

A **52-PAGE** THEME
ISSUE
FEATURING JACK'S
WORK IN **SCIENCE
FICTION!!**

A RARE INTERVIEW
WITH JACK BY
SHEL DORF

THE STORY BEHIND
SKY MASTERS

EC COMICS LEGEND
AL WILLIAMSON
INTERVIEWED

WHY DIDN'T IT LAST?
THE ETERNALS

KIRBY INKER
AND FRIEND
MIKE THIBODEAUX
INTERVIEWED

PLUS FEATURES ON:
**MACHINE MAN,
CAPTAIN VICTORY,
2001,
STARMAN ZERO,
SILVER SURFER
GRAPHIC NOVEL
AND OTHERS**

UNPUBLISHED ART
INCLUDING JACK'S
PENCILS **BEFORE**
THEY WERE INKED,
AND **MUCH MORE!!**

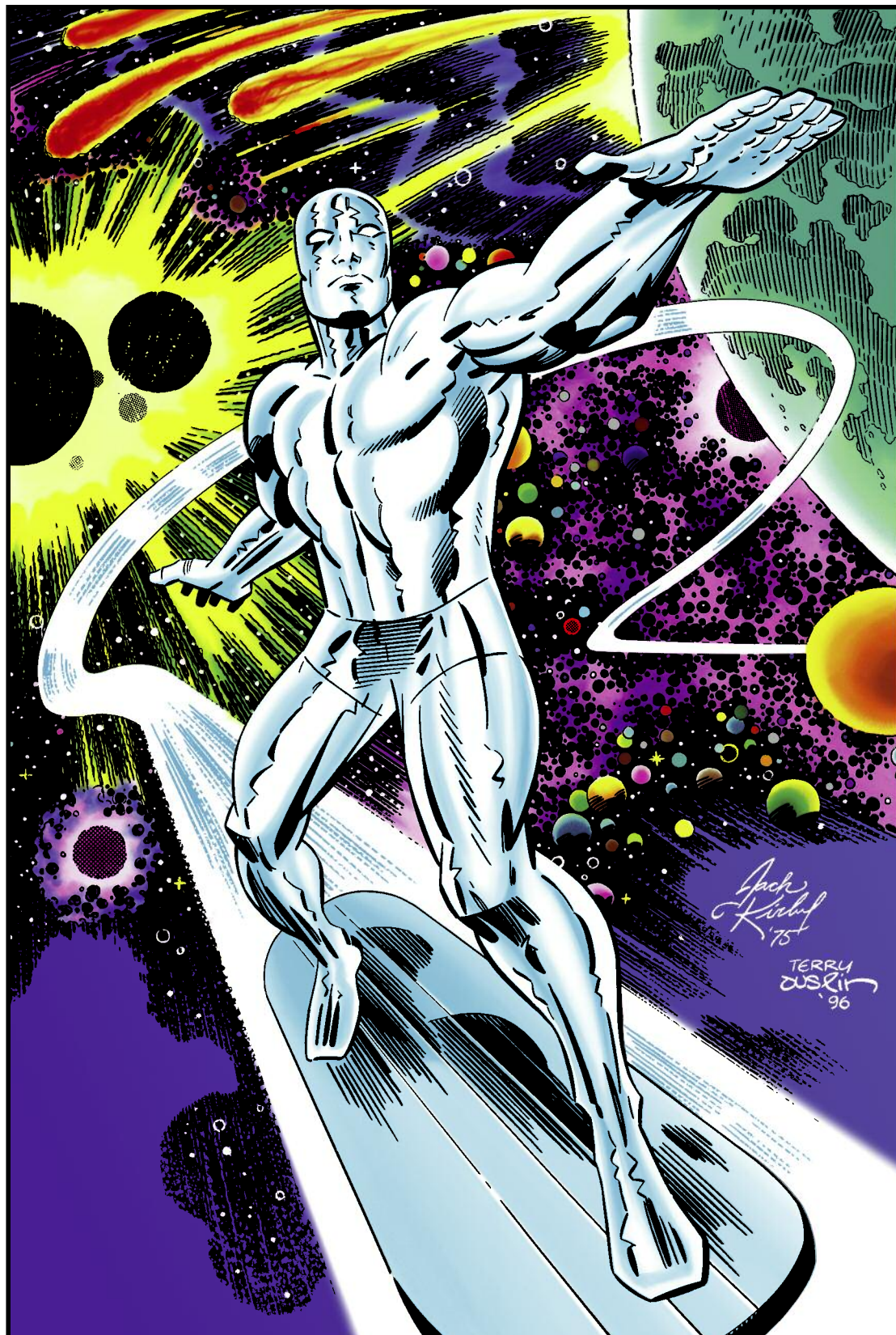
1997
HARVEY AWARDS
NOMINEE
FOR BEST BIOGRAPHICAL,
HISTORICAL, OR JOURNALISTIC
PRESENTATION

FULLY
AUTHORIZED
BY THE
KIRBY
ESTATE

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

ISSUE #15, APR. 1997

\$4.95
In The US





(above) A little scientifically-inspired dialogue rewording from Silver Star #1.
(right) Uninked pencils from Captain Victory #7, page 7.

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Front cover inks: Terry Austin
Back cover inks: Al Williamson
Cover color: Tom Ziuko

JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR



The Jack Kirby Collector, Vol. 4, No. 15, Apr. 1997. Published bi-monthly by and © TwoMorrows Advertising, 502 Saint Mary's St., Raleigh, NC 27605, USA. 919-833-8092. John Morrow, Editor. Pamela Morrow, Assistant Editor. Single issues: \$4.95 US, \$5.40 Canada, \$7.40 outside North America. Six-issue subscriptions: \$24.00 US, \$32.00 Canada and Mexico, \$44.00 outside North America. First printing. All characters are © their respective companies. All artwork is © Jack Kirby unless otherwise noted. All editorial matter is © the respective authors. PRINTED IN CANADA.



LET'S VISIT! BY SHEL DORF

A rare Kirby interview, conducted by Shel Dorf

(Editor's Note: This is one of Shel's early columns, originally published in The Menomonee Falls Gazette, Vol. 4, #181, June 2, 1975. Jack did the self-portrait especially for this column. The success of these columns led to Shel's later, more well-known columns in The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom. © 1977 Shel Dorf)

KIRBY: As I stated, Caniff, Raymond and Foster were major influences in my work. However, there were illustrators like Howard Pyle, cartoonists like Winsor McCay, George McManus and Cliff Sterrett, who intrigued me profoundly. Editorial cartoonists with the stature of Rollin Kirby, C.H. Sykes and "Ding" Darling could hardly be ignored by any artist who yearned for concept and style. If you'd study my work in depth, you'd find all of these great craftsmen somewhere in its structure.

DORF: Which science fiction writers were your favorites as a kid?

In May first of this year, Jack Kirby began his new contract with Marvel Comics. After a five year association with DC, he returned to Marvel — the company whose new direction he helped build. The comic book industry is full of capable craftsmen who turn out a quality product. Yet there is just a handful of true trend-setters. Kirby is in that league. He's his own toughest critic, and seldom indulges in the luxury of a comfortable old format. He's always pushing to make it better. Although he has been a comic book writer/artist for more than thirty years, he has that youthful excitement about what comes next.

