

IN THE DAYS OF THE GIANTS--HE WAS THE MIGHTIEST!

# ATLAS

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JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR FIFTY-SEVEN  \$10.95 IN THE US

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THE NEW

# JACK KIRBY

ISSUE #57, SUMMER 2011

COLLECTOR

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*(unpublished Atlas #1 cover)*

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(above) From the mid-1970s sketchbook Kirby drew for his wife Roz, here's Atlas, a Kirby concept that never got fully realized beyond his one appearance in *First Issue Special* #1 (April 1975). Atlas TM & ©2011 DC Comics.

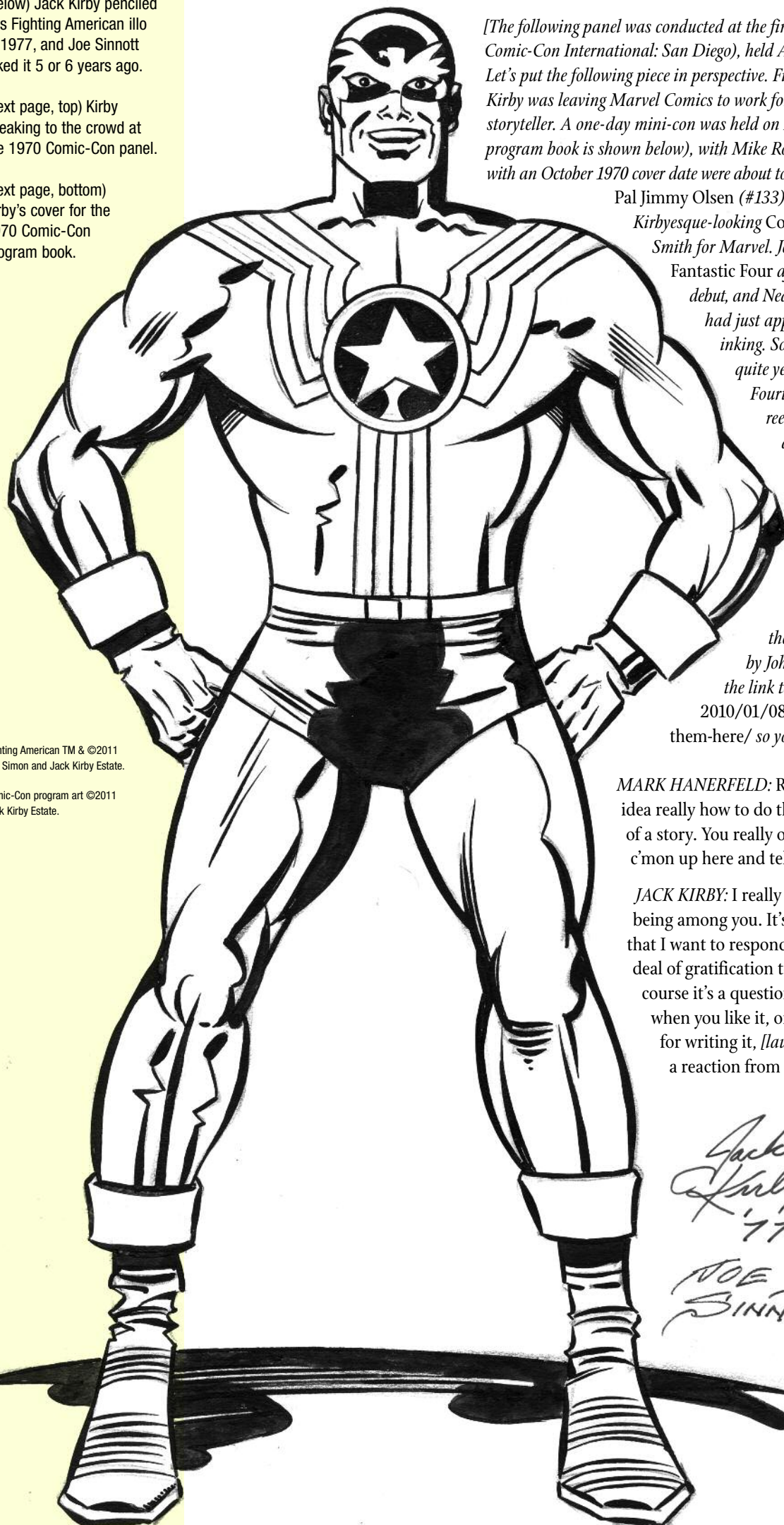
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# "IT'S NOT IN THE DRAFT

(below) Jack Kirby penciled this Fighting American illo in 1977, and Joe Sinnott inked it 5 or 6 years ago.

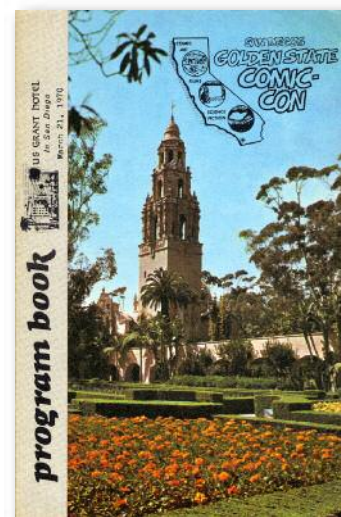
(next page, top) Kirby speaking to the crowd at the 1970 Comic-Con panel.

(next page, bottom) Kirby's cover for the 1970 Comic-Con program book.



[The following panel was conducted at the first, full San Diego Golden State Comic-Con (which is today's Comic-Con International: San Diego), held August 1-3, 1970 at the U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego. Let's put the following piece in perspective. Five months prior, in March 1970, it was made public that Jack Kirby was leaving Marvel Comics to work for DC Comics—an unprecedented move by the company's star storyteller. A one-day mini-con was held on March 21 as a warm-up for the big summer event (that show's program book is shown below), with Mike Royer as the only guest. At the time Jack is speaking here, comics with an October 1970 cover date were about to be released, which would include Kirby's first issue of Superman's

Pal Jimmy Olsen (#133) for DC, and the very Kirbysque-looking Conan #1 drawn by Barry Smith for Marvel. John Romita's first issue of Fantastic Four after Kirby was about to debut, and Neal Adams' first issue on Thor had just appeared, with Joe Sinnott's inking. So the comics world hadn't quite yet gotten to sample Kirby's Fourth World, Marvel was still reeling from Jack's departure and trying to make things look as "Kirby" as they could, and fans were wondering where the company would go without him there.



The tapes for this panel were given to Mike Towry by Shel Dorf's old friend Charlie Roberts, who had in turn received them from Shel's brother, Michael Dorf. The panel was transcribed by John Morrow, with the permission of Mike Towry. Mike has posted the link to the audio at <http://www.comicconmemories.com/2010/01/08/recordings-of-the-1970-san-diego-comic-con-1-listen-to-them-here/> so you can have the chance to actually hear Jack speaking.]

**MARK HANERFELD:** Right now I'm supposed to introduce Jack Kirby. I have no idea really how to do that, except to say he writes a hell of a story, and draws a hell of a story. You really ought to see the new stuff he's doing, 'cause it's terrific. Jack, c'mon up here and tell 'em more about it. [applause]

**JACK KIRBY:** I really appreciate being here. I really deeply feel that it's an honor being among you. It's one of the reasons I draw people like I do, because I feel that I want to respond to you in some way, and when I do, I find that it's a great deal of gratification to me. It's not a question of telling a good story; well, of course it's a question of telling a good story. The way I know it's a good story is when you like it, or you hate it, or when you hate me for writing it or like me for writing it, [laughter] because I get some kind of a reaction, see? When I get a reaction from people, even if it's bad, I feel that somebody's out there, and

I feel that people are living, and they're analyzing things, and that their minds are in motion, and that life is going on. It's the one time that I feel people; I don't feel cars, see? I don't feel buildings, I don't feel tanks, I don't feel guns, I have no respect for them, see? I have no respect for what they are; they're just not alive. That's why I ridicule cars, I ridicule guns. You'll never see me draw a gun the way you'll actually see a gun. Or you may not see me draw a car the way you'll actually see a car. It's my version of a car. I feel I can do anything I want with it. And I feel that's what we all should do with it. Just try to see the world our way. Those things are made for us. Cars are made for us, and all these immaterial non-living things are made for us to do what we want with. That's what I do; I try to make my version of it. I try to give a

Fighting American TM & ©2011 Joe Simon and Jack Kirby Estate.

Comic-Con program art ©2011 Jack Kirby Estate.

# SMANSHIP. IT'S IN THE MAN."



larger than life version to a very mundane object. I feel I've made life a little richer for myself. And maybe in a way I've done it for you. If I get a question from you, or get some response from you, I feel that I've established some kind of a link with you, the people that I'm doing my work for. Somehow I've done it; somehow I've been quicker living than dying, [laughter] and one of these days I'm just not going to change quick enough, and I won't be quick enough, and somebody will replace me, and maybe keep telling the kinds of stories that get reactions from you. But right now I'm doing it, and I'm enjoying it, and certainly my best moments come when I can really see you in person, and talk to you face to face, and see that I've really understood you in some way. That's why I say it's a pleasure for me. It's a real source of gratification.

So if I can do anything better, I'm gonna try it.

And if I can do anything weirder, I'm gonna try it. If I can do anything more startling, I'm gonna try it. Or maybe something very, very outrageous, I don't know. You might clobber me for it, and that'll be great, because it'll be a new experience for me, and I'll enjoy every minute of it. I was once going out of a burlesque theater, and I had a heck of a good time being thrown out. [laughter] It was a great experience. I feel that's what life is; it's just a matter of reaction. Reacting to experiences. Sometimes they're very bad, sometimes they're traumatic, and sometimes they have a deep effect on us. But that's okay; I think we should take it, and weather it, we weather it stoically, and take the best thing out of it, and maybe

become real human beings from it. I think if we're able to react, we're alive. If we don't react to anything, I think we're in some kind of limbo. Those are just my thoughts on things, and that's the way I draw. That's what goes into my drawing. My God, I've analyzed myself for thirty years, [chuckles] and I think that's what's come out of it. So, that's my thing. I'm giving you my version of the world as I see it, whatever random thoughts come into my head. You're getting what I think about it. I don't know what you think about it, but that's what I think about it. I see it my own way. And I feel, in doing that, I become an individual.

