



KIRBY

Unleashed

A "KING"
KIRBY PORTFOLIO

twenty dollars

FOREWORD

Almost 35 years ago—as the crow flies—Mark Evanier and I became assistants to Jack Kirby. It wasn't a job we applied for or even thought about, it just happened. Jack had decided to leave Marvel Comics and sign up with DC Comics. Carmine Infantino had been talking to Jack ever since he had been made Editorial Director, and for Jack, at 50 years old, it seemed like a fresh start and a chance to explore some new avenues of storytelling.

Mark and I had been working, so to speak, for Marvelmania International, a licensee of the Marvel characters. Mark was in charge of putting out the monthly magazine and I gathered the information that came in on the little coupons. My job was to create some sort of filing system to retrieve the information for future mailings. This was before computers, so everything was type-written on 3x5 cards. Talk about time-consuming! We were also to come up with ideas for new products that could be made either by printing or manufacturing overseas. We had gotten to know Jack pretty well because he was the mainstay for producing Marvelmania artwork. One of the first products we came up with was the **Jack Kirby Portfolio** produced just before Jack announced that he was leaving Marvel.

Jack's plan in going to DC was to set up a division on the West Coast to produce all types of magazines—not just comic books. His goal was to hopefully start a production studio that would allow him to create new formats and characters, and hand off the writing and drawing to others. It seemed like a good idea. There was no budget for this from DC, but Jack was certain that once things got rolling, the funds would follow. Would we like to help? As I recall, we said yes.

Now at the time (1970) comic fandom was just starting to gather momentum. Not that there hadn't been fandom up to then, but it was getting larger and more organized. Shel Dorf had come up to Los Angeles from San Diego to the Marvelmania offices. He invited us to participate in a little convention that he and some fans had planned to hold in the basement of the US Grant hotel in the Gaslamp District, when it still had real gaslamps (just kidding). Today, Comic-Con International as it's now called requires something like 25 hotels just to hold all the attendees. The Con has gone through two convention centers, and looks to outgrow the current one.

There were also conventions in New York City, Detroit, Dallas, Chicago and Florida. When Jack would attend these gatherings he would be besieged by fans wanting sketches, which was

impossible to fulfill. Not wanting to disappoint anyone, Jack thought that we should come up with something that we could offer at a reasonable price. Thus was born Communicators Unlimited.

Jack, his son Neal (a recent marketing graduate of the University of Syracuse), Mark and I sat down and tried to decide what we could make that would appeal to everyone. Using our experience from Marvelmania we knew that there were about 10,000 hard core comic fans in the U.S. We also came to the conclusion that a portfolio of Jack's unseen artwork might be a good idea. Going through Jack's storage closet we found a treasure trove of items—artwork from the '30s, '40s and '50s, unused pencil pages from Marvel stories, and other penciled renderings.

The idea of printing individual pages and a folder seemed expensive and difficult to distribute. Jack had been impressed with the **History of the Comics** that Jim Steranko had self-published as a **Rolling Stone**-sized magazine. What we finally settled on was a biography of Jack with a portfolio of drawings in the center on a higher quality paper. The question was how many, how much, etc. This fell to Mark and myself to figure out.

Fortunately at the time, I was working part-time at a graphics company and had access to a rather new device—an IBM typewriter. This model could change typefaces and justify margins. How unique! Mark and I began interviewing Jack for the the biography part and at the same time trying to decide what artwork to keep and what to leave out—a tough job since we liked it all.

Eventually we settled on the pages to use, and Jack drew up some new art for the portfolio section. We found a local printer who had a four-color press. We printed, I believe, 5,000 copies because that is how many it took to get a decent price break. We decided on a retail price of \$4.00 and I recall the books ended up costing about \$2.00 each to print.

Once Mark and I finished writing the text, I sat down at the IBM and started to set the type, learning the machine as I went along. Mark would come by after the place closed and we would fiddle with everything until we had the margins and the text right. Then Mark took it home, and with stats of the artwork, pasted up the book indicating where the final art would go.

