source. In addition to jungle adventure, the heroes encounter fierce resistance in the enemy's hidden lair.

Segment Eight
"THE SUN GUN"

The villains decide upon a counter-move to destroy the Justice League and its headquarters. A space weapon which used the power of the sun with laser precision is maneuvered in place to do the job. The super-heroes retaliate in time to avoid their demise.

Segment Nine
"FILL ME WITH FEAR!"

Pressure continues to plague the Justice League. This time it comes in the form of fear-waves, an insidious by-product of bio-rhythms which attack the neural system of the brain. The super-heroes are almost frozen into immobility, but overcome this devastating condition to track down and destroy the "fear-machine" in an old, eerie mansion.



(above) Original pencils to the cover of *Super Powers* (second series) #3 (Nov. 1985). Plot ©2006 Jack Kirby Estate. Characters TM & ©2006 DC Comics.

Segment Ten
"A JUMP THROUGH TIME!"

The super-villains devise a complex back-pack which enables them to literally jump through time like parachutists. Managing to duplicate these packs, members of the Justice League follow their foes to Nazi-occupied Normandy before D-Day. The heroes don't find the "earthquake hammer" being built there, but they do help the Allied forces to a victorious landing.

Segment Eleven
"THE GREATEST CAPTURE EVER MADE!"

Sivana realizes that Superman is the most dangerous threat to his plan. He lures the super-hero into a demonic trap of green Kryptonite which will draw the man of steel into space and bind him like Prometheus to a passing meteor. This will take his enemy on a flight into eternity and rid him of his presence. The Justice League goes into action and battles the villains in space before they effect Superman's rescue.

Segment Twelve
"THIS TOWN MUST DIE!"

A small western community is picked by the villains for destruction in a test of their earthquake device on a limited scale. As H-hour approaches, the super-heroes are unable to stop the test. But, they do save the townspeople before the entire area is shaken to bits.

Segment Thirteen
"BATTLE OF THE REPLICAS!"

H-hour also approaches for the world. The Justice League knows that somewhere, the earthquake hammer is being installed to generate mammoth vibrations in the crystal mountain. The heroes must learn the location of both and mount an attack against their enemies. One group of super-heroes corners some of the foes and defeats them--only to discover that

they've been fighting deadly duplicated constructed to divert them.

Segment Fourteen
"THE STREETS OF THE DEAD!"

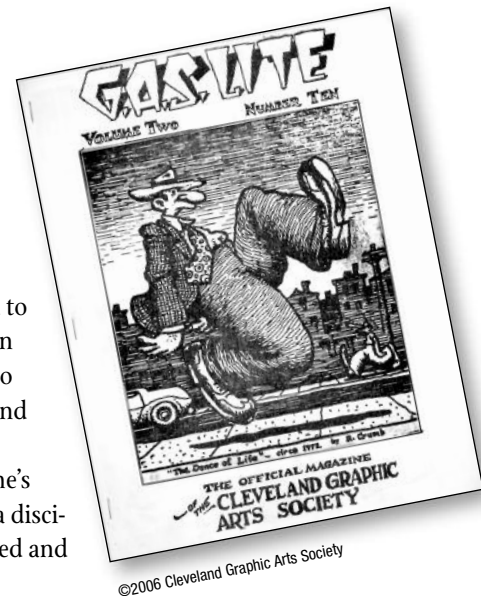
Aquaman and a team-mate find and trail on of Sivana's subs to sunken Atlantis. The ancient ruin is now encased in a giant air-bubble and is used by the super-villains as a stop-over enroute to the crystal mountain cavern. There is action in the sea with trained, mutated sharks and a rugged fight with the villains in the dead city where they set off a nuclear device in a temple idol. The heroes escape with valuable information for the Justice League.

Segment Fifteen
"THE CRACK OF DOOM!"

The super-heroes now know the location of the crystal mountain and that the earthquake hammer is being put into place to do its infamous work. They also know that a possible error could cause it to destroy the Earth itself. However, the villains make an all-out effort to contain the Justice League. They trap its members in a force shield and fill it with sleep gas. The heroes break out of this trap and are stopped by heavy-gravity machines which pin them to the earth. But they eliminate all obstacles to prepare to confront the villains in the great cavern.

Segment Sixteen
"FINAL FURY!"

In this last segment, the Justice League faces Sivana and his cohorts as the earthquake device goes into action. The battle is fought in a doomsday atmosphere in which the Earth is on the brink of destruction. But the super-heroes stop the operation before it can reach a fatal pitch.



(below) A partially inked, unused page from *Demon* #1 (Aug. 1972) which ran with this interview.

(next page) A fan drawing of Mark Moonrider from *G.A.S.Lite*. The *TJKC* editor remembers seeing the original of this drawing for sale at the 1978 Atlanta Fantasy Fair (his first big con) for the ridiculous sum of \$25. He passed on it, much to his current regret.

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Submitted by Bruce Hannum

(Reader Bruce Hannum received the fanzine *G.A.S.Lite*, The Official Magazine of the Cleveland Graphic Arts Society Vol. 2, #10 in the mail in 1973, shortly after the cancellation of Kirby's *Fourth World* series. Inside was the following interview with Jack, which was conducted by Peter Kuper—the current artist and writer on “*Spy Vs. Spy*” for *Mad Magazine*—when he was 14, and Seth Tobocman, co-founder with Peter of *World War III Illustrated*, which has been running since 1979. Our thanks to Bruce, Peter, and Seth for their permission to reprint this interview.)

Q: Could you repeat for the readers the symbolism of The Hulk?

A: The Hulk—when he is the Hulk—is the epitome of ignorance and therefore unstoppable, because ignorance combined with power is unstoppable. He represents everything that is primitive

and that's why he is the way he is, and is so hard to contend with. A caveman endowed with super-hero powers is unstoppable and becomes overwhelming. When he is Dr. Banner he's entirely different. He is a disciplined man, well-educated and under control.

Q: And without much power?

A: Well, he's got power in his knowledge. That's symbolic of all of us, because when we're out of control we're all capable of doing as much damage as The Hulk.



Q: Could you give us a brief run-down on your career in comics?

A: I began probably with the kind of stuff that needed improvement and over the years it got improvement because I worked at it and, of course, today I still see avenues where my art can be either changed or improved.

Q: What single character is your favorite?

A: All of them, because when I work on a character, each character is important to me. I try to make them as dimensional as possible. It's not an ego trip; it's just a responsibility to see that I don't give the reader caricatures.

Q: Where does most of the influence come from in your art... such as style?

A: The style is your own to begin with if you have no formal schooling in art. You know, you swipe and you cannibalize and you take the best of a lot of the other artists and they become your school—they become your influence; but the style that develops is your own.

Q: Was there anyone who influenced your writing?

A: There wasn't a certain writer; just my experience of writers—all sorts of writers. I combined whatever I learned from them with my own sense of drama. Each person has his own sense of drama. It could be passionate drama or sometimes it could be very cool drama. I feel that extreme drama will make a larger impact on the reader.

Q: What do you have planned for the future?

A: Anything that's assigned to me by DC.

Q: Are there any new concepts that you will be bringing up, or new characters? Such as...

A: I'm not going to give you "such as" because I would be giving away my ideas. I can only say that I am entertaining a variety of ideas which I will submit to the proper people and see what they think of them.

Q: What, if any, is the symbolism of Galactus and the Silver Surfer?

A: Galactus is an overwhelming force; an energetic, overwhelming force which I believe we all have to contend with from time to time; a force we can't control. He represents a force as strong as a hurricane or a natural disaster of some kind, like a landslide or a cyclone. Those are forces that we can't predict or control. They just come and if we're in their path we can get hurt and if we're not in their path we can only watch them and just wonder at the bigness of them. Galactus represents that kind of thing. In the instance

(below) Simon & Kirby splash page from the Boy Commandos story in *Detective Comics* #79 (Sept. 1943). Art restoration by Chris Fama.

(next page, top)
X-Men #17 panel
(Nov. 1965).

(next page, bottom)
Presentation art for the *Dingbats of Danger Street*; this was originally part of a concept called "Death Fingers."

Boy Commandos, Dingbats TM &
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The Evolution of Kirby's Team Concept, by Bruce Younger

In 1941, Joe Simon & Jack Kirby introduced the Newsboy Legion in the pages of *Star Spangled Comics*. The formula was a simple one: A beneficent and experienced mentor takes charge of a group of plucky youngsters, and together they get involved in all sorts of adventures. Each member has a distinct personality—Tommy, the shy, sensitive, reasonable one (read "normal"); Scrapper, the tough guy; Gabby, the hot-head; and Big Words, the smart one.

The Newsboy Legion was the first book in an evolutionary creative process for Kirby that yielded no fewer than eight more team concepts between 1942 and 1972. (For the purpose of this article, I am only including teams that had no independent affiliation, such as Young Allies or Avengers, or concepts that involved a loosely affiliated group that all appear in one book, such as New Gods or the Eternals.)

Simon & Kirby were obviously on a roll with the success of their Newsboy Legion, and just a couple of months later produced *Boy Commandos*, which not only played off of the popularity of

the Kid Gang concept, but also the growing nationalism with the US's entry into World War II. Joe & Jack kept the same basic pattern they used for Newsboy Legion: Rip Carter, the beneficent and experienced mentor, takes charge of a group of plucky youngsters orphaned by war—the shy, sensitive one, the tough guy, the hot-head and the brain. Four seems to have been the magic number, giving Kirby the diversity and dynamics within the group without confusing the reader. Although he sometimes expanded that number to five to avoid too much similarity, he continued to use this as a template for most of his team concepts.

After the war, Joe & Jack took their talents to Harvey, coming up with two Kid Gangs: *Boys' Ranch* and what turned out to be their last kid concept, *Boy Explorers*. By now, their formula was well established, and in each of the series (even the short-lived *Explorers*), it's easy to see how the template was filled in for each of the character types.

But the times, they were a'changin'. After the European and Korean wars, America had grown up. We all know what happened to cause the comic glut of the early '50s and the subsequent col-

lapse and self-censorship of the industry. Along with many other genres, Kid Gangs went by the wayside, as did the creative team of Simon & Kirby.

It's important to note that, within the pages of their Kid Gang stories, Joe & Jack created something unique that still goes largely unrecognized: The dedicated team. By that, I mean a team that is formed out of some shared experience and has no affiliation with any other group and whose members do not appear in solo adventures.

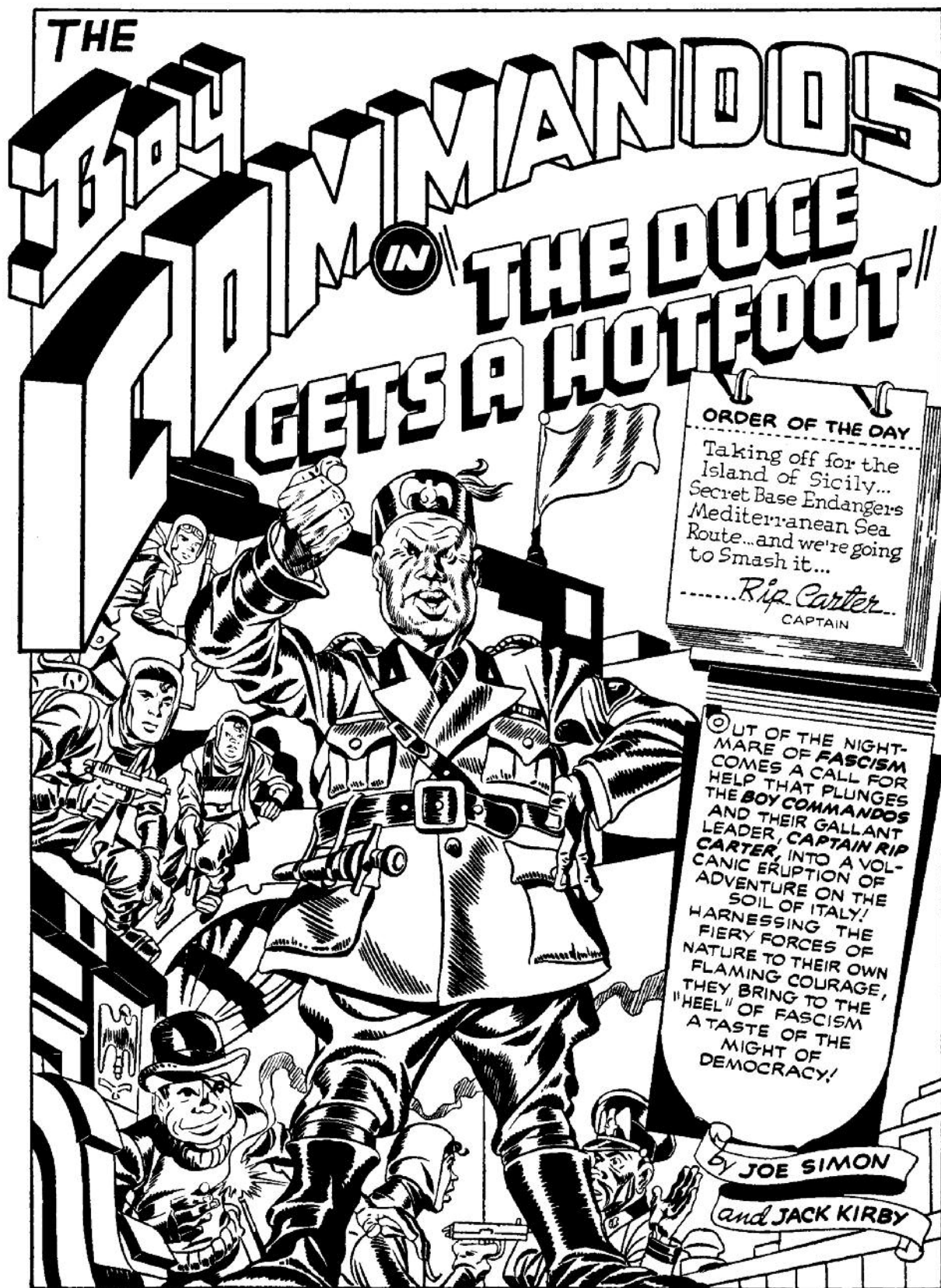
With the demise of the popularity of the kid team, however, Kirby took what he had learned about team structure, roles and group dynamics, and applied it to a new concept developed for DC: The first *adult* dedicated team, and the first dedicated team of the Silver Age, Challengers of the Unknown.

