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Spotlighting Kirby's Gods

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JACK KIRBY
COLLECTOR





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- Front cover inks: *Vince Colletta (Thor #134)*
- New Gods Concept Drawings (circa 1967):
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Pg. 69: Robot Defender, Pg. 70: Ramses,
Pg. 71: Space Guardian, Pg. 72: Mantis*
Inks: *Frank Giacoia (except Ramses, inked by
Don Heck, 1966)* • Colors: *Jack Kirby*

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THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR

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Jack's uninked pencils from the Gorgon pin-up in Fantastic Four Annual #5 (Nov. 1967).

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JACK KIRBY ON: STORYTELLING, MAN, GOD, & NAZIS

Excerpts from interviews with Jack Kirby from 1989 to 1992 by Ray Wyman, Jr. • Edited by Ray Wyman, Jr. and Margaret Hohlfeld

The people of my neighborhood were immigrants from Europe. And, of course, in Europe, it is a common thing among peasants to pass stories down, to sit around the farm house and tell stories they collected. People were honored for the number of stories they had

learned from their mothers and fathers. It was an important part of family tradition.

Fairy tales, the stories we tell our children now, are part of that legacy. Some of them originate from our ancient history. There were stories about creatures that flew, creatures that menaced them, and some creatures that were very good. Some of the stories came from our instinctual fear of the night; there were menacing and unknown dangers there, things that they couldn't see. For instance, if you were a Norseman, there were stories about demons of the sea. The Celts told stories about trolls and fairies that haunted the forests. Some of the stories are foundations of our notions of good and evil; right and wrong.

There were also stories about gods. Now, back then, as we do now, they had God, but they also had different gods. They had the one that we believe in, but before that they had ones for nature, for trees, the sea, the sky, and even ones that governed our feelings. They believed in each of them in every way that we now believe in one God and for the same reasons. They saw their gods in everything they did, everything that they could imagine. They created stories that they passed through the generations, legends of every imaginable kind. And since it was humans who were telling the stories, their gods were imbued with human qualities. Who was Odin but a father figure? Show me any legendary story that doesn't have a father figure. Hercules had to bow down to Zeus, or at least talk politely to him. Zeus ran the whole universe. The Germans had Wotan; he ran the universe. The Norsemen had Odin run the universe. Then there were other sons and daughters of gods. They had so many gods that it was of their conditioning, their way of life. They saw their gods in everything—you and I, we're no different.

I can tell you, I thought I saw God when I was standing there on Omaha Beach ten days after D-Day. It was only ten days after but I still could feel all the horror that you can imagine. Why? Because that is the nature of things, the nature of God and the spirit of people. The feeling doesn't vanish because we stop thinking about it or even when we try to destroy it, which is our nature to try. When I stepped off that boat, even though they had cleaned things up by the time we got there, I could still see the bodies lying on that beach—and I'm not talking about a few guys or a few bodies here and there. I'm talking about a huge beach littered with... well, an unimaginable sight, thousands of bodies.

We were rushed off those boats and they tried not to give us time to think about this, but we did. I did. All the horror of those memories live with me to this day. They are a part of me, and part of them is imbued in you and everybody else. Why? Because it is the nature of God to make us feel every soul, every spirit that has ever walked the Earth. That's what we believe, that's what I believe. It's part of my conditioning, part of yours. There is nothing you can do to change it.

IN AS GARD, ODIN WATCHES WRESTLING MATCH



OUT OF NOWHERE COMES HUGE FIGURE -- SMASHES WRESTLERS -- SAYS -- POWER OF LIVING TALISMAN BEATS ALL

ODIN SAYS -- NOTHING IS UNKNOWN TO ODIN -- ESPECIALLY THREAT OF LIVING TALISMAN --

Now, you had your evil gods and your good gods and, of course from time to time they would fight among themselves or against each other. They formed the mythology that later formed the backbone of civilization; and because of that they tended to be very simple, very easy to understand—they had to be because these were simple folk. It is those stories that I used when I was doing comics because comics are mythology of the modern society; tales of good versus evil done in a simplified form.

Now, all good stories are based on some aspect of reality. They are simpler to write that way because you can use elements of your own life to create a fascinating tale. Like good against evil; like the story about Darkseid against Highfather, the gods of Apokolips versus New Genesis.

The first thing I did was to go back into history for ideas on how to start the story. There was a custom among the European kings to trade babies, so the French king would give his baby to the English king and the English king would give his baby to the French king, and then they couldn't go to war with each other because in battle they might kill their own sons. It was a custom bound in self-preservation—a very real aspect to life no matter where you live, no matter who you are. Even kings think about self-preservation. It makes good story; it is good copy. I used it in the *New Gods*. Highfather and Darkseid would exchange sons in the same manner; Darkseid's son Orion was to live on New Genesis; Highfather's son Scott Free (who later became Mr. Miracle) would live on Apokolips.

"The Pact" is one of my favorite stories that I wrote for *New Gods* because it is based on the fact that good and evil men can make a pact; in fact mortal enemies can make pacts—like the English and French did. Of course it never really worked, but they tried.

I was impressed by the record of history, that men would try such a thing because, remember, although they didn't have any huge cannons or the atom bomb, they still felt threatened just as we do. They lived with broadswords and shields, but they were the super powers. It was more difficult to win a war back then. It was all hand-to-hand, one man's hand against another, and it was personal. It was the pillaging of cities; it was setting cities afire. If you lost it meant that you could lose your entire family.

Now, the story involves more than aspects of God; there are aspects of ourselves, the condition of mankind as a whole—these are all part of the real picture that I try to describe to the reader. So, every part of the story is important and every character has his own story to tell. When I started *New Gods*, I never thought about it the same way as we do when we write a story about Superman or Spider-Man. I visualized it as being a novel, a complete story, the first comics novel. There are various qualities that you will find in novels that you usually



Pencils from "Himon" in *Mister Miracle* #9 (July 1972)—a sequel of sorts to "The Pact."

do not see in a comic book; one of them is the complicated struggles and forces working against each character. So I started by describing the relationships between two sides, each very powerful, each very dangerous, and each with their own unique way of looking at the world.