If I played piano my own way, I'd be an individual, and I feel that I'd have some enriching quality. And I like that. I like to have some enriching quality. It makes me feel good. Some people don't like to have enriching qualities. And they just go about doing whatever they're doing, in business or something else, and they do well at it, and they accept it. But I don't accept that. In fact, I don't accept anything. I fight anything that comes along. I like to see it my way, and I like to do it my way. It makes me feel great. Whatever reaction comes my way, I love to handle it. I've handled all kinds of reaction, and I've had a great time at it, really. There have been times when it just scared the living daylights out of me, but having lived through those times, [chuckles] I can look back at them almost fondly. So you say, "Well, I've handled that," see? I've bloodied my axe

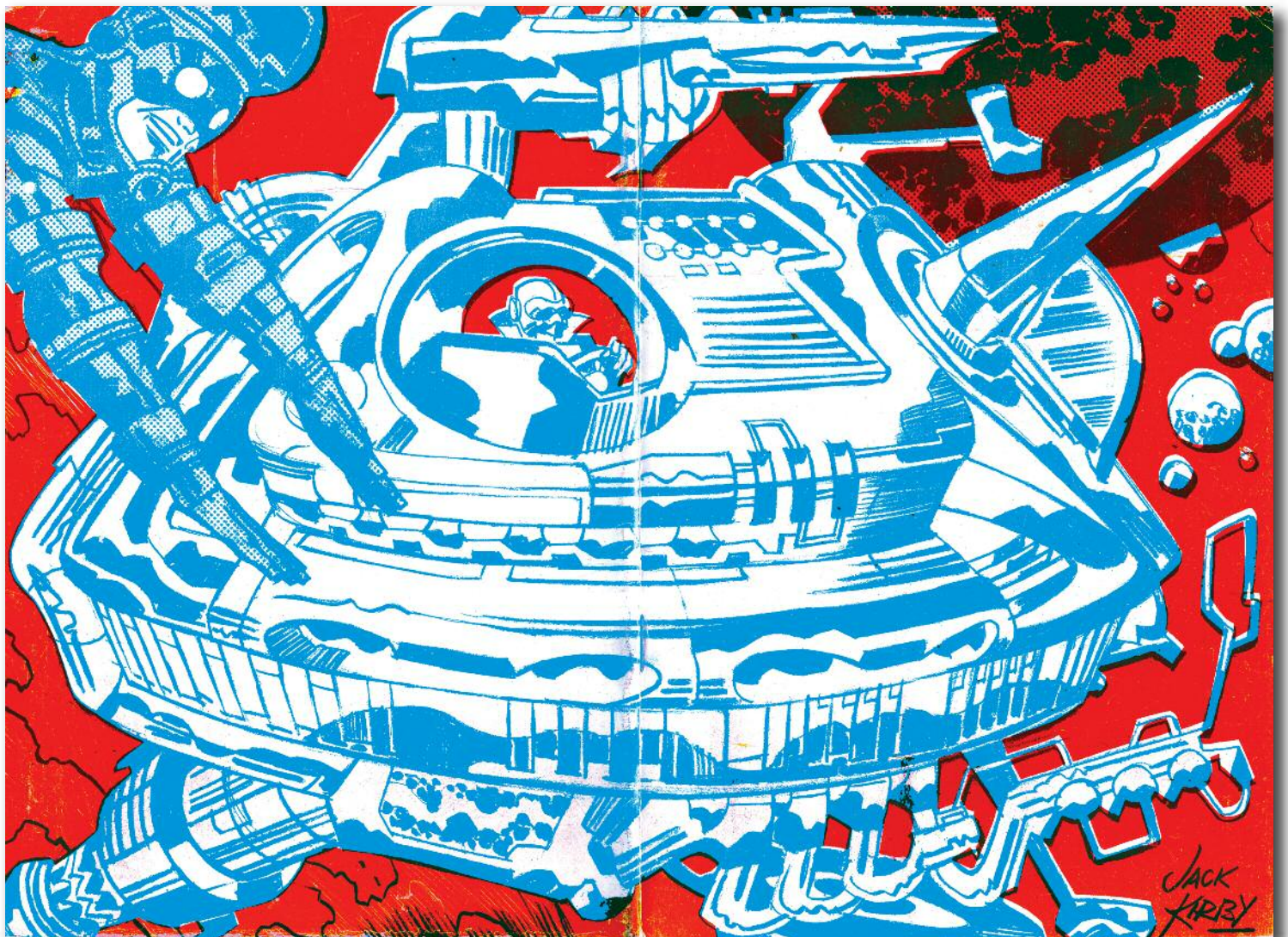
in some way, and I've handled it. So that's not so bad. Y'know, I don't know how it was resolved, but it was resolved in some way. I came away from it, the other guy came away from it in some way, but looking back on it, I had a great time, really. Even getting tossed by that bouncer, it was a great experience, because this guy looked like any character that Warner Brothers would dream up, y'know? The guy next to me was making a lot of noise, and being a loser, I was the one who got thrown out. But that was a great experience, although at the time, I couldn't understand it in its context, I feel that now I do. I really had a good time.

So, what I do is, take whatever I feel about all these things, and put it in my drawing, and maybe entertain you in some way. You have to tell me; I can't. I haven't got that much of an ego. You have to tell me. And of course, in a way, you do, because the books do well enough, [chuckles] and that's good enough. I get letters. I go along that way; I live that way. That's my—well, I suppose you call it a lifestyle. And I've never gotten out of the groove. So I'm content with it, and it just about sums me up.

If there's anything you'd like to ask me, possibly about the field itself, about the direction of comics—I can only give you my version of it, and you're welcome to it. So help yourselves.

AUDIENCE: Why did you quit the *Fantastic Four*?

KIRBY: Why'd I quit it? I can't tell you. [laughter]



SPECIAL GUEST OF HONOR

Jack Kirby is a self taught artist who is considered to be the King of comic book artists. He is a product of that famous incubator of talent, the lower East Side of New York. Growing up in the time of the depression, he knocked about among street gangs and was no different from the other kids except that he had a knack for telling stories, he liked to draw and did both a lot better than the next guy.

His career began in an animation studio at the age of 17. He later worked for a newspaper syndicate doing several different types of features. In the middle 1930's newspapers comic strips reprinted in book form began to sell and the demand for these books forced the publishers to look around for new material. They decided to hire their own writers and artists to produce brand new comic stories and comic books were born. Jack Kirby was there in those early days and the demand for his talents has never ceased.

Today after a career spanning close to forty years, he is considered tops in his field. No other person has created more new trends in comic books or has established as many popular characters.

As we go into the 70's, Jack's mind is as fertile as ever, and his pencil as skilled. He is constantly experimenting with new ideas. If a new trend is established, it is most likely to come from Kirby.

In his mountain top studio he communes with the god of imagination and we walk up to the comic racks with a sense of excitement asking, "What does Jack Kirby have for us this time?" We are never disappointed.

Shel Dorf



*JACK KIRBY*

*AUDIENCE:* There was a similar situation about 25 years ago. You quit Marvel, and a good selling magazine called *Captain America*, and you went over to DC. I liked your stuff better over there, but why'd you quit Marvel?

*KIRBY:* The situation demanded it. That's the only thing I can tell you. The details would bore you. But I can tell you that the situation demanded it. I do what I have to do. I can't vacillate. I'm not an indecisive man. I do what I have to do, and, y'know, I did it at that time.

*AUDIENCE:* Do you think it works in cycles? Like, you'll feel freer at one company, and you'll go over to that one...

*KIRBY:* No. No, it doesn't work that way. You're no more free with one company than you are with another. You just have to do it. Somehow, there's something happening at the company where you are that makes you feel... that's all you can do for it. And that's not enough, so I go somewhere else.

*AUDIENCE:* By "freer," I mean at one company you're just doing this one magazine, where at DC you're doing several...

*KIRBY:* No, no. I had the latitude of doing more than one magazine at Marvel, or at any other place. I just felt that the situation demanded my leaving, so I left.

*SHEL DORF:* What would your advice be to a young

cartoonist trying to break into the field these days?

*KIRBY:* Well, comics in particular is a very limited field. I suppose a lot of fields are that way today. But I feel it depends on you yourself. If you're an aggressive individual, and you want to make this your field—and there is no school. You make your school. I say that you borrow arms and legs and heads and necks and posteriors from anybody you can. In comics, which is a peculiar field, every man—every artist—is the other artist's teacher. There's absolutely no school for it. People can teach you the mechanics of it, which is good. I can see a good reason for that. But drawing a good figure does not make you a good artist. I can name you ten men, right off the bat, who draw better than I do. But I don't think their work gets as much response as mine. I can't think of a better man to draw *Dick Tracy* than Chester Gould, who's certainly no match for Leonardo da Vinci. *[laughter]* But Chester Gould told the story of *Dick Tracy*, the way it should've been told. No other guy could've done it. So it's not in the draftsmanship; it's in the man. Like I say, a tool is dead. A brush is a dead object. It's in the man. And if you want to do it, you do it. If you think a man draws the type of hands you want to draw, steal 'em; take those hands! *[scattered applause, laughter]* The only thing I can say is, Caniff was my teacher, Alex Raymond was my teacher. Every guy who drew comic strips was my teacher. Whatever he had stimulated me in some way. And I think that's all you need; you need

that stimulation, to make you an individual. And the draftsmanship? Hang it! If you can draw decently, learn to control what you can. Learn to control what you have. Learn to refine what you have. Damn perfection! You don't have to be perfect! You're never going to do a Sistine Chapel, unless somebody ties you to a ceiling. *[laughter]* So damn perfection! All a man has in this field is pressure, and I think the pressure supplies a stimulation. You have your own stresses; that will supply your own stimulation. If you want to do it, you'll do it. And you'll do it any way you can.

I remember I thought I was going to do it the proper way, and go to a big art school, and I went to Pratt Institute, and the next day I was out! My old man lost his job, and I was selling newspapers. *[chuckles]* You can't call the shots on these things. There's no script in life, you know. Except for today; there are art schools on every corner, and the opportunities have improved greatly on becoming an artist. Any man who wants to become an artist today has the opportunity of finding it almost anywhere, because it's the age of mass selling. It wasn't that way when I was younger. It was tougher, and I had to do it on my own. I used the dismemberment method. I took a hand from Caniff, and a head and spine from Raymond, because I liked his flexibilities—he could bend his figures. His figures moved, they had life; that's what I wanted. So I took from Raymond, unashamedly. I never really kept it, because I took what he had, and I blended it with

what I had. And I had something, just like you have something. I don't know what it is, but if you can snatch something from the next guy, who's had the experience, take it! Because that's all you're lacking. If you lack the experience, take it from a guy who has it. Because if you can't go to a place where they teach it to you properly, take it on your own, and help it fortify what you have. Something's going to come out of it; something with your imprint, something with your fingerprints. I mean, Gershwin's songs are fingerprints, Alex Raymond's drawings were fingerprints. And they're indelible, and they're immortal, because they were him. I don't know what you've got, but it's the same damn thing. It's an immortal thing. Whatever you put your stamp on is going to be you, for all time. And not only that, people are going to recognize it. They're gonna say, "You did that." And if it's good, they'll say, "You're good." And if it's bad, they'll say, "Boy, you need a little more instruction." [laughter] But it's gonna be you, and that's the magic of it. I believe that whatever a man touches, that's the magic of being a man. If a man touches a gun, or a man touches a pen, he gives magic to that object. That object becomes an extension of himself. That object does something that it can't do itself. That's the magic of being a man, and I feel that's what I've done in my own way. And nothing more than that; just a matter of being stimulated, and maybe settling some inner battle that I've had inside myself. And I've just let it go at that.

**AUDIENCE:** How does the process work when you're about to start a new strip with Gardner Fox or Stan Lee or somebody. Do they give you the outline, and tell you how to do that in each panel, or...?

**KIRBY:** Well, in the case of Marvel, most of the plots, I handle myself. It's easy enough to do it after 30 years. I would discuss it with Stan, I would tell him what I was going to put in it, and it was either approved, or I would change it, you know, to maybe further the plot. In my case, it was done that way. I've always done my own stories. I've never done anything else.

**AUDIENCE:** How did you and Lee first get together?

**KIRBY:** I applied for a job. [laughter]

**AUDIENCE:** You're probably most famous as the best of the action artists. Do you enjoy putting in more frames of action, just for the sake of having a good fight scene, or do you like it only when it's instrumental in the plot?

**KIRBY:** I like it when it serves the story. For instance, if it serves the story, I'll have a sort of choreographed action. I'll choreograph the thing out like a ballet. In other words, if Captain America hits a man and he falls to the floor, and some guy is coming up behind Cap, he'll already know what he's going to do with this guy. It all becomes one big dance; it becomes a ballet, and it's acted out on the paper. Of course, the limited amount of space is frustrating. It's not what it could be. I think that's what comes out of my drawing. It's just not what it could be. I think comics is a powerful, basic medium, and it hasn't had its full application yet. Maybe I'll never give it that application, but I feel frustrated in that respect, that the power of comics actually hasn't been utilized. And it can be utilized in a very sometimes awesome way.