Meanwhile, I had the task of color-separating the interior color art. We couldn't afford to have Jack color the art and then do the separations from that, so the next best thing was to do four-color separations on acetate sheets which the printer could then shoot as individual plates. Today, of course, you could do it in Photoshop in a

matter of hours. Armed with x-acto knife, registration pegs and gray-tone sheets of pre-printed dots, I proceeded to cut and paste the shapes, trying to match the different shades of gray to the right color. For example, a 20% gray on the yellow acetate and a 40% gray on the blue acetate might yield a medium green in the final print. Now each little area on the original had to be filled in with the right shape. And there was no way to check the final outcome because, again, we couldn't afford to print a proof. It was cross your fingers and hope. If we had the finances to have Jack do the coloring it would have really been great, but it was the best we could do at the time.

Our goal was to have a finished book ready for the 1971 San Diego Comic-Con which was held around the middle of July. Once Mark had pasted-up the boards and I had finished the color, we took it to the printer.

After a few weeks, we returned with Jack and Roz's Lincoln and loaded up the trunk with the first batch of finished books. Boxes and boxes were eventually stacked up in the Kirby garage. Roz was worried that we would never be able to sell all of these books. It was her \$10,000 riding on the line.

We had placed ads in **The Buyer's Guide** and handed out flyers at a local convention held at the Disneyland Hotel in April of 1971. It was at this convention that we actually sold the first Communicators Unlimited product. It was a set of eight black-and-white reproductions of Jack's original color renderings of the New Gods and Mr. Miracle. It was meant only as a stop-gap item since we didn't have the **Kirby Unleashed** books available for sale. Soon the orders started coming in. We took a few boxes to San Diego in July and sold those as well. We then were hit with something we hadn't expected. Carmine Infantino called Jack and said (for some reason I still haven't figured out) that DC wanted to sell the **Kirby Unleashed** books in their comics. They would run ads in all of their books, handle the shipping, we just had to send him the books—at \$2.00 each. So twenty-five-hundred **Kirby Unleashed** books went east. I have no idea how many DC sold or if they made any money on the deal.

We were left with about less than half of what we started with. The following year, Neal, Jack and I headed to New York for the Seuling Convention with an art display and about 500 books. We sold out. I got about 25 copies and I think Mark got the same. As the orders dwindled down, we were finally left with about a hundred or so copies. Roz was happy. She had made her

KIRBY UNLEASHED

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Assembled from the personal collection of the comic magazine's most-respected and prolific artist and creator, comes a handsome portfolio of the works of Jack Kirby. A pictorial chronicle of Kirby's career, traced from his earliest works to his present triumphs at DC.

Its large 11 X 14 size provides maximum reproduction quality of a gallery of Kirby's art, much of it done expressly for this portfolio. Included are such classics as:

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money back—almost. We hadn't exactly figured in the cost of postage or the shipping cardboard (or the specially printed envelopes that we made) so she didn't quite make it all back.

Over time some copies went to dealers. Roz would hand out the remaining copies to visitors. One day I got a call from her saying that a German publisher was interested in distributing the book in Europe. They needed about 10 copies of Kirby Unleashed but she didn't have any left. Did I? I had about 15 left, so I gave her 10. Of the remaining 5, one was autographed by Jack, which I still have and the other four ended up at a dealer's table in San Diego in 1989.

Kirby Unleashed had sort of burned us out. Many fans had been requesting posters, so we tried to see what we could put together. Regrettably, Jack's most popular characters were controlled by either Marvel or DC and they had their own deals for posters. However Jack had done some re-imaged drawings of the Norse Gods prior to leaving Marvel. He had colored them with Dr. Marten's dyes and they looked pretty spectacular. Jack thought that printing them on a quality paper stock would make great posters. We printed 1000 of each poster and put them in a special envelope printed in blue ink titled Jack Kirby's Gods. Unfortunately, what the fans wanted were super-heroes, not Norse heroes. Although we sold some to dealers and at conventions, we were left with quite a few. I can recall Roz Kirby jokingly saying that she could always use them as placemats. Over time, though, they have gained collector's item status. Occasionally a set will turn up on eBay.

Until Ray Wyman Jr.'s Art of Jack Kirby was published, Kirby Unleashed served as the main source for biographical information on Jack. I've seen copies on eBay for \$60 and up. At the 2004 Comic-Con International, John Morrow mentioned that he was still trying to fund the cost of preserving Jack's photocopies of his pencil artwork. I offhandedly suggested that he reprint Kirby Unleashed. Not one to let a few hurricanes stop him, you hold in your hands, five months later, that selfsame publication. Hopefully this printing of Kirby Unleashed will inspire the next generation of storytellers. I think Jack would have liked that.