Darkseid is a different kind of character. He is the ultimate expression of darkness. He is the guy that you and I will never get to see. You would never want to see him. Darkseid is the guy who runs the world. He isn't anyone that anyone knows but he runs things just the same. He is pretty well armed. He has an army behind him to control the intricate details of his empire. He is the type of guy that says when the dollar goes up and when the dollar goes down; he is the guy that says when we have a job or when we're on the street with our

JUDAISM

by John Morrow

Roz Kirby remarked in her interview back in *TJKC* #10 that Jack “believed in his faith, and he liked to read the *Bible*.” Roz went on to say that Jack loved and believed in God, so I don’t think it’s a stretch to state that his Jewish beliefs affected his work. The purpose of this piece is to give a brief overview of Judaism, in hopes of gaining a little insight into how it might’ve affected Jack’s thinking, and his conceptualizing of characters and stories throughout his career. Obviously, an article of this short length can only scratch the surface of this complex faith, and I’m forced to state Jewish beliefs in generalities. No disrespect is intended by oversimplifying it here, and if I inadvertently misrepresent anything, I hope our readers—Jewish or otherwise—will let me know.

THE HISTORY OF JUDAISM

The recorded history of mankind began roughly 6000 years ago. The world was primarily pagan thereafter, and people worshiped thousands of different gods, usually one for each of the elements (sun, moon, rain, etc.) that affected their lives. Around 1800 B.C., a man named Abraham revolutionized religion with his concept of monotheism (the belief in the one and only God), based on his encounter with God (as scripturally recounted in the book of *Genesis*). This was the beginning of what would become Judaism. Much of the conflict and strife the Jews endured throughout history stems from their strict and literal adherence to Abraham’s declaration of “one God,” putting Judaism at odds with

other religions.

The main common ground between Jews and Christians is the first five books of the Christian *Bible*’s Old Testament:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These “Five Books of Moses” constitute the Torah, an important portion

of the Hebrew *Bible*. The Torah outlines God’s declaration of the creation of the universe, and the covenant of faith that resulted from the encounter between Abraham and God (wherein God told Abraham his descendants would be His chosen people, so long as they obeyed His law and worshiped Him faithfully).

THE EVOLVING ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD

Judaism, like Christianity, has evolved into several “denominations” (for lack of a better word). Probably the two most prominent are Orthodox (those with a more traditional belief in God), and Conservative (who feel it’s important to believe in God, but are constantly asking questions about God’s true nature, rather than believing in a specific notion of God). From interviews he’s given, Jack appears to have been affected by both at different points in his life, so we’ll focus on those here.



In keeping with Jewish custom, Jack’s headstone was placed a year after his death. At the unveiling ceremony, those in attendance put a stone upon it in remembrance.



Kirby’s vision of God, from 1970. Inks by Mike Royer.

JACK KIRBY'S HERCULES

A probing peruse of the Prince of Power (and the King of Comics), by Mark Alexander

We first saw him in the Summer of 1965 on the cover of *Journey Into Mystery Annual #1* ("When Titans Clash!" Thor vs. Hercules!) and as great as that cover was, the "symbolic" splash page which followed was even more impressive. Here we see Thor, on the left, squared-off with a magnificent-looking entirely new Kirby character on the right (being full aware that the reader's eye moves from left to right, Kirby's placement of Hercules here was quite intentional).

Jack Kirby's Hercules looked every bit as powerful and majestic as Thor, and his golden mace appeared to be as formidable as Thor's hammer (although subsequently we'd learn it was only a glorified club, with no enchanted powers like the Uru hammer). Physically, Kirby's Prince of Power was based on Steve Reeves, the handsome, bearded star of the 1960s Hercules films (Lee makes a reference to this in *JIM* #128). The costume that Jack designed for his "new god" was so appropriate that for nearly twenty years (1984 to be exact), no one would attempt to modify it. As usual, Kirby got it right the first time.

In this short (15-page) story, Thor accidentally falls through a "time-space disrupter" which transports him to Olympus, home of the Greek gods. This was an extremely shrewd move on Jack and Stan's part; by this time they had pretty much moved Thor's storyline from Earth to Asgard, and they were getting a lot of mileage out of Asgardian characters such as Odin, Loki, Balder, and the Warriors Three, so why not introduce another pantheon of legendary gods as well? Very soon the ever-expanding Marvel Universe would include Kirby-Lee versions of Zeus, Ares, Hermes, Pluto, and other Greek/Roman mythological figures. In his debut, Hercules is merely introduced; he battles Thor to a standstill and they part as friends, but no hint of his personality is revealed. His characterization wouldn't be unveiled until his next appearance, some six months later.

Fast-forward to "The Grandeur and the Glory!" (*JIM* #124, Jan. 1966). Here we find three storylines unfolding simultaneously; in Asia a villain called the Demon is committing mayhem, while in the US, Dr. Don Blake has revealed his secret identity (as Thor) to Jane Foster. Meanwhile, high atop Mt. Olympus, another chain of events which will affect the life of Thor is taking place: Zeus, the Olympian equivalent of Odin (introduced in *JIM Annual #1*) has decided it's time for his son Hercules to visit Earth. Having no enchanted hammer to transport him through dimensional barriers, Hercules simply strolls down Mt. Olympus to Earth and the stage is set.

In "When Meet The Immortals" (*JIM* #125, Feb. 1966) we find the son of Zeus on Earth and finally get a glimmer into his personality. Upon learning that this planet actually has cities, Hercules exclaims:

"Hercules has always loved cities! It is there where the crowds are—where reveling and merry-making are ever to be found! And who can enjoy the good life as much as an Olympian god? Take me to your city! Hercules commands!"