Basically, the Challengers were a grown-up version of the Kid Gangs of the '40s and '50s, without the mentor figure. The concept, however, had one additional and unique aspect to it: The group was brought together by a near-death experience. In this way, the Challengers were the direct antecedents of the Fantastic Four.

Kirby's magic formula of four distinct characters once again proved to work well. We get Professor Hale as the brain, Red Ryan as the hot-head, Ace as the cool, sensitive one, and the tough guy played by ex-boxer Rocky. The formula worked so well that, after being featured four times in *Showcase*, they were given their own book.

The Challengers of the Unknown set the stage for what was to come. While most comic historians agree on the Flash's appearance in *Showcase* #4 being the official start of the Silver Age, I believe the Challengers were actually the *transition* between the Golden and Silver Ages, as well as the differentiation point between the DC House Style and the Marvel.

If you look at the early Challengers stories, you can see a reflection of the same style that Kirby had used in the '40s on titles like *Captain America* and *Newsboy Legion*. There's a sketchiness, a roughness in the finishing that was common to Golden Age art, but was also a hallmark of much of Simon & Kirby's art through the '50s. In addition, the way Kirby used unusual panel shapes and page layouts is very reminiscent of the way S&K designed pages for many of their Golden Age books, with



KIRBY'S SUPER TEAMS

by
Shane
Foley

When it comes to Super Teams, Kirby was the godfather of the genre. From his first work on *Young Allies* to his final on *Super Powers*, here's a few memorable ones.

(page 20) *New Gods* #8, page 6
(April 1972):

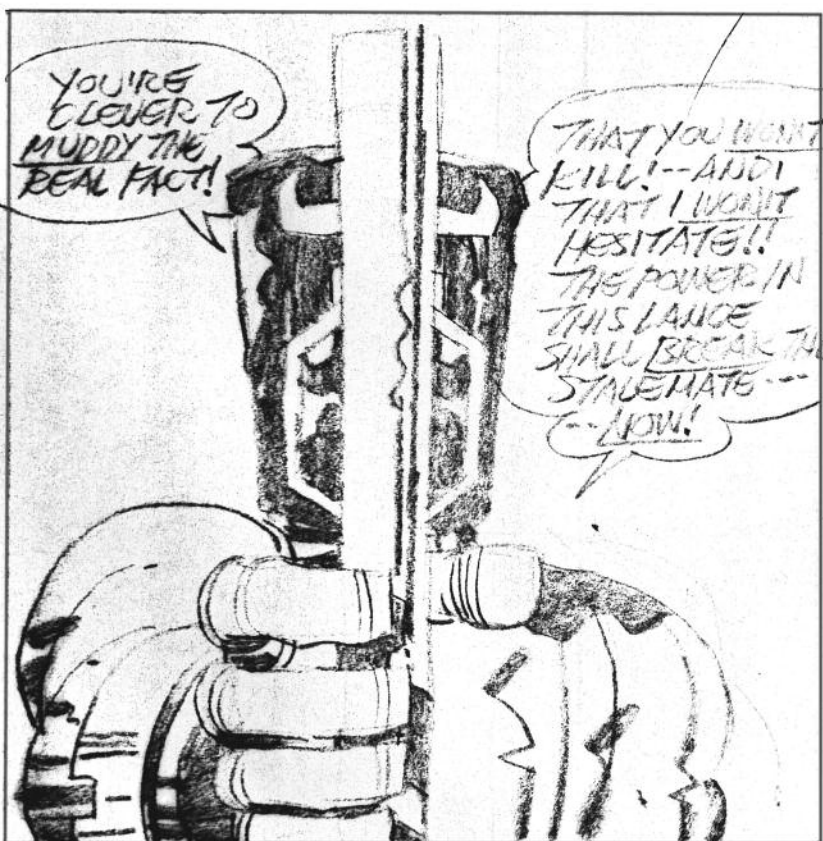
Within an entire pantheon of New Gods was this super-team of Orion and Lightray. What a great pair, so different and so complimentary to each other: Orion, the seasoned warrior, filled with barely controlled rage and torment; Lightray, younger and new to the battlefield, the strategist. Yet Kirby never stooped to the ploy of portraying Orion as a mindless idiot, nor did he simply use Lightray as a foolish foil for Orion. Some of Kirby's strongest characterization slowly played itself out between these two.

(page 21) *Forever People* #11, page 18 (Oct. 1972):

In the '70s, this book always felt like the strangest of the *New Gods* trilogy to me. Is it because there was no real 'super-hero' focus (especially after the characterless Infinity Man disappeared after #3)? Mark Moonrider and Vykin the Black didn't even have their own super powers until #8 (and then Vykin's ended up on the cutting room floor, as shown in *TJKC* #6). Yet it was here that Darkseid's personal presence was felt most strongly. It was here that the Anti-Life Equation reared its head in some fabulous stories. I can't help but feel that in many ways this super-team book was too mature for my young teenage taste.



SOUND
SFAK!





A column answering Frequently Asked Questions about Kirby
by Mark Evanier

Okay, I promised this issue I'd discuss this first matter and I always keep my promises except when I don't. It's a question received it from any number of people over the years and I've stalled giving a firm answer 'til now. Most of the time, it's asked roughly as follows:

Hey, Evanier! So, like, what's the deal with the inking on the first issue of Fantastic Four? I've read that Jack inked it. I've read that Dick Ayers inked it. A lot of people have said it was someone named Christopher Rule. In the Kirby Collector, you said it could have been Rule but might have been George Klein. What more can you tell us?

(below) Who inked the first issue of *Fantastic Four* in 1961? Mark thinks he knows...



(next page, top) Compare the background inks on these panels from *FF* #2 (Jan. 1962) and *Thor* #168 (Sept. 1969). Since George Klein inked both, it's a pretty compelling argument.

(next page, bottom) So, Mark, who inked this unused cover to *Fantastic Four* #3, circa 1962? Inquiring minds want to know!

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when I first got involved with this kind of comic scholarship, no one gave the matter much thought. I think Dick Ayers was generally identified as the inker of all those early issues of *FF* that lacked credits, except for #5 by Joe Sinnott.

(If you want to get really fussy about this, Sinnott inked a little bit of #6 before he had to turn the job back. Ayers finished it and then became the book's regular inker... with occasional exceptions.)

I knew the identification of Ayers as the inker of #1 was wrong because I'd examined the issues. The first two were obviously by one guy. The second two were obviously by another... and neither



work matched the inking that was credited to or signed by Dick Ayers. With a little more sleuthing, I matched up the inking on #3 and #4 with inking that was credited to Sol Brodsky (left) on the Ant-Man strip in *Tales to Astonish*.

I think I was the first person to make the Brodsky connection. Around 1975, my pal Tony Isabella was working at Marvel

For whatever it's worth—and my opinion and eight dollars will just about buy you a latte at Starbucks—I've decided that the first issue of *Fantastic Four*—the first two, actually—were inked by George Klein. In the past, I hedged this identification by saying that perhaps his friend Christopher Rule assisted or that the two men double-teamed the assignment.

After taking a harder look at the evidence, I've changed my mind. I think it's just plain George Klein.

It's kind of interesting how this identification has evolved for me and for others. In the late Sixties and early Seventies,

on a project that needed some information. He called to ask who'd inked *FF* #3 and I told him it was Sol, and that he'd inked the issue after, as well. Tony marched down the hall and asked Brodsky, who was then working in some sort of production managerial post for the company. Sol confirmed it.

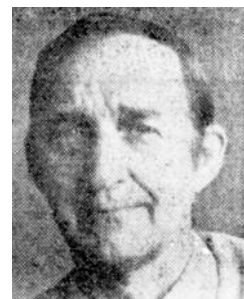
Unfortunately, though Sol was there at the time *Fantastic Four* #1 was done—he even did art touch-ups on it and designed the title logo—he didn't remember who'd inked the first two issues. And when Tony asked me, I had to admit I wasn't sure.

On another occasion, someone else at Marvel needed to know about #1. They checked with Stan Lee but Stan didn't remember. So they called Kirby and asked him... and Jack, for some reason, said it was Artie Simek.

No, it wasn't.

I almost don't blame Jack for this bit of false info entering the annals of comic book history. I blame whoever asked Jack and thought he might know. Mr. Kirby never paid much attention to who inked his work. On the rare instances when he did know, his memory for that kind of thing was worse than Stan's, Stan's being about as bad as your average amnesia patient.

Simek (right) did letter the first issue but he was not an inker. I'm told he got some sort of artist credit on a few old Timely/Atlas teen publications but I see no reason to presume those weren't a matter of someone lumping his lettering handiwork into the list of those who actually drew. Also, Simek didn't letter the second *Fantastic Four*, which was inked by whoever inked the first one. Why wouldn't he letter the book if he was also inking it? Why wouldn't he ever ink anything else?



So if it wasn't Simek, who was it? Others suggested Bill Everett, Marvin Stein, Carl Hubbell and Kirby himself. I was never convinced of any of those and many of us found it a maddening riddle. It had to be someone who'd done something else in comics. I mean, you don't just enter the business, ink the first two issues of what would soon be called "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine" and a few concurrent monster stories for Marvel, then disappear forever.

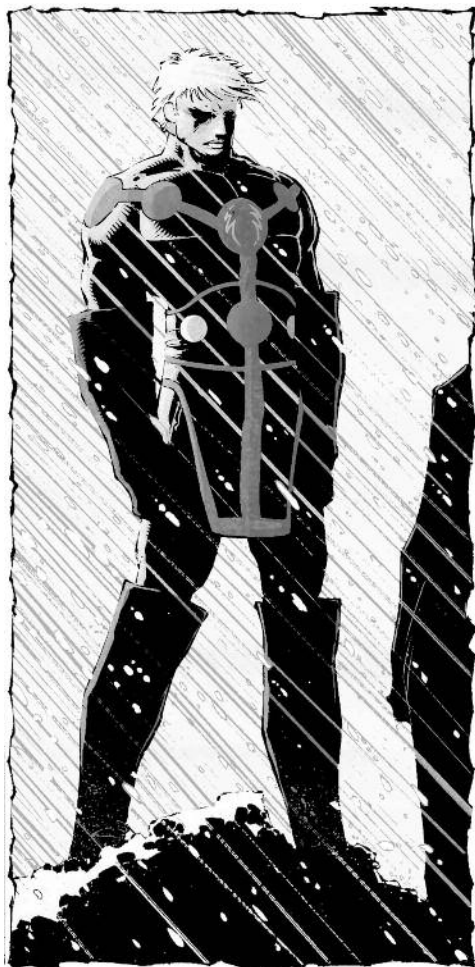
Then one day, well into the Eighties, the name of Christopher Rule entered the picture. I believe John Romita identified him in an interview as a guy who'd embellished some of Jack's science-fiction stories for Atlas in the late Fifties.

Kirby scholars pounced on this revelation of a hitherto-unidentified Kirby inker. It was true that Rule, who did most of his work on Marvel's teen comics, had sometimes been called on to ink Kirby stories. Many then vaulted to the conclusion that he must have been the mystery inker of *Fantastic Four* #1.

