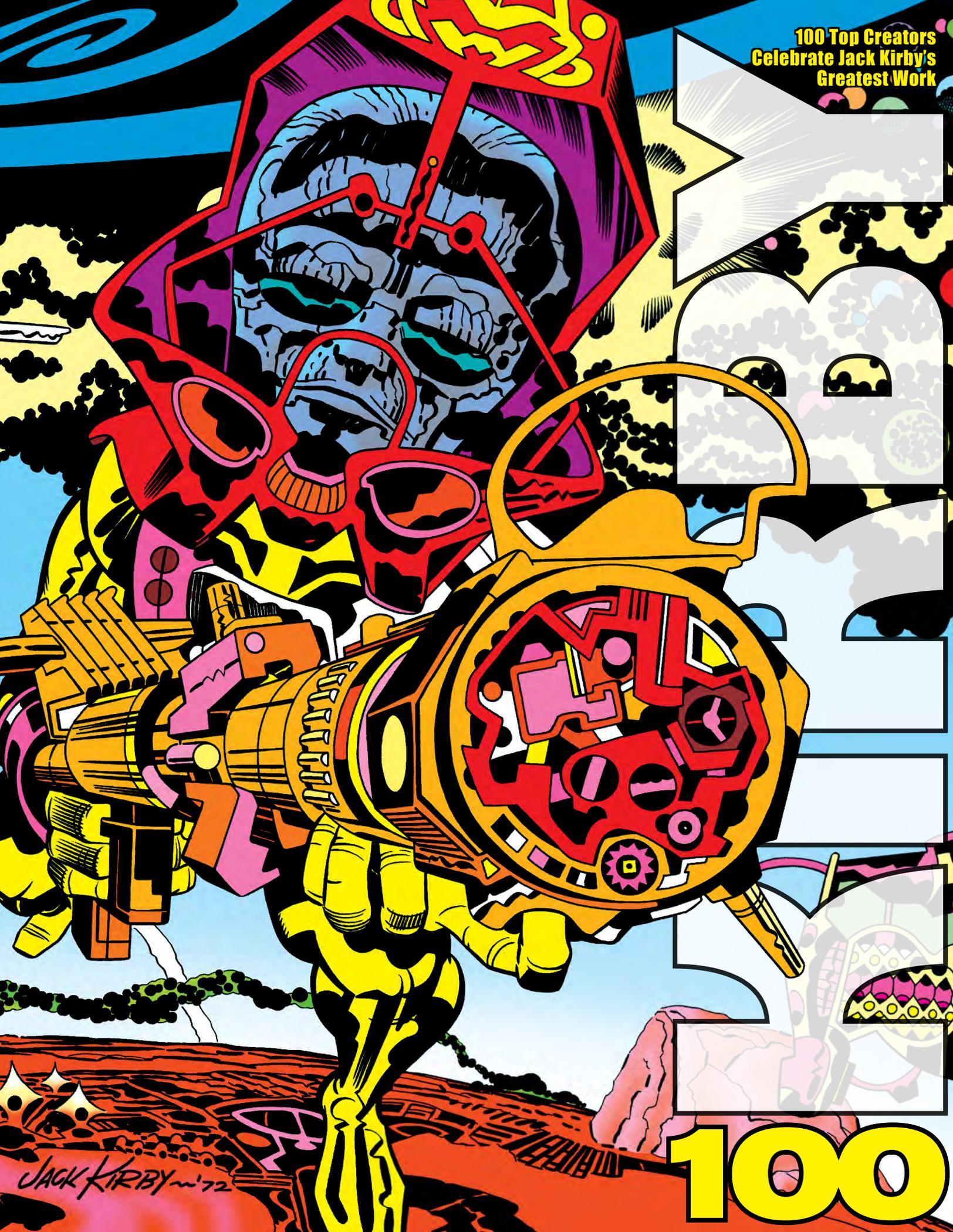


100 Top Creators
Celebrate Jack Kirby's
Greatest Work



JACK KIRBY '72

100

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Introduction

by John Morrow

Welcome to the Celebration!

If you picked up this book by accident, with no idea who Jack Kirby is, you're probably lost. But what a great place to lose your way — in the imagination of the greatest comic book creator (and now, film conceptualizer) who ever lived.

Jack Kirby was born Jacob Kurtzberg on August 28, 1917. This book is being released exactly one century later, but despite containing over 100 of the top creators in comics and animation — all offering their personal praise for, and critiques of, their favorite Kirby work — it can only begin to scratch the surface of the life and career of the man rightfully dubbed the “King” of comics.

Before co-editor Jon B. Cooke and I began approaching said creators for their cooperation with this 100th birthday celebration, I spent a solid week poring over every Kirby comic book and reprint volume at my disposal, choosing what I felt were key Kirby pages to discuss, and making notes as to why I picked them — all so we could offer the potential contributors a starting point for making their own choices. After nearly a quarter-century of producing my magazine, *The Jack Kirby Collector*, preceded by more than three decades of my own Kirby collecting — long before I ever imagined it'd end up being my life's work! — I've amassed a gargantuan collection, but still haven't read every story Kirby produced (though I'm getting close!).

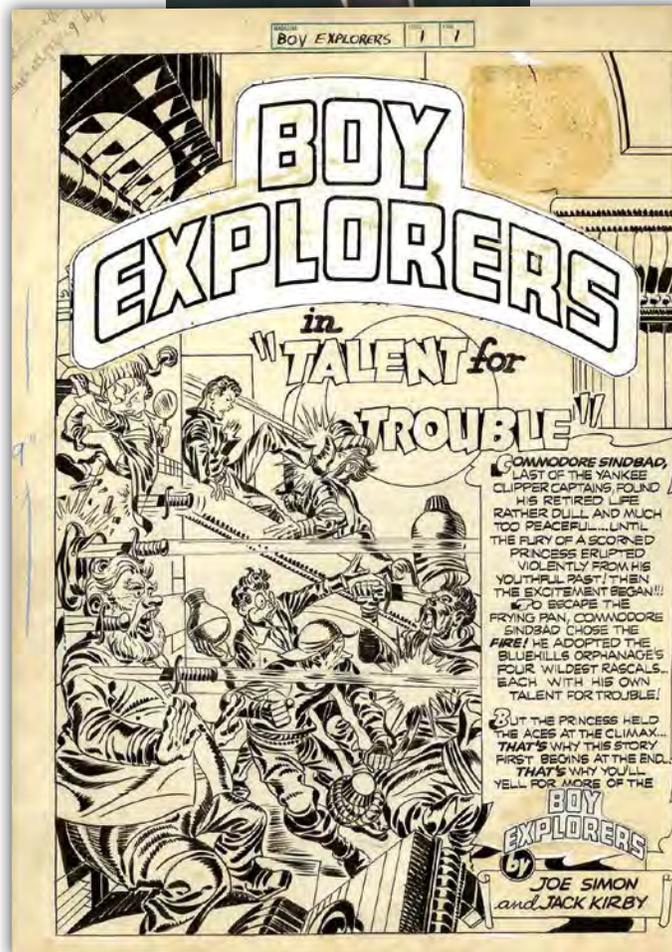
The exhausting task of re-viewing that much material,



while fun, was ultimately in vain. The creators who agreed to share their essays for this book needed little help. If you love Kirby, the problem isn't trying to think of a page that's meaningful to you; it's narrowing it down to *only* one, from the tens of thousands you digested since first discovering the guy's amazing work.