And herein lies the key to his character; Hercules is a total hedonist, a devil-may-care pleasure-monger of the highest order. To him, combat is merely another pleasurable pastime along with wine, women, song, and food. He behaves like a spoiled child in the body of a Greek god, and Thor, by contrast, seems downright stuffy and humorless. When faced by circumstances, however, Hercules can be just as noble and valorous as Thor, but he seldom chose to be. Hercules soon hooks up with Jane Foster (Thor's beau) and upon returning from Asia, Thor is furious to find them together. He challenges the powerful prince to battle, and what follows is an epic five-issue saga which is nothing less than the pinnacle of the entire Kirby-Lee *Thor* series. Remarkably, Kirby created this superlative tale during the same time in which he produced the Galactus trilogy; it was arguably the creative zenith of his entire career.

The next four issues focus more on Hercules than Thor. Hercules ascends to fame after defeating the Thunder God and is offered the starring role in a movie, playing himself. What he doesn't know is that the "producer" behind this offer is actually Pluto, the evil ruler of the netherworld, and the movie contract is actually an "Olympian pact" which once signed, will free Pluto from Hades, forcing Hercules to rule in his stead for all eternity. In "The Power of Pluto" (*Thor* #128, May 1966), we see that Hercules is obviously drunk (or at least tipsy) when Pluto offers him the contract, and Hercules' ego, along with his overindulgence in wine and women have proved his undoing; his fate is now sealed.

A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE: PART 5

by Mike Gartland

SUBMITTED FOR YOUR APPROVAL...

There's been some response during the course of my writing the "Failure to Communicate" articles that I was being unfair to Stan Lee. Several people have written to *TJKC* expressing their disappointment in our trying to take credit away from Stan, reminding us of Lee's contributions, his superior writing skills (comparing it with Jack's solo work yet again) etc., and citing that, just because Jack left a few border notes, it doesn't necessarily mean he had anything to do with writing the stories—he was in on the plotting, but Lee was the writer. And of course there's the old favorite critique of every research writer: "You don't know



Pg. 4, panel 2; one of many panels that were used in the limited animation Gantray-Lawrence Marvel cartoons of the '60s.



Splash page from *Journey Into Mystery* #111 (Dec. 1964); Cobra's lower arm was erased and repositioned.

because you weren't there." (By the way, there was a much larger percentage of letters approving of the articles, for which we say "thanks.")

Rather than going into a lengthy explanation concerning my opinions of the Kirby/Lee creative process, I thought it would be far more enlightening and entertaining to let the stories try and speak for themselves; thereby giving the reader an example of how a typical Kirby/Lee plot was finalized before printing. In the next few articles I will be showcasing Kirby/Lee stories from various books that they have worked on, the stories to be determined by what original complete stories I can find; I will document whatever is on the original art and print it verbatim for the reader to see. It should not only give us a glimpse into the creative process of a Marvel comic, but reveal the seldom-seen editorial changes made by Stan (and of course, whatever notes Jack left for assist).

In keeping with the theme of this issue, I decided to start with a Thor story from 1964. Whereas some will attest that the Thor stories from 1966-on were pretty much Kirby directing the storylines, this story comes from a time when many believe that Jack and Stan were plotting together, or Stan was creating the plots solo. The story is from *Journey into Mystery* #111, the second half of a two-parter. The synopsis is: In the previous issue, Loki had increased the power of two of Thor's arch-enemies, The Cobra and Mr. Hyde. Loki also reveals to them that, in abducting the nurse Jane Foster, they will gain the advantage over Thor. They kidnap her and take her to a specially-prepared house of traps; when Thor arrives and begins battling, Jane becomes mortally wounded. Thor suspends time around the house in order to keep her from dying; with her safe for the time being, he turns to confront his adversaries....

Below are the border notes left by Jack, broken down panel-by-panel; some have been cropped off by the printer, some have been rubbed off from handling. Also, any changes made by Stan will be revealed. Notes followed by a "X" mean that the rest was cut off or not legible. Where no panels are mentioned, no notes exist or were legible. Grab your copy of *JIM* #111 and enjoy!

(NOTE: This story was approved by the Comics Code Authority on 7/13/64, which puts Jack drawing it in June 1964. Throughout the book, Chic Stone's bold thick ink brush lines are actually greyish on the originals; the faces stand out as denser black because they were apparently inked separately with a pen.)

PAGE 1:

Splash: THOR BATTLING COBRA AND HYDE X (Note: Cobra's right arm was erased and re-positioned.)

PAGE 2:

Panel 1: COBRA AND HYDE TWICE AS POWERFUL AS THEY USED TO BE (My note: Thor has two right hands)
 Panel 3: WITH THESE TACTICS THOR X
 Panel 4: THOR CAUSES WIND TO BLOW X (Note: In word balloon, the phrase "—lash out with savage fury" was originally different; only the word "villain" can be made out beneath)

PAGE 3:

Panel 1: THOR GRABS GIRL AND BOLTS DOWN CORRIDOR.
 Panel 2: TRAPS SPRING UP EVERYWHERE.
 Panel 5: HAMMER STRIKES INVISIBLE BEAM X
 Panel 6: HEAVY CONCRETE BLOCK COMES X

PAGE 4:

Panel 1: ROOM HAS BEEN CLEARED OF DANGER--THOR MAKES GIRL COMFORTABLE
 Panel 2: THINKS SITUATION OVER
 Panel 4: X CAUTION X
 Panel 5: ROCK TOSSED IN REMAINS X
 Panel 6: ODIN WATCHES X

PAGE 5:

Panel 1: NOTICES HOW HARD THOR BATTLES FOR GIRL'S LIFE--BALDER OFFERING TO SOOTHE ODIN WITH SONG
 Panel 3: X THINKS BACK X
 Panel 4: THINKS OF GORGEOUS GODDESS--THOR'S MOTHER
 Panel 5: LOKI BREAKS IN X

PAGE 6:

Panel 1: MEANWHILE THOR COMES OUT TO MOP UP VILLAINS
 Panel 2: COBRA IS TOO FAST--HYDE IS CLOSING IN
 Panel 4: THOR WANTS TO TAKE ON THE BETTER ONE FIRST



Pg. 2, panel 1; notice how Thor has two right hands!