But was he?

A comparison of inking styles—laying those late Fifties' *Tales to Astonish* jobs alongside *FF* #1 didn't convince me. Just not a close enough match. Then there was also the following to consider, as I explained in my first column for this publication:

"...there's some circumstantial evidence that argues against Rule. At the time of *Fantastic Four* #1, almost half the Marvel line consisted of books in the teen or romance genres—*Millie the Model*, *Love Romances*, *Teenage Romances*, *Linda Carter*, *Student Nurse*; *Kathy*, *Life With Millie*, *Patsy Walker* and *Patsy & Hedy*. One might assume that if he even set foot in Stan Lee's offices around then, we'd also see his handiwork in



(this page) Romita Jr.'s work on *The Eternals*.

(next page, top) Gaiman's account of never meeting Kirby, from *Entertainment Weekly* #884/885 (June 30/July 7). Art by JRJR.

(next page, bottom) Kirby cover pencils for *Eternals* #5 (Nov. 1976).

Eternals TM & ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.

A May 2006 Interview by Christopher Irving

(We previously interviewed John Romita Jr. back in TJJC #36, but with his recent work on Marvel's Eternals revamp with Neil Gaiman, we thought it was high time for some more from this great artist.)

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: How far into drawing *The Eternals* are you right now?
JOHN ROMITA, JR.: I'm about halfway through drawing the second issue, but the first one was double-sized. I call it "third issue, in page count."

TJJC: How would you describe this new *Eternals* series to someone who'd never heard of Jack Kirby?

JRJR: It's Neil Gaiman's version of the telling of the origin of man through space gods.

TJJC: This project just seemed to fly out of left field when it was announced.

JRJR: I think it came out of Neil's left field. It wasn't announced until the assignment was agreed upon. Neil couldn't have made it all up in two days. This was an ongoing thing with Neil. When I finally got it offered to me, it was announced once the team was intact. Neil has been working on

this for a while, and it's a pretty strong and intense storyline with a great backstory. It's a complete re-telling of history.

TJJC: How does this relate to the Kirby series? Is it a complete re-imagining? Does Neil work to retain the tone of the original Kirby series?

JRJR: There's enough of Kirby's original, but it's used as a springboard. I don't want to get too detailed, but Neil took something in its infancy and sailed with it. He did an amazing job.

TJJC: Had you read the original?

JRJR: I had, but not when it came out. I started going through it again. I looked more at it visually than anything else, because I'm

a fan of Kirby. I didn't really read it, so much as I looked at it. I hate to say that I look at the pictures, but that's the case.

TJJC: There's a real Kirby influence to your work. Have you felt the need to channel that more heavily with *The Eternals*? In drawing it, have you looked more at the Kirby template, or have you tried to go in a completely different visual direction?

JRJR: I haven't tried either. I think what happens is that my generation of artists had such an influence from Buscema, Romita, and Kirby, that it's almost impossible to avoid referencing their storytelling and visual strength. As far as specifically influencing Kirby in my art, I don't see that; I think it's more in design and storytelling. I'll put the Kirby stuff up when I'm redesigning the visuals of the characters. I think that copying Kirby (or anybody) is a big mistake.

My own style is a deadline style: Whatever comes out on time is what I take. It's hard to describe. There comes a time when I take an artist's work and look through their books, like Jim Lee or Frank Miller. It's an inspiration, like watching an athlete before you go do something athletic. I'll watch baseball games before I play softball or look at a weightlifting magazine before I go to the gym. It's a subtle thing, but still an inspiration.

With Kirby, I've worked on characters that he created visually. I don't want to use his stuff so much that it's an obvious rip-off, but there is a certain amount of inspiration you get from looking at his work. When I did *Thor*, it was the same way with redesigning old costumes or designing new characters with the flavors of the old character designs. It's the costume, building, and machinery designs that are so unique that you can't copy it.

You could copy it, literally, but that would be a mistake.

TJJC: When people try that, it fails.

JRJR: Exactly. Jim Lee's work was taken by a whole group of young artists and created a stamped copy of his stuff that was so obvious it was a shame. I don't want to do the same thing with Jack Kirby, my father, or John Buscema, but there was the influence of all three of them in my work. I used reference of Kirby's *Eternals*, but we've altered the designs of the costumes while keeping the characters intact. We changed the visuals slightly, kept the characters as they were, and just went from there. It's a real testament to Kirby's stuff, and a testament to Neil to just

take something and improve upon it; especially Jack Kirby's stuff. I'm really pleased with the balance of this. This is Neil Gaiman's work, but using Jack Kirby's visuals, and I'm really excited about this. I can't tell you.

TJJC: It's an interesting combination.

JRJR: Yes, it is, and it came out of left field. One day, Marvel went, "We've got this assignment with Neil Gaiman," and I went "Great! Whatever it is, I'll do it."

"It's on *The Eternals*."

I didn't expect that and went with it, no problem.

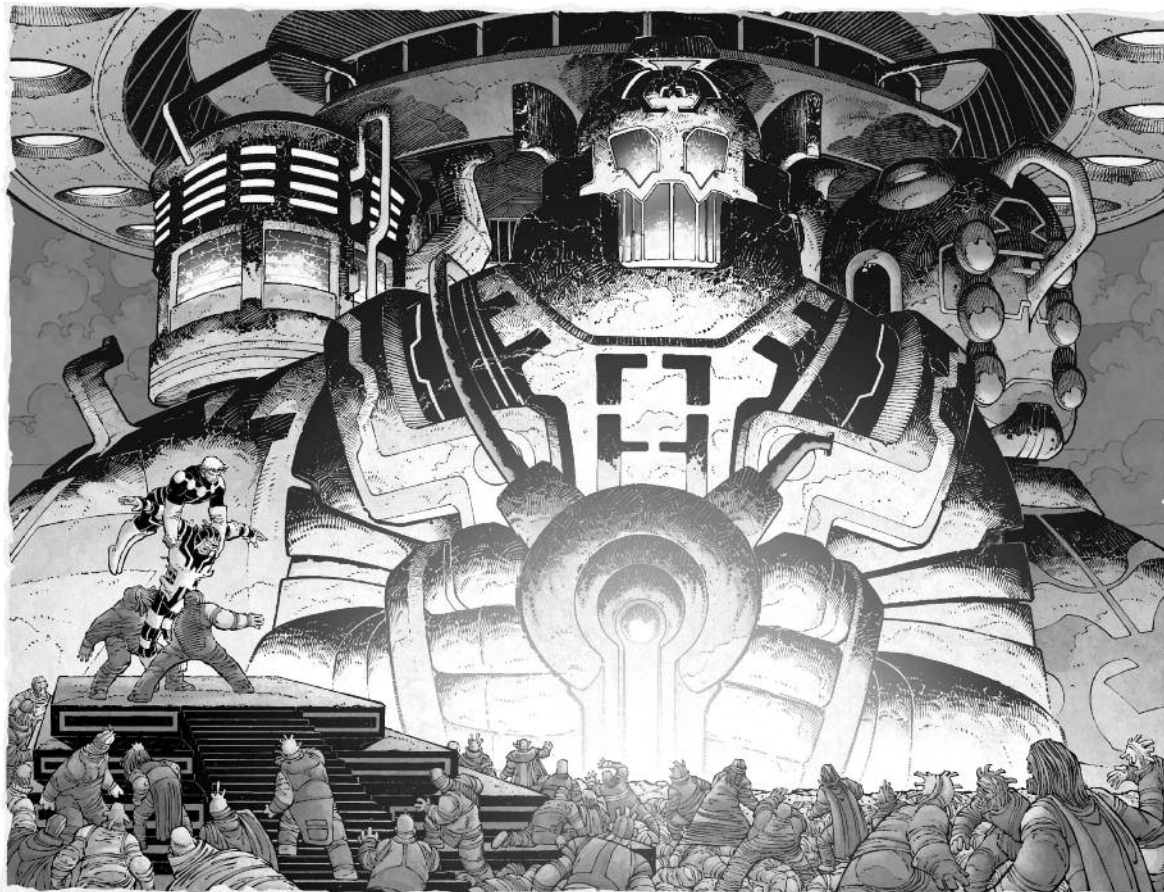
TJJC: Did you ever meet Kirby?

JRJR: Yes, I did. I met him a couple of times. He was a great guy, to me he was a big, cigar-smoking guy (I was a short guy at the time). He was very nice.

TJJC: Is there anything else that sticks out about him?

JRJR: It wasn't much more than an introduction, and then a second "Good to see ya again," kind of thing.

TJJC: I'm anxious to see how the book comes



KIRBY OBSCURA



Looking for inexpensive reprints of the stories featured this issue? *Journey Into Mystery* #56 (Jan. 1960) was reprinted in *Where Creatures Roam* #6 (May 1971). Although “The Microscopic Army” from *Yellow Claw* #3 (Feb. 1957) was reprinted in 1997’s *The Golden Age of Marvel Comics* trade paperback, the other three Kirby stories from that issue, alas, remain unreprinted. Likewise for the Kirby story in *Cracked* #14 (June 1960); it’s still unreprinted also.

A regular column focusing on Kirby’s least known work, by Barry Forshaw

It’s fascinating to see the very different ways for which the Atlas/Marvel ‘monster’ period has been regarded over the years. Stan Lee had become aware that the blandness of the post-horror stories had worn thin, and the rejuvenation of his comics line might come about via borrowing from the popular big screen creatures that were laying waste to such cities as Tokyo. But before Lee put together the implacable Lee/Kirby/Ditko team that filled so many books with rampaging behemoths, there were some fascinating ‘in-between’ issues—such as *Journey into Mystery* #56 (1960). Don’t be deceived by appearances: This is not a fully-formed book in the new manner. Despite what the cover suggests, “I Brought Zog The Unbelievable Back To Life!” has a giant Kirby monster bursting out of a block of ice, but the first (title) story is actually illustrated by Don Heck in capable fashion (although lacking the sheer dash that Kirby was to bring to such material). Joe Sinnott’s “I Spent a Night in the Haunted Lighthouse” is eminently forgettable, but it’s the penultimate tale which is the Kirby treat. “I Planted The Seeds of Doom!” is actually a rather pedestrian Lee tale in which an astronaut brings back seeds from another planet, which he thinks will blossom into beautiful flowers. Having marketed them throughout the world, he discovers to his horror that they are Trojan horses;

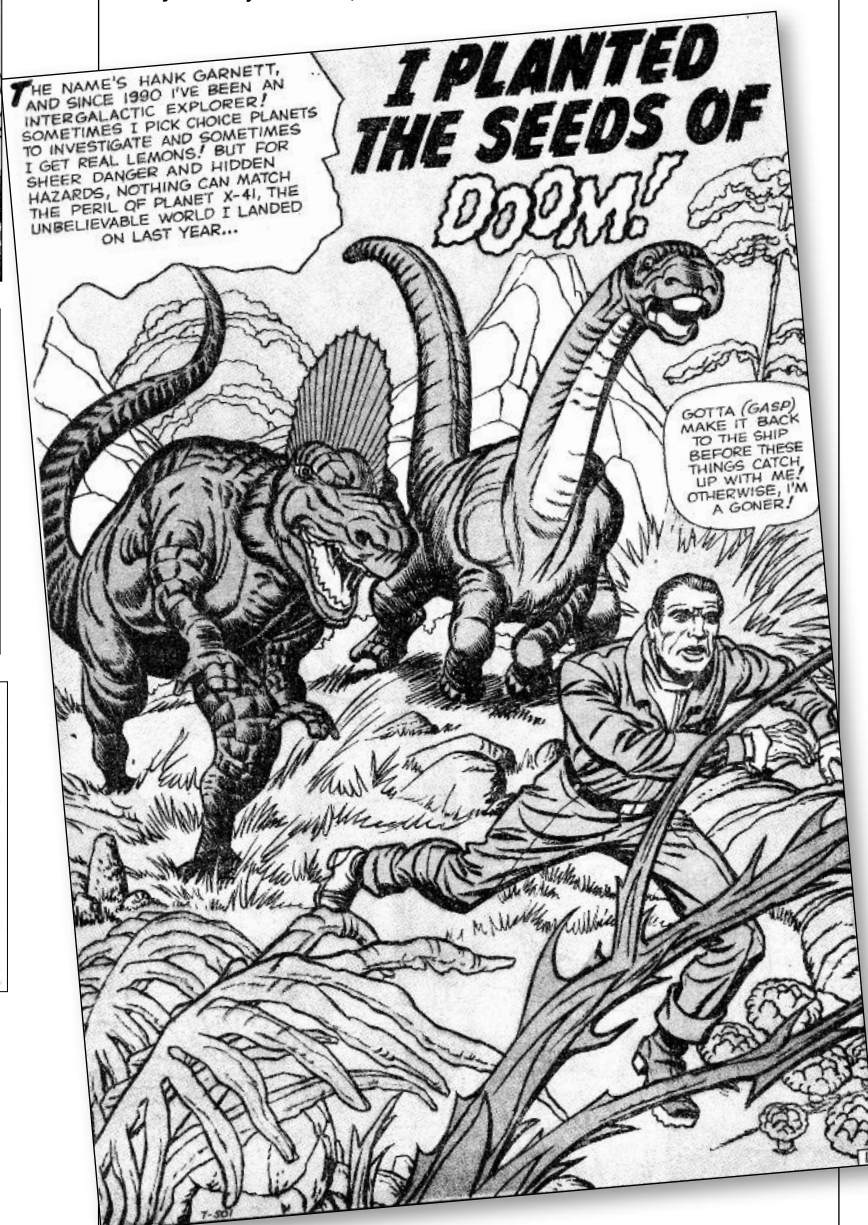
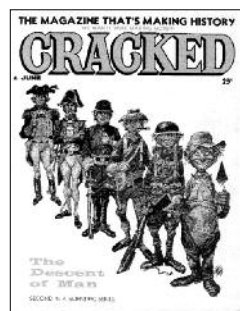
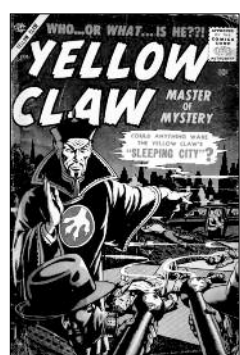
they actually blossom into the dinosaur-like monsters which were chasing him in the first (impressive) splash panel. Perhaps kids in the early ‘60s didn’t think it odd that there wouldn’t be some kind of control over things brought back from an alien planet, but for an adult reading the tale now, it rather renders the whole thing ridiculous.