**AUDIENCE:** Aside from yourself, who do you think is the greatest living comic artist? [laughter]

**KIRBY:** I'm not gonna answer that. The only thing I'll say is, find a guy with an ego and he can answer that.

**AUDIENCE:** How would you say working at DC is different than working at Marvel?

**KIRBY:** Well, technically it doesn't differ, because I work from my house, I've got a studio in the house, and I send the stuff in. That's the way it was at Marvel. I would live in some suburb, and maybe once in a while, twice a month, I'd go into the city, see all the people, and get the heck scared out of me, and run home. Maybe that's the way it is here. I like it. There's been so much tumult in my life, that the experience of being isolated is very fresh to me. And I suppose I'll get bored with it sooner or later, because I'm living on top of the last of the teenage condors, and we're beginning to bug each other. [chuckles]

**AUDIENCE:** What character's your favorite, and which one do you identify with?

**KIRBY:** Well, I identify with the Thing, if you must know. [laughter, sustained applause] Despite his looks, I think he's a very heart-warming character. And I try to portray him that way.

I don't identify with characters. I feel that I identify with using the characters. The characters themselves are a challenge. I explained to some people in the back that characters are like the weapons. I mean, they're useless, unless you use them in a very

(previous page) Kirby's write-up from the 1970 Comic-Con program book, by the late Shel Dorf.

(below) An uninked ballet in pencil, from the splash page of *Captain America* #104 (Aug. 1968).

Captain America TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.

20/100  
C.A. DRAWING  
#104

CAP AMERICA - BACK FROM ISLE OF EXILES  
IS LIVING IT UP WITH GROUP OF DETERMINED KILLERS -  
HE'S BACK IN ACTION



## IMMORTAL PENCILING



ODIN

JACK KIRBY





# THE ONSLAUGHT OF THE NEW!

From old tech to new; Kirby's *Thor* evolved as Jack's storytelling desires matured. Below are pencils from the "Tales of Asgard" story in *Journey Into Mystery* #112 (Jan. 1965), and (next page) more pencil art from *Thor* #166 (July 1969). The later level of technology was nowhere to be found in the character's earliest adventures, but *Journey Into Mystery* #120 (Sept. 1965, bottom row) seems to be a starting point for Kirby adding high-tech to the strip, with both a collage, and some of his trademark scientific gizmos showing up.

Thor, Loki, Odin TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.

by Shane Foley

Many words have been written comparing Jack Kirby's *Thor* to his *New Gods* series. This short piece seeks to show that Jack's changing appreciation of the theme of the gods on Earth is apparent in *Thor*, both in elements of plotting and artwork.

As most '60s Marvel fans know, the *Fantastic Four* was the only strip that Jack commenced and remained with. All others he started, he then left in the hands of others so he could move on. When the initial explosion of new features was over, it was *Thor* that Jack decided to return to for his regular assignment. In reading these early *Thors*, it seems fairly obvious that it was his interest in the Norse mythology that drew him to it. He had begun "Tales of Asgard" a few months earlier in *Journey Into Mystery* #97, which Stan Lee admits was "90% Jack's plots" [interview with Roy Thomas in *Comic Book Artist* #2, page 13]. While the lead *Thor* feature often had him in conflict with more mainstream type Marvel super-villains, the Asgard feature retold Norse parables and stories and was consistently set in the mythological realm of Asgard. Soon, the elements of this back-up feature found their way more and more into the main story,

where the contrast between the "ancient ways" of Asgard and the elements of the modern world were often in focus.

Then in the mid-'60s, Jack had a renaissance. Both his art and interest in technology exploded in a new direction, and it was here that I believe there was a problem for him with *Thor*.

What do we see? As Jack changed his style in the mid-'60s, the initial results were tremendous and the work looks like he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

The *Fantastic Four* evolved easily with Jack's increasing fascination with technology. It was there that his first "new technological gods"—the Inhumans, Galactus and the Surfer, the Black Panther, and Prester John—appeared.

In *Thor*, Kirby seemed just as inspired. The storylines involved the Absorbing Man, Hercules, Pluto, and a mystic Demon, while "Tales of Asgard" had the celestial Viking ship sail on its marvelous "Quest"—brilliant stories, beautifully told, with the Asgardian backdrop used loosely and to full advantage.

In these stories, we note how Jack attacked his visual representation of his gods. Never was he interested in looking "authentically ancient." He wanted the illusion of "ancient Norse," but this was secondary to a real feeling of power and "otherworldly-ness."

Asgard never looked just like an old city. It was glorious, strong and alien, yet usually with enough flotsam around (shields, flags, swords and spears, blazing torches, etc.) to give the impression of an ancient, if unworldly city. When Jack drew Olympus with Zeus and his gods, they wore togas and sported leaf-wreaths on their heads and used harps, yet rather than looking like a group of theater actors, they looked every inch to be powerful gods, as befitted the story Jack was telling.

Super technology in the *Fantastic Four* and on Earth. Otherworldly power in Asgard. Yet even here in these wonderful *Thors*, we see Jack's "new" approach—his fascination with super-science and technology—creeping in.

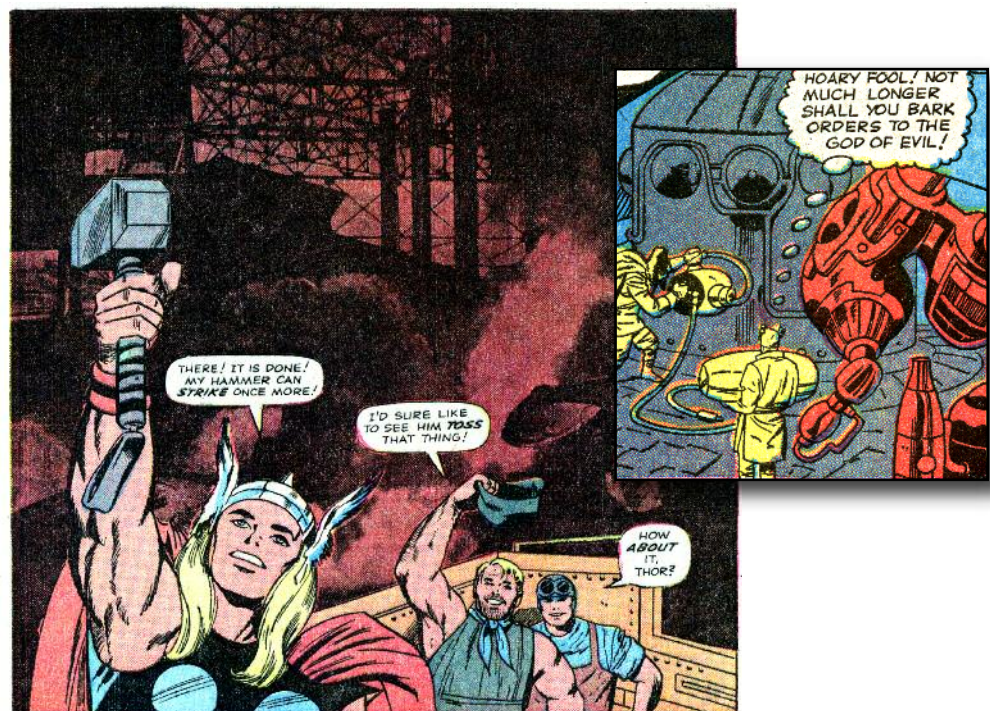
In the earliest "Asgard" features, the myth of mankind's beginning, as well as elements such as Yggdrasill, the protective tree around the Earth, were recounted. (The first "TOA" in *JIM/Thor* #97.) But already by *Thor* #122, Jack ejected any continuity with this and showed during Thor's time travelling escapade with journalist Hobbs a more "evolutionary" view of the Earth and the universe's beginnings.

Thor's hammer was said to have had mystical, Asgardian origins, yet in *Thor* #120, the power of the fires of the Pittsburgh furnaces were sufficient to heal Thor's ruined hammer; a strange blending of two worlds indeed.

In the same issue, we see Ularic the Warlock's parlor looking very "technological" in places (see example at left). Still, most of the time, Jack drew the environment around this "technology" to give it the feel of being something ancient. It all looked so right!

It was around this time that, in my opinion, Jack's interest in the ancient mythology as a basis for his storytelling peaked, but then died, replaced by a desire to tread new ground and leave the old behind.

After Pluto and Hercules (climaxing in *Thor* #130—concurrent with *FF* #53), Thor in one sense went back to being the 'old' Thor—that is, though he was now depicted in Jack's new cosmic mode, he was again an ancient hero outside of Asgard thrust into a modern setting. Rigel, the Recorder, and Ego, followed by the High Evolutionary (#131-135) were thoroughly modern Kirby creations, springing not from any roots in ancient myth but from the same creative techno-fountain as Galactus. After these issues, Thor does indeed confront Ulik and Trolls, but of equal importance to the story is the power of a very technological



right) The book of mythology young Adrian Day had on his bookshelf.

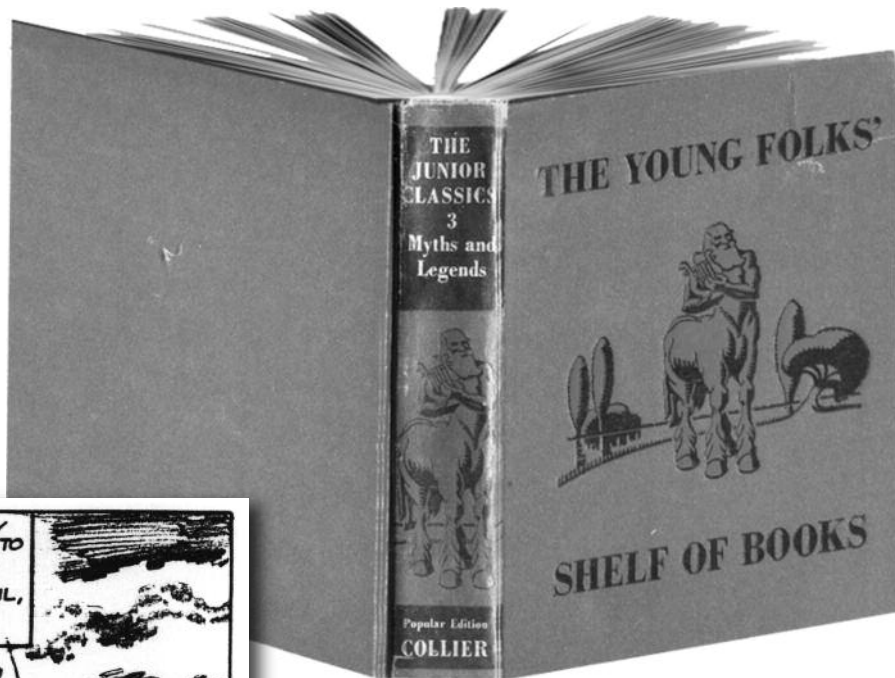
*The Mythology of the Mighty Thor,*  
by Adrian Day

(below) Loki schemes in isolation, in pencils from *Thor* #147 (Dec. 1967).

(next page, bottom) Adrian's homemade Mjolnir and Norn Stones.

Loki, Thor TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.

Joseph Campbell was the greatest proponent of mythology in the 20th Century. He had no religious affiliation but he embraced all religions, often speaking of the common mythic structure that informs them all. Though revered academically and recognized by many as the leading authority on mythology, his views were unavoidably heretical to the devout practitioners of western faith.



MEANWHILE IN LIMBO, LOKI FRET'S ON HIS INABILITY TO USE HIS CUNNING-- BUT RASCALLY POWERS

For many, “mythology” carries the inference of falsehood, typically associated with pizza and fairy tales. Campbell understood mythology differently. To him, the purpose of any myth was to reveal truths; deep truths—truths than can’t be solved with equations or examined under a microscope. Where most people of faith get in trouble, according to Campbell, is in substituting denotation for connotation. They hold the stories themselves as sacred rather than the truths behind the stories.