We've attempted to assemble this project into some semblance of chronological order, from Jack's earliest work to his final. That's easier said than done, however, since numerous contributors couldn't contain their comments to just one page, issue, title, or even a single era. So all-encompassing was Jack's influence on comics, and even mainstream pop culture, that many of the contributions here crossover from talking about their chosen Kirby work, to reference a much earlier — or later — strip to make a point about their favorite. (And, truth to tell, some just wanted to discuss the King in general terms, so we simply assigned a pertinent piece to accompany their testimonial, whether it's mentioned or not.) Such was Jack's influence and impact, that just like a Kevin Bacon party game, you can connect nearly any Kirby creation to another, usually in far fewer than six steps.

The selections here are surprisingly varied; we assumed most people would choose perennial favorites like the *Fantastic Four* and *The New Gods*, and indeed, many did. But work as obscure as DC's 1970s *Sandman* and Marvel's *Devil Dinosaur* also made the



Top: Jack Kirby, circa 1968. This photo was subsequently color-tinted. **Above:** The original art for the splash page from “Talent For Trouble,” *Boy Explorers Comics* #1 [1946], featuring Jack Kirby pencils and Joe Simon inks. The Harvey Comics title lasted for one single issue on the stands (though an ashcan of #2 was sent to subscribers).

Mike Vosburg

Artist/Writer/Storyboard Artist/Television Illustrator
Creator, *Lori Lovecraft, The Mad Mummy*
1997 Primetime Emmy Award-winner, *Spawn*

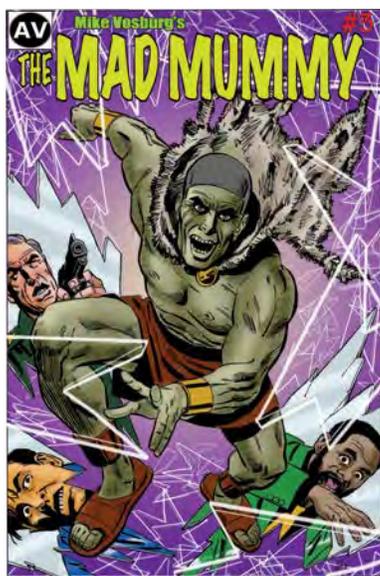
“The Rescue of Robin Hood,” *Stuntman* #2, pgs. 1-2

Kirby was someone I was familiar with mostly from his monster stories at Atlas and later the Marvel superheroes. But while everyone was raving about his work, it didn't resonate with me emotionally. My preference for his work were a couple of “Newsboy Legion” stories and the brilliant *Challengers of the Unknown* series (inked by my hero, Wally Wood). Then my buddy Ronn Foss sent me a copy of a reprint called *Thrills of Tomorrow*, featuring Simon and Kirby's *Stuntman*. I was hooked from page one.

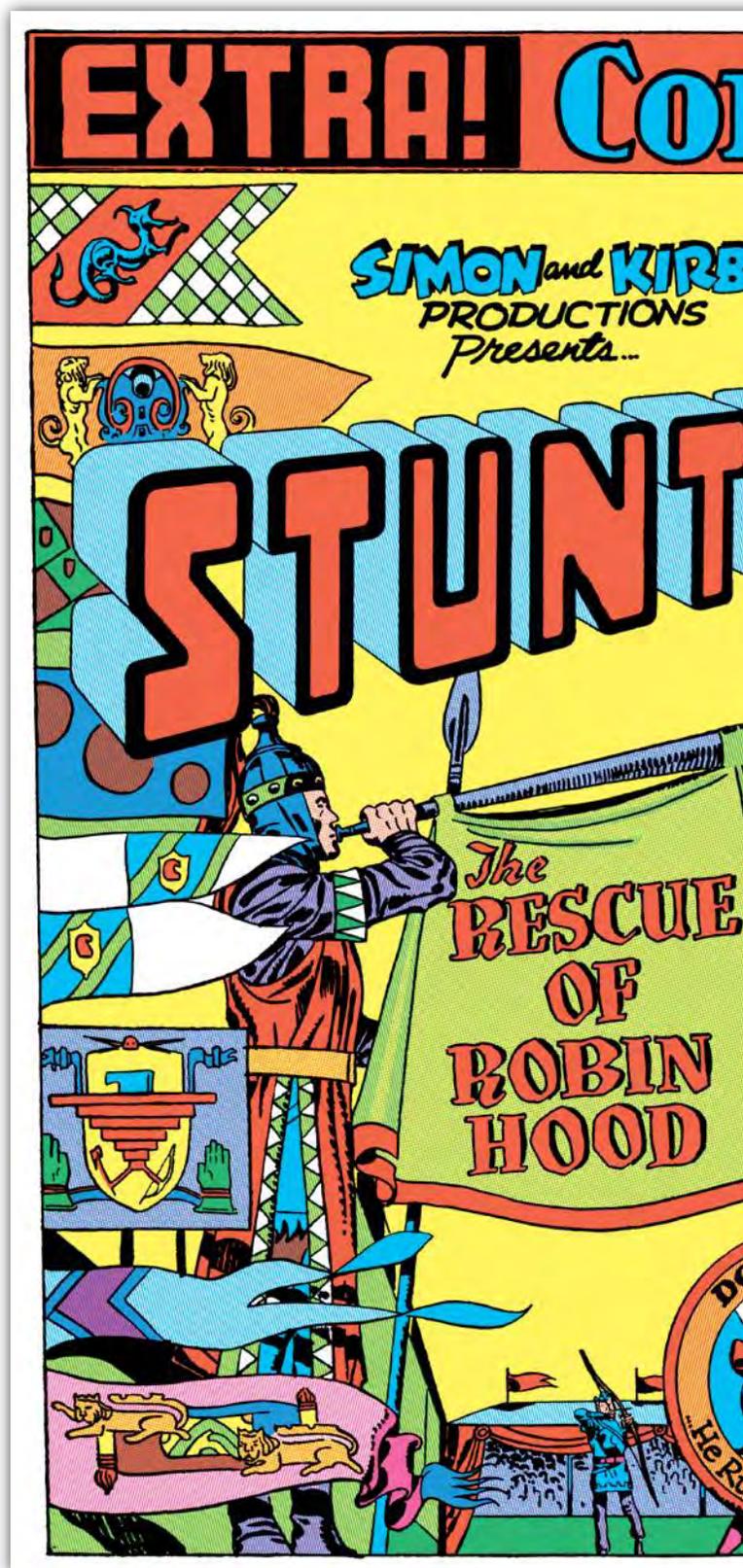
The character was a circus stuntman, Fred Drake, who added a mask and a cape to his outfit to become his vigilante alter-ego. In the first story, he tracks down the sideshow malcontent who has murdered his trapeze artist partners. Drake's amazing likeness to actor Don Daring leads to his logical employment as a double for the bumbling actor, constantly saving his skin while Daring gets the credit.

The color palette was very simply: lots of red, yellows, and blues for the characters, and the backgrounds done in more neutral shades. (I didn't understand this then; I just knew I liked it.) *Stuntman* himself wasn't some musclebound stud; he looked like a basketball player — long, lean and athletic. The action leapt off the page. Bodies flew, heroes leapt... and the girls looked glamorous. *Stuntman* didn't have super-powers; his success was based on his intelligence and athleticism.

Like Joe Kubert's “Tor,” Jack would usually introduce the stories with these wonderful double-page spreads that took your breath away. But such was his wizardry as a storyteller, that things didn't miss a beat when the action returned to the multiple frame pages. There weren't a lot of close-ups; the camera was always pulled back away from the action so that we could clearly see the mayhem that was happening — and all of this while maintaining a sense of dynamics unparalleled in comics.