But it’s the art we are here to talk about, and Kirby delivers an excellent job—crammed with monsters, yes, but not yet the simple monster-on-the loose tale that he and Lee were to deliver *ad infinitum* (and *ad nauseam*). The spaceman running from two alien monsters splash is followed in the tale itself by some typically eccentric Kirby space vehicles (no simple silver needles for The King), and the monster that menaces the astronaut in his apartment on Earth is well characterized. Interestingly enough, the best way to read this tale is in its Marvel reprint in *Where Creatures Roam* #6 (1971), where the rather pedestrian colors of the original have been replaced by a far wider color palette. Take the splash panel for instance: In the original, the mountains in the distance are a simple cream color, while the reprint makes them a riot of color. And the monster itself is no longer a simple primary green, but a variety of hues. Usually, such re-coloring is disastrous (or renders everything too joltingly colorful, as in the hardback Archive editions from both DC and Marvel), but the result is triumphant. A short Ditko tale of no great distinction winds up the issue, showing that Lee already had him in mind as the standard provider of finales.

When it comes to reissuing comics material from an earlier era, there is a problem that occasionally comes up which makes life very difficult for the new editors assembling such material: The changing attitude toward race. As a schoolboy growing up reading Dick Dillin and Chuck Cuidera’s otherwise splendid Silver Age *Blackhawk*, I was vaguely uncomfortable with the Chinese member of the team, Chop Chop. Why was he the only member of the Blackhawks not given one of those splendid militaristic uniforms with peaked cap, but instead confined to a pantomime Chinese outfit with waistcoat, etc.? Why was he the most cowardly member of the team, given to panicky explanations of ‘Oh, wobbly woes’? Yes, I had never met anyone who was Chinese, but I’d become aware of the fact that we were dealing here in stereotypes, and while I might have been less than happy with the Silver Age Chop Chop, I had no idea that the original incarnation of the character (in the earlier Will Eisner and Reed Crandall era) was an even more outrageous Chinese stereotype, with hideous buck teeth and ludicrous pigtail. Furthermore, he was drawn in an exaggerated cartoonish style—at least the Dillin/Cuidera Chop Chop was rendered naturalistically.

Similarly, British schoolboys had never seen another Will Eisner creation, the demeaning black sidekick Ebony in *The Spirit*, with his comically distended eyes and rubbery lips. What we had seen, of course, was Green Lantern’s Silver Age buddy Pieface in the classic Julius Schwartz revival of the character—and while such a name that references skin color would be completely unacceptable today, I confess that any incipient racial stereotyping passed this then-14-year-old by. All of this is not to argue for some kind of retrospective Political Correctness—these things were the products of their day and must be seen in context (similarly, Jewish objections to Shylock in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and Fagin in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* ignore the received attitudes of the Elizabethan age in wanting to ban these products of the greatest of all English writers).

Problems of presenting such dated characters in the present remain, and when Tom Brevoort was putting together the trade paperback *The Golden Age of Marvel Comics* in 1997, he had a problem with one of Kirby’s earliest creations for Marvel, The Yellow Claw. This oriental super-villain (with his demonic face, pointed ears and taloned fingers) was, of course, a knock-off of Sax Rohmer’s diabolical Fu Manchu, and any racism in the treatment of the character should perhaps be attributed to the original author. Perhaps that’s why Brevoort put the *Yellow Claw* reprint right at the back of the book, and, moreover, utilized an extremely short five-page story. Then again, he could fill the whole book with Golden Age “Human Torch,” “The Vision” and



Art restoration
by Christopher
Fama

This magazine's editor makes no secret of his fondness for Kirby's Kid Gangs, so you know no team-theme issue would be complete without at least one such example! And though we managed to run an unpublished *Boy Explorers* story back in *TJKC* #25, as Chris Fama and I were digging around for something to run in this issue's "Foundations" section, Chris realized that their origin story had never seen print since it was first published (and apparently not widely distributed) back in May 1946! So with Joe Simon's kind permission, we proudly present the inaugural outing of Gashouse, Gadget, Smiley, Mister Zero, and Commodore Sindbad, as they show off their "Talent for Trouble."

Story and characters TM &
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COMMODORE SINDBAD, LAST OF THE YANKEE CLIPPER CAPTAINS, FOUND HIS RETIRED LIFE RATHER DULL AND MUCH TOO PEACEFUL...UNTIL THE FURY OF A SCORNFUL PRINCESS ERUPTED VIOLENTLY FROM HIS YOUTHFUL PAST! THEN THE EXCITEMENT BEGAN!!! TO ESCAPE THE FRYING PAN, COMMODORE SINDBAD CHOSE THE FIRE! HE ADOPTED THE BLUEHILLS ORPHANAGE'S FOUR WILDEST RASCALS... EACH WITH HIS OWN TALENT FOR TROUBLE!

BUT THE PRINCESS HELD THE ACES AT THE CLIMAX... **THAT'S** WHY THIS STORY FIRST BEGINS AT THE END... **THAT'S** WHY YOU'LL YELL FOR MORE OF THE

**BOY
EXPLORERS**
by
**JOE SIMON
and JACK KIRBY**

JONATHAN LETHEM INTERVIEW



Interviewed by Chris Knowles, and transcribed by Steven Tice

(Jonathan Lethem is one of today's top novelists, with such titles as *Motherless Brooklyn*, his take on the hard-boiled detective novel, and *Fortress of Solitude*, a story of the racial tensions that take place on a Brooklyn street. His recent collection, *The Disappointment Artist*, contains an essay that spotlights Kirby's influence on him, and he graciously took time out to participate in this interview in 2006.)

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: This is for *The Jack Kirby Collector*. I don't know if you're familiar with the magazine.

JONATHAN LETHEM: Yeah, I like the magazine a lot. I see it sporadically. I always come across it when I'm in comic shops, which isn't often enough anymore, but I always pick one up when I see it. It's incredible what emerges. Well, there's the vitality of the response to it, too, the way that people are still thinking about him and arguing about him, and the magnetism of his life and career—an extraordinary thing.

(below) A stat of Jack's pencils from page 19 of *Jimmy Olsen* #139 (July 1971). Clark Kent's face looks pretty good to us, just the way Kirby drew him.

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The Disappointment Artist ©2006
Jonathan Lethem.



TJKC: Let's talk about *The Disappointment Artist*. I had actually listened to *The Disappointment Artist* on audio, which you had read yourself. That's why it caught my notice—the Kirby in the Seventies chapter, which really is quite remarkable for an author of your standing to take time in a book of essays to talk about something that's really obscure.

LETHEM: Well, you flatter me. I took a lot of inspiration from 1970s Marvel comic books, and Kirby in particular, and it's a big part of what I do, in a weird way. It resonates for me with those images, those authors.

TJKC: What kind of themes do you try and visit in your own work that came specifically from Kirby?

LETHEM: Well, y'know, I mean, Kirby was always really mysterious to me, because of the way a reader of my age encountered him. When you first encounter Marvel in 1974, I guess, he's sort of the great, unspoken missing piece. There was always this nostalgia or kind of hyper-inflated sense of history in Marvel, and, as a young reader, you're confused by this sort of "It was always greater before." There were always these, "Once, giants walked the Earth." And you've got to look back, you've got to buy the back issues, you've got to figure it all out, because everyone's always making reference to everything.

TJKC: Well, that's endemic for any kid in the Seventies.

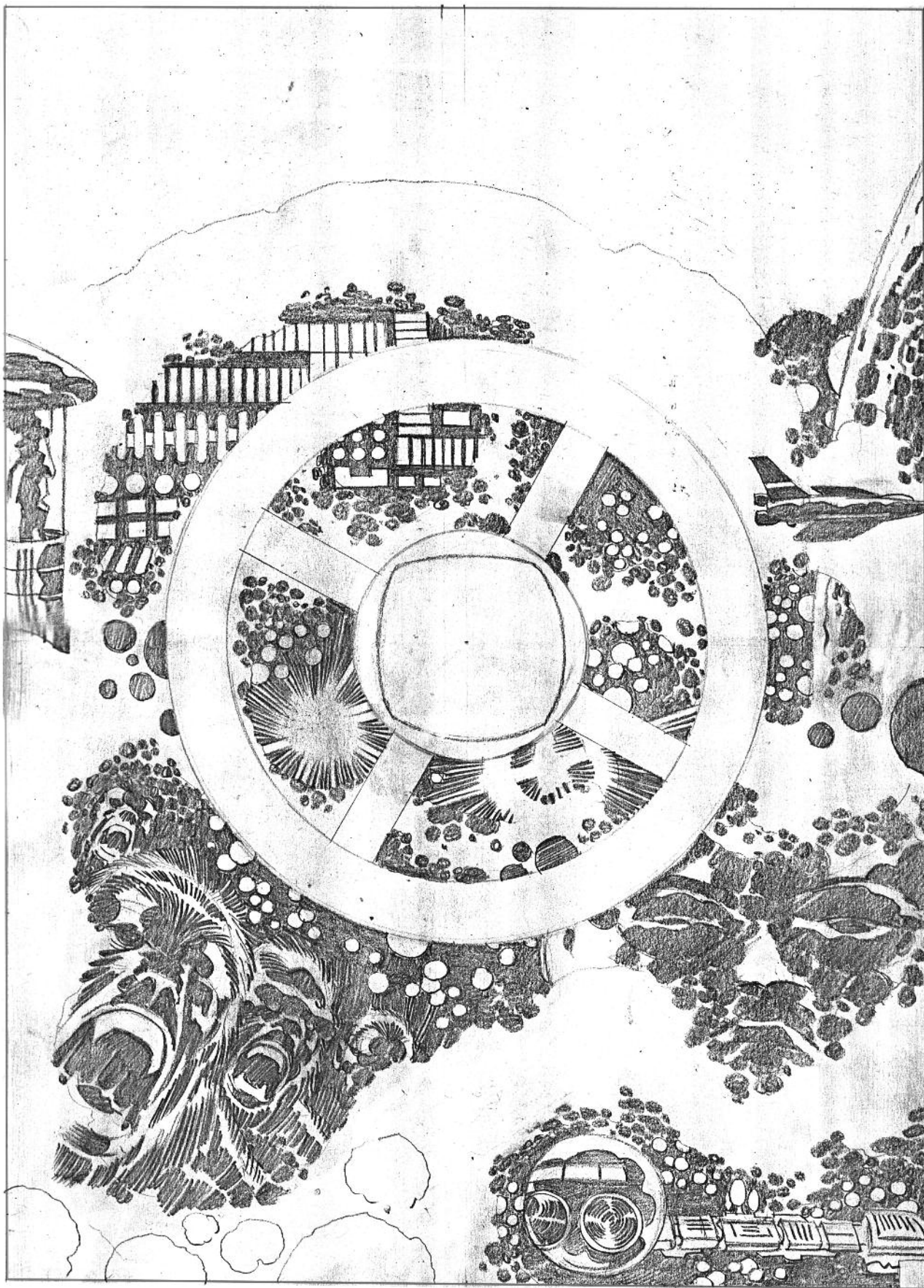
LETHEM: Yeah, exactly. Right. It's not the different love of things you're experiencing, where you're listening to Paul McCartney and Wings, and everyone's telling you how good the Beatles were. So there's a sense at that moment that Jack Kirby's a sort of great exiled figure. You can't figure out why he's not around, or what it means that he's over at DC.