Jack Kirby and Joseph Campbell, it would seem, had a great deal in common. In the early 1960s, Jack Kirby was just waking up to the power of storytelling as a way to “connote truth.” Said Jack, “I didn’t want to tell fairy tales. I wanted to tell things as they are. But I wanted to tell them in an entertaining way. And I told it in the *Fantastic Four* and in *Sgt. Fury*. If I wanted to tell the entire truth about the world, I could do it with *Robinson Crusoe*, and do *Robinson Crusoe* for the rest of my life.” While Jack certainly did not confine this realization to traditional mythic figures, the odd mixture of his own Judaic and Germanic origins was a large influence in his propensity for patriarchs and gods.

Specifically, Kirby seemed to have a fondness for Norse mythology and Thor in particular. Both had surfaced in his work several times over the course of his career leading up to his association with Stan Lee in the '60s. While exploring potential characters to expand the Marvel line, he must have dragged them out again.

In 1962, *Journey Into Mystery* was just a monster/sci-fi title with sagging sales. Stan Lee was looking for ideas to infuse it with the same kind of success he was seeing with his newer titles. Superheroes were experiencing a revival and placing a character like Thor as the lead story in a title that was already going down the tubes seemed like little risk.

Stan and Jack did not consistently appear as the writing team for Thor until *J.I.M.* #101, though they were clearly shepherding the book even when not directly involved in the finished product. While Stan has always assumed full credit for the creation of the series, striking similarities between Marvel’s Thor and Jack’s earlier utilization of the character are strong evidence that the character’s conception was more Kirby than Lee.

At first, as in previous incarnations, the larger aspects of Thor’s Norse heritage were understated. Though Stan and Jack’s own embellishments may have had their roots in the comic book tradition of Captain Marvel, they were equally appropriate within the ethos of its mythic origins. Don Blake

## SERPENT IN THE GARDEN

(below) Jack's penchant for creating powerful female characters was in full force with Eev from *Devil Dinosaur* #6 (Sept. 1978). Though this series is not that highly regarded among Kirby fans, perhaps another look is in order?

All characters TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc.

*Devil Dinosaur and the Satanic Imagination of Jack Kirby, by Jarret Keene*

Many of Jack Kirby's best concepts are inversions of legends, myths, folktales, and, in particular, stories from the *Bible*. His most obvious and resonant biblical turnaround is the conflict between the Silver Surfer and Galactus. (Surfer is the fallen angel who, rather than lead humans into temptation, protects them from Galactus, who is God, albeit a World-Eater instead of the Creator.) Late in his career, Kirby continued to tinker with ideas from the Old Testament, especially those in the book of Genesis. His most successful effort includes *Devil Dinosaur* #6 and #7, a two-part story that recasts Adam and Eve's expulsion from Paradise as a harrowing escape from a homicidal, computerized, alien intelligence.

I'm going to elaborate on this in three ways. First, I'm going to show that, through the character of Eev, Kirby recasts the biblical Eve as the less-passive, more Kirby-esque, tough woman Lilith. Second, I'll show that Kirby twists the Fall from a story of Adam and Eve's weakness into Adam and Eve's freedom from a vicious, technological god. Finally, I'll explore Kirby's relationship to technology as developed in this two-part Adam-and-Eve story in *Devil Dinosaur*.



Set in the Valley of Flame circa the Mesozoic Era, *Devil Dinosaur* is Kirby's stab at prehistoric fiction, a sub-genre of sci-fi. Like *Kamandi's* Earth A.D., the Valley of Flame is a vast, imaginative playground, minus the mutations. Instead, the terrain is overrun with terrible lizards (Thunder Horn, Iguanodon, Bone-Back) and brimming with various tribes of dawn-men (small-folk, hill-folk, killer-folk). No one enlivens genres like Kirby, and the Valley, though it's no Asgard, hosts a spectacular rogues gallery: Long-Legs (giant spider), the Swarmers (giant ants), "sky demons" (alien invaders), the Hag of the Pits, and the dino-riders. The title's extraordinary cast is matched by the ambitious underpinnings of Kirby's stories. For instance, issue #3 ("Giant") challenges the taboo-entrenched notion of childhood innocence. Indeed, Kirby's juvenile literature is never completely juvenile, and "Eev" (issue #6) and "Demon-Tree" (#7) confirm the King's position as a dramatic and thought-provoking comic-book auteur.

"Eev" begins with a quirky potentiality: "The greatest story ever told could have begun with dinosaurs, demons, and giant ants. Of course, there had to be a man... and a woman called Eev!" Having just sent the sky-demons packing, Stone-Hand (the "Adam" character), White-Hair (an elder dawn-man), and Devil encounter the eponymous character, a prehistoric pretty who is intent on bashing the Swarmers with a rock and piercing their skulls with a sharp instrument. She is not the passive "Eve" of the *Bible*. Eev is assertive, outspoken, an individual ("Stand clear! I don't fear these Swarmers!"). Stone-Hand, the story's Adam, calls her "arrogant" and "loud." As such, Eev resembles the Jewish archetype of Lilith, which requires elaboration.

The story of Lilith in Jewish folklore grew out of a single contradictory passage in the Old Testament: "Male and Female He created them" (Gen. 1:27). Since God's creation of Adam and Eve are sequential and distinct, rabbis—working under the assumption that every word in the *Bible* is true—resolved the contradiction. The rabbis interpreted the first passage as referring to the creation of Adam's first wife, whom they named Lilith. (Thus, many "literalists" consider Eve to be Adam's second wife.)

This interpretation led to the development of the legend of Lilith, whose name appears in the *Bible* only once: "Yea, Lilith shall repose there" (Isa. 34:14). In the Talmud, a post-biblical text, and in the apocryphal Testament of Solomon, Lilith is

Book *Gods*

Issue# 2

pg.#

9

When it comes to taking a concept and turning it on its head, nobody can touch Jack Kirby. Whether it's a fable, legend, biblical character, or a "new" god of some sort, he spun the kind of folklore that his readers will be passing on for generations. To wit:

**(this page)** Pencils from *Eternals* #2 (originally titled *Return of the Gods*), detailing an entire heretofore unknown race that once ruled Earth.

**(pages 36-37)** Two-page spread from *Eternals* #3. The Space Gods have returned, and you better hope they're happy!

**(page 38)** Jimmy Olsen #143 brought back the iconic Frankenstein and Dracula characters, Kirby style...

**(page 39)** ...while Olsen #144 dredged up the Loch Ness Monster.

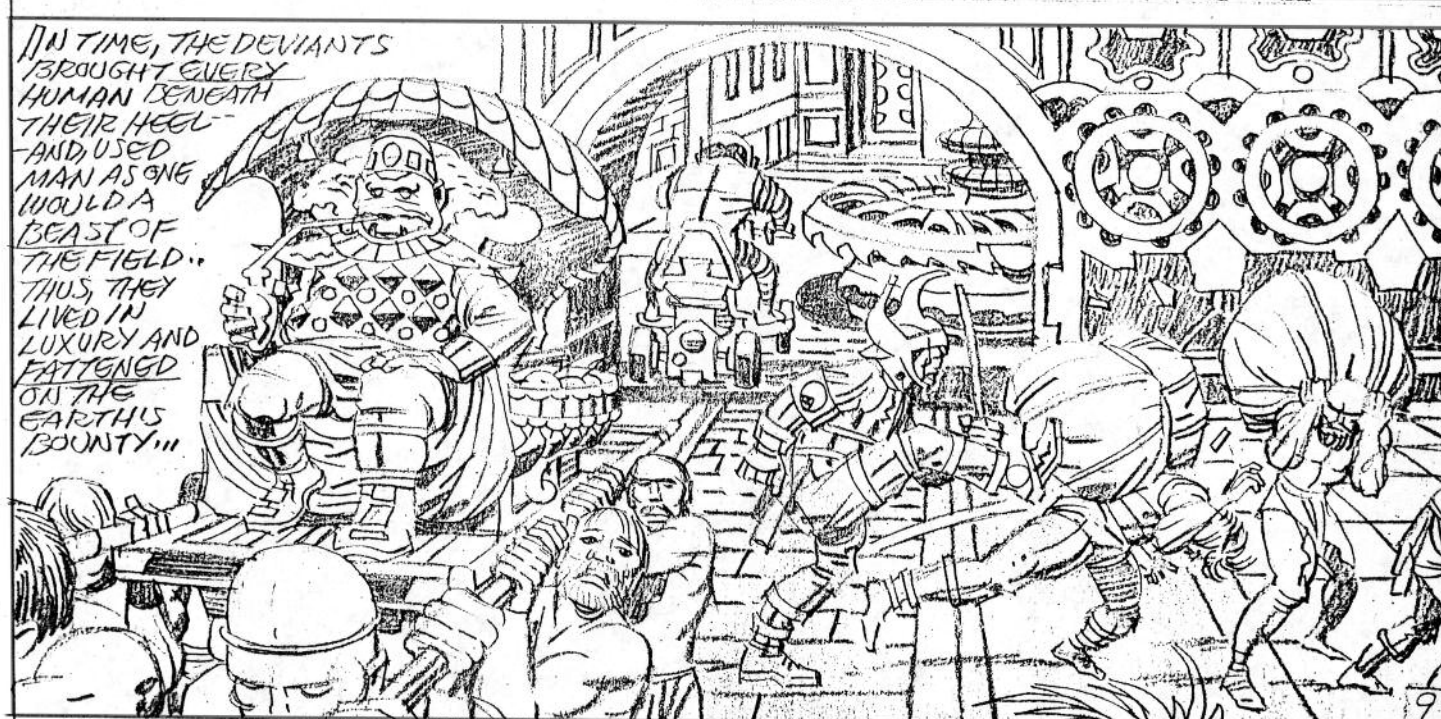
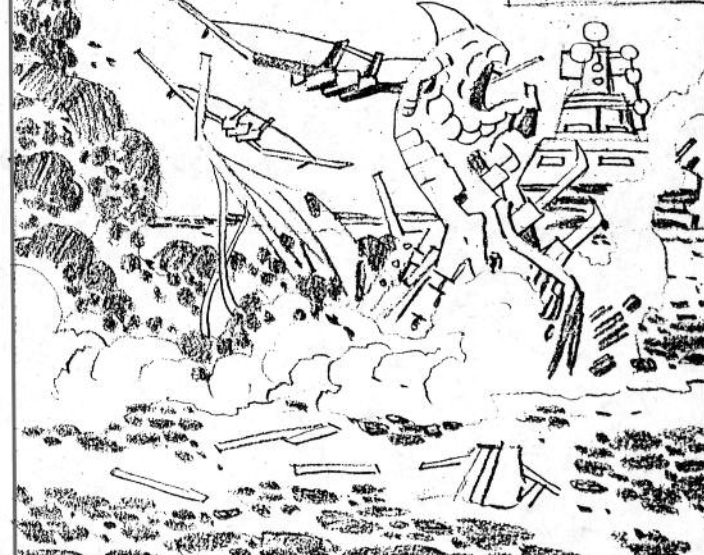
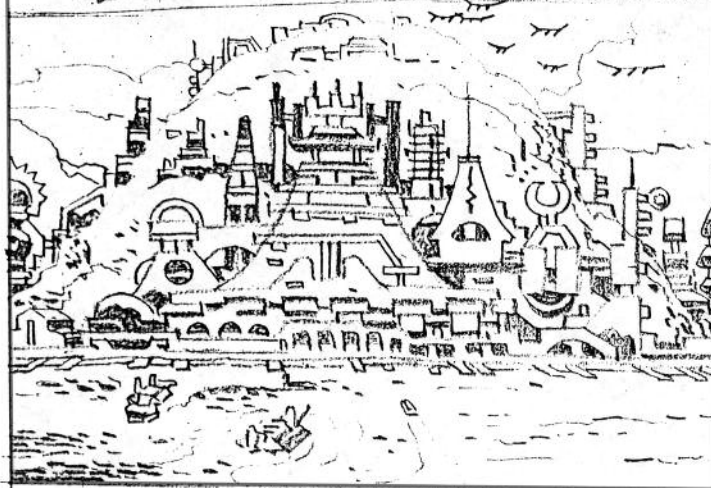
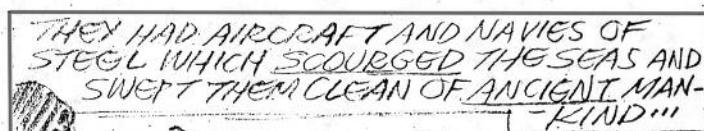
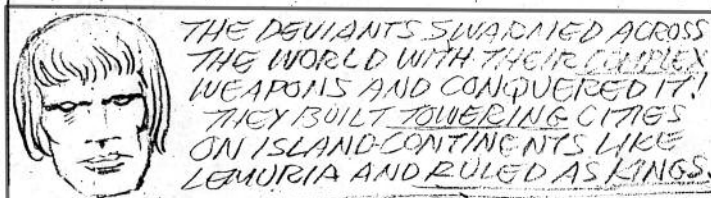
**(pages 40-41)** Kirby's "Jericho" drawing adds a new spin on the Old Testament story of Joshua, who brought the legendary city's walls tumbling down with sound waves.