Steve Sherman
Los Angeles, CA
September 2004

Opposite, l to r: Flyers used to promote KIRBY UNLEASHED (ink assists by Mark Evanier) and the GODS poster set, and the envelope copies were mailed in.

Above: The ad that ran in early 1970s DC comics; our copy only had 3 paintings!

Right: Cover of the 1975 museum catalog, that was a scaled-down version of KU.

INTRODUCTION

To a generation of fans, Kirby Unleashed was a godsend, giving us the most intimate look ever taken at a comics creator up to that point. As Kirby fans, we all saw the ads in DC's early 1970s comics, but scraping together \$4 meant—for me at least—giving up sixteen Jack Kirby comic books. So initially, I passed on it. When I finally got my own copy years later, I saw what I had missed. I learned about the life and career of my favorite comics artist, and got to experience a lot of Kirby art I'd never seen before. It was a bargain at any price, and is long out of print. So when Steve Sherman suggested reprinting it, I jumped at the opportunity.

But how do you improve on perfection? That's the challenge I faced in attempting to remaster Kirby Unleashed. I didn't want to jeopardize that feeling of wonderment I got when I first saw a copy, so I decided to remain as faithful as possible to the original, while taking advantage of technology that wasn't available in 1971. The original art for this book was scattered to the four winds, and tracking it down was a monumental task, but we managed to get scans from either the originals or good photocopies of nearly all the art contained here, resulting in better reproduction than the original. (I always thought the old lady on page one was holding a top hat—it's a water pitcher!)

As for the design of the book, it worked for me in the 1970s, and I think it still works now. So I followed the road map laid out before me, and only very gingerly tweaked the layouts where I felt it could add to clarity, or where viewing the originals resulted in greater understanding of the art. (An example is the unused Black Magic #12 cover on page 39; a handwritten note at the top of the original says, "Al: This was made up for a weird book—never used—but it would do nicely as revised for crime." The "Scarface" dialogue is classic Kirby, and not to be missed.)

To present a fuller representation of Jack's entire career—the book left off at 1971 in the original printing—I decided we needed to add some pages. The extras were used to present some choice items from Jack's later work, but also to make this remastered version a compilation of many of the obscure Kirby collectibles that have been produced over the years. I've included a section detailing the 1970 Jack Kirby Portfolio from Marvelmania (in many ways, the forerunner to Kirby Unleashed). Two black-and-white posters (Silver Surfer and Captain America), released in the mid-1970s, are included here. The 1975 KIRBY museum catalog, produced by David Folkman and Neal Kirby for an exhibition of Jack's work at the Museum of Cartoon Art in Greenwich, CT, was a scaled-down version of Kirby Unleashed. However, it included a couple of previously unseen Kirby works, which are added to the mix here.

The expanded color gallery spotlights some of Jack's best color work, while also representing the four pages that ran in color in the original KU. Tom Ziuko used those original color versions as guides, judiciously varying from them for reasons of color accuracy and to bring out details that weren't as evident due to the original versions' low-budget color (look at all the detail we missed in Joe Sinnott's Fighting American inks on page 25!). We rescanned the four GODS posters from the original paintings, amazed at how little the Dr. Marten's dyes Jack used have faded in four decades. And thanks to Steve Sherman preserving the original transparency from the cover image, we can now see what Jack's watercoloring really looked like (a quality lost due to the murky printing of the original version).