TJKC: Did you read any DC comics?

LETHEM: I would glance at them, but I never figured them out. It was like I didn't have an entrée into that world. I knew who Superman and Batman were, but the DC comics at that moment, of course, weren't that way. Some of them were very interesting and strange. I'd come across something like a socially conscious *Green Lantern* comic book, or a really muddled-up issue of *Jimmy Olsen* and the Newsboy Legion with this Jack Kirby art and these weird Superman heads drawn over the top. And I could sort of tell that there was something going on that I couldn't translate. But, because of the kids I knew who were a little older and had better comic collections, I just understood and identified with the Marvel mythology much more easily.

TJKC: It's much more resonant at that point, too.

LETHEM: Yeah, yeah. I immediately identified with all those young, alienated loner characters. I was a born customer for



(above) Inside front cover pencils for Jack's *2001: A Space Odyssey* movie adaptation from 1976.

(next page) *Eternals* #12 cover pencils (June 1977). After xeroxing the pencils, Jack scribbled the cover captions (shown here) on the back of his photocopy before adding them to the cover itself.

All characters TM & ©2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.
2001: A Space Odyssey TM & ©2006 Turner Entertainment.

what Marvel was selling at that point. It's right around that time—you would know probably better than I—that Stan Lee put out those *Origins* books. So then you're looking at the beginnings of these characters' lives, and the early, very—sometimes very awkward, but very stirring art on those early issues, the Thing looking kind of weirdly molten, and then Hulk all gray. You just get very involved, as a reader, immediately, in the idea that there's all this great stuff in the past that you've got to check out. And Kirby is this mythic name who everyone's got this total reverence for. Then suddenly here he is coming back. So I'd been looking at old issues of *FF* and that stuff just—I'd read it in the reprint issues or I'd look at old copies that my collector friends had, and I sort of thought, "This is really the heart of what this kind of storytelling can do." I wouldn't have articulated it back then, I just liked it.

TJKC: Like the *Marvel's Greatest Comics* reprints?

LETHEM: Yeah, yeah. Y'know, I guess, in retrospect, the ones I was probably looking at were *FF* in the mid-forties into the mid-sixties of the run; really the classic, heart-of-the-plate issues. Y'know, Kirby wasn't burned out yet, they weren't imitating themselves quite as much as they would be towards the end, and he was free

to introduce all these ridiculous cosmic themes, and they were always going to the Negative Zone. So at the same time there was this great propensity, which I guess I later understood might have come more from Stan Lee, for keeping things grounded in really human melodrama, the pregnancy, and Johnny's dating life, and the Thing and Alicia. This combination to me was just sublime, and that's still, I think, what I reach for in my work; to constantly put together the most outlandish and conceptual kind of material, the most raw-canvas, mind-blowing...

TJKC: High concept.

LETHEM: ...high concept stuff, with innately, almost embarrassingly, intimate, human material. That conflation really gets me where I live.

TJKC: And that's the Stan Lee/Jack Kirby tug of war.

LETHEM: Yeah, exactly, exactly. And so this part of Kirby that was a sort of dreamer, who was so alienated that I've speculated—quite irresponsibly, of course, in print—about things that might have been going on in his mind. I identify Kirby with a generation of guys who went to World War II and kind of came back and were never the same. I think there's something about seeing the devastation that changed him and gave him a really, really—not the really cosmic perspective, but the kind of mystical one. But he's also really morbid, very death-obsessed. Very...

TJKC: Pessimistic.

LETHEM: ...yeah, very concerned with imparting to his readers what he, I think, felt intuitively, which was that the scale of human events was so much vaster than they'd ever considered. There was a scale of cosmic events that dwarfed the human scale, that we were sort of near-puppets on stage. One reason that strange attempt to do Kubrick's *2001* as a comic book was so striking was because in some ways that super-alienated vision that Kubrick put across in that movie was already very Kirbyesque. I'm sure that Kirby felt it when he looked at that movie; that here was

material that had the kind of cosmic reach that he was always straining for, and when he was throwing the *Fantastic Four* or whomever it was out at it, it just seemed a kind of infinitely protracted cosmic struggle with—well, just creating characters like Galactus, for whom human beings are kind of, y'know...

TJKC: But it seems like the Vaudevillian in Jack was kind of struggling within himself, because he didn't really know where to go with the *2001* book and it ended up being *Machine Man*.

LETHEM: That's a great description, the Vaudevillian. The other thing that, of course, I ended up much, much later realizing I identified with very profoundly was his street kid side. You know, the part of him that was kind of a—he hated bullies and was constantly reliving the sort of dramas of ground-eye-view New York street kid culture.

TJKC: Well, that's what *Kamandi* is all about.

LETHEM: Absolutely. Exactly. And if you've even glanced at *Fortress of Solitude*, you'll see my own version of that material comes from a different era in New York street life. It happens to be much, much more informed by racial politics, but a lot of the energy, a lot of the strife and anxiety that comes from growing up in that

Know of some Kirby-inspired work that should be covered here? Send to:

Adam McGovern
PO Box 257
Mt. Tabor, NJ 07878

As A Genre

A regular feature examining Kirby-inspired work, by Adam McGovern

DRAMA KING

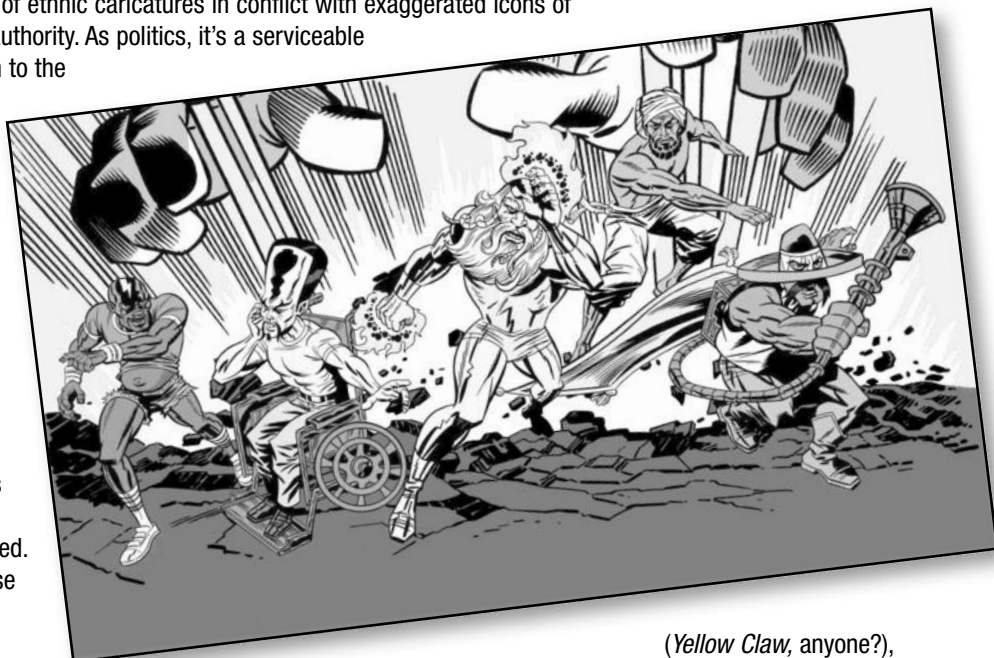
Kirby started in animation and dreamed of filmmaking, so it's no surprise that we can fill a column with pop discoveries that bring his style into the dimension of performing arts, or bring it to mind...

Live-Action Heroes

The Kirby DNA was clear in the poster heralding primordial indie-comics hero Caveman Robot's breakthrough to the musical stage. *Adventures of Caveman Robot: The Musical* conquered Brooklyn's Brick theatre for a month or so this Spring, worthy of a cult to match its shamanic stone-age subject matter. The creative team are omnivorous archaeologists of pop and folklore, so the super-heroic promo image fit as well with the fringe theatrics as the serial score of operetta, glam anthem, revolutionary march and themepark-Broadway power-ballad fit together for a kind of giant-size anthology of musical styles and greasepaint clichés. Fourth World fans would recognize the source code of the digital oracle Mater Vox (among the show's honor role of other witty pulp archetypes), and the cast-of-thousands fight-scenes had an unmistakable phantom choreographer. A grown-up re-creation of super-hero ice-capades turning the B-movie trademarks of yesterday into the collaged multimedia theatre of tomorrow, *Caveman Robot: The Musical* takes you back to a utopian future where our brains fire like Kirby's and all our bodies have corners and a shine. (www.cavemanrobot.com)

A League of Their Own

If you've heard of Cartoon Network's *Minoriteam*, it's probably for the calculated outrage of its cast of ethnic caricatures in conflict with exaggerated icons of WASP authority. As politics, it's a serviceable addition to the

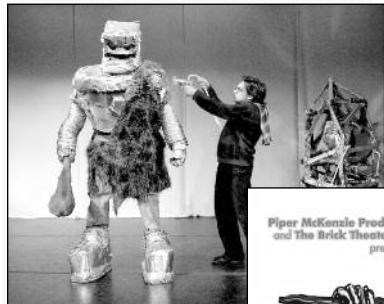


(*Yellow Claw*, anyone?),

which is as good for Kirbyphiles to keep in mind as Kirby's staggering contribution is important for those not in on the joke to know. Where stereotypes are concerned, Kirby, early in his career and to a degree rare for white guys of his era, got over it, which is as good a subtextual subtitle as any for this whole cartoon.

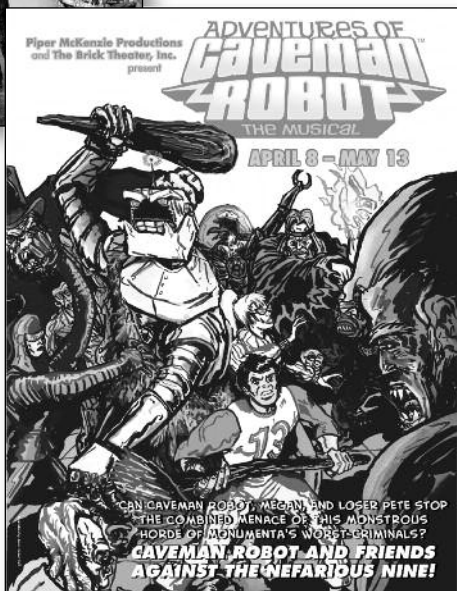
The French Recollection

No sooner did we travel across France in last issue's column than another sector of the Kirbyverse was mapped with the receipt of artist and animator Reed Man's epic music video for apunkalypytic French cult fave Bérurier Noir. Introducing their concert DVD *L'Opera des Loups*, the extended cartoon uploads the explosive Kirby aesthetic into the videogame spectacle of today for a dystopian mini-movie, disjointedly scored by shards of the band's post-industrial squawk, in which imprisoned rebels play out the whims of two cosmic beings' Yahweh-Satan-and-Job-style RPG in a way that would do the spiritually questioning Kirby proud. Reed Man also runs his sleek, tense take on the King's style through the recent *Atomics avec Mikros* series, a Kirby Kornucopia collecting French-language versions of Mike Allred's already-classic *Atomics*, Reed's own new stories of venerable French characters, and surprisingly



(above) The stage production of *Caveman Robot*, and (right) its *Eternals Annual* #1-inspired poster.

Characters TM and © 2006 Jason Robert Bell and Shoshanna Weinberger.



(center) The *Minoriteam* may not be politically correct, but they sure are Kirbyesque!

Characters TM & © 2006 Cartoon Network.

(below, bottom left, and next page, top left) Kirby lives in France.

Atomics TM and © 2006 Mike Allred. Others TM & © 2006 their respective owners.

(next page, bottom) Mr Comics' *Revolution on the Planet of the Apes*.

Characters TM & © 2006 Fox.

(next page, center) From *Doris Danger Seeks...*, a perfectly tongue-in-cheek homage to the King's Atlas Monster comics.