Panel 5: BOTH THINK THEY ARE MORE X
 Panel 6: HYDE GRABS COBRA--ME X

PAGE 7:

Panel 1: COBRA DOESN'T LIKE HIS ATTITUDE
 Panel 2: HURLS HYDE
 Panel 3: THOR X HIM BACK
 Panel 4: COBRA HURLS X
 Panel 5: THOR'S HAMMER X

PAGE 8:

Panel 1: COBRA LEAPS LIKE CRAZY BUT MISSILES CATCH UP WITH HIM
 Panel 2: HE LEAPS UP VENT AS MISSILES BLOW INTO GAS
 Panel 3: MEANWHILE HYDE ATTACKS THOR
 Panel 4: GAS REACHES HYDE X
 Panel 5: HYDE SMASHES THRU CORRIDOR X
 Panel 6: THOR THROWS HAMMER X

PAGE 9:

Panel 1: MEANWHILE ODIN DECIDES TO HELP GIRL
 Panel 2: GIVES MESSAGE TO LOKI TO DELIVER TO HEALER WHO LIVES BEYOND BADLANDS
 Panel 4: DON'T TRUST X YOU RAT X I'LL TAKE MESSAGE
 Panel 5: BALDER RIDES OFF ACROSS BADLANDS
 Panel 6: HE'LL NEVER MAKE IT--THOR'S GIRL WILL DIE

PAGE 10:

Panel 1: BADLANDS GET ROUGH--ONE SLIP AND INTO FLAMING LAKE (Note: the word balloon in this panel was originally the word balloon in the next panel, but Stan moved it over)
 Panel 2: MORE DANGER--BALDER SEES SOMETHING THAT MAKES HIM DRAW SWORD
 Panel 3: THOR PURSUES HYDE X
 Panel 4: HYDE TURNS ON THOR
 Panel 5: MEANWHILE PUSHES X

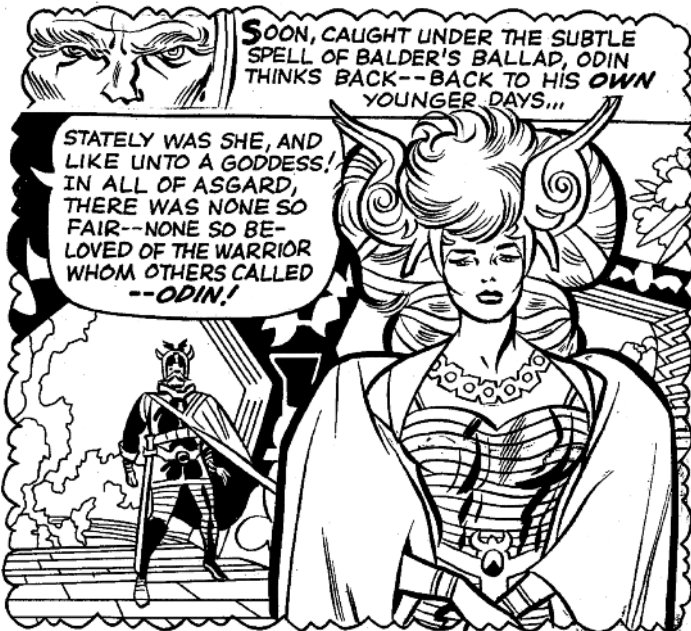
PAGE 11:

Panel 1: THOR FLIPS HYDE INTO RAY (Note: Stan's original caption for this panel read: "Meanwhile back on Earth, Thor's own battle continues without let-up")
 Panel 2: HYDE STIFF AS A BOARD (Note: in upper corner is notation "Chic Stone—ST-3-1899")
 Panel 3: THOR PROPS HIM UP X NOW JUST X
 Panel 4: SLAMS WALL TO EXPOSE X
 Panel 5: ASSOCIATION WITH IRON MAN X
 Panel 6: REWIRES CIRCUITS TO X

PAGE 12:

Panel 1: RESTORES WIRING
 Panel 2: HIGH TINGLY EFFECT COURSES THRU CIRCUITS OF ENTIRE HOUSE
 Panel 3: COBRA, STILL SLITHERING THRU INTERIOR IS REACHED BY JAZZED UP EFFECT
 Panel 4: COBRA X DURESS X STOP
 Panel 5: COMES OUT X (Note: Stan changes the word "help" in balloon to "Hyde")
 Panel 6: TOO WEAK TO ESCAPE X
 Panel 7: COBRA AND HYDE READY FOR X (Note: the name Hyde in word balloon)

SPECIAL PLEA!!
 Help us continue the "Failure To Communicate" series! If you have original art from Kirby's 1960s books, send us xeroxes (and jot down any visible margin notes)! We'll award you a FREE ISSUE when we use it!



Pg. 5, panel 3; Kirby intended this to be Thor's mother, but Lee ignored his intent.

"IT'S IN THE BAG, ALL-WISEST!"

Jack Kirby's Golden Age Gods, by R.J. Vitone

"It occurred to me—that, in this new age, we must seek new roads to tread!"
—Darkseid, New Gods #6

The grinning image of an exuberant Mercury from *Red Raven* #1 reflects the wide-open optimism of the early Golden Age. This was a time to tread new roads, to create new myths. A horde of talented young artists and writers rushed to the job.

Jack Kirby and Joe Simon were there, separately at first, then as a team that would help to shape the actual course of that early comics history.