While Joe Simon's inks could be a bit rough at times, they always enhanced the life that Jack Kirby had in his pencils. The blacks were boldly and stylishly laid in, popping the important elements of the picture. *Thrills of Tomorrow* only reprinted two of the *Stuntman* stories, but I've long since been able to see the entire series and have loved every minute of it. For me, like my other Kirby favorite, *Fighting American*, it was the consummate in thrills, chills and laughs... all for a dime.



Left: Kirby-inspired cover of an issue of Mike Vosburg's creator-owned series, *The Mad Mummy* [#3, 2014], published by AV Publications.

Trevor Von Eeden

Co-Creator/Artist, *Black Lightning*
Creator/Writer/Artist, *The Original Johnson*
2010 Inkwell Award, 2011 Inkpot Recipient

“Break the Spy Ring,” *Fighting American* #1, pg. 9

Even this early example of the King’s work resonates with all the qualities that make Jack Kirby the most creatively exciting artist in the entire history of comics.

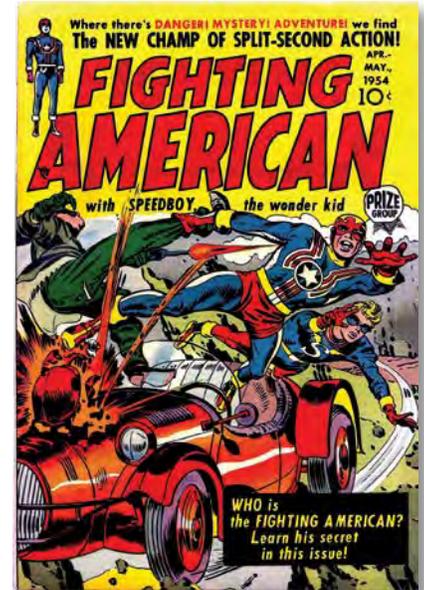
In Kirby’s world, everything is vibrant and alive — almost crackling with the pure, uninhibited power of a seemingly limitless source of arcane, explosive, creative visual energy. His bold, violent, dramatic, usually modernistic, and endlessly dynamic universe was one created in broad, sweeping, confident strokes of an ordinary #2 lead pencil, but his was a sense of perspective — and spiritual, cosmic grandeur — never before imagined, much less seen, in the history of sequential art.

Jack’s source of power, energy, and dramatic visual expression seems as primal and ancient as the visual and narrative art of civilizations that existed millenia ago: the beautiful hieroglyphics and ritualistic, totemic carvings of the great ancient Egyptian, Nordic, Mayan, and Incan civilizations and societies that existed at the beginning of recorded history (and which are constantly referenced in his *Fourth World* and *Eternals* books, as if to emphasize his affinity with these ancient founts of cosmic mystery, wisdom, and wonder). He seemed to channel, understand, and express spiritual, emotional, and psychological forces of incalculable depth, breadth, and power that have existed deep within the hidden, unacknowledged corners of the human psyche since the beginning of mankind’s consciousness. Kirby’s sensibilities were more than just larger-than-life; they were cosmic, universal — and intensely primal.

Tense, violent, elegantly slashing lines, abstractly spotted blacks, and shadows created from a realm of visual logic all their own — yet all unerringly and astonishingly effective in heightening the sense of three-dimensional solidity and volume of Kirby’s drawings to an uncanny degree of representational expression. The King’s figures on this particular page are not yet refined to the point of pure abstraction of line, form,

Top inset: Before switching to humor, straight-ahead action led the way in *Fighting American* #1 [1954]. Cover by Kirby and Joe Simon. **Right inset:** Trevor Von Eeden’s Kirby-esque artistic take on Superman, from *World’s Finest Comics* #305 [1984]. **Next page:** Dynamic action page by Kirby (pencils) and Simon (inks), from “Break the Spy Ring,” in *Fighting American* #1.

volume, and spatial representation that defined his later, more mature work (i.e., the “legs four feet apart” larger-than-life poses, endlessly inventive impossible machinery/diverse alien cultures of his *Thor/FF* comics — notably the immortal Surfer/Galactus trilogy), but they still jump and slide all over the page, literally bursting energetically out of the confines of the panel border itself (as in the final panel) in a restless explosion of uncontrollable creative, narrative, and compositional energy that would subsequently become the hallmark of this singularly unique, and incomparably expressive comics artist.



In the field of comics, the name Kirby is synonymous with the words “POWER” and “CREATIVE ENERGY” — and rightly so. His was the energy of one man’s inexhaustible love for his chosen profession and field of self-expression. In Jack’s case, it was also a genuine feeling of love and compassion towards his fellow man — which is rare in any field, individual, or time. With Jack, it permeated everything that he did.

People tend to forget, but Jack Kirby was a man who saw the unimaginable horrors of war, the sheer, inhuman brutality of which his fellow man was capable, firsthand, and up close — yet he never once surrendered his love of life or mankind to them. He somehow managed to survive World War II with his humanity, and his sense of love and compassion towards his fellow man, intact — which is why I think he became the great artist that he was. He was a great human being first.

Kirby’s storytelling is as brilliantly inventive as his drawing and composi-

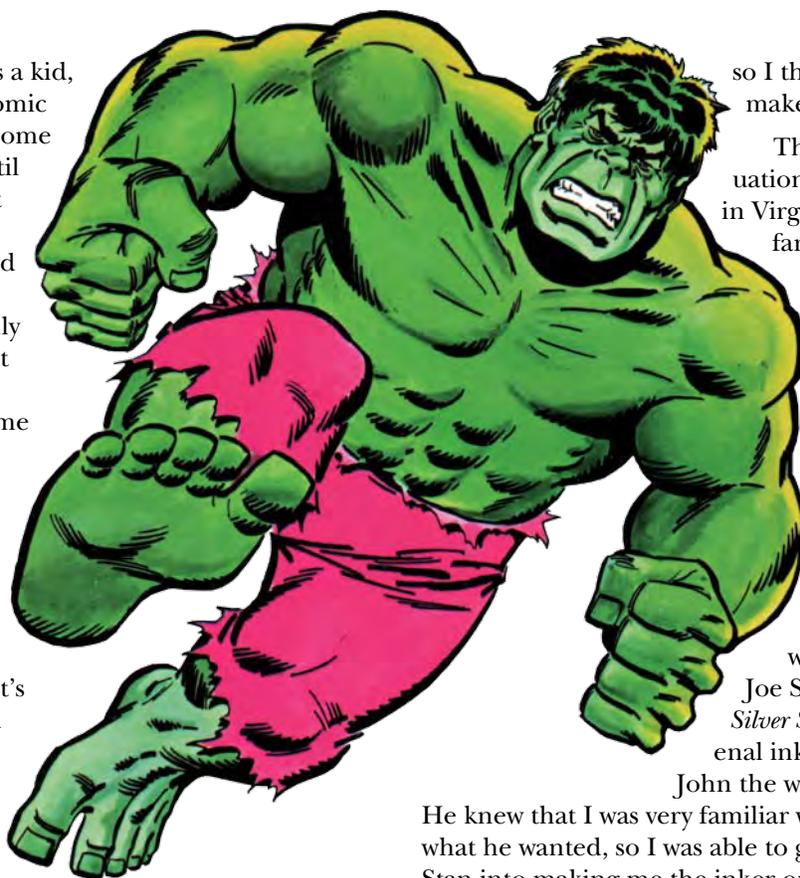
Sal Buscema

Artist/Actor
Co-Creator, Nighthawk, Nomad, Starhawk
2003 Inkpot Award, '13 Hero Initiative Lifetime Achievement Award

Fantastic Four Annual #1, The Incredible Hulk pin-up

I wasn't a huge fan as a kid, but I certainly read comic books, and I didn't become familiar with Jack Kirby until my oldest brother John got into the business. John was eight years older than I, and he was 20, I believe, when Stan hired him, so I was only 12 at that time, and I wasn't really familiar with artists. But, later on, as John became a fixture in the business, I became familiar with Jack Kirby's stuff.