Characters TM & © 2006 Chris Wisnia.

canon of pop product seeking to defuse the multiplying frictions of our impending no-majority national patchwork. As humor, in the post-Chappelle TV landscape the show's catalogue of ironic stereotypes is practically pedestrian, while its most outlandish joke may be reserved for Kirby insiders: The producers have marshaled the omnipotent capabilities of the computer era to re-create the jumpy, clumsy low-tech look loved and hated by generations of cult-admirers of the original *Marvel Super-Heroes* cartoons. Since there were of course no Kirby panels of *Minoriteam*'s characters to shoot directly from, his style has been painstakingly, eye-scorchingly reconstructed. Of course, there are some Kirby panels too close to this material for comfort



SECRETS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR

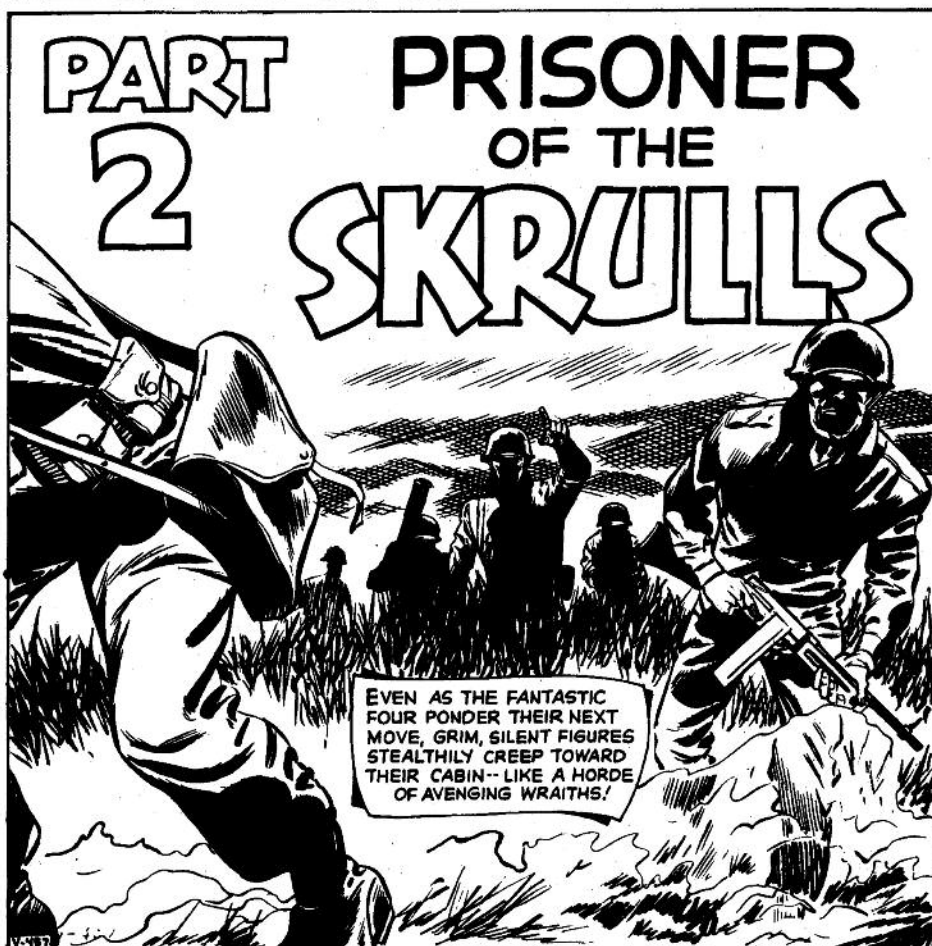
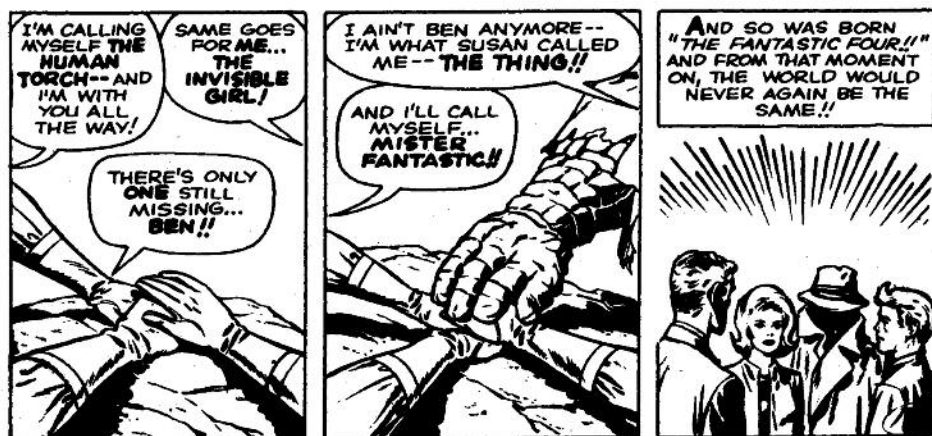
by Will Murray

(bottom right) Russian Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin.

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When people talk about the origin of the Marvel Universe, they of course point to the inaugural issue the *The Fantastic Four*, cover-dated November 1961, but which actually went on sale on August 8th.

Stan Lee often tells the story of how Martin Goodman discovered that DC's *Justice League of America* was selling usually



(above) We combined the last panels from *FF* #1, chapter one, with the splash image from *FF* #2, chapter two, to show what looks like a pretty convincing possibility of how the first *FF* tale might've originally been drawn. What do you think, readers?

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well and suggested that it was high time Timely reentered the genre. Working with Jack Kirby, Lee came up with the novel concept of four American astronauts who ventured into space and are transformed into super-mutations by cosmic rays.

I've often wondered when the FF were really created and why the space background was selected over a more traditional super-hero origin. Of course, Kirby had recently wrapped up his *Sky Masters* newspaper strip, which focused on the new NASA space program. So that was a probably a primary influence, even though the FF weren't primarily space heroes. And the Challengers of the Unknown parallels, particularly the idea of a quartet of explorers who rededicate their lives after surviving a near-fatal crash landing, are striking.

DC's *Justice League* premiered in its own title with a November 1960 cover-date. Several months and issues would have to pass for sales of the new title to be definitively known.

So I imagined we'd be talking about the beginning of 1961 at the earliest for Goodman to make his wishes known.

I got on the trail of the truth when I was looking over a list of early Marvel stories listed in the order of their job numbers. *FF* #1 is V-374. I was fascinated to discover that the numbers that immediately preceded *FF* #1 pertained to the pin-up and other short features for *Millie the Model* #105 and *Linda Carter, Student Nurse* #2, both cover-dated November 1961.

Afterward, Lee returned to script the main stories for those two titles. It seemed clear that the job numbers were applied at the script, not pencil art, stage.

And that Lee had paused in the middle of those tasks to fit in the *Fantastic Four*.

Then I looked to see what Jack Kirby was doing at the same time.

V-364 was "Orrogo... the Unconquerable," which appeared in *Journey into Mystery* #74. While "The Thing in the Black Box" in *Strange Tales* #90 was numbered V-377. Both bore November 1961 cover dates, and both were inked by Dick Ayers.

Knowing that Ayers kept meticulous records of his assignments, I e-mailed him and asked if he'd indeed worked on both stories consecutively.

His answer surprised me. He reported that both stories arrived in his mailbox on the same day: May 16, 1961. Amazingly, he turned them around in a mere ten days.

This date suggested that *FF* #1 was probably drawn in May, 1961. It followed that the FF were created no earlier than April.

Something about that period tickled a faint memory. So I did a little research on the space program. Ours, it turned out, was still struggling. John Glenn was almost a year away from becoming the first American in orbit. But the Soviets had launched their first cosmonaut into space on April 12, 1961! His name was Yuri Gagarin.

It sure seemed that the Russian leap into the cosmos might have inspired Lee and Kirby to provide the U.S. answer by sending Reed Richards and his brave band up to beat the Soviets to the moon.

While Jack Kirby is no longer available to comment, I turned to Stan Lee for confirmation. Here is what he wrote back:

"Yuri Gagarin!

Wow, that's a name out of the past!

"Y'know, I truly don't remember why I had the four go into space like astronauts. In fact, I had no idea at what exact date I dreamed up the FF until reading your email.

"But—

"Considering the date, and considering our friend Yuri, I'd say it's a very safe bet that I probably *was* motivated to send our little quartet into space because of the Russian space flight! It all fits too neatly to be just coincidental.

"But damn, if only I had a memory—or a filing system like good ol' Dick Ayers!"

If this is the way it really started, then maybe we can start dating the beginning of the Marvel Universe to April 1961.

While I had Stan, I thought I'd ask about another *FF* origin puzzle.

While the origin script to *FF* #1 survives, there is no companion script for the Mole Man main story. In fact, they read as if there were two different tales. Some have posited that the FF



MARTY LASICK INTERVIEW



(above) Marty Lasick at the 2006 Comicon International: San Diego. Photo by John Morrow.

(this spread) Marty's first Kirby inking assignment, circa mid-1980s.

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Interviewed by John Morrow

(Kirby Award recipient Marty Lasick was born, raised and continues to reside in Northern California. Happily married to his wife Rita for 25 years, he's a self-taught freelance and commercial artist who began his work in comics during the Black & White independent era as an inker on such titles as Beast Warriors, Rust, Phigments, and Wild Knights. His circle of friends at the local Comics & Comix shop included Kelley Jones, Sam Keith, and Ron Lim, who encouraged and helped one another hone their skills. He first met Mike Thibodeaux and Rick French at the San Diego Comic Con, beginning a friendship and collaboration with Mike on Kirby-related projects like Last of the Viking Heroes and Phantom Force. This interview was conducted by e-mail in September 2006.)

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: Did you grow up reading comics? When did you first discover Jack Kirby's work?

MARTY LASICK: As far back as I remember I was reading comic books. My earliest recollection of my first comic books was reading "Green Arrow", *The Fly* and *Challengers of the Unknown*. Next was the world Jack created at Marvel (*X-Men*, *Fantastic Four*, *Avengers*, *The Hulk*, *Thor* and so on.) I didn't know who the artist was at first; I was just pulled in by these incredible images. I was hooked and I knew I needed to get more. When it turned

out that one man was responsible for all these books and stories I loved, they inspired me to draw and it was the beginning of my goal of becoming a comic book artist. Jack's work transported me to extraordinary places and was the catalyst of everything I did from that moment on. His influence drove everything I did and how I saw the world with endless possibilities. Jack became my hero. I recall the highlight of my childhood was running to the local liquor store to purchase the latest Jack Kirby comic books that came out like clockwork every month. That is when I learned the value of a dollar. I saved my money to make those important purchases of comic books... Jack's books. I would have to sneak and hide my books from my parents since they thought "funny books" were a bit of a waste of money. Now they are very supportive and proud.

TJKC: When and how did you first meet Jack in person?

MARTY: I first met Jack and Roz Kirby as a fan when they came up to the local Comic & Comix shop in Northern California; I believe it was 1985. My wife and I arrived early to ensure a great spot to see them. I was in complete and utter awe. I had played in my mind everything I wanted to say to him, but the reality overwhelmed me. I couldn't mutter a word and luckily my wife held out some of the books I brought for him to sign. We stayed there the entire time and enjoyed watching Jack thoughtfully interact with everyone. Jack was never negative and encouraged everyone he spoke to. The remarkable thing about Jack was he was signing some books he didn't even draw, for example *Casper the Friendly Ghost*. Roz would tell him that those weren't his books and it didn't faze him a bit. He continued signing while enlightening everyone with stories. Jack had brought a portfolio of original art and I kept going over and over it in amazement, and disappointed I couldn't afford to purchase any of them. I was looking at The King's masterpieces! The pages were beyond belief and that was my first encounter with original comic book art. During that time, Roz walked over and said something to me I still cannot believe. Roz was watching me and then told me to pick out my favorite piece and send her the money when I could. I was stunned. They didn't know me at all. This was the first time she met me and still had the trust that I would pay her for such a treasure. As generous and tempting that may have been, I just couldn't do it. However, this is when Roz also became my hero, and my first introduction to the legendary openness of The Kirbys.

TJKC: How did you meet Mike Thibodeaux?

MARTY: At my first comic book convention in San Diego in 1987. I had created booklets of my portfolio to hand out and was going from one booth to another showing my work. It was my wonderful luck I came across Rick French at the Genesis West booth. Mike was not at the booth at the time, but Rick wanted me to stay and meet Mike. When Mike arrived, he looked over my samples and he was extremely enthusiastic and complimentary of my art, which by the way was mostly on Jack Kirby. I guess he could see exactly how I felt about Jack. We struck up a conversation and we've been immediate and great friends ever since. I consider the friendships I have with Mike and Rick to be one of the most special things to have happened to me. Mike and I are a solid artist/inker team. We come from the old school of comics, comic art and storytelling. We both share the same (artist) heroes: Jack, Frank Frazetta, Ditko, Steranko, Gene Colan, Bernie Wrightson, and many others. Most of all, our love of Jack formed an instant bond between us.