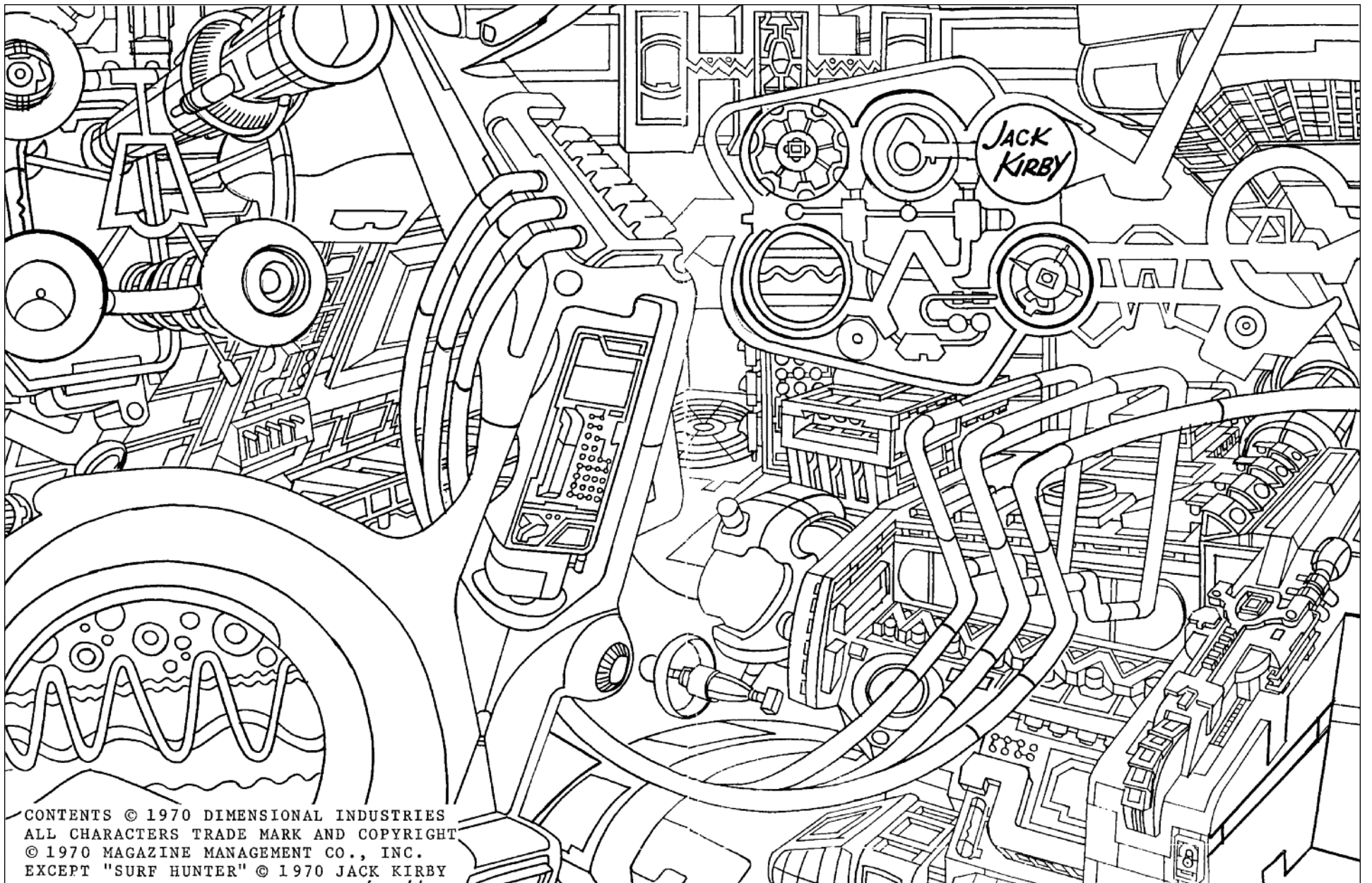
Steve didn't hesitate when I asked him to write a new Foreword, outlining what was involved in the initial printing of this book and the GODS posters. Mark Evanier also agreed to update the biography from the original, correcting errors that had crept in initially, and completing the picture of Jack's career that still had another couple of decades to go when this book was first published. With over thirty years of hindsight, Mark was inclined to completely rewrite the text he wrote in his youth, rather than just update and correct it, but I'm glad we went with authenticity; despite Mark's concerns, I think his copy still holds up pretty well.

Everything contained here really revolves around those two people: Mark Evanier and Steve Sherman. So I'd like to dedicate this remastered edition of Kirby Unleashed to them. As Jack's assistants, you helped him turn out some of my favorite comics of all time. You had the jobs every Kirby fan dreamed of (especially me!). And by producing the original Kirby Unleashed—and the GODS poster set, and the earlier Jack Kirby Portfolio for Marvelmania—you did him proud, and made a lot of fans happy in the process.

John Morrow
Raleigh, NC
December 2004

Special thanks to: Shel Dorf, David Folkman, David Hamilton, Robert Katz, Lisa Kirby, Tracy Kirby, Neal Kirby, Jeremy Kirby, Richard Martines, Steve Robertson, David Schwartz, Tod Seisser, Mike Thibodeaux, Ray Wyman, Jr., Bruce Zick, Tom Ziuko, and of course, Mark and Steve.