**(pages 42-43)** Two pencil pages for *Atlas* #1, which eventually appeared in DC's *First Issue Special* #1.

**(pages 44-45)** The "Young Gods of Supertown" was a quick filler used when DC expanded *New Gods* to a lengthier format. Had the comic continued under Kirby, we'd likely have seen Fastbak in more than his two appearances.

**(pages 46-47)** *New Gods* #9 pages, as Lightray shines, and Orion unleashes his fury.

**(pages 48-49)** Merlin, King Arthur, and Morgaine LeFey served as the backdrop for these pages from *Demon* #1.



Eternals TM & ©2011 Marvel Characters, Inc. Jericho TM & ©2011 Jack Kirby Estate. Demon, Jimmy Olsen, Superman, Fastbak, New Gods, Atlas TM & ©2011 DC Comics.

SUDDENLY,  
 STARING DOWN AT A FRIGHTENED CHILD WAS THE FACE  
 THAT WOULD CHANGE ITS DESTINY... IT WAS THE FACE OF A  
 HUMAN LIZARD... -- A CRUEL REPLICAN OF THE CREST UPON ITS  
 HELMET... THE CHILD, ATLAS WOULD NEVER FORGET IT... THAT FACE  
 WOULD MAKE HIM AN ETERNAL

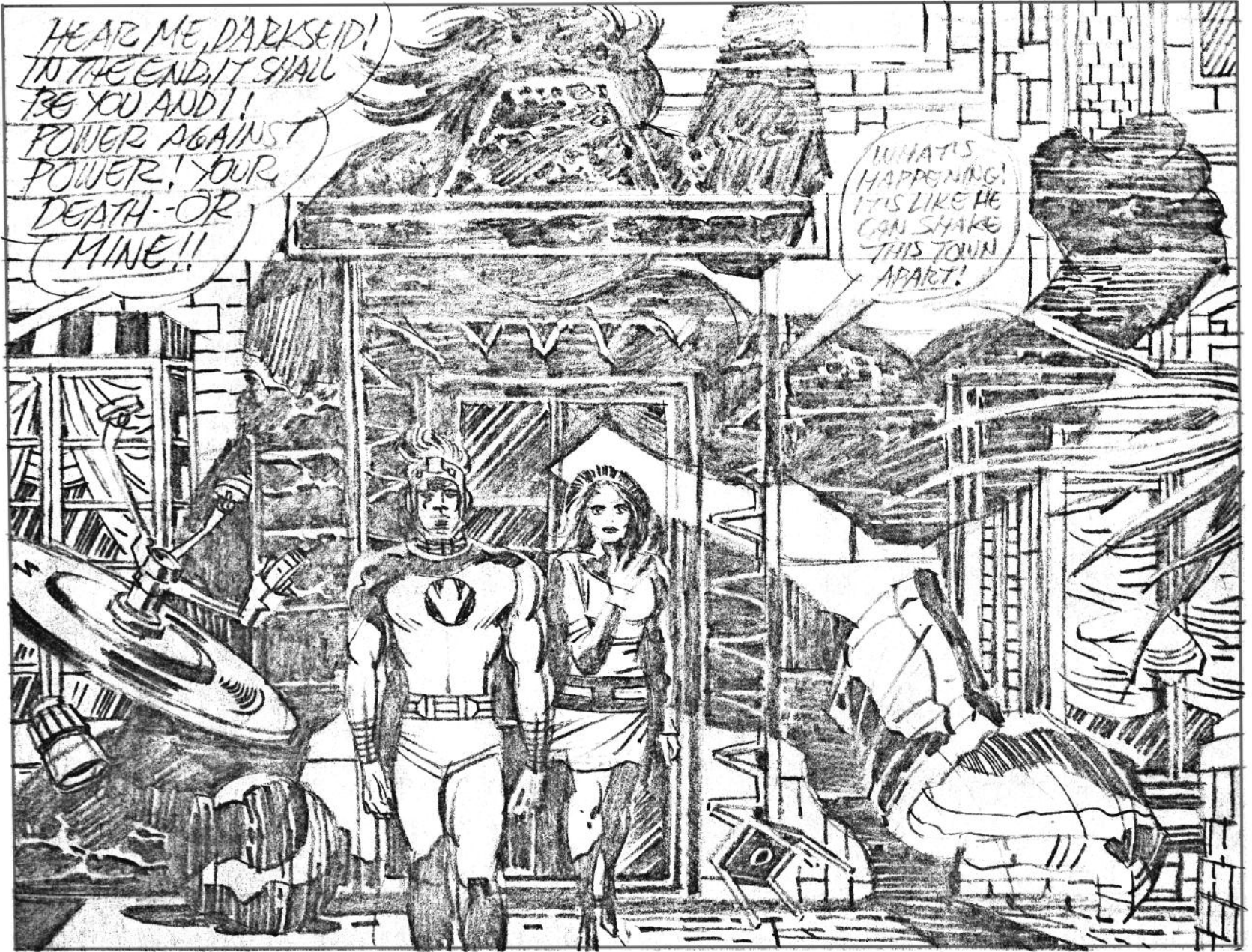
# AVENGER!!!

CHAPTER  
 THREE

LET  
 ME  
 GO!

YOU'LL  
 MAKE A  
 MY SLAVE  
 ONE DAY,  
 CUB!!!





# WE ALL LIVE IN HAPPYLAND

In Kirby's original splash for *New Gods* #1 (Feb. 1971, below), why didn't he leave room for the issue's indicia? On the opposite page, you can see the published version where the sword behind the goblin's head doesn't line up. Otherwise, it was a pretty clever patch-job by DC's production department.

New Gods TM & ©2011 DC Comics.

*Jack Kirby and the JFK Assassination, by Robert Guffey*

In the Summer 2006 issue of *The Jack Kirby Collector*, Jack Kirby biographer Mark Evanier reports an intriguing comment once made by Kirby that has far-reaching implications in regards to reassessing the real world influences Kirby brought to bear on his most challenging works of the 1970s.

Let's begin by quoting Evanier's reportage in full:

*One time, we got to talking about the assassination of President Kennedy. That event had an impact on everyone who was around at the time, at least on their personal life, so I was not surprised to hear Jack say that it had a profound effect on him. My little eyebrows shot up, however, when he said that it had a major impact on his work.*

*That, I had never sensed... and I still am not sure what he meant by that. He was unable to cite an example. He was definitely not referring to the one short story he did for Esquire years later chronicling the*

*events in the life of Jack Ruby after Kennedy was shot.*

*With that in mind, I went back one time and reread everything Kirby had done around the time of the Kennedy assassination. The work that would have been on his drawing table around or after 11/22/63 included the Thing-Hulk battle in *Fantastic Four* #25-26 and the issues soon after, the coming of *The Cobra* and *Mr. Hyde* to the *Thor* strip, *X-Men* #5 or 6 and *The Avengers* #5 or 6.*

*Can you see anything in those stories to suggest one of the creators was deeply moved by the murder of John F. Kennedy? I can't. Even reading forward a year or two, I don't get a sense of the turmoil it brought to this nation. There are no storylines dwelling on [that] kind of upheaval. In *Fantastic Four*, Stan and Jack did a tale called "Death of a Hero" in which the father of Sue Storm was killed. It was a moving story but you'd have to stretch farther than *Mr. Fantastic Four* to connect it to the death of J.F.K. in any way.*

*And yet, Kirby said what he said and his grief at the death of our 35th president is undeniable. I'm sure he must have put it somewhere into his work. I just can't figure out where. If I ever do, that may turn out to be my favorite Jack Kirby work.*

I understand why Evanier's "little eyebrows" shot up upon hearing this comment. To get to the bottom of this mysterious statement, my initial instinct probably would have been to do what Evanier did: re-read the stories Kirby was working on at the time of the assassination. The fallacy in this approach, however, is to assume that an event as tragic as the assassination of John F. Kennedy would *immediately* manifest itself in someone's work. Artists are like anyone else. Sometimes it can take years to even acknowledge that a tragedy has occurred, much less express one's grief in a meaningful way.

Two examples, both referring specifically to the JFK assassination:

Richard Matheson, author of the classic novels *I Am Legend*, *The Shrinking Man*, and *What Dreams May Come*, among numerous others, once gave an interview in which he discussed the genesis of his classic short story "Duel." This suspense story, published in the April 1971 issue of *Playboy*, was subsequently adapted by Matheson into a screenplay that became Steven Spielberg's first film (and, some contend, one of his best). The film, like the story, is entitled *Duel*, features Dennis Weaver in his most challenging role, and premiered on ABC television in 1971 to great critical acclaim. Many critics contend it's one of the finest films ever made for television.



Though the story was not actually written until 1970, Matheson came up with the idea on November 22, 1963. If not for Matheson revealing this in the interview, one would never imagine that the subtext of this relentless thriller involved the JFK assassination. Matheson said that he and a friend were at a golf course in Simi Valley, CA when they heard about the President's assassination. They abandoned the game immediately and drove home in a deep depression. On the way back home, for no apparent reason, a truck began terrorizing them on the freeway. For awhile it seemed as if the driver wasn't going to let up, then pulled away and vanished as fast as he'd appeared. This disturbing incident, along with the tragic news about the President, combined to create an overall sense of unease in Matheson. Matheson said he grabbed an envelope and on the back of it jotted down an idea about a

man stalked relentlessly by a semi during a road trip, then forgot about it. Only years later did he stumble across the scrap of paper, remember the momentous events surrounding that day, and begin writing the story. The ubiquitous paranoia that pervades both the story and the film, the sudden sense of one's tidy universe having been turned upside down, stems from the emotions Matheson and the entire world experienced on 11/22/63. But the important point is that it took Matheson seven years to write the story (*McBride 199-200*).

Example the second: Jim Garrison, the District Attorney of New Orleans when Kennedy was assassinated, brought in David Ferrie—a private investigator believed by Garrison to have been involved in the assassination—for questioning on the very day of the murder. Even though there were numerous reasons to follow through on the

investigation of Ferrie, Garrison stood down when the FBI announced publicly that Ferrie was not considered to be a viable suspect (*Garrison 10*). As dramatized in Oliver Stone's film *JFK*, Garrison promptly forgot about the assassination and went about his life as did almost everyone else in America. Not until encouraged by a private conversation with Senator Russell Long, a conversation in which Long expressed great mistrust in the findings of the Warren Commission, did he resume his investigation of Ferrie and his cohorts (*Garrison 13-14*). The essential point is that even Garrison, a man directly involved in investigating the assassination from the very first day, experienced an emotional delayed reaction that prevented him from seeing the facts of the case until three years after it had occurred.