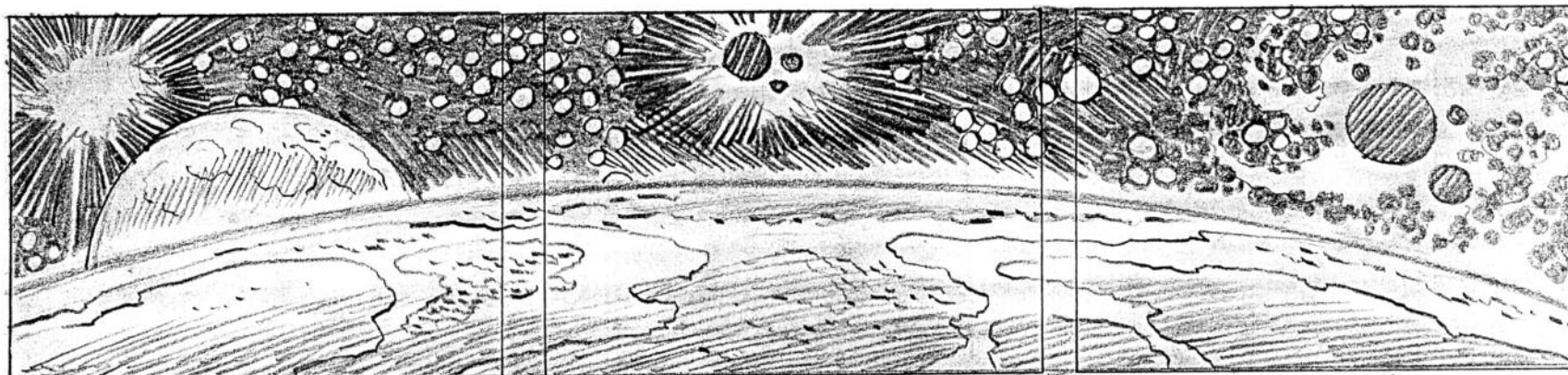
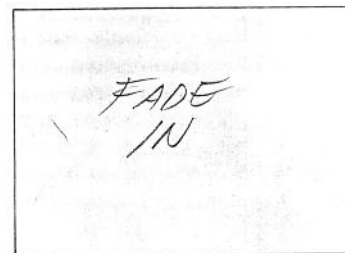
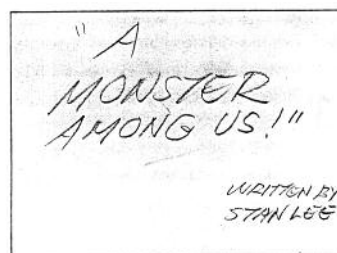
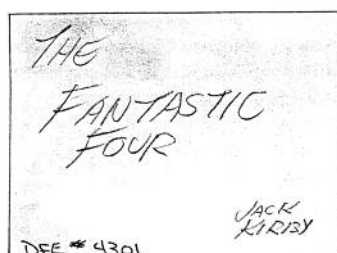
TJKC: How did you end up getting to know the Kirbys so well over the years?

MARTY: After meeting Mike at the convention, I later learned he was close friends of the Kirbys. On one of my visits to Los

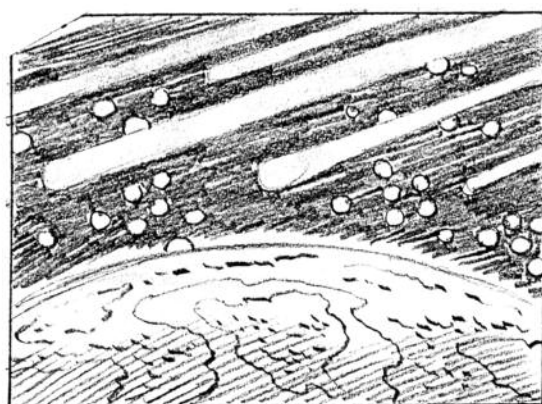


Jack didn't entirely abandon the *Fantastic Four* when he left the book in 1970. In addition to some covers in the 1970s, and an issue of *What If?* with the Marvel Bullpen as Reed & Co., Kirby had an extended stay doing storyboards for the 1978 DePatie-Freleng *Fantastic Four* animated series. Presented here is a complete set of Kirby storyboards for one of the episodes. Of note is Jack's calling H.E.R.B.I.E. "Charlie"; guess that's better than Z-Z-1-2-3!

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FIRST SCENE OPENS WITH HUGE, SPECTACULAR SHOT OF PLANET EARTH. MOON HOVERS BEYOND HORIZON AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF VAST COSMOS.



WE BEGIN TO SEE EVIDENCE OF HEAVY METEOR ACTIVITY IN PROXIMITY TO EARTH.



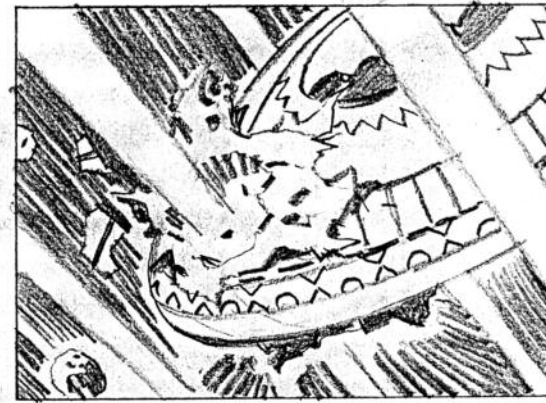
CLOSE UP OF FLASHING METEORS! THEY LOOK MENACING! (GREAT, FIERY BOULDERS)



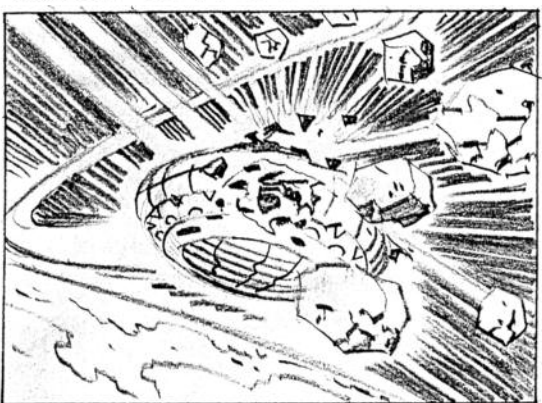
FAR SHOT OF SPACESHIP STREAKING INTO VIEW. IT'S CAUGHT IN METEOR SHOWER.



AS IT YAWS AND DODGES TO ESCAPE A HIT, THE SPACESHIP SUSTAINS A STEADY POUNDING!



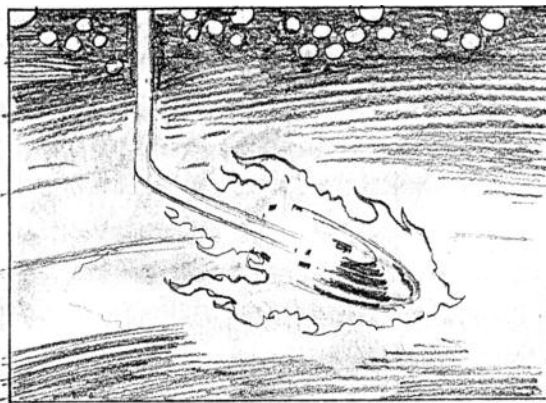
METEORS FINALLY CRASH INTO SHIP, CAUSING MAJOR DAMAGE!



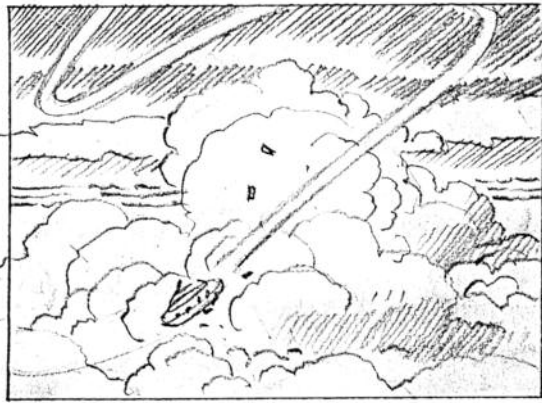
ESCAPE BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE. THE SPACESHIP CANNOT CONTINUE ITS FLIGHT.



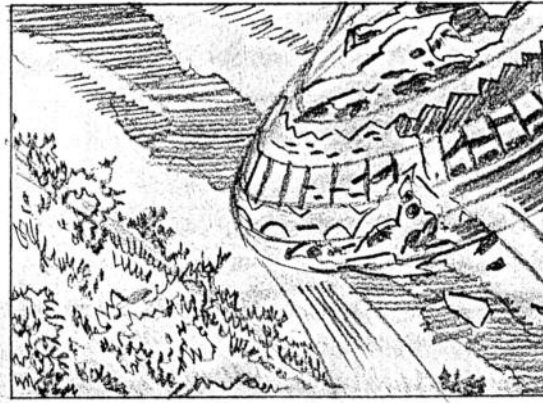
DISABLED, IT PLUNGES TOWARD EARTH.



IT SKIPS INTO ATMOSPHERE AS FLAMES LEAP AND SPUTTER ON ITS SHIELDED SURFACE.



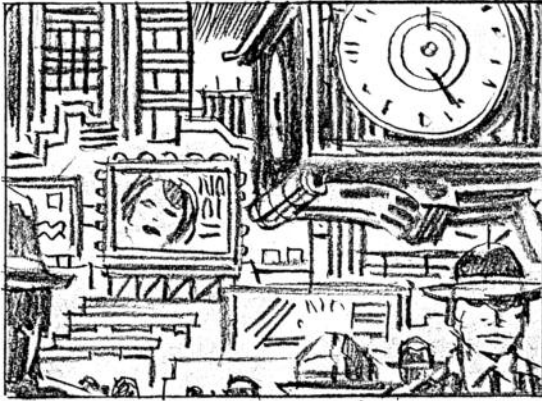
THEN IT ENTERS HIGH CLOUD LEVEL--STILL WEAVING ERRATICALLY



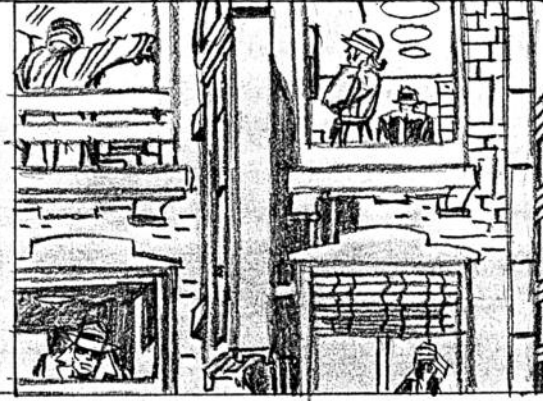
JERSEY MARSHES LOOM INTO VIEW AT LOW ALTITUDE...



SHADOW OF SPACESHIP SPEEDING OVER MARSHES BEFORE LANDING!!



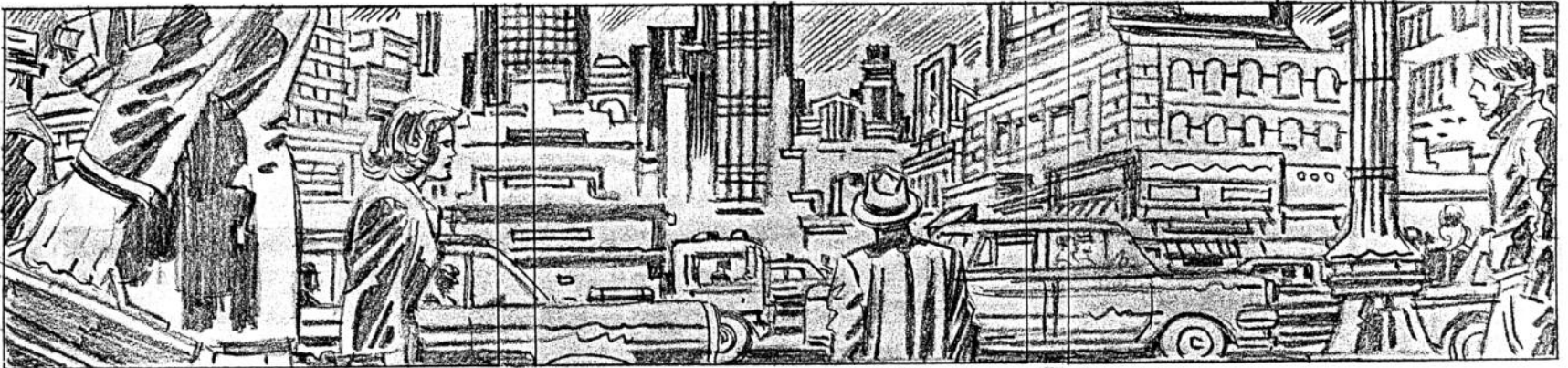
IN BIG CITY, CLOCK DENOTES END OF WORKING DAY..