THE 1970 MARVELMANIA PORTFOLIO





These two pages: Plates from the **JACK KIRBY PORTFOLIO** released by **Marvelmania** in 1970, shortly after Kirby announced he was leaving **Marvel Comics**.





Like many of today's success stories, it all begins with a birthdate on the Lower East Side of New York City. The birthdate was August 28, 1917, and the Kurtzberg family was one more strong. And the growing up period is not entirely atypical, either: Street-fighting, the usual childhood activities, and the burgeoning instinct of self-preservation were all a part of it. And, too, there was the foreshadowing of what was to come—the doodles cluttering every available scrap of paper, the “wasted” afternoons at the movies... the profound interest in stories. That, more than anything else, occupied young Jack's time.

Schooling was not the best and certainly inadequate in the field of creative writing and art.

Jack Kirby was, then, the student without an official teacher. He learned from anyone who had something to offer, adopting the virtues and making them his own. An early source of art-inspiration, for example, was Alex Raymond's **Flash Gordon** newspaper strip. Splendidly illustrated, it has served as the model for a majority of today's panel-artists. Some of them have adopted its techniques with little reservations and others, like Kirby, now boast very little of the then-important Raymond influence. He learned techniques, not styles, and then went on to make them his own.

The storytelling sense grew, as well, and it was to be important... for it was most likely what led the youthful Kirby into comics instead of into serious illustration. From the start, his drawing style was never intended to emulate reality or to provide any sort of photographic representation. Rather, it was to tell exciting, interesting stories—the Kirby conception of anatomy, for example, defies all manner of real physiology. It does, however, perfectly convey the idea of figures in motion. A semi-realistic caricature—realistic to be identifiable and exaggerated for effect.

Remaining sketchbooks from Kirby's earlier

days are filled with pencil renderings of expertly-formed, carefully-shaded figures and scenes. With such potential, it came as no surprise that Kirby should enroll in the famed Pratt Institute to refine his abilities.

It did, however, come as a surprise when he dropped out the afternoon of his first day at Pratt. Family financial pressures necessitated such and it wasn't long before Kirby was searching for practical applications of his talents—those which would be both financially rewarding and self-satisfying. Earlier attempts at submitting his work to various markets had yielded an endless series of rejection slips from every market from **The New Yorker** right on down.

Ultimately, Kirby began his career not in comics but in the other media where drawings are used to tell a story: animated cartoons.

As an “in-betweener” at the Max Fleischer studios, Jack worked on **Popeye** cartoons. After a few months however, labor unrest erupted at the studio and Kirby decided to get out before he found himself on strike and to seek employment elsewhere.

That employment was found at the Lincoln Newspaper Syndicate, where he began his stint as a political, gag, and strip cartoonist.



“WELL, YOU GO UP AND GET PLENTY OF SLEEP NOW, AND YOU’LL GROW UP TO BE A BIG G-MAN LIKE ME!”
rejected New Yorker cartoon, Jack Kirby, age 14

THE BLUE BEETLE

The Blue Beetle

RELEASE MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1940

CAUSE FOR KILLER'S CONSTERNATION

by Charles Nicholas

POSING AS A PHOTOGRAPHER, KILLER CONWAY, THE SLAYER OF YORK CITY'S DISTRICT ATTORNEY, CONFRONTS JUDY GRANT, AN ACCIDENTAL WITNESS TO HIS CRIME CONWAY DRAWS HIS AUTOMATIC AS HE REVEALS HIS OMINOUS INTENTIONS TO THE TERRIFIED GIRL !!!