SHEL DORF: What do you consider the first responsibility of a comic book artist/writer?

JACK KIRBY: The first responsibility of a comic magazine writer/artist is to inject the necessary elements into his work in order to make it salable.

DORF: Can you remember your most challenging assignment?

KIRBY: My most challenging assignment was always the assignment I was working on.

DORF: Is there an area of story-telling (TV scripts, movies) beyond the comic book format you'd like to try your hand at?

KIRBY: I'm intrigued by all forms of storytelling, including Masai tribal dancing. But of course the chances are that turning out comics will always be my bag.

DORF: Do you have a prepared script for each book you do? If not, please describe your approach.

KIRBY: I approach writing as I do drawing — from the most salable angle. In each case, I'm telling a story. If the reader responds to that story, my writing or drawing has been a valid task.

DORF: How much formal training did you have before becoming a professional?

KIRBY: The men who made their mark as craft-masters of the comics (Caniff, Raymond, Foster, etc.) had all the essentials necessary in their work to provide formative professionals, like myself, during the thirties, with the availability of well-rounded skills. In short, these fine men were the schools for a host of young people in search of quality in their own product. I believe that this borrowing process is still practiced to this day. I like to believe that in payment to the elder craftsmen, my own work has contributed something to a peer group younger than mine. This is the nature of formal training for comics.

DORF: Who do you consider your major influences in drawing?

YES-- AND I JUST ANSWER TO ODIN-- NOW VOLNIR MUST TAKE ME TO HIM

ON ASGARD, ODIN IS USHERED INTO BUILDER'S AREA-- WHERE THEY'VE BEEN WORKING.

FULL WELL WE KNOW THE LAW OF ODIN!

THE GOD OF THUNDER TO WARRIOR MADNESS HATH SUCCEEDED!

NOW, NAUGHT REMAINS BUT THE LEARNING OF THE ALL-FATHER'S DREAD SENTENCE!

I HAVE DONE THE DEED... I MUST PAY THE PRICE!

THUS, BY THE POWER OF VOLNIR... NOW HE WE ALL TO THE FABLED REALM!

AND, WITHIN THE GOLDEN GATES OF ETERNAL ASGARD...

LET ALL HEADS BOW! LORDLY ODIN DOETH APPROACH!

YON COSMOS-CRAFT... BE IT COMPLETED?!

THE TIME HATH COME TO SEARCH THE ENDLESS HEAVENS FOR HIM WHO IS GALACTUS!

ALL AWAITS THEE NOW WITHIN, OMNI-POTENCE!

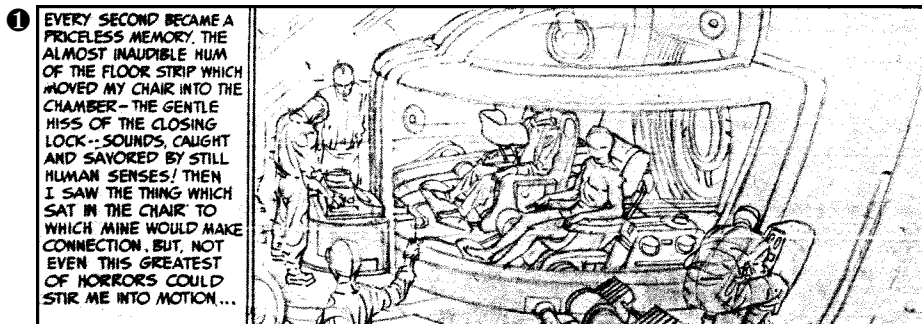
NEVER HATH THERE BEEN SUCH VESSEL, SIRE!

IT SHALL REACH BEYOND THE UNIVERSE... BEYOND THE END OF TIME!

MY EYES BEHOLD... AND FIND IT GOOD!

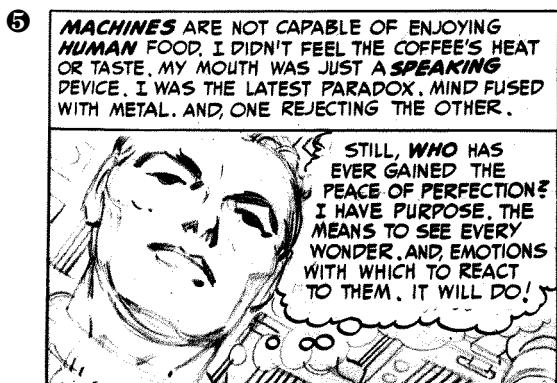
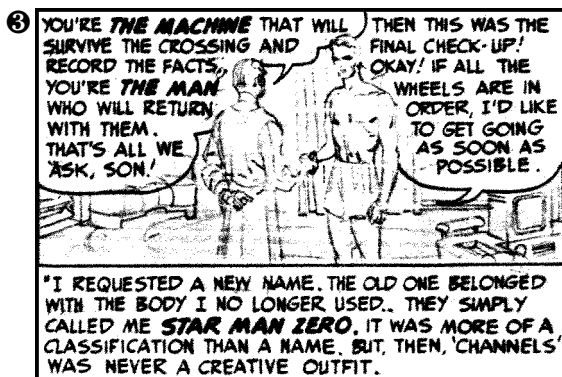
SO THERE IT IS-- AND NOW I HAVE THE ONE TO GUIDE IT TO ITS DESTINATION-- WHEREVER IT IS

LEAD ME TO THE VESSEL-- IT IS MEANT TO FIND GALACTUS' ORIGIN-POINT



STARMAN ZERO AND TIGER 21

by John Morrow



As Steve Sherman noted in his article in *TJKC* #11, in the 1950s Jack pitched an idea for a sci-fi television show called *Tiger 21* to NBC-TV. The concept was a reworking of a late 1940s unused newspaper strip idea called *Starman Zero*, and a look at the first six unused Sunday pages shows the name *Tiger 21* played an important part in the strip. Since the quality of the copies I have access to isn't great, I've excerpted some of the clearer panels to illustrate this synopsis of the strip. (For more *Starman Zero* art, check out the *Kirby Unleashed* portfolio for Jack's *Starman Zero* concept drawing, and Pure Imagination's *Jack Kirby Treasury Vol. 2* for a full Sunday page reproduction.)