Jack's first "Satan" lookalike, from Science Comics #4.

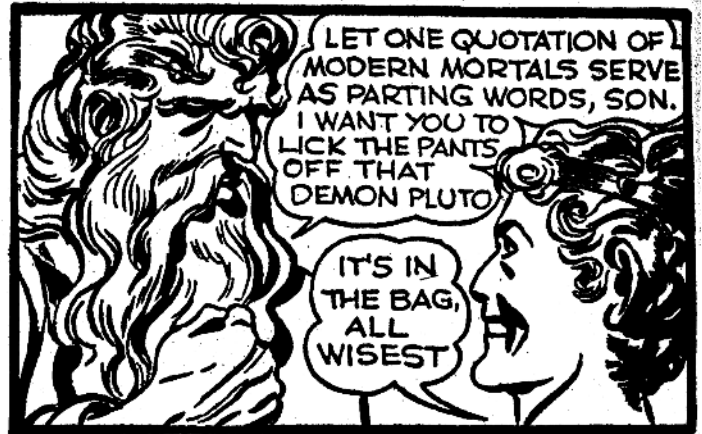
Their backgrounds and interests were similar. Joe enjoyed sports, radio dramas, reading, and films; Jack did too—plus pulp mags and newspaper comic strips. Both men would draw heavily from these sources for story inspiration. It should come as no surprise that Classic Mythology would fuel their imaginations as well.

The ancient gods have been a part of man's collective memory from virtually the earliest recorded history. Egypt, Rome, Greece, and almost every culture contributed their own set of deities to the mix. The fabled exploits of Thor, Hercules, Zeus, Eros, Isis, Mars, Minerva, and the rest have endured the march of time. Many showed up during the Golden Age—if not in their original form, in name at least. (Hey, public domain is a beautiful thing!)

Jack Kirby's first use of his "gods" file shows up in *Science Comics* #4 (May 1940). Written and drawn by Jack as a proposed newspaper strip, it was cut and pasted up to sell to the feature-hungry comics market. In it, Iako, leader of the enslaved 'Mekkanos', bears a strong resemblance to the classic image of Pluto/Satan, an all-time

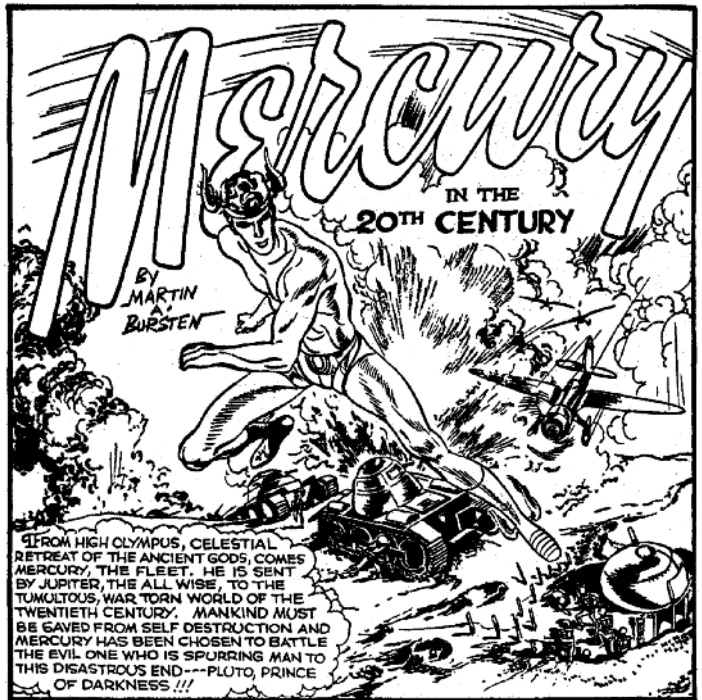


Myth and reality collide in Red Raven #1.



favorite Kirby villain. A short but solid story, but just a warm-up for what was to follow.

"Mercury in the 20th Century" saw print in *Red Raven* #1 (August 1940). Drawn by Jack (from a script by Martin A. Bursten), it's the epic tale of a full-blown mythical god, sent to Earth at the command of Jupiter to stop the evil plans of Pluto. Pluto, who looks like Satan, is impersonating Hendler, the dictator of Prussland, who looks like Adolph Hitler—whew—did you get all that? Another short story, but memorable and well done.



Joe Simon had entered the picture by this time, and the team kicked into high gear. Martin A. Bursten is also credited with the script of the "Marvel Boy" strip in *Daring Mystery* #3 (Sept. 1940). It's a choppy effort, mixing Kirby art, Simon art, a couple of Timely inkers, and an origin that features Hercules descending from Valhalla! (Huh?) That same issue features the same group of artists on Fiery Mask, a truly forgettable hero, battling a bloody murderer who turns out to be a demonic angel of Hell, working for (you guessed it) Satan!

Around this time, late 1940, The Vision swirled up out of the Smoke Dimension and into *Marvel Mystery* #13. Although a more traditional "super-hero," he was called a "smoke god" once in a while,

MYTH-ING PIECES

An examination of Kirby's use of mythology, by Mike Gartland

Jack may not have introduced mythological characters to comics, but no one ever expounded and expanded upon their stories the way he did. Upon his return to Marvel/Atlas in the Fifties, he would bring in mythological concepts for the short monster stories he was drawing; Pan and Cyclops are two that come to mind. When he began creating characters and concepts for Marvel's super-hero line, it didn't take him long to come back to an old friend.

Mythology was at Marvel to stay once *Thor* proved to be successful. Jack briefly touched on Norse themes in the early stories, but really opened up when he introduced the "Tales of Asgard" back-ups; the early stories from this series take much of their plot from the actual Norse myths. Using these stories, Jack also introduced readers to some of the Norse pantheon who would eventually find their way into the *Thor* stories—among them, Ymir, Surtur, Hela [below], Balder, Sif, and Heimdall.