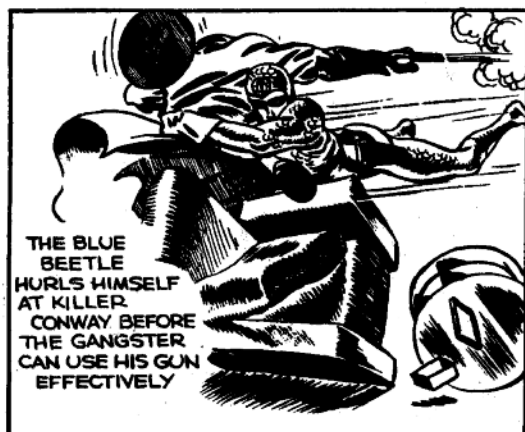


The Blue Beetle

RELEASE TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 1940

FOULED ABOVE THE BELT

by Charles Nicholas

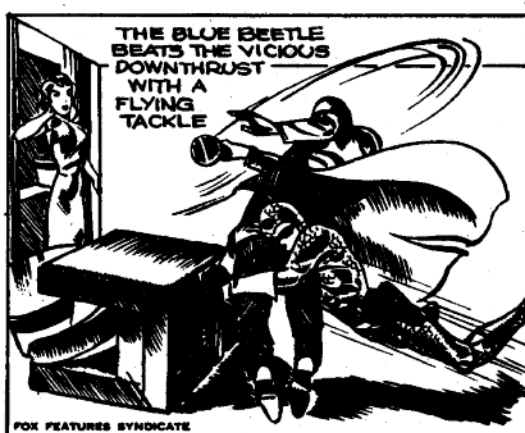


The Blue Beetle

RELEASE WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 1940

BEGINNING OF A BLITZKRIEG

by Charles Nicholas

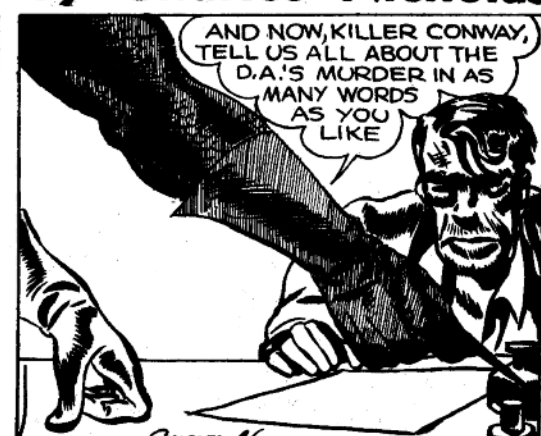


The Blue Beetle

RELEASE THURSDAY, JANUARY 25, 1940

THE MAN WHO KNOWS ALL — WRITES ALL

by Charles Nicholas





The partnership of Simon and Kirby was finally formed when Kirby switched over to work for the new Timely Comics Company and ran into Joe Simon for the third time. The Timely line was, then, distinguished only by its two star-characters: **The Human Torch** and the **Sub-Mariner**. More stars were needed then, and Jack Kirby set about to create likely prospects, such as **Hurricane**, **Tuk the Cave-Boy**, **Mercury**, **the Vision**, **Red Raven**, **Comet Pierce** and, finally, the character whose creation was to bring the team into prominence—**Captain America**. (Moonlighting for another company, they also produced the first full issue of **Captain Marvel Adventures**.)

Captain America was an immediate success and it was due to the great demand for his adventures that Simon and Kirby began to produce material at a fast pace... one which would gain even greater momentum later. In a short time, they had produced ten issues of their star-spangled creation and the basic outlines for a companion book to star Cap's partner, Bucky, as one of the **Young Allies**. This was to be the end of their creations for Timely, as it became evident that, despite a deal that promised them a share of the profits, they were not sharing in the gold mine that Captain America had become. Convinced they were being swindled, they decided to go elsewhere.

Simon and Kirby's profit on Cap was, therefore, limited to a good reputation in the business—good enough to earn them a spot at the Detective Comics company, owners of **Superman** and **Batman**. Here, they set about creating new strips and in setting up a shop from which to work.

The four strips on which they worked for DC were all popular and ads for the strips sometimes



featured the Simon and Kirby by-line more prominently than the strip's title. Their strips were always filled with action, but not dependent on it. Highlighted by plot twists and humor, they were reflective of the times. Kirby drew upon his own background for settings and characterizations and the audience was very much responsive to it.

The DC editors kept the team busy and their rate of work, very swift at Timely, was now more rapid. They often turned out six pages a day and, when necessary, more than that. This involved doing penciling, lettering and inking—plus scripting; the DC editors were buying scripts from their regular stable of writers for the two, and Simon and Kirby were making gliders out of the scripts and writing their own. More than once, a DC editor would deliver a script to the team and then see its pages drifting out the window as he left.

Sandman and **Manhunter**, appearing in **Adventure Comics**, were not created by Simon and Kirby but were, rather, drastically-altered versions of earlier strips. Bearing little or no resemblance to their predecessors, they were both of a super-hero nature and both very well received by the public.