The story told in those first six Sundays is quite remarkable, and the dialogue is striking. (Traces of Jack's handwriting are in the balloons, so he was at least partially involved in the scripting.) The first panel of Jack's initial Sunday page shows a haunting close-up shot of a man's eyes (the kind of close-up Jack would later use to great effect in his 1960s Marvel work). The opening dialogue reads:

"I can still remember my last moments as a mortal human being. There was a room of bare simplicity -- a clock face projected on a wall of pleasing color. I had twenty seconds before I stopped being flesh and blood -- and became -- something else --"

After this provocative beginning, the story unfolds in a scientific research facility in the Chicago of the future. 1 A man is being wheeled into a radiation chamber, about to be subjected to a procedure code-named "Project Lifelong." He's been drugged, and apparently wasn't fully aware of what he had volunteered for. As the procedure takes place, the subject feels "the weightless sensation of rising -- and suddenly, being everywhere at once." As it ends, he stands up to discover that his mind has been transferred into a new indestructible body. 2 "It looked human... inside, it was all machine." Giving up his human name (we're never told what it was), the subject is given the classification Starman Zero. 3 His new body was designed to survive the rigors of space travel; it wouldn't age ("The people I passed paid me no notice. A thousand years later, I would still look twenty-seven -- and brush shoulders with their descendants!"), and didn't need normal human sustenance ("Machines are not capable of enjoying human food... My mouth was just a speaking device.").

Halfway through the second Sunday page, Starman Zero leaves the research facility for a Chicago rocket port, where he hops a passenger ship to England. 4 His mission: to make the "Saturn Run," culminating with his blasting through deep space to his eventual destination—a star called Tiger 21!

Once in outer space, Zero would cover the long distance from Saturn to Tiger 21 (900 billion miles!) by means of the Time Jump. The third Sunday page begins with British scientists readying his ship, as he mulls over how the Time Jump works:

"The best I could make of it was that it blew you into nothingness and put you together again at a calculated distance. It only took a second."

Shades of *Star Trek*'s transporter room!

As Starman Zero's ship blasts off for Saturn, he ponders his purpose in life, 5 only to be interrupted by an alarm signal that warns him of an approaching Atomic Torpedo! It narrowly misses his vessel, and reaches its intended target; an intergalactic trading ship. As the fourth Sunday page begins, he witnesses the aftermath of the explosion, and notes the death of the unfortunate trader who piloted the devastated ship:

"The body of a man drifted close to my ship. Like the bits of scattered debris, he sped on aimlessly... I judged his course to lead directly into the all-consuming flames of the sun."

Outraged by this merciless killing, Zero decides to track down the assailant: 6

"Perhaps, I did it because I'd been a scrounger myself -- hopping from one inferno to the next -- digging for the alien loot that would make my fortune. Machine or human, I was boiling mad!"



Jack Kirby (left) and Al Williamson (right) talk shop. (photo by John Montero)
(below) Williamson-inked panels from Race For The Moon #2.

INTERVIEW WITH AL WILLIAMSON

Interviewed by John Morrow

(Al Williamson was born March 21, 1931, and lived in Colombia, South America until the age of twelve. He's no stranger to the science fiction genre, having made his mark drawing stories for EC's science fiction comics in the 1950s, and later for Marvel's Star Wars adaptations and the Star Wars newspaper strip in the 1970s and '80s. In-between, he carved out a career in the syndicated comic strip field, and even inked a few of Jack's stories in the late 1950s. This interview was conducted on January 6, 1997.)

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: Was there much Kirby work available in Colombia where you grew up?

AL WILLIAMSON: The first work I saw of Jack's was in Colombia. I can't remember the Spanish title, but in English it was *Cosmic Carson*. I loved it! The next stuff I saw of his was *The Lone Rider* in *Famous Funnies*.

TJKC: Were you fluent in English at this age?

AL: My father was Colombian, and my mother was American. They met here in the States, got married, and went down. I grew up down there, so I learned both Spanish and English at the same time. It was comic books that taught me to read both languages. *(laughter)*

TJKC: Did you follow Jack's work all the way through his career?

AL: More or less. I loved that early stuff of his very much. I loved *Stuntman*, and the westerns he did were just

great. The first stuff I saw of Jack's was the early stuff, so it's sort of my favorite, but that certainly doesn't take away from what he did later. The real good guys turned out a lot of stuff, and they never looked back. I don't think Jack looked back. I have a feeling he did a drawing and that was it; on to the next one. The real good artists were like that. Raymond was like that, Foster was like that.

TJKC: Jack mentioned many times that Hal Foster and Alex Raymond were big influences on his art, and you've said the same thing about your work. Do you see common elements between their work and Jack's?

AL: Well, in early Kirby work—1940, 1941—I can see certain influences of Alex there, especially the way Alex drew legs. If you look at Alex's work around 1935-36, you'll see Jack Kirby. I mean, you take from the best! He didn't swipe them, he just got the idea, he got inspired, which is fine. All of us are inspired by something or someone.

TJKC: What about their approaches to storytelling?

AL: I think Jack was a better storyteller than Alex. Oh, yeah, Jack was a very good storyteller. I mean, Alex was very good when he did Rip Kirby—he was very good on the characterization. But I think Jack Kirby was a better storyteller in the long run.

TJKC: Didn't you attend Burne Hogarth's School?

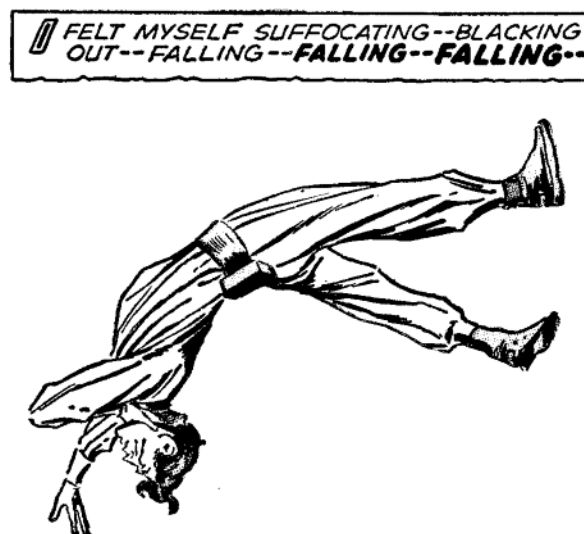
AL: Actually, I just went to that Saturday morning sketch class he had. It was never really the school. I did go to the school when I was working for him, but only to pick up the work and spend some time there. That's how I got to meet my dear friend Roy *[Krenkel]*.

TJKC: Isn't that also where you met Wally Wood?

AL: Yeah, I met him at the school when I was working with Hogarth. He was there and I met him briefly, but I didn't really get to know him until about 1950. As the years went on, we became better friends, but we hit it off right from the beginning. We talked serials, old movies. We talked comics, and we talked art. He just loved serials, and he loved comics. We had a lot in common.

TJKC: We hear now that the names "Simon & Kirby" on a book were a real sales factor. Were you guys aware of that name recognition?

AL: Oh, sure. We were all crazy about that stuff. I know Wally liked Jack's work very, very much. Marvin Stein liked Jack's work very much. Marvin was a good friend; I met him back in 1945 when he was going to the Saturday morning sketch class at Hogarth's. He wound up working with Jack Kirby. He was a great fan of Jack's work. I remember going up to their studio when they did Prize Comics, to see Marvin. I met Jack probably 25 times, and every time I met him, he never recognized me; he didn't remember me. *(laughter)* He was in a world of his own.



Some of Al's beautiful figure work, from 1973.