I got my first job in comics in 1968 when they were expanding the line. I'm not completely certain about the timeline, but that's probably when they started with Stan's concept of very, very loose scripting and leaving the storytelling to the artist. I had a very good job with an art studio in Washington, D.C., known as Design Center. They're no longer in business — they've been gone for many years — but, at the time, they were probably considered the top commercial art studio in the area. We did everything from visual aids to advertising, animation — the works. You name it, we did it. But I always wanted to get into comics, and I wasn't completely happy with the work I was doing at the studio. They were interested in supporting animation and filmmaking, and that's not what I wanted to do. I wanted to illustrate, and they were moving in another direction,



so I thought it was a good time to make a change.

The beauty of the whole situation was that I was able to stay in Virginia. Marvel was starting to farm work out to people all over the country, so I didn't have to move to New York. I went to Marvel with the idea of being an inker. My first love has always been inking. For some reason, I draw better with a brush than I do with a pencil. One of the first jobs that they gave me was at John's insistence, because he was not happy with the way he was being inked at the time.

Joe Sinnott was inking John's *Silver Surfer*, and Joe is a phenomenal inker, but he wasn't inking John the way John wanted to be inked.

He knew that I was very familiar with his work, and knew what he wanted, so I was able to give it to him, and he talked Stan into making me the inker on the book.

I wasn't totally familiar with the body of Jack's work, but I was certainly familiar with what he was doing for Marvel at the time. Who in the business wouldn't be familiar with Jack's work? He was the Babe Ruth of comics! He was phenomenal and, to this day, I think he's still the greatest comic book illustrator of all time.



I'm not sure John was ever asked to draw like Jack Kirby. First of all, John would not do that because he had his own style of drawing. And who could draw like Jack Kirby? Those who have tried to imitate his style of drawing have fallen flat on their faces. I remember a statement from Gil

Top inset: Detail from Sal Buscema's Hulk illustration in the Mighty Marvel Calendar for 1975. **Above inset:** Character-filled panel from *The Incredible Hulk* #278 [1982], with pencils by Sal Buscema and inks by Joe Sinnott, repro'd from the original art. **Next page:** Kirby's Hulk pin-up in *Fantastic Four Annual* #1 [1963], with inks possibly by Sol Brodsky.

Rick Veitch

Artist/Writer/Publisher
Creator, *Bratpack*, *The Maximortal*, *The One*
2000 Eisner Award winner (shared), "Best Anthology"

"The Mysterious Molecule Man," *Fantastic Four* #20

Jack's Other Negative Zone

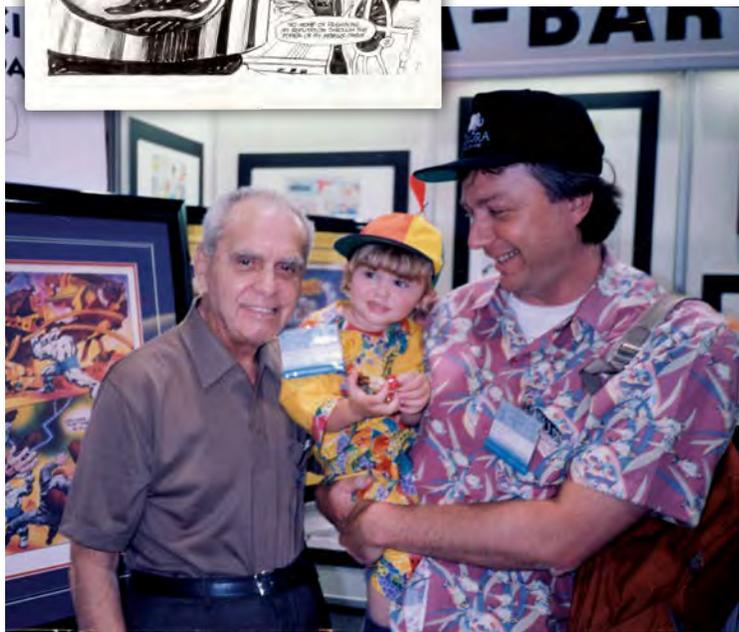
Growing up where I did, the schools didn't offer much in terms of art training. Bitten by the creative bug early, I had to look elsewhere to learn the basics of drawing, design, perspective, and anatomy. The place I found them being demonstrated, if not explained, was in comics.

While I was fascinated by all comics, certain artists really got my engines revving. Often I would study a powerful panel and try to understand why it held such an attraction to me. Many of those images were Jack's. In fact, almost everything Jack Kirby did seemed to possess an underlying vitality that other cartoonists lacked. What was it?

"It" was a lot of things, of course, but one of the hidden things jumped out at 14-year-old me while studying *FF* #20, "The Mysterious Molecule Man." Jack must have been particularly rushed that issue as his normally highly detailed backgrounds were absent. Many panels were left with completely empty backgrounds, which were only lightly color tinted or left white.

Somehow this seemed even more mesmerizing than usual. I kept looking and looking until it dawned on me that the space *around* Reed, Johnny, Sue, and Ben was incredibly interesting. If I scrunched up my eyes and ignored the line art, the white spaces formed insanely amazing abstracts which, when grouped together, formed bigger structures that bordered on metaphysical. I was seeing Jack's art (and my own) in a whole new way!

I didn't have a name for this shift in visual perception when I discovered it in Jack's work, but now I know it's called "figure-ground reversal" and is essential to comprehending "Negative Space," a basic design concept that should be part of everyone's foundational training in the arts.



In art, Negative Space is defined as "the space around and between the subject(s) of an image. Negative Space may be most evident when the space around a subject, not the subject itself, forms an interesting or artistically relevant shape, and such space occasionally is used to artistic effect as the "real" subject of an image."

It's one of the things Jack understood (maybe intuitively?) that made his stuff so much more visually powerful and eccentric than other cartoonists. Blasting out page after page during the Sixties, he was embedding hypnotically effective

abstract design elements in every corner of his comics. Readers experienced all this subliminally, but I think it contributed to their general delight with his work.

Later, Jack introduced the "Kirby Krackle," a design trick conveying fiery energy that made Marvel's competition look instantly

obsolete. What's interesting is that the reader must experience "figure-ground reversal" for the "Kirby Krackle" to work! The eye initially wants to linger on the bazillions of black dots; but only by reversing focus to the Negative Space around them will the reader see Jack's dancing fractal flames.

Just part of the Kirby magic!



Top inset: Rick Veitch famously worked Jack's Fourth World characters into *Swamp Thing* #62 [1987]. This page features Veitch pencils and inks by Alfredo Alcalá. **Above:** Rick Veitch shares about his son, Kirby: "When I brought little Kirby up and showed Jack his name tag, Jack said 'Yoiks!' I think this was 1991 or '92 at San Diego. Kirby was three. Now, at 28, Kirby is a fantasy illustrator and comics colorist!" **Next page:** Splash page from *Fantastic Four* #20 [1963]. Pencils by Jack Kirby and inks by Dick Ayers.

John Romita, Sr.