Of course, for the sake of children (and the Comics Code Authority), many of the stories based on the myths were altered so as not to share the grim climaxes of their originators (in the story "Balder Must Die" in *Journey Into Mystery* #107, guess what happens in the original tale?); also in comics you don't kill off potentially good return characters—not in the first story, anyway. Jack also used the opportunity to extrapolate on the myths, giving us his versions of the boyhoods of Thor and Loki. He even utilized stories from pantheons other than Norse and adapted them; the story "The Secret of Sigurd" [*Journey Into Mystery* #111] is actually based on the Greek story of Heracles and Anteaus. In brief: Anteaus was the son of Terra, the Earth, and remained invincible so long as he remained in contact with the Earth. In the ancient myth, Heracles defeated him by holding him off the ground

and strangling him. In the comics version, Thor used his hammer and flung Sigurd off into space; it's not as graphic, but the point is made.

Jack also used "Tales of Asgard" to introduce new mythological characters not in the original myths; the most notable being the Warriors Three. It becomes obvious that Fandral is based on either Doug Fairbanks or Errol Flynn, Volstagg is reminiscent of Shakespeare's Falstaff, and Hogun is, well, Hogun—a good counterpoint to the other two. A tip of the hat is also noted to Dumas' *Three Musketeers*.

As with all the plots Jack worked on in the mid-Sixties, the "Tales of Asgard" stories began to develop into continuing stories, becoming



The second of two Atlas concept pages, dated May 7, 1974. We ran the first one in TJKC #23.

DOING HIS DAMNEDEST

Walter Simonson on *Manhunter*,
and taking the reins of Kirby's *New Gods*
Interviewed by Christopher Irving

(Walter Simonson is no stranger to the comics scene. An accomplished writer, penciler, and inker, Walt has covered most every major character. His work on Marvel's Thor and X-Factor in the past has won him much acclaim, as well as his contributions to Michael Moorcock's Multiverse and Batman: Black And White. One of his first works to get noticed, however, was the *Manhunter* back-up in *Detective Comics*, which he did with the late, great Archie Goodwin authoring. Having recently completed a new *Manhunter* story for DC's new reprint of the series, Walt will be taking over from John Byrne on Jack Kirby's *New Gods* for DC Comics. Our thanks to Walter for taking time out to do this interview.)

THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: What can you tell me about the new *Manhunter* story that was just published?

WALTER SIMONSON: Archie Goodwin, who was the original writer on the series we did together back in the early '70s, went back to work at DC around '91. Shortly after that, DC asked the two of us if we would be willing to do a new eight-page *Manhunter* story that DC could include in a reprint of the original series. When the series originally came out, it was in a series of eight-page chapters, and this was going to be a new one to go with it.

Our feeling was that we wanted to do an appropriate story. The problem was that the original series had a clear beginning, middle, and end. It ends with the death of the *Manhunter*.

TJKC: How was it tied to the original [Paul Kirk] *Manhunter*?

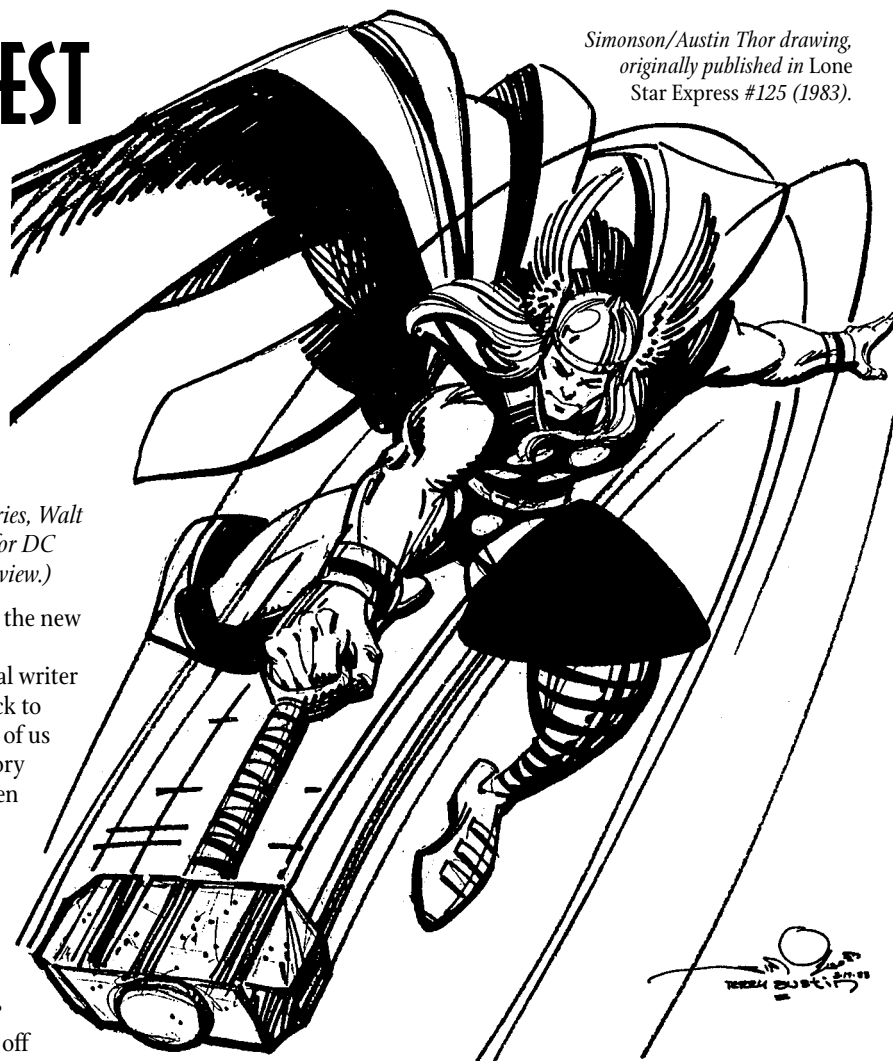
WALTER: When we wrote the original series, we didn't start off with the idea of making it the same guy as the Kirby character from the '40s, but we used the same name, Paul Kirk, because why not? "*Manhunter*" was just a back-up feature in *Detective Comics* when it was 100 pages long; our series was the last eight pages of a hundred-page comic.