But the thing I remember about going up to Prize was, there was a fellow there, a very fine artist named Mort Meskin. Mort Meskin was one of the sweetest gentlemen I've ever met in the business. He and I got along famously. Every time I'd see him, we'd sit and talk. I was just a kid, between eighteen and twenty-four, twenty-five. I had, and still have, a *Sheena* Sunday page he did for Eisner and Iger back in 1938, and I asked if he'd sign it for me. He did, and I'm very proud of it. He was a *damn* good artist.

TJKC: I have your first published work as being in 1948.

AL: It was two spot illustrations for *Famous Funnies*, for a story called "The World's Ugliest Horse." (laughter) That was my first published work. I don't count the Hogarth stuff, because that was for Hogarth.

TJKC: Did you do a lot of work before you hit EC?

AL: Yeah, I worked for Toby Press, which was the Al Capp outfit. I did *John Wayne Comics* for them, a western. I did some more work here and there for *Famous Funnies*. Mostly it was western stuff. Then in 1950, I started working for different companies like ACG. I did some stuff for Marvel; that was one of my first jobs, too. I worked in the bullpen in early 1948 or '49.

TJKC: Was Stan Lee in charge?

AL: Stan hired me as an inker, and I punched the time clock for a couple of weeks, and then I got tired of that. I'd just gotten out of school, and I hated going to school because it was a 9:00-3:00 business, y'know? I hated regimentation.

TJKC: What do you remember about working for Stan?

AL: I brought my samples in, and there was a guy who came out and looked at them. He said he'd take them in and see if Stan was interested in hiring me. He came out and said, "Stan likes your work. He wants to hire you as an inker." I wanted to pencil though, because I wanted to do *Sub-Mariner*. That was not to be! He gave me a staff job at \$30 a week, but I had to punch the time clock. After a couple of weeks, I

said, "Naahh...."

TJKC: It sounds like you didn't have much interaction with Stan.

AL: Absolutely not. I'd take my pages in when they were done; all the artists had to do that. He'd look at it and say, "That's fine," or "Change this, fix this" or something. But I don't recall him giving me any trouble. I never had trouble with Stan; he's a nice guy. I enjoyed working for him.

TJKC: As I understand it, Wally Wood urged you to go to EC.

AL: That's correct. Wally and Joe Orlando both. I went up in January or February of 1952, I think. I was just about to turn 21. They gave me a job, and I had my 21st birthday by the time I'd done my third story for them. I still don't understand why they hired me. What's annoying is, I look at some of that stuff, and I say to myself, "Why did you waste your time, Al? Why didn't you *really* work?" I had absolutely no faith in my work or myself. It was terrible that I wasted so much time, and thought so little of myself. Not that I think I'm so hot, but I look back and I say, "You had the talent, why didn't you work at it?" I didn't really shape up until I was about thirty.

TJKC: I've read all the stories about you going out and seeing movies and playing baseball, and letting your deadlines slide until the last minute. (laughter)

AL: Well, when you're a bachelor and don't know any better, (laughter) you go ahead and live for the day. It's when you get married that reality sets in. (laughter)

TJKC: I understand that, at EC, the horror books were the big sellers, and the science fiction never did that well.

AL: The money they made on the horror books was put back into the science fiction books, because they loved doing them. The science fiction never sold.

TJKC: I've always wondered what it would've been like if Jack had worked at EC on some of the science fiction books.

AL: Well, I have a feeling he probably wouldn't be as dynamic as what he was on his own. First of all, you've got the pages already lettered, and you only had a certain amount of room to draw, which was kind of a drawback. The last job I ever did for them was a science fiction, and I said, "Please let me lay it out," and they did. If you see that job, it's quite different from the others. It's got long panels, and things like that. Now I'm sure Jack could've done them, but whether he would've been able to give that wonderful "bam, sock, wow" look to those pages, I don't know. It probably would look like his "love" stories. EC stories never had any action in them, unless somebody was slashing somebody, or stuffing somebody in a stove, or something like that. (laughter) I don't think I ever drew anybody bopping anybody in those stories. I think he would've been wasted doing that stuff.

TJKC: Didn't you do some westerns for Prize Comics?

AL: I worked with Johnny Severin on some stories. He had a terrible deadline a couple of times, and I went over and we worked a couple of days. He put me up, fed me, and we worked around the clock and turned out fifteen or twenty pages between the two of us.

TJKC: Didn't you also work with Frazetta during the 1950s?

AL: Yeah. Frank came and helped me out with some jobs; he inked some things for me. I was always late on deadlines, and he'd come in and give me a hand. He only helped me out for maybe three years, on and off. It wasn't for every job. He helped me out with some *John Wayne* stuff.

THE STORY BEHIND SKY MASTERS

by Jon B. Cooke

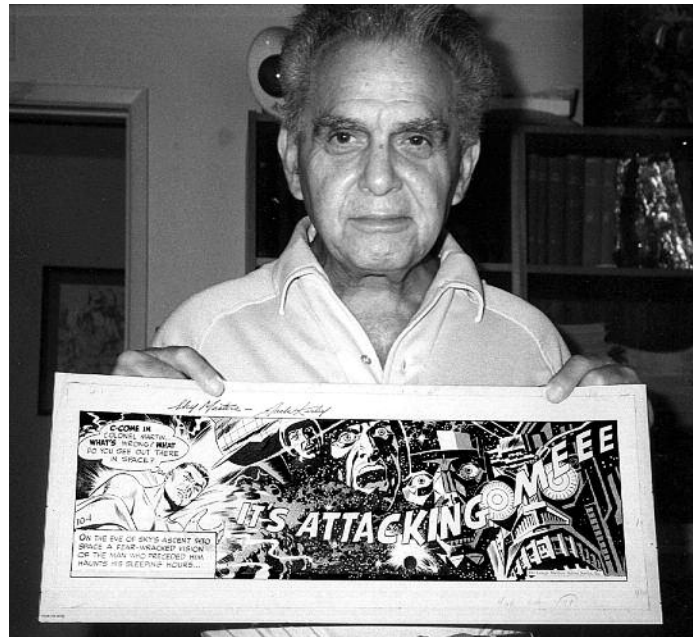
Mystrifying to fans of Jack Kirby is the story behind his stay at National Periodical Publications (today's DC Comics) between 1957-59 — that is, why was his second visit with the publisher so brief? Getting back on his feet again after the near-death of the comics industry and closing Simon & Kirby's Mainline shop for good, Jack seemed to have found a home at National, kicking things off by creating the first superhero team of the Silver Age, the *Challengers of the Unknown*. He also redefined Green Arrow, and produced almost three dozen tales of mystery and imagination (plus one western!). But by 1959, after 30 months and over six hundred pages of art, Jack abruptly left the reigning publisher of adventure comics behind to work for the struggling Atlas Comics, a publisher with reputedly one of the lowest page rates in the business. Why?