Artist/Art Director/Licensing Illustrator
Co-Creator, *The Punisher*, Designer, *Wolverine*
Inkpot Award, 2002 Eisner Hall of Fame inductee

“If a Hostage Should Die,” *Tales of Suspense* #77

I first saw Jack Kirby’s work when I was ten years old. I was in the streets of Williamsburg in Brooklyn. Everybody assumed, because I could draw chalk super-heroes on the street, I was the authority on art, and I had all of my guys in my neighborhood buying that *Captain America* book. I remember telling them, “This is no ordinary comic where people are standing still and the dialogue is screaming. The drawing is screaming and the dialogue can’t keep up with it!”

I had never heard of him. I was a Daredevil fan, the one with two different colors; he was my favorite character. When I saw the first *Captain America* I grabbed it... I had a copy of #1, and, like a trillion other comic collectors, my mother lost it. I was very aware when Kirby and Simon left the series, and very surprised that theirs was such a short run. I had no idea that Jack couldn’t be tethered down like a horse in the bullpen there. I was so disappointed when Syd Shores, a pretty good artist, took over for Jack. It just wasn’t the same.



Above left: After Kirby’s departure from Marvel, John Romita Sr. was one artist on *Captain America*. This vignette of the character is from his work on the Aurora Comic Scenes insert that was included in plastic model kits in the '70s. **Above right:** Page from Kirby and Simon’s *Captain America Comics* #1. **Next page:** *Tales of Suspense* # 66 page. Inks by Chic Stone.

THE FABULOUS F.F. FACE THE MOST POWERFUL FOE OF ALL!

"IF THIS BE
DOOMSDAY!"

GALACTUS HAS LANDED ON EARTH! ANY ADDITIONAL WORDS OF OURS WOULD SIMPLY FALL BESIDE THE AWESOME PORTEMENT OF THAT ONE STAGGERING PHRASE! GALACTUS HAS LANDED ON EARTH... AND HUMANITY ITSELF TOTTERS ON THE BRINK OF ... DOOMSDAY!

GALACTUS HAS SEEN THE WATCHER! THEY'RE FACING EACH OTHER! STAY BACK! ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN!

HE'S A GIANT! HE SEEMS TO BE POWER PERSONIFIED! REED... WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US??

THE WATCHER IS SPEAKING TO HIM! THEY... THEY ACT LIKE THEY KNOW EACH OTHER!

IF WE'RE GONNA HAVETA TACKLE HIM, THIS WILL BE A GOOD TIME TO GIT INTO SOME OTHER KINDA BUSINESS!

IF YA ASK ME, THAT BOZO LOOKS LIKE HE COULD PULVERIZE THE WATCHER WITH HIS EYES SHUT!



WRITTEN IN THE MASTERFUL MANNER OF **STAN LEE!**

ILLUSTRATED IN THE MAGNIFICENT MODE OF **JACK KIRBY!**

INKED IN THE MAJESTIC MOOD OF **JOE SINNOTT!**

LETTERED IN THE NICK OF TIME BY **S. ROSEN**

OPENING SHOT! ON ROOF OF TRAXER BLDG., THE FF WATCH



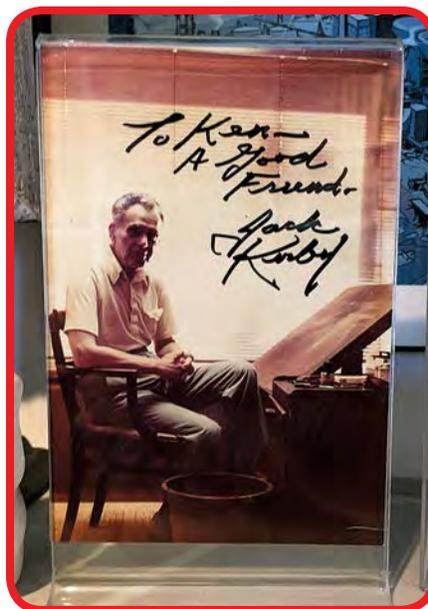
er me into Stan the Man's office for an interview. He'd be on the phone with Jolly Jack, who'd come down with a nasty cold and couldn't do that month's story. The minute he'd hang up I'd beg Stan for the chance to do a fill-in issue, and he'd stroke his chin and say, "You really think you can do it?" and I'd reply, "You bet, Stan!" He'd show me to a desk in the bullpen, right next to Sturdy Steve Ditko, and Dashing Don Heck, and Jaunty Jim Steranko, and Adorable Artie Simek. I believed that everyone actually worked there, happily kibitzing with one another as they penciled and inked and lettered and colored. I'd knock out 20 pages that make Jack proud, and later he'd say, "Not bad, kid — welcome to the Bullpen!" and my career would be launched.

Of course it didn't happen that way. I did bang on Stan's door in 1974, and he sent me to Jazzy Johnny Romita, who offered me work as an inker, which I declined, deciding to go to art college instead. By doing so I learned one of life's great lessons; that wanting something and having it are two very different things... but that's a story for another day. I eventually did break into comics, and years later got a call from editor Tom Peyer at DC, who asked if I loved King Kirby. He needed

someone to channel his energy for the next *Doom Patrol*, an *FF* parody issue with a pulse-pounding script by Grapplin' Grant Morrison. I eagerly replied that not only could I emulate The King, I could even replicate the style of Joltin' Joe Sinnott, the man I consider the very best inker to ever embellish his pencils. The storyline placed the *Doom Patrol* in a Marvel-esque universe, and it's revealed that Automaton, a.k.a. Robotman, has had his brain swapped by a wicked villain who seeks to destroy them. To make a long story somewhat less convoluted, this erstwhile foe is called upon to defeat an awesome evil and save a child's life, but by doing so sacrifices his own existence — sound familiar?

I could go on at length about the impact Kirby had on making me the artist I am today. A few years ago I was at a con in NYC, and some fans were perusing the originals for that *Doom Patrol* story, to

which I had added plenty of Kirby krackle. They then enthused over some *Tempus Fugitive* pages, all heavily airbrushed, and I asked what it was about them that they liked. One replied that it's the way the artwork kinda sparkles, which my wonderful wife Joan immediately picked up on: Kirby krackle, Steacy sparkle. I'd never been so proud!



This page: At top are photos taken by Ken Steacy during an early '80s visit to the Kirby home in California. Ken asked Jack to sign one the following year at the San Diego Comic-Con, and he notes of the bottom photo, "It has watched over my drawing board ever since, a reminder of the heights to which we aspire, and the great man who set the standard for us all."
Next page: If but to lighten the tone a little after so much discussion of the quite emotional "This Man, This Monster," here's Kirby and inker Joe Sinnott's fun splash, *FF* #99 [1970].