I believe it was coming out bi-monthly, so there wasn't a lot of room to establish a sense of background, a bigger world for the character to operate in. Pretty early on, we decided that we would tie the character in to the '40s Kirby character as a way of enlarging his world, and giving him a broader background than he would have had otherwise.

We established a link in the third chapter. We recapitulated the story from Jack's version of how Paul Kirk had gone from big game hunter to hunting "The World's Most Dangerous Game" (one of Archie's favorite themes) as *Manhunter*. Then we enlarged the story by telling how Kirk had undertaken a series of jobs for the OSS, doing covert operations during and after World War II. When that was over, he went back to big game hunting, and found that it didn't mean what it had meant to him—and in a moment of hesitation, he was run down by a charging bull elephant and it seemed to him like he had died.

In fact, he was spirited away, almost dead, by some folks who became an organization known as The Council, an group of eminent scientists who decided the world was floating on the brink of disaster with the opening of The Atomic Age. They were going to put together a covert government of the world that would guide humanity through to better times. Paul Kirk was carried off and put into stasis, until such time that he could be repaired and brought back to life, so that the Paul Kirk in the *Manhunter* strip that Archie and I did, turned out to be the same Paul Kirk that was the *Manhunter* in the 1940s—retroactively.

What The Council also did, since Paul Kirk was such a good *manhunter*, was envision him as the head of their enforcement division or their "League of Assassins" if you will. These were agents who would



Simonson/Austin Thor drawing,
originally published in *Lone
Star Express* #125 (1983).

pluck certain humans out of continuity, and human history; it was unfortunate, but occasionally necessary. To do this, they cloned Paul Kirk, and made a series of identical replicas of him to be his company of assassins; the original would be in charge. Except, after they woke him up, he said, "Well, no, really, this isn't what I want to be doing." So, then he became the target of his own clones, and of The Council itself. Essentially, the story of *Manhunter*, in the seven chapters we told, is the story of his rebirth, his existence, and his death, in his battle with The Council.

Neither Archie or I wanted to do a new story that would interfere with or screw up the old stories. Our feeling was that anybody could do a *Manhunter* story (he's a work-for-hire character, so anyone could pick him up and run with the ball) but, if anyone else does it, it won't really count—but, if Archie and I did it badly, it would count, and we would screw up the old stuff.

Since the original series was so tight with a clear beginning, middle and end, there seemed to be no logical place to put a story. Neither of us wanted to do the kind of insert story you see occasionally where we would have said, "Well, in Chapter Four, page five, between panels seven and eight, *Manhunter* disappears for a few moments. This is the untold story of those few moments." (*Simonson snores, Irving laughs*) We're all instantly asleep!

What happened was we didn't do a story. Every so often we'd talk about it and couldn't find any ideas for it. We preferred not to do one rather than doing one and screwing it up and doing a bad job. The original series was one that we were both quite proud of, and liked the way it worked out. In the end, about two years ago, Archie caught me one day, as I was walking in the offices of DC, and said he'd had an idea that he thought might be able to be made into an eight-page story, and ran it by me in his office. I thought it was a really cool idea,

so we sat down and shot the breeze for an hour or two. When that was over, I had a page-and-a-half of scribbled notes that essentially was the plot for a new Manhunter story we both thought we could not only live with, but believed appropriate to the series and the character—and it didn't screw up the original storyline.

I went home to do the layouts to it. Archie was going to write the script from my layouts—but I was working on *Michael Moorcock's Multiverse*, which was a book from Helix at the time, and a full-time job, month to month.

So the plot sat in my desk and, one day, Archie was gone.

I wrote the introduction for the collected *Manhunter* edition, which explains some of this as well. Basically, he'd been ill for a long time; none of us had expected for him to go as abruptly as he did, though, in retrospect, it's not really surprising; but it was a shock when it happened.

There was no script, because I hadn't yet done the layouts. I thought that was pretty much the end of it and then, sometime a month or two later, my wife Louise suggested that I might be able to do it as a silent story since I didn't want to write the words. I thought that was a really interesting idea. I talked to DC about it, and they were completely supportive of the idea of my trying it, with the understanding that if I tried it and couldn't do it, we'd just bag it.

It turned out to be extremely difficult to do for a number of reasons: There are the emotional reasons, obviously, but it was also just hard to cover a couple of the plot points silently. I didn't want the character walking up gesturing 'sounds like' as if it were a pantomime. I worked on the layouts last Summer, off and on over a couple of weeks. Eventually, I was able to pound it out into a 23-page silent story. I needed more room, obviously, than I would have had in the original eight-page idea. There are central plot points that I could explain to you in two word balloons, but I needed a couple of pages to show this stuff so that you could read it smoothly, and understand what was happening.

I then went to DC and said, "Here's the problem: This was an eight-page story that's now 23 pages. Do you still want to do this?" And DC said, "Sure."

So now there's a collected *Manhunter*. It has some of the drawings I've done with the character over the years, like the DC *Who's Who*, and the pin-up I did, whatever they could fit in. Archie's original idea (without saying what the story's about, because I prefer readers get to read it fresh) was that the new story would act as a framing device that you would read first as an introduction to the series. But given that now there are no words, and most readers won't know who these characters are, there's really no way in pictures to imply the characters' backgrounds the way you could with dialogue. Denny O'Neil, who was the editor on the project, suggested that I use the new work as an epilogue, and I think that's exactly right. What we have is the seventy-page run of the original series, and then the new story.