To find the answer we have to look beyond the lowly comic book to that holy grail of art assignments, the syndicated comic strip, and to Jack's greatest achievement in the field, *Sky Masters of the Space Force*. Hailed as one of the finest serial action strips to appear after the heyday of the art form (coming twenty years after the "adventurous decade" of *Dick Tracy*, *Flash Gordon*, and *Terry and the Pirates*, and in the midst of the still-popular daily gag strip), the sci-fi series debuted while Jack was at National on September 8, 1958 before a country caught up in space race fever. Written by *Challengers* writers Dave and Dick Wood, penciled (and often plotted and written) by Jack, inked at the onset by the even-then legendary Wally Wood and later by Kirby mainstay Dick Ayers, the strip seemed a recipe for success. It lasted until February 25, 1961, with Jack producing 774 daily strips and 53 Sunday pages, the latter appearing between February 8, 1959 and February 7, 1960.

Scoring a lucrative comic strip gig was a high aspiration for many a lowly-paid comic book artist. In the fifties, not only was there the prestige of joining ranks with such personalities as Al Capp, Charles Schulz, and Walt Kelly (and the financial reward accompanying such an honor), but a cartoonist could peddle his talent before a national audience instead of the increasingly marginalized comic book readership. While Jack told Greg Theakston, "I don't like the newspaper strips because you were severely limited in the amount of space you had to tell a story,"¹ he certainly pursued a syndicate job, putting great effort into pitching numerous ideas, including *Inky*, *Starman Zero*, *Surf Hunter*, *Chip Hardy*, etc., over the years, and even drawing the *Black Hole* strip as late as 1979.

Doing *Sky Masters*, Jack was now at a high point in his career: in the realm of idols Alex Raymond and Milton Caniff, getting a healthy cut of the profits, with an entire nation of not just kids, but grown-ups as his audience. But the opportunity turned sour almost from the onset.

On December 11, 1958 (three months into the strip's run), Jack Schiff, a managing editor for National Periodical Publications, filed a legal complaint against Jack Kirby for withholding 4% of the proceeds derived from Kirby's share of *Sky Masters*, as was agreed to in return for Schiff's securing the syndicate job for Kirby and the Woods. Kirby countersued in the following weeks, stating that the alleged agreement was actually a gratuity offered to Schiff, but the editor demanded excessive payments, and that the contract was made under duress. Depositions by both parties were made, and on March 10, 1959, the County Clerk of Westchester County granted index number 1798-59 to the New York Supreme Court case, *Jack Schiff vs. Jack Kirby, David Wood, and Dick Wood*. The following is derived from the surviving court documents, and reveals as much about the entirely different word of comic strip syndicates as it does about Jack's fall from grace at National, and the pitfalls of a freelance artist's experience making deals on the side.



Jack holds up the original art to the 10/1/58 daily. (photo by Bob Latimer)

SCHIFF'S CASE

In January 1958, the country was gripped in Sputnik Fever and Harry Elmlark was in his own space race. As general manager for the newspaper syndicate, the George Matthew Adams Service, Elmlark saw the events of the previous fall and caught scent of a trend. The Russian launching of the first artificial satellite into orbit on October 4, 1957 took the world by surprise. Now the Cold War abruptly moved to outer space, into the very skies above, and the U.S. government jumped into a frenzy of catch-up rocket building, with the American public braced for the fallout of this new Space Age. It was his job to exploit trends that make for successful comic strips, and Elmlark saw big capitalist bucks for his small syndicate in that 23-inch Soviet satellite. But where to find the right talent or property for a strip that could satisfy the growing national desire for true-to-life space adventure?

Elmlark settled on National, publisher of the science fiction comics *Strange Adventures* and *Mystery in Space* (and home to the world's most famous alien, Superman) to voice his ideas with managing editor, Jack Schiff. Schiff was a busy man. Not only did he oversee all the supernatural titles, *Tomahawk*, and the Batman books, but he produced those monthly single-page public service announcements which appeared in every National comic published between 1950-67, in addition to pitching comics as educational tools to any organization that would listen. He served as company contact with the new Comics Code Authority, and as *de facto* managing editor, he coordinated production schedules, issued writing and art assignments, and acted as liaison between freelancers and the front office."²

But Schiff made room in his hectic schedule to speak to Elmlark. Schiff understood Elmlark's quest, as he states in his deposition (extensively quoted hereafter): "It was only natural that aggressive syndicates and publishers would seek new entries in the cartoon strip and comic book field to exploit the heightened interest of their large readership in the world beyond our minute planetary system."

"Mr. Elmlark inquired whether National Comics had any science fiction space feature available that could be adapted for syndication," Schiff wrote. "He was... pretty sure he could sell a good space strip. I showed him several features [we] had been running, but he said he wasn't sure it was quite what he wanted. Perhaps, he suggested, we might get something up for him, based on one of these. We discussed outer space types of stories taking place in the future, and 'those just around the corner,' that is more realistic, along the lines of the newest developments in the headlines. I told him that I had been contemplating a science fiction strip myself [possibly *Space Ranger*, a strip *Julius*

THE ETERNALS: KIRBY'S NEW HISTORY OF THE WORLD

An Overview by Charles Hatfield

Jack Kirby had a disconcerting habit of reinventing the world. In the cream of his work with Stan Lee in the 1960s, Kirby positioned his heroes within a vast, teeming cosmology, encompassing hidden lands, other-dimensional zones and worlds within worlds. This radically imaginative universe became the foundation of Marvel's now-staggering media fiefdom. Breaking with Lee and Marvel in 1970, Kirby created the Fourth World at DC, which poised humankind between rival "gods" from the sister worlds of New Genesis and Apokolips. This Manichean premise has only recently been recognized as a cornerstone of DC's "continuity." After the Fourth World, Kirby redrew the map of the world yet again, with *Kamandi*, the *Last Boy on Earth*, a post-apocalyptic fantasy, as well as *OMAC*, a dystopian revision of *Captain America*'s super-soldier premise. With his return to Marvel in 1976, Kirby undertook what may have been his single most ambitious series ever: *The Eternals*, in which the entire history of the Earth is rewritten in a few bold strokes.

UFO 'FLAPOLOGY'

The Eternals, eventually spanning some nineteen issues and one annual (July 1976- January 1978), took its cue from the speculative pseudo-archaeology of Erich Von Däniken, author of *Chariots of the Gods?* (1968) and related tomes. Von Däniken's spurious thesis was that humankind had been visited, millennia ago, by benign, highly-advanced extraterrestrials whose likeness and activities were encoded in human artifacts and legend. While his evidence was skewed and partial, and

his rhetoric tendentious to a fault, Von Däniken's yarnspinning grew out of a kernel of brilliance: the merging of "unsolved mysteries of the past" with the then (as now) popular fascination with UFOs and alien visitation. What force could have enabled humankind to construct the pyramids? The stone heads of Easter Island? The lines on Peru's Nazca plain? Gods from outer space!