Barry Windsor-Smith

Artist/Writer/Illustrator/Author
Creator, *BWS: Storyteller*
Multiple award-winner

“The People-Breeders,” *Thor* #134, pg. 3

Jack Kirby meant a lot to me. When I was young, the new American comics that came to England were mostly DCs, and later Marvel started to happen in the mid-'60s. Beforehand, they were all secondhand comics, which you could buy for a tuppence each at the junk shop. As a child, I was reading black-&-white British and Australian reprints of DC's *Superman*, *Adventure Comics*, and *Batman*, and that sort of thing. While I was as interested in super-heroes as much as any kid, there came a time around the early to mid-'60s when I started losing interest in comics because they were no longer satisfying to me in any way. The Superman stories were stupid and the artwork was bland. Not that they weren't before — they had been bland all along — but it's just my temperament had changed. If it hadn't been for Jack Kirby, I would have been one of

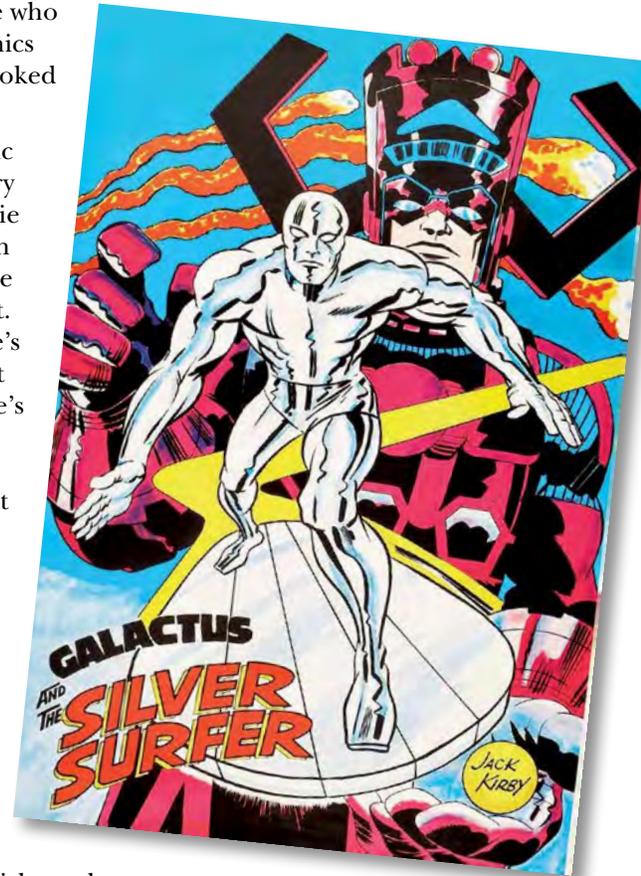
those people who outgrew comics and never looked back.

The comic book industry and the movie industry both owe Kirby the greatest debt. Of course he's gone. I don't know if there's a thriving Kirby family anymore, but whoever's left should be reaping rewards. It would be great if Marvel would sponsor a biographical film

about Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. A docudrama type thing. There are enough people who know about their creations now because of the movies, that although it wouldn't be a runaway blockbuster, it might be an art house hit, and they could probably make their money back from it. I'm talking about a biographical film with actual Hollywood actors. I can't think of anybody who could play Kirby, but give me ten minutes and I could probably come up with half a dozen names. It would be telling the story of the creation of Marvel Comics. I would love people to know the truth. It would be an inspiring picture, with the right screenplay, and the right sort of independent sponsorship. I think that Stan Lee would go for that instantly, and I think he would be gracious enough to say Jack Kirby is the co-star of such a film. That would be a good way to acknowledge how Jack Kirby changed the comics industry.



Left: Barry Windsor-Smith page from a proposed mini-series starring *The Thing*. “As the four-part series in incomplete,” he explains, “I should mention that the premise of the work is that Ben is left alone in New York and undergoes something of a personal crisis; a mental breakdown in a way where he questions himself as a man or a monster, and his value (if any) to the *Fantastic Four*. It's a comedic look at a serious subject for Ben Grimm.”
Top inset: Kirby Mavelmania poster. **Next page:** *Thor* #134, page three, inks by Colletta.



Jim Valentino

Artist/Writer/Editor/Publisher
Creator, *normalman*, *ShadowHawk*
Founding member, Image Comics

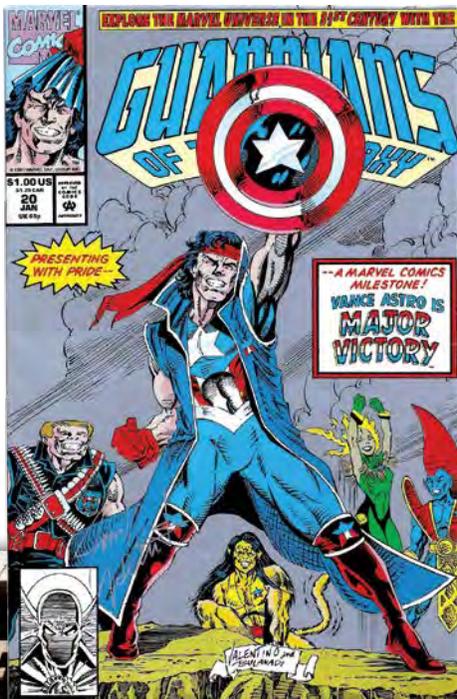
“The Omega Effect,” *The Forever People* #6, pg.18

Kirby did not believe in one-dimensional characters. His heroes had flaws; his villains, depth and nobility, as shown in this page from *The Forever People* #6.

Here we see Darkseid (arguably Kirby’s greatest villain, if not his greatest creation) showing a depth of character and conscience rarely, if ever, seen in a comic book super-villain. His regal stance, hands clasped behind his back reflecting his power and position; his slapping the insubordinate Desaad, an act of authority over a subordinate; and his refusal to allow his resident sadist to

kill the youngest of the Forever People, Serifan, as an act of mercy; the magnanimousness of having absolute power at one’s fingertips.

We understand more about these two characters — how they think, what they feel, to what ends they will go — in these four panels than in most writers’ entire books! So, the next time someone says to you that Kirby couldn’t write, show them this page. Explain the subtleties and the nuance, if you must. For just as he drew, Kirby wrote from the gut and from the heart.



Top inset: Vance Astro displays the shield of Captain America to become Major Victory in Jim Valentino’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* #20 [1992]. **Above left:** Original art, *The Forever People* #6 [1972]. Inks by Vince Colletta. **Above right:** Yes, that’s the late Kung-Fu star David Carradine sitting next to Jack, with Jim Valentino in the background. **Previous page:** Great characterization by Kirby, such as this from *The Forever People* #6, has perhaps made Darkseid the most potent villain in the DC universe. Pencils by Kirby and inks by Royer.

Steve Rude

Artist/Writer
Co-Creator/Artist, *Nexus*, Creator/Writer/Artist, *The Moth*
Seven-time Will Eisner Award winner

“The Saga of the DNAliens,” *Jimmy Olsen* #136, pg. 5

When Roz Kirby walked up to me at the San Diego show one year and asked, “Is this one of your letters, Steve?” I was disoriented for a moment. What Roz had just retrieved from her purse was a letter that I had written the Kirbys back in high school. This letter was then almost 20 years old and, sure enough, it was one of mine.

Apparently, the Kirbys thought so highly of the reader comments they received in the mail during the 1970s, they had actually thought to save the damn things, which had to number at least several thousand. I used to think that these comments sent in by readers were never really taken seriously, beyond the ones that were lucky enough to make it to the letter columns. After maybe holding on to them for a week or so, these letters would surely be thrown out.

But there it was: written on my mom’s 5” x 7” stationery on which I used to write regular letters to Jack, hoping that he might give the Golden Guardian from *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen* his own book. The explosive scene featured here is why Kirby, and the way he drew things, made my time in high school so inspired and memorable, channeling my 16-year-old anxieties into a jet-stream of hopes to make comics my life’s work.



This page: Say what you will about the superb rendering of artist Steve Rude, but if any contemporary comic book artist “gets” Kirby, it is the Dude, as he consistently produces exceptional Kirby-inspired material that expertly channels the King. Whether it’s his wonderful *Mister Miracle Special* [1987] of 30 years ago or his recent *Fourth World* cover for the *TwoMorrows*’ magazine, *Comic Book Creator* [#12, Spring 2016], the guy just nails it! Of note is his *Legends of the DC Universe* #14 [1999], a new story around Kirby’s concepts in *Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen*. Inset is a 1998 Steve Rude *Orion/Darkseid* illustration.