OFFICE EMPLOYEES CAN BE SEEN PREPARING TO LEAVE...



TRAFFIC BEGINS TO THICKEN



TOWN IS ON THE MOVE--FILLING UP WITH PEOPLE AND VEHICLES...



HOME BOUND PEOPLE NOW JAM STREETS..



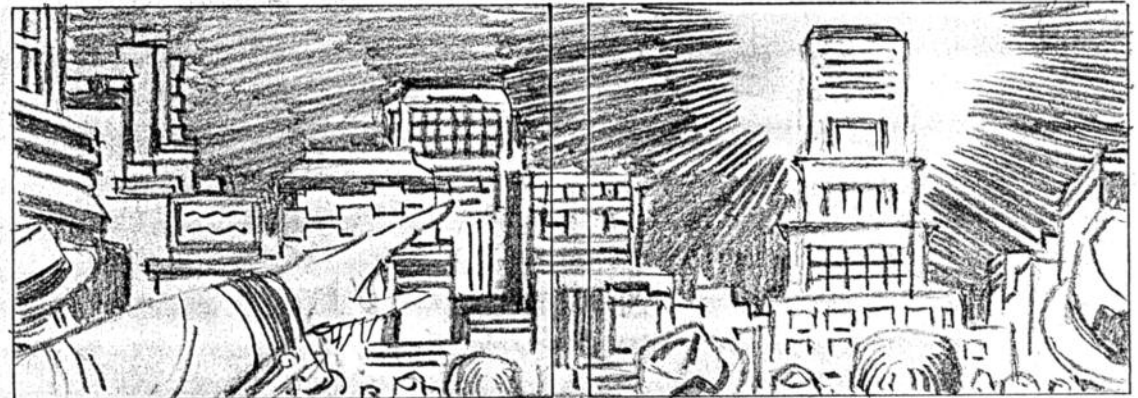
A WOMAN HOLDS UP THE PARADE AS SOMETHING ABOVE CATCHES HER EYE



LOOK! ATOP THE BAXTER BUILDING!



THE FANTASTIC FOUR HEADQUARTERS IS BLOWING



IT'S THEIR RED ALERT LIGHT! IT MEANS DANGER



REED AND SUE PAUSE
AS ARGUMENT CONTINUES



THEN THEY CRACK UP



END WITH LAUGHING

FOURGROUND

THE FANTASTIC FAMILY

(next page) Unused page from *Fantastic Four* #68 (Nov. 1967). Kirby's name "Go-Go" corresponds to the initials "GG" on the hot rod in that issue.

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By Nicholas Caputo

While much has been written about the overwhelming aspects of Kirby and Lee's *Fantastic Four*, there is another aspect of the strip that is often overlooked. Lurking in-between the innovative villains, imaginative concepts and continual exploration of the unknown, Kirby's ability to convey the little

moments in the characters lives provided the strip with an unenviable charm. The use of body language, facial expressions and familiar places gave the strip a strong foundation that readers related to. While the fanciful aspects of the strip were essential, there was always a touch of the real world within the super-scientific universe that the FF populated. By relating to outlandish characters such as the Thing, Kirby defined both himself and his audience. Below are four moments (appropriately enough) that illustrate the essence of that special feeling.

BASEBALL

Kirby's ability to weave the unbelievable with the mundane was mastered in *Fantastic Four* #53 (Aug. 1966), opening with the sight of Ben Grimm pitching to Wyatt Wingfoot in the African kingdom of Wakanda. After a two-part adventure introducing the Black Panther to the strip, the reader is suddenly

placed firmly back on Earth. In their own simple way, Lee and Kirby were breaking new ground by having an African-American (or more accurately, an African) and an American Indian appearing not only as supporting players, but as equals interacting with the FF. Whether done consciously or not, it nevertheless illustrated the dignity, respect and friendship that the team afforded to everyone they made contact with (besides, what were the Inhumans and the Silver Surfer besides outsiders?). Avoiding the stereotypes of the past, both T'Challa and Wyatt Wingfoot were intelligent men: One the leader of his nation, the other an athlete and college student. What better metaphor then playing the all-American game of Baseball together? Lee and Kirby choose not to preach to their readers, but instead let their characters speak through their actions.

THE GIFT OF LIFE

The birth of Reed and Sue's child (*FF Special* #6, 1968) was an event that Lee and Kirby had led up to for a year. While the majority of the issue centered on the prerequisite action (the teams attempt to obtain an antidote to save the life of Sue and her unborn child), the final pages focused on Reed, Johnny and

Ben in the Hospital waiting room. Kirby evokes tension with scenes such as Ben comforting a worried Johnny. The scene changes abruptly with news of the baby's birth, and the excitement of the moment is captured with a smiling Crystal hugging Johnny, arm raised in exuberance. The final panel focuses on a somber Reed holding his child, surrounded by his family (Lee's dialogue complimented the moment: "He seems so HELP-LESS—so TINY... in a world that's so GIGANTIC—so filled with unknown DANGERS!"). The mixed feelings of a parent's joy and trepidation came through in both story and art.

THE FAMILY UNIT

The opening pages of *FF* #88 (July 1969) involve the team returning home from an extended battle, excitedly rushing towards Alicia and the baby. Kirby's direction here is excellent, beginning with a three-panel sequence on page 2. The large opening panel centers on the Thing lifting Alicia into the air, as the parents hold their child and Crystal and Johnny look on. Panel two focuses on Reed and Sue looking down on their smiling baby. The third panel pictures the family surrounding the child. The following page continues with Reed lambasting Johnny as he entertains the baby with a flaming finger, illustrating the division between adult wisdom and youthful recklessness (the Baby, meanwhile, is gleefully reaching out to the colorful flames). In the next panel Reed's anger quickly dissolves as he waves to the baby as Sue carries him away. Kirby uses his own experiences as a father and husband and incorporates them into the strip, touching on universal feelings.

AT THE BEACH

While Kirby's mid-1960s *FF* stories were arguably his most dynamic work on the strip, individual moments stand out even towards the end of his run. One such moment was encountered on the cover of *FF* #97 (April 1970). While the family is unknowingly threatened by a green skinned "Gill-Man" in the background, the foreground focuses on the FF (out of costume) on vacation, enjoying the beach. Reed is playing with Franklin, Sue is testing the baby's bottle, Ben is laying down, grooving to the music on a transistor radio and Johnny looks bored, burning flame into the sand. Kirby's takes a typical family event and uses it as fodder for a fantasy comic, transforming it to suit his needs. Inside, a single panel of Johnny lifting a giggling Franklin in the air needs no explanation: It speaks clearly for itself.

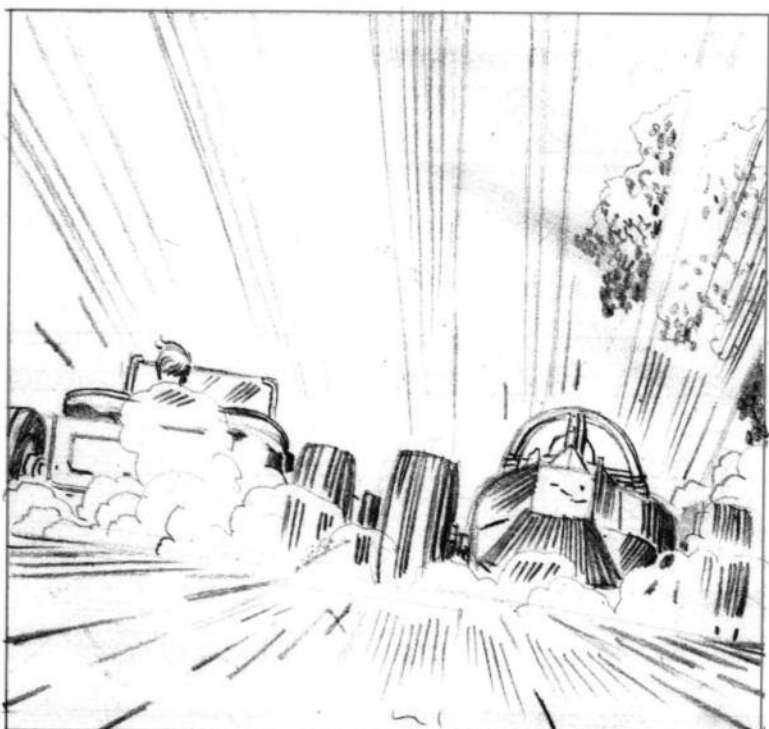
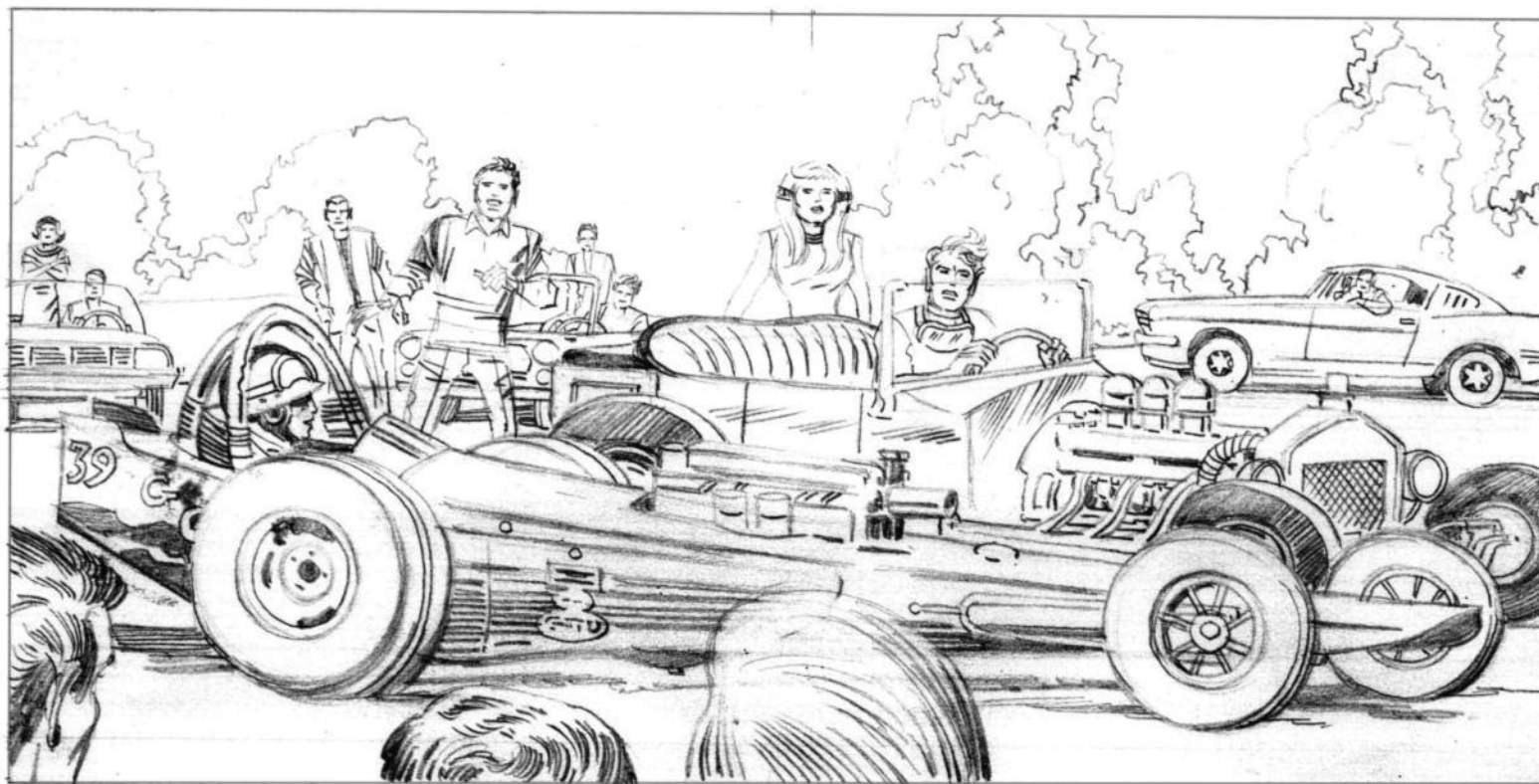
Many such family moments populated the pages of the *Fantastic Four* through the years: The team shopping, arguing, laughing and suffering together, but these four vignettes struck a chord with me and speak volumes about Jack Kirby's ability to make not only the overwhelming come to life, but the everyday events as well. ★



(above) Family-friendly scenes from *Fantastic Four* #97 (April 1970).

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ON NEW DRAG STRIP - BEGINNING OF RACE BETWEEN
JOHNNY'S ROD AND GO-GO'S BUCKET CAR



BOTH CARS ZOOM OFF

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