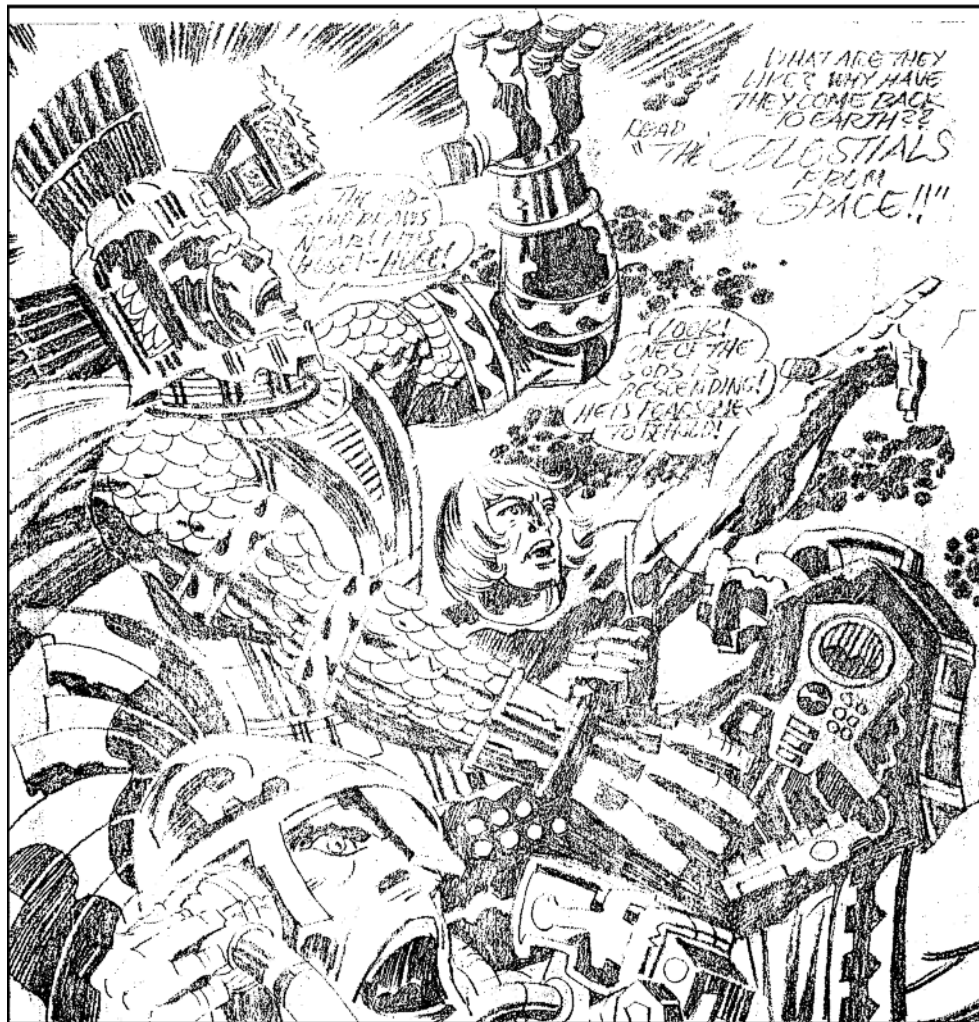
If the idea of visitors from space offers a slate on which we can inscribe our various popular obsessions (as *X-Files*, for instance, treats alien visitation as a pretext for its own mythology of conspiracies), then Von Däniken ingeniously used this *tabula* to revive the mystery of our own origins. This blend proved popular enough to spawn many sequels and imitations, in print and on film. Indeed, so popular was *Chariots?* that by 1974 (less than two years prior to *Eternals*) the book had gone through at least thirty-three US printings, topping 4,000,000 copies. Kirby himself was not immune to such pseudoscientific fantasizing ("UFO 'flapology,'" he called it), and in case any doubt lingers about *The Eternals*' line of descent, a blurb on the cover of issue #2 ("More fantastic than *Chariots of the Gods!*") makes his debt to Von Däniken explicit [although the blurb wasn't on Jack's pencils]. As usual, Kirby was timely in his choice of subjects but highly idiosyncratic in his delivery.

CHILDREN OF THE GODS

Kirby's own preoccupations are apparent in *The Eternals*' premise, which is simple, all-encompassing and thus radical: humanity is not the

only advanced hominid species on earth; we share the globe with two sister species—on the one hand, the deathless Eternals, reclusive superbeings graced with such powers as telepathy and levitation; on the other, the miserable Deviants, cursed with an unstable genetic makeup which causes each new generation to breed new, unprecedented horrors. The Eternals, favoring peace and seclusion, interfere but rarely in human affairs, and in only the subtlest ways, while the Deviants, nursing bitter memories of a lost empire, scheme of conquest in their undersea hide-away, Lemuria—the last remnant of their erstwhile kingdom.

More alarming than this revelation, however, is the cosmic event which brings Eternals and Deviants out of hiding—the return of the *gods*. These are our creators, the unfathomable Celestials who (in an echo of Von Däniken) first bred humans, Eternals and Deviants by transforming our common ancestor, "the dawn ape." They have come back to judge the success of their experiment. The newly-arrived Fourth Host of the Celestials—that is, the fourth visitation of the gods—promises a final, irrevocable judgment, an apocalyptic reckoning that will come after fifty years of observation. Fifty years from now, the earth will pass muster, or die. In a few bold strokes, then, Kirby provides not only angels (Eternals), demons (Deviants) and gods—a richly populated cosmography—but also an eschatology: this is the way the world might end. Such a remarkably bold conception, knitting together origins and endings,



Jack's unused cover to *Eternals* #2, which was then called *Return Of The Gods*.

THE MAN BEYOND THE MACHINE

by Jarret Keene

At first glance, *Machine Man* (with its clever, oxymoronic title) appears to be a minor, insignificant series within the King's immense and influential body of work. Though the series hung on after Kirby's departure, commercially speaking, it appeared destined for early retirement. No matter how much gratuitous action one administers, the story of a purple robot plagued with human thoughts and emotions seems a sure recipe for lackluster sales. Moreover, much of Kirby's return-to-Marvel output is usually considered inconsistent, even inferior, when compared to his acclaimed tenures on *Fantastic Four* and the *Fourth World* books. Despite such commonplace opinions, *Machine Man* readily displays Kirby's inventive and compelling workmanship. Its first six issues contain a visual thematic thread, a motif which underscores the craft Kirby applied to all of his creations. Evidence of this commitment includes the refrain of the human face, an image which resonates throughout the storyline. Eventually, *Machine Man*'s face is revealed as the site of his inner conflict, the source of his identity crisis. To transcend his disorientation, *Machine Man* must confront a philosophical question of the highest order: beyond the physical form, what constitutes a genuine human being?

In some of Kirby's best stories, the face is a facade, one that masks dark secrets. For instance, *New Gods* introduces Orion, the powerful, warlike god of New Genesis, whom we later learn was born on that planet's evil antithesis, Apokolips. In "Spawn!" (*New Gods* #5), we are reminded that Orion's mother box sustains his heroic appearance and keeps others from detecting his Apokolipsian heritage. ("Mother Box protects me!" he says. "She calms and restructures and keeps me part of New Genesis!") In another title, the creepy cosmonaut from "The

Soyuz Survivor" (*Kamandi* #35) transforms into a bizarre, elastic-tissued monster, erupting Alien-style from his space-helmet. This visual motif of evil disguised behind faces can be found in such disparate titles as *Our Fighting Forces* and *Devil Dinosaur*.