Therefore, it's logical to suggest that Kirby might not have been emotionally ready to deal with the true implication of the assassination until many years later. The place to look for Kirby's reaction to the JFK assassination lay not in his Marvel work of the 1960s, but in his most important work for DC Comics in the early 1970s, one year after Garrison's highly publicized trial of Clay Shaw, the only man ever brought to trial for the assassination of JFK. It's likely that Kirby was paying attention to Garrison's much-publicized trial, just as many Americans were at that time.

The reason that Kirby was "unable to cite an example" to Evanier is probably because no one specific example existed. Kirby was no doubt referring to an overall tonal change in his work, a veritable paradigm shift that must have been as tumultuous to Kirby's world as Kennedy's assassination was to the country. Let's return to Mark Evanier's words for a moment: "I don't get a sense [from his early Marvel work] of the turmoil [the JFK assassination] brought to this nation. There are no storylines dwelling on [that] kind of upheaval."

Turmoil. Upheaval. What Kirby books contain more turmoil and upheaval than his Fourth World stories? The Fourth World is a complex quartet composed of four separate books, *The Forever People*, *The New Gods*, *Mister Miracle* and *Jimmy Olsen*. The cornerstone book is *The New Gods*, the first issue of which begins with the apocalyptic sentence, "There came a time when the old gods died!" Just as the subtext of the Matheson story involved our struggle to survive in a world where our sense of order has been tipped over onto its side, the recurrent theme throughout Kirby's Fourth World stories—a theme not repeated in many other Kirby works—is that of the shallow facade of everyday life being ripped aside to reveal something far darker underneath. Not only does Kirby depict puny human beings trying to maintain their sanity in the face of such sudden life-altering events, but demonstrates that even gods have a hard time adjusting to new realities.

David Lynch, another groundbreaking artist fascinated with the JFK assassination (in fact, he once wrote an unproduced screenplay about JFK's relationship with Marilyn Monroe based on Anthony Summers's book *Goddess*), begins his 1986 noir masterpiece *Blue Velvet* with a defining scene about post-assassination America: We begin with the establishing shot of a picture-perfect front lawn outside a suburban household surrounded by a white picket fence somewhere in the American South, then track downwards through the black soil





WHAT'S  
OLD

IS NEW  
AGAIN!

# INCIDENTAL ICONOGRAPHY

An ongoing analysis of Kirby's visual shorthand,  
and how he inadvertently used it to develop his characters,  
by Sean Kleefeld

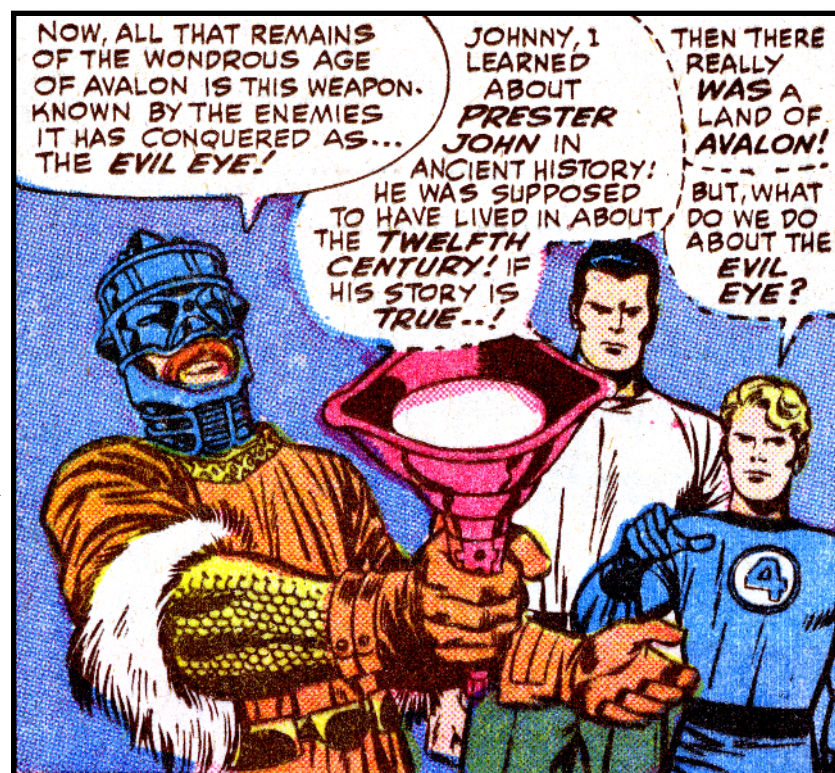


Jack Kirby pulled from any number of sources for inspiration, and the myths and legends of old were not to be looked over. You may have seen something about his take on Thor lately in a theater. One of his lesser known updates to an old legend is that of Prester John, who he'd written in to *Fantastic Four* #54.

The original Prester John legends started becoming popular in the 12th century, but had probably been circulating for generations prior. There are many conflicting stories about the character, but he's generally depicted as a just and honorable king that ruled a small Christian empire amid the Muslims of Eastern or Central Asia. Because he ruled in such a "strange" and "exotic" land by European standards, he was frequently also given many magical treasures, everything from a mirror that was able to see anywhere, to the Fountain of Youth.

Prester John's appearance in the *Fantastic Four* stems from the Human Torch's quest to release his girlfriend Crystal and the Inhumans, who were trapped behind a Negative Barrier. The Torch stumbled onto an ancient crypt quite by accident and discovered the sleeping Prester John in the tattered remains of his armor.

The bulk of his armor is drawn as chain mail. Though first invented around 400 B.C., it remained in use for centuries. Certainly by the 12th century it was not uncommon for protection—it is repeatedly shown in the Bayeux Tapestry from around that time—though people began favoring plate armor in the 1200s. Interestingly, though, Prester John is presented much more serenely in other, older depictions, often in kingly robes and cloaks.



Jack's interpretation of Prester John, at first blush, seems unique from any other illustrations of him. Outside comics, he's almost always shown with a long beard and a stately crown. One 13th century depiction, *The Battle of Gengis Khan and Prester John*, does feature John in chain mail with a red tunic over it, but the helmet and crown are wildly different than what Jack drew. In fact, the helmet Jack designed does not seem to have a direct counterpart in medieval history. It does bear some similarity to a spangenhelm design, some of which sport eye protection, but they also tend to use chain mail to protect the neck and not the solid plating Jack drew.

There were two Anglo-Saxon cemeteries dating to the 6th or 7th century excavated in Sutton Hoo, near Suffolk, England in 1939. There were a great many artifacts uncovered there and it was a significant find that helped fill in some gaps of history from around a period previously clouded by legends. One of the objects found was an elaborate ceremonial helmet (above left). It featured a fairly solid construction around the entire head not unlike the one Jack's Prester John wears, though it also covers the mouth area as well.

The mask, I think, bears mentioning here because part of the ornamentation includes a bushy mustache—much like Jack's Prester John. It's impossible to say for sure that Jack drew inspiration from this mask but, for a little context, excavation on the Sutton Hoo site was re-opened in 1965, not long before *Fantastic Four* #54 would have been started. General interest in the excavation would have been piqued again, and news stories most certainly would have passed by Jack's eyes. The accompanying photo of the helmet ran as a full page in *Life* magazine.

Prester John's appearance in *FF* #54 is abrupt both in his introduction and his departure. He pops on to the scene with little fanfare on page 11 and, though he remains a significant presence throughout the remainder of the issue (his torn garments miraculously repairing themselves by page 12) he is absent and unmentioned in #55. In fact, he remains absent from comics entirely for nearly a decade until his Evil Eye is used as the main plot point for Steve Englehart's *Avengers/Defenders War* in 1973.

[Editor's Note: Interestingly, the Evil Eye is similar in design to the wand Kirby included in his 1966 "Ramses/Black Sphinx" concept drawing, shown here. *FF* #54 shipped in 1966, so we're not sure which came first.]



As shown in the Kirby Museum Newsletter last issue, another piece entitled "The Golden Age of Prester John" was found stapled to a pitch entitled *Three Presentations*. It also included two story premise sketches showing John investigating a UFO base and encountering Count Dracula. The character design is very similar to his Marvel version, though Jack's removed the fur-lined sleeves and trimmed down the helmet a bit. Jack's also given him a "demon horse" and some sort of feathered, saw-toothed lizard/bird. Though these pieces are undated, his accompanying Raam piece (seen last issue) is marked 1972. These concepts don't seem to have gone anywhere—if they were done for DC, where Jack was doing the bulk of his work at that time, it's possible that "The Golden Age of Prester John" was rejected for the similarity to the Marvel character.

Jack returned to Prester John one final time in 1975, after he returned to Marvel, by drawing the cover to *Marvel Two-In-One* #12. John appears much as he did in *Fantastic Four* #54, so it seems likely Jack was given some reference material. Though inker Frank Giacoia did make a few alterations from Jack's pencils (seen in *TJKC* #44, and a detail atop this page), he left Prester John's design intact.

Though Jack spent little time working on the character, and he was neglected for many years, Prester John found some notoriety as he became a regular character in *Cable & Deadpool* back in 2005, sporting much the same iconography Jack gave him decades earlier. ★

Sean blogs at <http://kleefeldoncomics.blogspot.com>, and is the author of *Comic Book Fanthropology* available from [www.comicbookfanthropology.com](http://www.comicbookfanthropology.com).



# MARTY PASKO INTERVIEW

(right) A recent portrait of Pasko by *Kobra* collaborator Michael Netzer (then "Nasser").

(below) Original art from *Kobra* #1 showing D. Bruce Berry's lettering of Kirby's original, unused dialogue, which got covered by pasted-up balloons (see next page). Note the redrawn face (by Pablo Marcos) and the unretouched Kirby face in the last panel.

(next page, bottom) Cover to *Kobra* #2.

*Kobra*, Dr. Fate TM & ©2011 DC Comics.

Conducted by Jon B. Cooke

[Martin Pasko was nicknamed "Pesky Pasko" by legendary DC Comics editor Julius Schwartz, for whom he wrote for many years. He is a veteran writer and/or story-editor in a diverse array of media, including non-fiction and television, working on such shows as *Roseanne* and cult favorites *Twilight Zone* and *Max Headroom*. He helped translate many comics to TV animation, including *The Tick*, *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs*, and *Batman: The Animated Series*, for which he won a 1993 Daytime Emmy® Award. He is also a co-writer of the animated feature *Batman: Mask of The Phantasm*. Pasko has worked for many comics publishers as well, writing "Superman" in several media, including TV animation, newspaper syndication, and webisodes as well as comics, and co-created the revamp of "Dr. Fate" (shown on next page, from First Issue Special #9) that is the basis of the character's current, long-lived incarnation. He also got the thankless task of taking over Kirby's *Kobra* comic after Kirby left DC, which is the main subject of this interview, which was conducted in May 2011. It was copyedited by Martin, who currently blogs about comics and the entertainment industry at <http://martinpasko.blogspot.com/>]



THE JACK KIRBY

COLLECTOR: When did you first encounter Kirby's work?

MARTY PASKO: I first read *The Fantastic Four* when I was really, really small, and, perhaps because my own family was a bit dysfunctional, the book really turned me off (all that bickering). I was used to the DC approach, which was all very benign, with friends who didn't argue with each other much. It was unrealistic, but benign. And seeing the *Fantastic Four*—this was in the first ten issues or so—at that young age... I reacted badly to it. I didn't like it at all. I really wasn't that aware of the art. At that age, it was always more a matter of the story to me. I think that's always been a bias of mine, being a writer. To some extent my attitude has always been 'a good story can always survive bad art' but it doesn't work the other way around. Until I was much older, I wasn't art literate enough to appreciate Jack's work—the dynamism and the ways in which he would take liberties with conventional anatomy but make it work.