I did the sound effects, because back in the old series, I used to do my own sound effects (I used to letter them, as well as write them). Normally, in most of the work I do, John Workman letters; because I was doing "Manhunter" before I met John, I thought it would look more like the old "Manhunter" if I did my own sound effects again. I haven't done that in a good twenty years! (*laughter*) I was bordering panels and doing sound effects and I was *really* nervous about doing them, since I hadn't done it in so long, but they actually worked out very well.

It was a little intimidating to start with. Everything with this job has been like that. I'm doing a character I haven't done in twenty-five years; I'm doing it without Archie to show it to; I'm going back to a



(this page and next) Pencils and inks of a spectacular example of the New Gods by Simonson.

more realistic adventure strip in look, feel and texture after spending a long time drawing super-heroes (guys ten heads high that are knocking over entire mountains).

Also, one of the ideas in the original series was that it would run as a counterpoint to Batman. Where Batman was in Gotham City, and everything was dark, including Batman's costume, Manhunter was brightly colored and the series took place in real locations. We did stuff in Istanbul, Nepal, Australia; we weren't using the DC fictional universe.

Manhunter carried deadly weapons, like a broom-handled Mauser, throwing stars, and stuff of that sort. In some ways, it was more action-adventure with a touch of super-hero, and with a worldwide theater of operations. Batman appeared in the original series in the last episode; before crossovers were a big deal, we did Batman and Manhunter together in that story. And in the new story, Batman makes a brief appearance. Because of the way everything worked out, the story actually occurs in Gotham City. So for his last appearance, Manhunter actually shows up in one of the DC fictional cities.

TJKC: You and Archie did this book in the early '70s before cloning was

THE CHURCH OF STAN & JACK

or "The Bible and Brotherhood, Marvel-Style" by Jerry Boyd

In the last few hours of his life, Adolph Hitler's uncanny political acumen returned to him as he composed his last political testament. He accurately predicted the emergence of "the stronger eastern power (Russia) and England's heir (America)" as the states that would inherit the future. This future would include the discovery and uses of atomic power, ushering in an age the mad fuhrer could not envision. With the Atomic Age as a part of life, all states, large and small, wisely decided to retreat (somewhat) from saber-rattling, and readdress the problems that had brought on WWII (and other wars); a lack of brotherhood.

Real brotherhood could, of course, never happen but the attempts had to be made. The *Holy Bible's* last book, *Revelation*, talks of the conditions that will surround the end of man's time on Earth. "Wars... and rumors of war" will be part of it. The savior, Jesus Christ, knew this years before when He said this to His disciples. Yet He still demanded, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 23:39)

It's easy for many people to honor their mothers and fathers, to not steal or kill, to acknowledge God as the only god, etc. Loving one another as God wants us to is the tough one. Ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural divisions remain a gulf not easy to transcend (and understandably so) for millions. Want proof? Just look around you.

PRE-HEROES

In the relative comfort of the Eisenhower years, EC comics made some of the first (and best) stabs at man's intolerance this side of the Iron Curtain. They were published within the pages of *Shock Suspensories*, an anthology title which concentrated on criminal doings. The stories stunned their readers. Some said they recognized a little of themselves in the bigots the great Wally Wood illustrated while (thankfully) only a few others angrily denounced the whole proceedings and the staff who produced them. Jack Kirby was putting together *Fighting American* and other books



The scientist-hero, victorious over Spragg, cites the "Divine Master of Destiny" as the real hero in *Journey Into Mystery* #68.

OUR LEAD-OFF YARN FOR THIS MONTH WILL HIT YOU WITH THE IMPACT OF A SLEDGE-HAMMER!! IT COULD HAPPEN TO YOUR TOWN...TO YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD...**TO YOU!** TAKE WARNING! LIKE RATS IN THE NIGHT, MEN LIKE JIM HORTON CAN BE ANYWHERE!

MEN IN BLACK



In this story from *Menace* #3, Stan's blurb labels bigotry as a sin.

during the early '50s but Stan Lee, over at Atlas, apparently had his eye on this "new trend" in social relevance.

In *Menace* #3, Stan, with art by John Romita, Sr., did a take on hooded bigotry. In a story called "Men in Black," the main character, Jim Horton, angrily decries the number of foreigners coming to America and taking jobs from "real Americans." Typical of Lee villains, Horton's bad qualities are repellent to even his friends and spouse. In short order, Jim organizes some similarly disgruntled men into a black-hooded group bent on violent disapproval of foreigners. After beating one man up, they disperse to avoid a police pursuit. Horton returns to his ramshackle home to remove his disguise only to find out hood after hood shows up to frustrate his efforts. (Symbolically, his bigotry cannot be removed.) When the police finally arrive, they stare down at Horton's bloodstained face. One officer mentions that one hood is laying on the floor. (Well, Horton was sick, right?) It's an interesting yarn, not as good as the EC stuff, but the type of thing Rod Serling would make a trademark of in his later anthology TV series *The Twilight Zone*. EC shut down sometime later, but their themes of brotherly tolerance, man's inhumanity, and being one's own worst enemy found their way into some of Stan's writing for the Atlas titles. A lot of them weren't bad at all, either.

By the end of the '50s, Jack and Stan's scientist-heroes in the monster books would be like philosophical Frankensteins fortunately released from their living nightmares. Their monstrous creations or alien adversaries having been defeated, these forerunners of Reed Richards, Tony Stark, etc. could sometimes be found under a starry sky delivering summations like "Mankind doesn't realize how close it came to utter destruction" or "Never again will I attempt to meddle in things man wasn't meant to..." etc. You can almost hear the mad doctors of Hollywood's classic sci-fi/horror films as you read them.

Sometimes the simplest things confounded or destroyed Kirby's



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