Looking back on Kirby's DC stint, it's clear that the face is one of his stock images. For instance, Kirby loads *OMAC's* paranoid dystopia with subtle, ominous references. Members of the Global Peace Agency use cosmetic spray to extinguish their features, to become faceless, anonymous guardians of humanity. The evil Mister Big constructs "build-a-friends," beautiful primed female automatons who seek out world leaders, kiss them, then detonate; the face of one of these robots dominates the opening splash of #1. *OMAC's* satellite safeguard, Brother Eye (ironically named for one of our more expressive features), monitors the earth, ready to beam down information and molecular energy at the hero's discretion. Meanwhile, *Kamandi*, the Last Boy on Earth, wanders the nuclear ravaged USA in search of an expressive human face like his own, one that has retained its intelligence; yet the human faces in "The Last Gang in Chicago!" (#20-21), for instance, conceal only cold circuitry. In *Mister Miracle*, Doctor Bedlam repeatedly manifests his physical presence through one of his indistinct "animates," a process Kirby typically details panel-by-panel, as a blank-faced puppet gradually assumes the villain's snarling features. Rewind further back to Ben Grimm and Bruce Banner's gruesome facial contortions as they changed into, respectively, rock-ribbed bruiser and green-skinned goliath, and compare these with *The Demon*, another superhero/monster crossover with an emphasis on mutating features.

Masks, a staple in superhero comics, are brought to shocking,

innovative heights under Kirby's direction. In the underappreciated *1st Issue Special* #5, Manhunter braves the dangers of the Cave of the Talking Heads, where the Chopper operates flame-throwing masks that chant "Death! You will find death!" and a particularly wicked invention called "the Electric Head," a device which envelops the intended victim's face and melts the brain. More memorable are the savage, otherworldly disguises of the Red Skull and Doctor Doom. Indeed, faces, whether masked, duplicitous or deadly, are a visual hallmark of Kirby's work.

Likewise, *Machine Man* is chock-full of faces. In the first issue, readers are introduced to Colonel Kragg who, true to his namesake, is craggy-faced. Furthermore, he wears an eye-patch, having been mutilated in a previous skirmish with an X-model. In fact, the eye-patch is symbolic of the colonel's limited vision: he's unable to perceive that his quarry is different than the maniacal robots that killed his men. Like Melville's Captain Ahab, Kragg is so obsessed with revenge, with obliterating his non-human prey, that his own humanity becomes questionable.

The second issue ("House of Nightmares") explodes with a nightmarish splash page: *Machine Man* is strapped to a chair and surrounded by an insidious crew, a self-proclaimed "brotherhood of living steel and wire," intent on stealing his mask. "No! No! Please don't touch my face—!!" he pleads, but to no avail. The brotherhood strips *Machine Man* of his disguise, revealing his harsh robotic features. In this horrifying sequence, we



The unused (and very psychedelic!) cover to *Machine Man* #6. Walt Simonson drew the final cover.



2001: A Space Odyssey explored, by Jon B. Cooke

In one sense, the monthly comic series *2001: A Space Odyssey* was

“Various characters will be in it, some continuing,” Jack told *FOOM* #15 of his intentions for the new title, “but the strip will retain the

Save for the transition of the series to showcasing Mister Machine/Machine Man in #8-10, Jack's continuing characters were icons from the film: the enigmatic Monolith and the New Seed ("star baby" of the movie's finale). "Yes, the New Seed is the conquering hero in this latest Marvel drama," Kirby writes in his text feature for *2001* #1. "He will always be there in the story's final moments to taunt us with the question we shall never answer. The little shaver is, perhaps, the embodiment of our own hopes in a world which daily makes us more than a bit uneasy about the future... in the meager space devoted to his appearance, he brightens our hopes considerably. He is a comforting visual, almost tangible

HERE IS AN INCONCEIVABLE... BUT
NOT DEATH... -- PUT THE ASSHOLE
NEVER LIVED UNTIL, WHEN... AND HE
-- AND ACCIDENT INTO HIS
-- LIFE!!!



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Jack Kirby, Frank Frazetta, and Mike Thibodeaux in the 1980s.

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL THIBODEAUX

Interviewed by John Morrow

(Mike Thibodeaux first started inking Jack's work in 1981, and continued on and off for the remainder of Jack's career. But many people are unaware of how close Mike is to the Kirby family, and that he serves as their official art agent. He generously agreed to an interview, which was conducted by telephone a few weeks after the 1996 San Diego Comic Con.)

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: Did you grow up reading Jack's work?

MICHAEL THIBODEAUX: Absolutely. It was hard not to read Jack's work in the mid-60s since almost every Marvel cover featured his artwork! The local barber shop was where I was first introduced to comic books. They'd always have a small stack of books for kids to read. Though my attention span kept me from reading the stories—Jack's art spoke to me even then! Even at the tender age of 6 or 7, I distinctly remember singling out Jack's monster books (*Strange Tales*, *Tales of Suspense*, etc.). It wasn't until a few years later at a local Rexall Drug Store that my entire focus would be on Jack Kirby's talent. Among an array of mostly DC titles, it was the cover of *Fantastic Four* #54 that jumped out at me—a large figure of the Torch flaming towards you framed along the sides with head shots of the Fantastic Four and the Inhumans. And all that was contained within this one issue was the Black Panther, the Inhumans trapped in the Eternal Dome, and a medieval warrior from the mythical isle of Avalon with technology vastly beyond our own. But what was most moving to me was a single panel that featured Crystal in an ethereal form behind an anguished and tortured Johnny Storm. It was a posture and pose that touched me with the emotional artistry that would rival the masters of centuries ago. Quite an introduction to Jack's world. I thought this was a one-time masterpiece, but after purchasing *Fantastic Four* #55 and witnessing a full length epic battle between the Thing and the Silver Surfer, I realized this was a typical monthly endeavor for Jack. I was then forever hooked and had to unearth everything the man had done.

TJKC: How old were you at that point?

MIKE: Twelve.

TJKC: What with your *Last of the Viking Heroes* series, I assumed *Thor* had made a big impression on you.

MIKE: From *Cap* to the *X-Men*, I read them all. I had other personal reasons for doing the *Last of the Viking Heroes*. But I believe all of

Jack's comic books influenced me.

TJKC: How'd you first meet Jack?