It was also seeing his work in the period in which he was inked by Joe Sinnott that changed my mind. I really got hooked by the imagination at work in that stuff. That's when I reassessed *Fantastic Four*, in 1968, when Jack was doing most of the plotting, so it really was his fertile imagination at work that hooked me. A few years later, when he took over *Jimmy Olsen*, that's where my real exposure to Kirby as a comics reader (as opposed to writer) happened, because I was primarily a DC reader rather than a Marvel one.

TJKC: What was DC like in the mid-'70s?

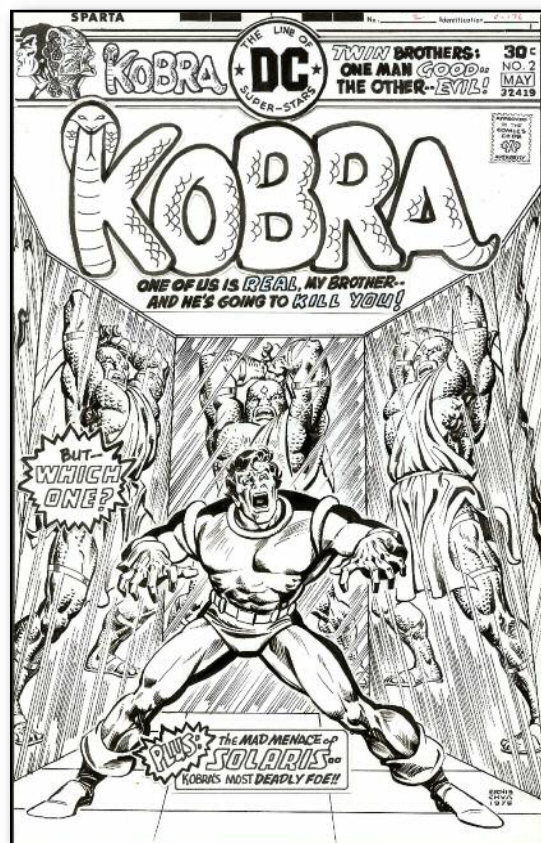
MARTY: I worked primarily for editor Julie Schwartz but I also wrote for Murray Boltinoff, Joe Orlando, and Gerry Conway. I loved working with Gerry, especially on the *First Issue Special* revamp of *Dr. Fate* with Walt Simonson. Gerry had a deal that assumed he would write all the titles he edited, but he soon realized he had bitten off a little more than he could chew, I think. And he admitted as much. So that's why his office became a really great place for younger, less experienced writers to go looking for work: Gerry quickly evolved a system whereby he would do the first issue of something as a writer and then another writer would pick it up. His first issue would function like a "pilot" script. He did that with *Man-Bat*—he did the first issue with Steve Ditko and then handed it off to me with the second issue, with art by Pablo Marcos. He did that with *Freedom Fighters* and *Metal Men*, too. Except for *Metal Men*, where Walt Simonson stuck around for a few months, those second issues usually didn't have the same quality of art as they had in the first. Then-





Publisher Carmine Infantino cancelled the *Man-Bat* title after the second issue, and after that it stated getting harder and harder for Gerry to hang onto artists. They didn't want to turn down other work and make a commitment to DC because they felt that cancellation was imminent at any moment, often capriciously and without reference to sales figures.

By the time Gerry had to do *Kobra*, Jack had already left the company. It had been planned as a



one-shot for *First Issue Special* before Carmine cancelled *that* title, and the 17 pages or so were left over in inventory. Carmine basically threw this thing, originally called *King Kobra*, at Gerry and said, "Here, do something with this." Then Carmine scheduled it as a monthly ongoing. Gerry had the feeling that, because it was a Kirby title, it wasn't going to be long for this world, so he didn't even bother doing the reworking of the first issue himself. He just handed it off to me and that was as close as I got to working with Jack in comics. It was a collaboration after the fact.

Gerry had decided the Corsican Brothers take-off was the only thing that he really wanted to preserve from Jack's *King Kobra*. The twin brothers were 65 in the original version and Gerry thought the built-in logical flaw there was that if they had a psychic link like the original Corsican Brothers—one is hurt and the other feels the pain—how has the Scotland Yard detective, who became the Jason Burr character, been unable to locate *Kobra* all these years? The set-up in the original book was that he had been searching for his twin brother for six decades because he knew his twin brother was evil. We had to contrive a way for that psychic link to have been there for a shorter amount of time, to rationalize the premise that, at the point of attack in that first issue, Jason was learning about *Kobra*'s existence for the first time, as opposed to having known about it and been trying to find *Kobra*. I think Jack, in his original concept, modeled Jason Burr (that's what we called him; he was called something else in the original) on Nayland Smith and was thinking of *Kobra* as a kind of East Indian version of Fu Manchu.

To answer your question about what it was like working at DC, it was very chaotic in those days. This was right after the formation of Warner Communications and right after DC had moved into 75 Rockefeller Plaza, and just about a year or two before Carmine got fired. *Kobra* was one of the last things done on Carmine's watch.

TJKC: Did you welcome the assignment? And were you given *carte blanche* to do what you wanted? You obviously had the art...

MARTY: Yes, and Gerry ordered some changes to the art, too, but it didn't match the Kirby art terribly well. Did I relish the assignment? To be honest, at

that point, I was happy to be working on it because Julie couldn't keep me busy enough, so anytime Gerry threw something my way I was happy to do it. Quite frankly, the alternative was to write another horror mystery anthology script for either Joe Orlando or Murray Boltinoff, whom I didn't find it particularly easy to work with. And those kinds of jobs were always more labor intensive because, for some reason, those editors required a pitch in the form of a written plot synopsis before committing to the assignment. Whereas, with Julie and Gerry, you could just go in and spitball the story, and after a half-hour you had it, you took your notes home and wrote the script, which was much easier.

What Gerry did was hand me Jack's original art and say, "What can you do with this?" I told him I didn't think the story made a lot of sense. It was a toss-off. Years later, Jack admitted as much to me. "Oh, *that*," he said. "*King Kobra*. Yeah, I had to fulfill my contract." He said, "I think I penciled it in two days." Seventeen or 18 pages in two days—that just astonished me. Anyway, all we did, basically, was have stats made from the foreign edition, because they had already shot the negatives for it, and what they did with the foreign editions would be to opaque out—they don't do it anymore, as comics haven't used negatives like that in 20 or 30 years—but at that time, they would opaque out all the lettering for the foreign publishers, and these overseas subcontractors would substitute lettering in the respective foreign languages. So I had stats of those made up, so I wouldn't be influenced by the script, and I just created a whole new story, retrofitting it to the existing art. We even moved some panels around.

The only people hearing this story who have been dismayed by it have been hardcore fans of Jack Kirby's work, and over the years they've said, "You've mutilated Kirby's vision!" And so on and so forth. So I was very, very happy to have caught up with Jack at Ruby-Spears and found out it was okay with him.

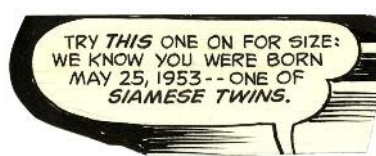
TJKC: You made an effort *not* to look at the original dialogue in the story as submitted by Jack?

MARTY: Exactly.

TJKC: Did you do much shuffling with the story?

MARTY: There was stuff that came in from left field in the original story. There was an alien spacecraft. Jack obviously had something in mind to pay off later on in the run, but since there was only the one issue, since Carmine had cut him off after the one issue, we had no idea where it was intended to go, so we devised an entirely new rationale for what it was and why it was there.

I don't think that Gerry believed we would do more than two or three issues. And, in point of fact, Carmine did cancel it after the fourth issue, but then Jenette Kahn came in and the first thing she did was revive it and it was given to Paul Levitz to edit. A lot of the inventory jobs in the mystery titles were done that way. What an inventory job was, was, if a story didn't work out for some reason, Joe Orlando would shelve it. Once a year, the accountants would come in and have to document the intended write-offs, and Joe and Murray Boltinoff would be under pressure to rework and publish as much of that stuff as possible. So they would often have their assistants write new dialogue to existing



# THE ETERNAL QUESTION

by Craig McNamara

In the hands of a lesser artist, an actionless debate over the worth of mankind would result in a pretty flat comics reading experience. Kirby, however, imbued such scenes (as in *Fantastic Four* #49, April 1966, below, or *Eternals* #6, Dec. 1976, next page) with a sense of spectacle and pageantry that kept readers riveted and engaged in the discussion.

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**F**rom the beginning, Jack Kirby's *The Eternals* series (1976) was seen by comic fans and professionals alike as a kind of extension of his uncompleted Fourth World saga.

It was a new series, for a different company, and featured all-new characters, but by its very subject matter—gods walking among men—the comparisons were inevitable. That the series putative star, Ikaris, seemed to be an avatar of Orion only strengthened the feeling that this was indeed *The New Gods* revisited, copyrights be damned.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the cancellation of the Fourth World titles at DC, Marvel probably felt the concept was a better fit in their comic line, which already boasted a thunder god and a planet-devouring demi-god, among a host of other mythical and cosmic beings.

What Jack delivered, though, was as similar to *The New Gods* as the Hulk is to Superman. *The New Gods* told of the war between New Genesis and Apokolips, a near-biblical battle between good and evil. *The Eternals* also had their own diametrically opposed adversaries, the mutated Deviants, but after the first story arc,

they became a much more passive force in the series. With one exception in the later issues, they all but vanished as antagonists. Instead, Jack used *The Eternals* to explore the foundations of mythology and legend in the world's cultures. Using the visitation of strange beings from space as a catalyst, Jack delved into Incan legends, Greek and Roman gods and even biblical history, linking them together with surprising ease.

A recurring theme in both series was the human race's struggle with the idea of otherworldly races and the expanded view of the universe it engendered. But whereas most humans seen in the *New Gods* seemed more in awe than threatened by this realization, the humans of *The Eternals* reacted with the kind of fear, suspicion and apprehension that people in the real world would exhibit if suddenly faced with beings of such unimaginable power.

In fact, upon closer examination, *The Eternals* is less a *New Gods* or even a *Thor*/Asgard redux than a further exploration of themes first posited in Kirby and Stan Lee's Galactus stories, particularly in *Fantastic Four* #48-50 (1966).<sup>2</sup> Instead of a mere two- or three-episode arc to work with, here Kirby had an open-ended series which allowed him to delve more deeply into the responses of humanity prompted by an alien visitation.

Similarities occur strongest in three main areas: the premise of each story, the Celestials/Galactus connection, and the human reactions that the events provoked.



**L**  
*"My journey is ended! This planet shall sustain me until it has been drained of all elemental life!"*

Galactus, *Fantastic Four* #48

*"The mission of the gods is now clear. This is the hour of Earth's trial!"*  
 Ajak, *The Eternals* #3

Consider the cataclysmic event that sets each story line in motion:

A monolithic figure from space arrives to pass judgement on Earth, with extinction for the human race in the balance. In *The Eternals*, that presence was Arishem of the Celestials, extraterrestrial beings who (in Kirby's backstory) long-ago experimented on apes to create the human race (along with the god-like Eternals and the demonic Deviants).<sup>3</sup> Standing motionless upon twin pylons in the Andes Mountains, Arishem was to monitor the planet for fifty years before making his decision on the fate of our race.

The alien Galactus, in *Fantastic Four* #48-50<sup>4</sup> may seem like less of a judge than an indiscriminate hand of destruction. True, his initial pronouncement left no doubt of both his intentions and his utter disregard of Earth: "This planet shall sustain me until it has been drained of all elemental life." And over the next two issues, Galactus showed no interest in debating the worthiness of the race his actions would incidentally exterminate. But this arrival of a near-omnipotent figure from above coupled with Kirby's images of worldwide destruction gave the story biblical overtones, calling to mind nothing less than Judgement Day itself. The link becomes even more explicit when Galactus' actions are finally checked by the Fantastic Four, who force him to acknowledge humanity's claim to life. Consider how Galactus' final words were both a judgement and a caution: "At last I perceive the glint of glory within the race of man! Be ever worthy of glory, humans... be ever mindful of your promise of greatness... for it shall one day lift you beyond the stars... or bury you within the ruins of war!! The choice is yours!!"