Glen Murakami

Artist/Animator/Director/Producer
Art Director, *Superman: The Animated Series*
1995 Eisner Award, "Best Single Issue" (shared)

"Horoscope Phenomenon," *Weird Mystery Tales* #1

When I was a kid, I didn't like Jack Kirby. "Oh, he's that guy who draws square fingers." It was around junior high, high school when it started to click, and I started to get it. I started to realize how the different inkers affected the artwork, and I was seeing different phases of his career. When I was only looking at the late '70s Marvel stuff, I didn't have any context for any of it. But in any article or interview I would read, people would talk about Kirby, so I began thinking he deserved further investigation, and I started to piece it all together.

I wasn't a huge comic collector when I was younger, because we couldn't get our hands on them. We would mostly get comics during summer vacations when we went on a long road trip as something to pass the time while in the car. I didn't start collecting seriously until I was in junior high. I remember one year at San Diego Comic-Con someone telling me, "If you want a bunch of Kirby comics, you're going to have to dig around all the discount boxes on the floor." I walked out with a two-foot stack of all the '70s DC and the later Marvel stuff I rooted out from the quarter bins. That's when it came together for me.

I just think you wouldn't have modern comics if not for

Jack Kirby. He invented a lot of the language of comics. His page layouts — how dynamic they were. His work is sort of impressionistic, and I think that's something a lot of people misunderstand about his style. He's kind of a genius, someone who invented so many things. Where he places the camera when drawing something — there's a *New Gods* sequence where Kalibak is fighting Orion, and Kalibak is punching Orion. The camera has to be mounted on Kalibak's arm to get that angle. Nobody else was doing that. Recently I went back and looked at *Tales of Suspense* with Captain America fighting all those soldiers. That sequence is pretty amazing, just the fight choreography. There's an early *Fantastic Four* sequence where the Thing is charging at a door — all of those drawings are amazing.

Kirby is one of those artists I never get tired of. I can just pick up a stack of comics, it doesn't matter from which era, and get something new from them every time I look at them. Little things I'm impressed with: there's an early *Hulk* sequence where he's transforming and his shirt is ripping. How did he know how to do that? There's a lot of weird, abstract stuff where he just seemed to know how to draw it all.

I think Kirby sets a standard, and you try your best to try

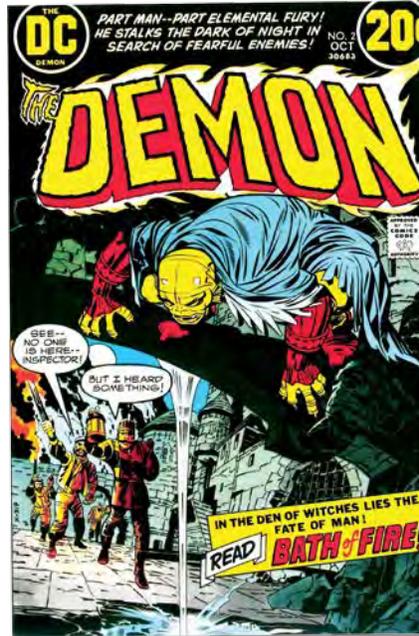


Steve Bissette

Artist/Writer/Editor/Historian/Publisher
Creator/Artist/Writer, *Tyrant*, Creator/Editor, *Taboo*
Three-time Kirby Award winner, 1993 Eisner Award winner

“My Tomb in Castle Branek,” *The Demon* #2, pg. 6

There aren't many mainstream four-color corporate-owned comic book characters I can actually cite as somehow defining arcs of my personal and professional life, but Jack Kirby's Etrigan, the Demon, is one of the two of 'em (I'm sure you can guess who the other one is). I was still in high school — well, actually, poised between my junior and senior years, that weird final limbo summer between not-yet-an-adult and better-be-an-adult-fast — when *The Demon* #1 hit the newsstands. I was making money hand-over-fist, working long hours in my family's rural grocery store and a part-time highway crew stint as one of the guys with a walkie-talkie holding that sign directing traffic: You know, “Stop.” “Slow.” Repeat. “Bored sh*tless” doesn't begin to cover it.



It was the summer of '72; the coming-of-age movie *Summer of '42* was still circulating in Vermont theaters, along with *Billy Jack*, *Mark of the Devil* (the vomit bag gimmick movie that was “The First Film Rated ‘V’ for Violence!”), and some great drive-in fare changing twice a week in a plethora of local Vermont open-air passion pits. What did I know about passion, though? I was still a virginal Catholic lad, and I wasn't just “still reading comic books,” I was drawing my own comics, too, in my sketchbooks, dreaming of being a pro. I was so intoxicated with underground comix at ages 15, 16, and 17 that I'd completely missed Jack's move to DC Comics from Marvel, and the entire Fourth World run (I caught up with those later, while in college), occasionally browsing newsstands and comics racks



Above: Steve Bissette inks a blueline version of Kirby's original concept drawing for *The Demon*. Next page: Splash page from *The Demon* #2 [1972], with inks by Mike Royer.

Kevin Eastman

Artist/Writer/Editor/Publisher/Patron
Co-Creator, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*
Signatory, *The Creator's Bill of Rights*

“The Hospital,” *Kamandi, the Last Boy on Earth* #16

My love for comics developed at the usual young age, seven or eight. First, it was about the characters I enjoyed reading about, and then, as my passion to want to draw my own comics grew, the artists themselves became the more important focus.

Jack Kirby had been one of a few with whom I identified as an early-on favorite, because of his Marvel Comics work, but, in the early '70s, when he moved over to DC Comics, the King became my obsession.

Using every penny of my paper route proceeds and birthday money, I followed all the titles he created — Edited, Written, and Drawn! — but there was a stand-out, my all-time favorite, and still is today...

Kamandi, the Last Boy on Earth!

Looking back, I think that growing up in a tiny town in Maine, and *Planet of the Apes* being the first film I ever saw in the theater, had a hand in the connection, but it ran so much deeper.

Kamandi was the hero I could relate to and dreamed I could be.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world gone mad, it was an epic adventure filled with action and fantastic characters, who, to me, had real emotions and personal struggles, and they dealt with incredible hardship trying to survive another day! All centered around a boy, Kamandi, who used his wits and skills to make it through each day, stayed strong, and, true to his beliefs, stood beside his friends at all costs!

For an eleven-year-old kid like me, it clicked on every level.

Back in the real world, Jack Kirby was the hero I dreamed of becoming.

His ideas seemed endless, anything he could imagine; he could create, write, draw all of it. He was the complete storyteller, and this is what appealed to me.

The pacing was fast, but he always left time to breathe life and personality into his characters. The stories never seemed to be over-written — or under-written — with just

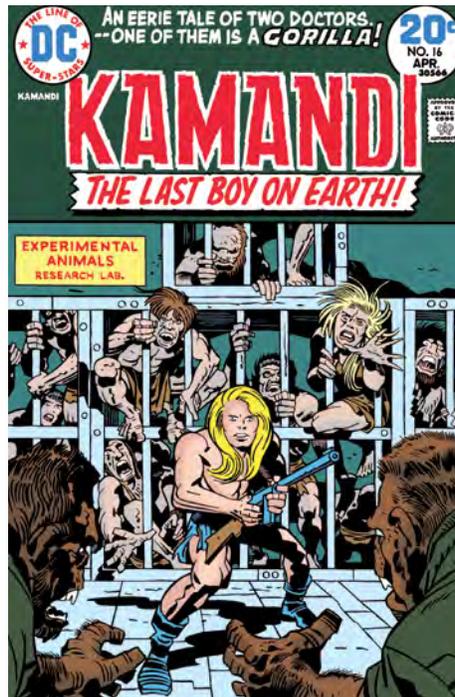
enough detail to bring you into their world through the story he wanted to tell you.