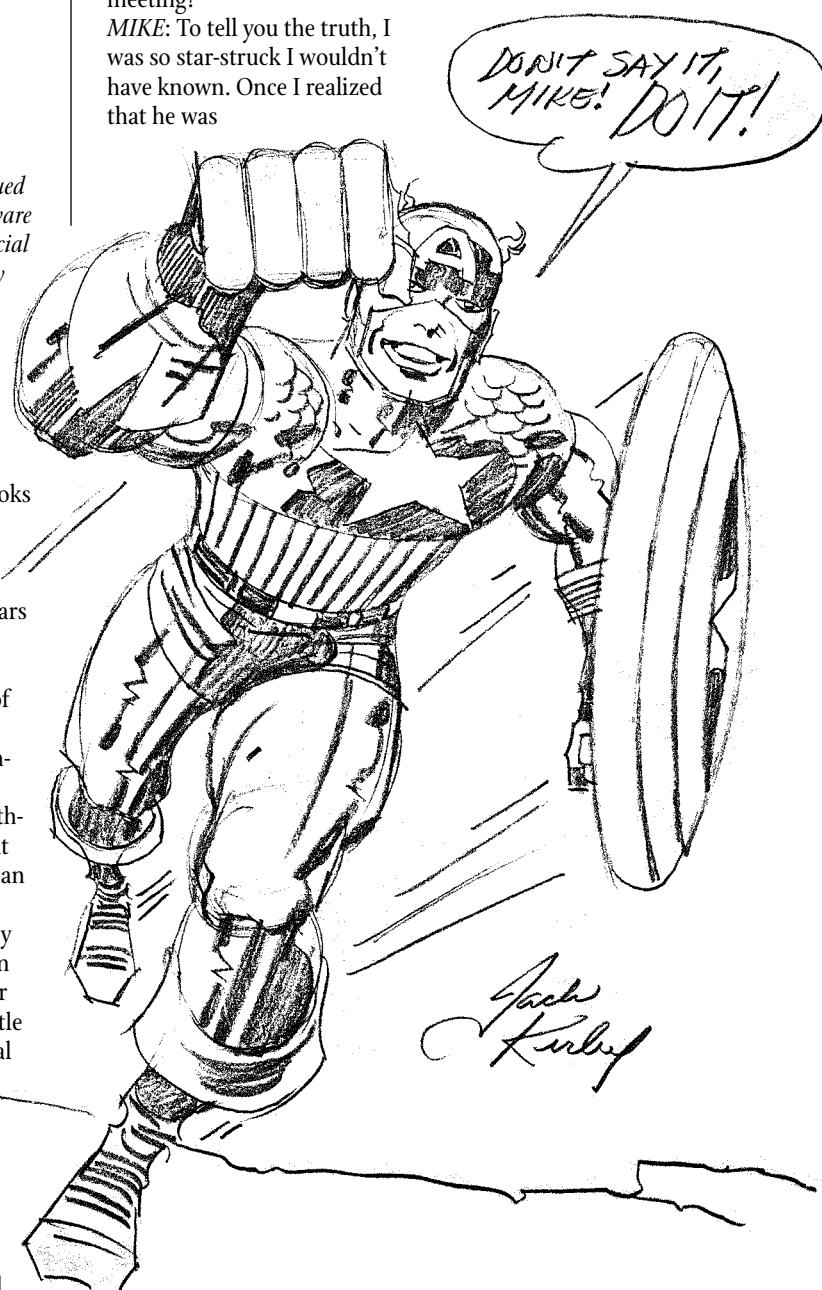
MIKE: I met Jack briefly at a Hollywood comic convention in 1972. Then in 1974, his son Neal invited me and a friend of mine, Steve Robertson, over. Steve's a good friend, and if not for him, I don't think I'd have gone over, because I was very shy at the time. Steve was the one that called and got us over to Neal's one day. And during our wide-eyed visit, Neal was kind enough to ask if we'd like to go and visit his dad. Our jaws dropped. We were going to the King's house!

TJKC: What was that first trip up to the house like?

MIKE: I just remember sweating a lot as we were driving up what seemed to be a long winding mountain road. I was anticipating arriving at a towering castle with life size statues of the Thor, Odin, Hulk, and Captain America. *(laughter)* My imagination as a kid got the best of me. On the outside, it appeared to be a typical suburban home, but once I entered their home the fantastic artwork on the walls made it a magical sanctuary.

TJKC: Did Jack impact any great words of wisdom to you at that first meeting?

MIKE: To tell you the truth, I was so star-struck I wouldn't have known. Once I realized that he was



Jack drew this Captain America sketch to inspire Mike to break into comics.

accessible to me, I was calling Roz and Jack weekly to visit them. *(laughter)* It was Jack's stories that I remember most, new ones and embellished old ones. His words of wisdom were always wrapped up somewhere in his tales. He was my idol and my mentor. He was so down-to-earth. They just don't come any better.

TJKC: Did Roz do the usual 'milk and cookies' thing, and ordering out for McDonalds?

MIKE: *(laughter)* I believe it was fruit. She is always very gracious. If you wanted pheasant under glass, Roz would probably order it for you.

TJKC: What did you do before you started inking Jack's work?

MIKE: Let me start by prefacing: if not for Jack I may not have become an artist. During college I worked for an airline advertising agency. I later landed an art directing job for One-Stop Posters where I stayed for eleven years. I had also freelanced for Mattel Toys and Disney. But of all my dreams, one of my biggest was to work with Jack and to ink his art.

TJKC: What was the first thing you inked for Jack, and how did it come about?

MIKE: The very first thing was a huge drawing of Thor. The dimensions were 24" x 36". I was heavy into airbrushing, and I did a lot of photo retouching work. He asked me if I could do that on this Thor drawing, so I took the drawing home and airbrushed it and inked it up, and he seemed pretty impressed with it.

TJKC: *Captain Victory* #3 was the first regular Kirby book you inked. How did that come about?

MIKE: I would always show my artwork to Jack. I was trying to break into the field, and I wanted to do something with him. And then one day Roz called me, and told me Jack had something to ask me. I remember him getting on the phone, and saying Mike Royer was under contract with Disney, and didn't have enough time to ink the book. He asked if I could possibly do it. I was shocked, I was just shocked! *(laughter)* I think I blurted out, "How much do I have to pay you?" That's when it started.

TJKC: So was this before the first issue hit the stands?

MIKE: Yes. Actually, the first two issues of *Captain Victory* were done several years before Pacific picked it up. If I remember correctly, I think Jack said it was completed about three years before I worked on it in 1981.

TJKC: Do you know what it was originally done for?

MIKE: I've heard different things.

TJKC: When you started working on *Captain Victory*, would you drive out to the house and pick up the pencils from him? Were you living near him at that point?

MIKE: I lived about twenty minutes away. I wanted all the time I could get to work on the pages, so I told him whenever he had one done, I'd drive up there. But Jack would be working on some other project and suddenly he'd pump out five pages of *Captain Victory* in one day. *(laughter)* I wish he'd have spread the work out more evenly. *(laughter)*

TJKC: How fast did you have to ink to keep up with him?

MIKE: It was very erratic. There were times I had to do one page in



A Kirby Hulk drawing, commissioned by a fan. Inks by Thibodeaux.

three days, and then near the end of the series, there'd be six pages in one day, which I was not very good at. In the beginning he tried to get them to me on a regular basis. I think he was also working on other projects at the time, and that's why he didn't devote all his time to it. He was still working for Ruby-Spears, and he was always doing specialty pieces for people. He was *always* working! *(laughter)*

TJKC: What was a typical session like? Would you take the pencils back to your studio and immediately get to work?

MIKE: Yeah. But I gotta tell you, when I had the first book, I couldn't even touch it. It sat there for a week, I was so scared! *(laughter)* But I eventually did the sacrilegious deed of covering up Jack's pencils with ink.



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