The similarities continue. As the Silver Surfer played the role of Galactus's herald, so did Ikaris (and occasionally, other

(below) Pluto unleashes his madness in this page from the "Mercury" story in *Red Raven Comics* #1 (Aug. 1940), Kirby's first work for Timely/Marvel.

(next page) A squad of good old American troops tackle Pluto's Mutates from the future, in these pencils from *Thor* #164 (May 1969). Go get 'em, fellas!

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Ragnarok, 'Last Battle', the Big One, and smaller wars analyzed in Kirby-esque context, by Jerry Boyd

For decades, we had "gods" in the field of sequential artwork. Like movie moguls or "film gods/goddesses" in old Hollywood, titans of incredible talent peopled the comic packaging companies of New York City.

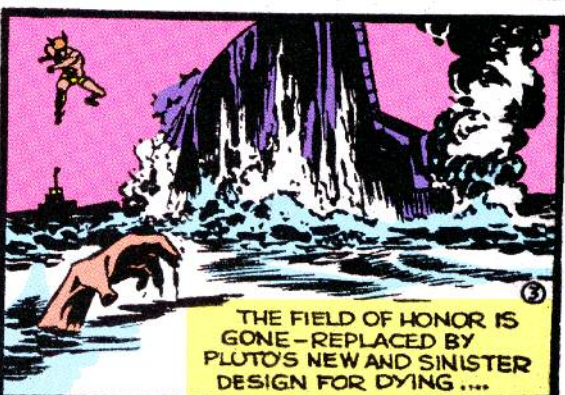
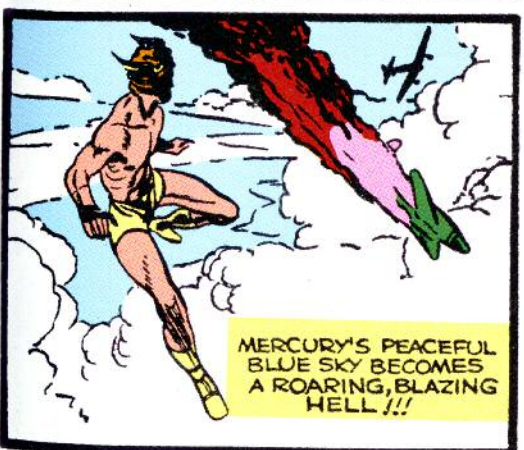
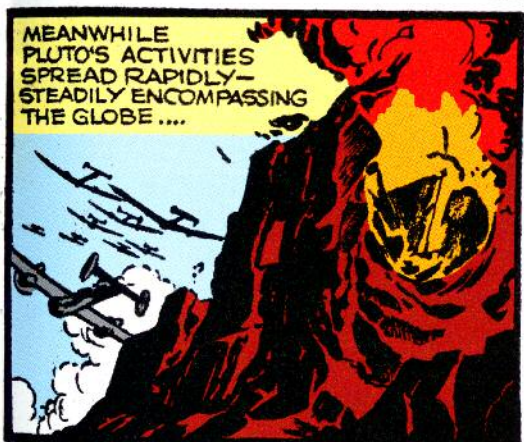
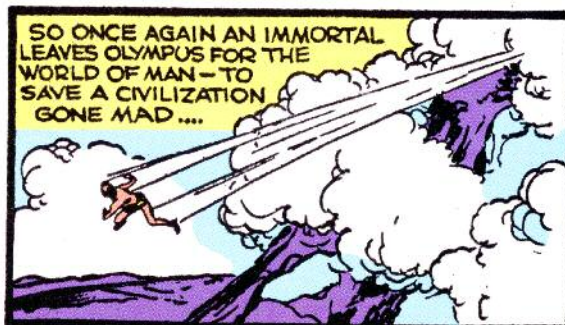
Graham Ingels, Bernie Wrightson, Gray Morrow, and Tom Sutton (among others) were masters of gothic horror. John Severin, Russ Heath, and Joe Kubert did war stories better than most. Dan DeCarlo, Harry Lucey, Samm Schwartz, Stan Goldberg, and Henry Scarpelli held court when it came to teen humor. Al Williamson, Wally Wood, and Al Feldstein beckoned us to the stars like no three others. But when it came to the gods, there's only one name—and that's Jack Kirby.

Many times the King professed to a lifelong interest in

mythology. He told an interviewer for *Comics Scene Spectacular* (#2, 1992), "Thor is an ancient myth—what I did was to make him saleable once again."

Scott Fresina, one of Jack's many friends, recalled that, "Kirby certainly read and studied the Germanic and Norse gods as he got along in years, but he told me that he first heard the myths from his Austrian-born grandmother when he was very young. He fell in love with these stories and some of them stayed with him forever."

In sundry myths, there were gods and goddesses of beauty, harvesting, and representatives of the oceans, sun, moon, and stars but (like a typical little boy) Jack was particularly fascinated by the power, grandeur, and supernatural weapons and abilities of the warrior gods. Their lives and triumphs, defeats, and ends would wind their way into his retooled but immensely entertaining modern mythologies.



## MERCURY... FIGHTS FOR EARTH!

Continuity wasn't a big deal in the Golden Age of Comics, but some Timely creators gave it a real shot. Bill Everett's early Sub-Mariner adventures were continuing cliffhangers akin to *Flash Gordon* serials, and Timely writers sometimes explained how the Red Skull and the Black Talon cheated death or escaped when they next resurfaced.

The ultimate real-life villain and comics villain at the time was a former Austrian corporal and frustrated artist named Adolf Hitler. Captain America and Bucky fought him under that name, but Mercury, son of Jupiter, knew the dictator as Rudolf Hendler—actually the evil god Pluto in human guise! Hendler was a S&K thing only—elsewhere in Timely Comics, Hitler was Hitler!



Mercury is given the task of upsetting Pluto's plans, and his fleet feet speed him across time and space to our besieged planet, where men and their great war machines collide in wide swaths of destruction. Pluto explains to his cousin Mercury (whose godly gaze easily penetrates his disguise) that he's "never had so much fun!"

An enraged Mercury strangles Hendler but the dictator's guards intervene. Their earthly weapons have no effect on the handsome young god, and he takes it upon himself to show the leaders and people of the warring nations the paths to peace, much to Pluto's consternation! (Mercury could've been a latter-day Supertowner with an inventive name change—Fastbak, maybe?—and a nifty new costume.)

Jack was never like his later commanding officer, Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. who thrived on combat and loved war. Though he'd never return to Mercury (later renamed Hurricane by other Timely stalwarts), Kirby and Simon's decision to make their fast-moving protagonist fight just as hard to secure a lasting peace as when he'd trade punches, reflects Jack's affectation for the reluctant but capable warrior, ready to extend the "olive branch of peace" but standing prepared to physically defend the rights and lives of others.

Moreover, Jack and Joe couldn't have allowed Mercury to destroy Pluto then and there. This villain's evil was eternal and World War II, in which S&K would soon participate as soldiers across France, Belgium, and Asia, had yet to engulf the majority of Americans. The end of the war could not be

foretold when Mercury took leave of Hendler/Pluto and the young god wouldn't be there at its end.

At the war's end, Joe and Jack's warriors (whether celestial or mortal in nature) could only stand in as idealized embodiments of the millions of Allied servicemen and women (almost 20 million in the States alone!) who'd eventually help break the backs of the Axis coalition.

## THE POWER OF THE AESIR

Jack, aided by Joe Simon and with others, would return to mythological warrior gods off and on throughout the '40s and '50s. However, it was the introduction of the Mighty Thor in 1962 and that strip's ongoing success that cemented Jack's reputation as the comic gods' 'godfather.' Lordly Odin's tribesmen, the Aesir, were drawn in spectacular fashion by the King to a grateful comicdom who'd also spent a godly... er, goodly amount of time in theaters with mouths agape at the exploits of Hercules, Maciste, Samson, the Sons of Samson (!), Atlas, and the beloved Jason and the Argonauts (1963).

(I saw the latter feature then with older cousins and their friends and we spent a happy afternoon afterward battling in teams as "warriors and skeletons." But the niceties of having a *Journey Into Mystery* comic mag was that it could be taken home with you and cherished again and again at your convenience.)

Jack and Stan rapidly expanded their *JIM* cast of characters: Odin, Loki, Heimdall, Surtur, Ymir, Hela, Sif, Mimir, Geirroddur, Sigurd, and Balder.

Lee's dialogue for the lords of Asgard reflected his love for Shakespeare. He told an interviewer for *Comics Scene Spectacular* #2 (1992), "If I think about it, I was crazy about Thor. I loved the corny way he would talk. I loved having his father say, 'So be it!' and all of those expressions."

The Asgardians and the various rock trolls, flying trolls, storm giants, etc., were wonderfully attired, radiating power. And since none of them owed their unique abilities to radioactivity or advanced scientific breakthroughs, it had to be a little easier for Lee and Kirby to eschew plausibility based on atomic age experimentations and just rush them into battle!

But who would the Aesir battle... and why?

To their mortal worshipers, the immortals were Vikings writ-large. They invaded enemy strongholds (like the Vikings did), drinking heartily along the way and laughing in combat. They reveled in their powers, taking on their sworn enemies—the dwarves, monsters, and giants who were jealous of the proud Aesir.

Thor (Thunor to the ancient Germanic tribes) sometimes depended on help from Loki (they'd been buddy-buddy for centuries before Loki's imprisonment by the gods), Tyr (the Norse god of war), and the wise Thjalfi.

(Thor's need for allies in his struggles may have accounted for the creative inclusion of Hogun, Fandral, and Volstagg.)

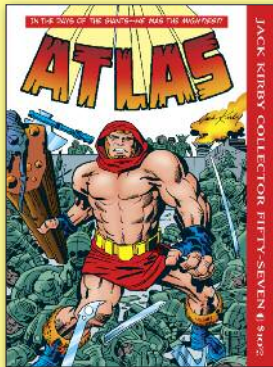
The Thunderer was not sadly resigned to his fate—indeed, he relished his missions. He was immensely strong (as he was in the comics), full of enormous vitality and power, and the sole possessor of Mjollnir (the Scandinavian spelling is used here), the single most powerful weapon of his tribe. He

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slew the Asgardians' enemies with thunder and lightning. In some legends, Odin was his father. If he wasn't, Odin was still regarded as the All-Father, ruler of gods and men, and chief of the sky gods (and the brooding clouds above them were where the Vikings pointed to as they celebrated their gods' stories). Odin's vast powers created the solar system as men knew it then, and he spent much of his time choosing earthly champions from among the dead to rally about him to stave off Ragnarok.

Heimdall is pretty much the same as he appeared at Marvel. Ever vigilant and courageous, he sits beside the Rainbow Bridge to guard the entrance to the fortress of the gods from the giants and monsters. He rarely needed sleep and had hearing so keen he could detect the growing of grass on our planet.

Stan's interpretation of Loki was that he was "an evil god," Kirby saw him as "a tortured person" and both were right! In myth, this adopted son of a giant was both a help and a hindrance to his fellow gods (sometimes in the same story!) and a tortured prisoner of his own evil, eventually shackled to three large flat stones for his treachery against Balder. To some ancient believers, he was the Norse equivalent of the Devil, whose monstrous offspring would one day bring about Ragnarok.

Other gods weren't used much (drat the luck!) by Kirby and Lee. (One can't blame them, they were kinda busy with Midgard-based heroes at the time, also.) Tyr, the war god, appeared briefly as "the master archer" of Asgard in the story where Odin bestows Balder with the enchantment of invulnerability for