The artwork was insane. Every panel on every page seemed to literally explode with excitement! The imagination that went into every detail, the splash pages, the two-page spreads — YEEOW! — every issue was a page-turner that would leave you out of breath in the end.

I truly loved all the issues, but issue #16, “The Hospital,” was in my Top Ten. I loved the parallel, where Kirby finally leads you deeper into the origins of Kamandi’s world, when you think you’re reading the handwritten diary of a gorilla doctor recording the rebirth of mankind, but you’re actually reading the diary of the human doctor recording the birth of the new animal order. Perfectly done.

As I continue to stand firmly upon the shoulders of the man, and humbly try to walk in his footsteps, I owe him a million lifetimes of thanks

for all that he has given me. I am forever grateful to Jack Kirby.



Right: Kevin Eastman, who sponsored *The Art of Jack Kirby*, poses with pride in his San Diego studio with a prized personal possession framed on his wall, the original cover art of *Kamandi, the Last Boy on Earth* #16 [1974]. **Next page:** Original cover pencil art for *Kamandi* #16, from a photocopy in Kirby’s files.

AN ECIE TALE OF TWO DOCTORS.
-ONE OF THEM IS A GORILLA!!

KAMAUU! THE LAST BOY ON EARTH!



One Hundred Years of Kirby

by John Morrow (with Jon B. Cooke)

(Please refer to all those who assisted at the end of this feature.)

A Chronology of the King's Reign

While this isn't a complete list of every important date in Kirby's life and career, it hopefully hits most of the key events and a few we think pertinent. Rule of thumb: Cover dates were generally two or three months later than the date the book appeared on the stands, and six months ahead of when Kirby was working on the stories, so we've assembled the timeline according to those adjusted dates — not the cover dates — to set it closer to real-time. — John Morrow.

1916–1930s

- **August 12, 1916:** Kirby's parents Rosie Bernstein and Benj Kurtzberg marry in New York City. On the certificate, Rosie's father's given name is Jacob.
- **June 5, 1917:** Benj Kurtzberg, living at 147 Essex Street, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, registers for the draft during World War I. Jacob is born almost three months later. (Until a birth certificate is discovered — which the family does not have — this is a best guess at Kirby's birthplace.)
- **August 28, 1917:** Jacob Kurtzberg [Jack Kirby] is born on New York City's Lower East Side. Jack's younger brother, David, will arrive on January 22, 1922.
- **1920 Federal Census:** Bennie, Rose, and Jacob are listed living at 131 Suffolk Street, Manhattan.
- **September 25, 1922:** Rosalind Goldstein [Roz Kirby] is born, in Brooklyn, New York.
- **1930 Federal Census:** Ben, Rose, Jack, and David are living at 172 Delancey Street, Manhattan.
- **Early 1930s:** Kirby (still Kurtzberg) joins the Boys' Brotherhood Republic, a self-governing youth organization helping to keep kids off the street and remain productive, and he sees his work in print for the first time, in the club newsletter. He draws a regular feature, *Kurtzberg's Konceptions*, between 1933–35.
- **Mid-1930s:** Kirby gets his first professional job as a cel opaquer for Max Fleischer's animation studio, the producer of *Popeye* and *Betty Boop* animated cartoons. He advances to become an assistant animator. With a possible studio strike or relocation looming, he takes a position at Lincoln Newspaper Syndicate, drawing comic strips and one-panel cartoons, such as *Laughs from the Daily News*, *Cyclone Burke*, *The Black Buccaneer*, and *Socko the Seadog*.
- **September 1938:** *Jumbo Comics* #1, published by Fiction House, and reprinting some of Jack's earlier syndicate strip work. This is the first Kirby work appears in a U.S. comic book.
- **1939:** Kirby joins Victor Fox's studio as a staff artist.

1940

- **1940 Federal Census:** Ben, Rose, Jack, and David are living at 30 Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. The census also asks where the family and the Kurtzbergs confirm the same address.
- **January:** *The Blue Beetle* newspaper strip debuts with uncredited Kirby art.
- **Early 1940:** Kirby meets Joe Simon in the Fox offices and, in May, Kirby and Simon collaborate for the first time, in *Blue Bolt* #2. Kirby's debut work in comics (the future Marvel Comics) appears in *Red Raven Comics* #1 (cover date), with the "Mercury" feature. It is the first time Kirby signs his name Jack Kirby (one of numerous pen names he initially used, but the one that sticks). The team of Simon and Kirby is established. Sometime in late 1939/early 1940, Timely publisher Martin Goodman hires Joe Simon as the editor of the company's comics line's editor, and, outside the office, Simon and Kirby conceive *Captain America*, which they pitch to Goodman, who agrees to share 25% of the profit with the team on top of their rate of \$12 per page. Kirby is hired as a staff artist for \$75 a week.
- **Summer:** Jack Kirby meets Rosalind "Roz" Goldstein, who lives in an apartment building. They begin dating.
- **Fall:** *Marvel Mystery Comics* #13 features the debut of Simon and Kirby's "Vision."
- **September 25:** Kirby proposes marriage to Roz, who accepts.
- **December 20:** Simon and Kirby's *Captain America Comics* #1 goes on sale, reportedly selling nearly half a million copies. Subsequent issues sell over one million copies per issue. The title is an unqualified success, becoming the biggest seller to date. The series continues until 1949 and the character's trusty sidekick, Bucky, also appears in numerous other Timely comic

1941

- **Early 1941:** In addition to their Timely assignments, Kirby and Simon (along with several inkers) frantically produce *Captain Marvel Adventures* #1, the first book devoted solely to Fawcett's new super-hero sensation (a boy who says the magic word "Shazam" and is transformed into the "World's Mightiest Mortal"). But, because they believed the book would bomb, Simon and Kirby left their credit lines out of what would soon become one of the biggest selling titles of the decade.
- **February:** Stan Lee's first professional writing appears in Kirby and Simon's *Captain America Comics* #3, a two-page text piece entitled "Captain America Foils the Traitor's Revenge." Soon the former Stanley Lieber, who is editor of *Captain America*, will be writing stories for the creative team during their stay at Timely.
- **July:** Simon and Kirby's *Young Allies* #1 goes on sale, featuring a S&K first for comics: The kid gang.
- Before completing their work on *Captain America Comics* #10 (cover dated Jan. 1942), Timely's accountant reveals to Kirby and Simon that they are being cheated out of promised profits from the title as originally negotiated with Goodman. By then, the men are recognized throughout the industry as a top creative team in the field. Clandestinely, the partners contact Jack Liebowitz, co-owner of DC Comics, the industry's top publisher, and negotiate a deal: \$500 every month for the partners in return for 25 pages (extra for any additional work). Secretly preparing their DC stories, Simon and Kirby's secret deal is uncovered by Goodman and the two, after finishing their last issue of *Cap*, are fired. Upon their departure, Stan Lee takes over as editor of the comics line.
- **December 8:** The United States of America enters World War II.

1942

- Benjamin Kurtzberg's draft registration card lists his address at 3142 Coney Island Avenue, Brighton Beach, Brooklyn.

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