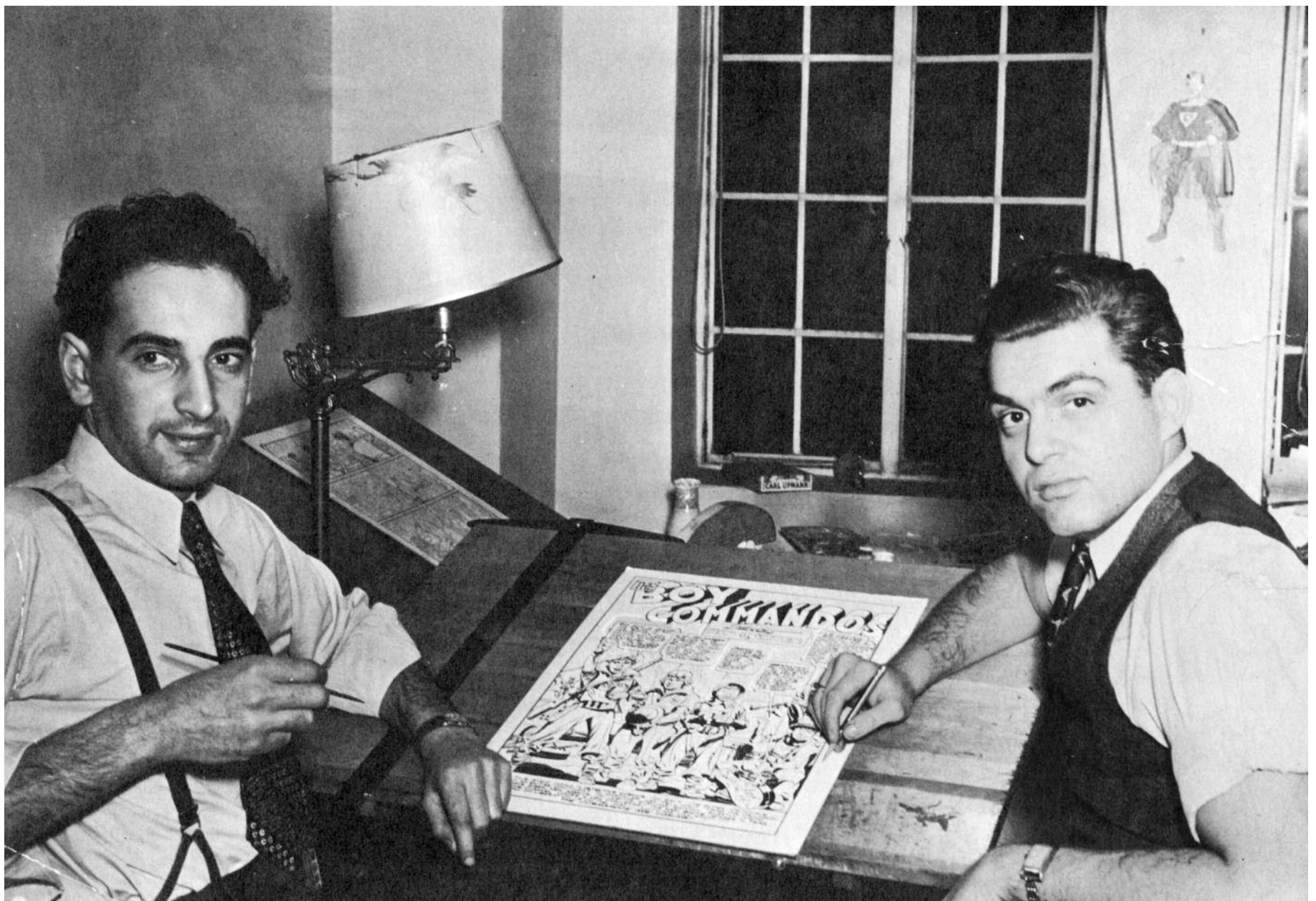
Even more popular, however, were the team's "kid strips": **The Newsboy Legion** and **The Boy Commandos**. The newsboys, aided by the **Guardian**, a policeman guised as a super-hero, dwelled in Suicide Slum where they encountered bizarre criminals and, as the war effort grew, Nazi spies as well. They were forever getting into trouble and relying on the Guardian to get them out.

The Boy Commandos, led by Rip Carter, were even more popular than the **Newsboy Legion** and ended up with their own comic, in addition to appearances in **Detective Comics** and **World's Finest Comics**. They battled the Axis more directly than did the Newsboys, as the Commandos fought in Europe while World War II was in progress.

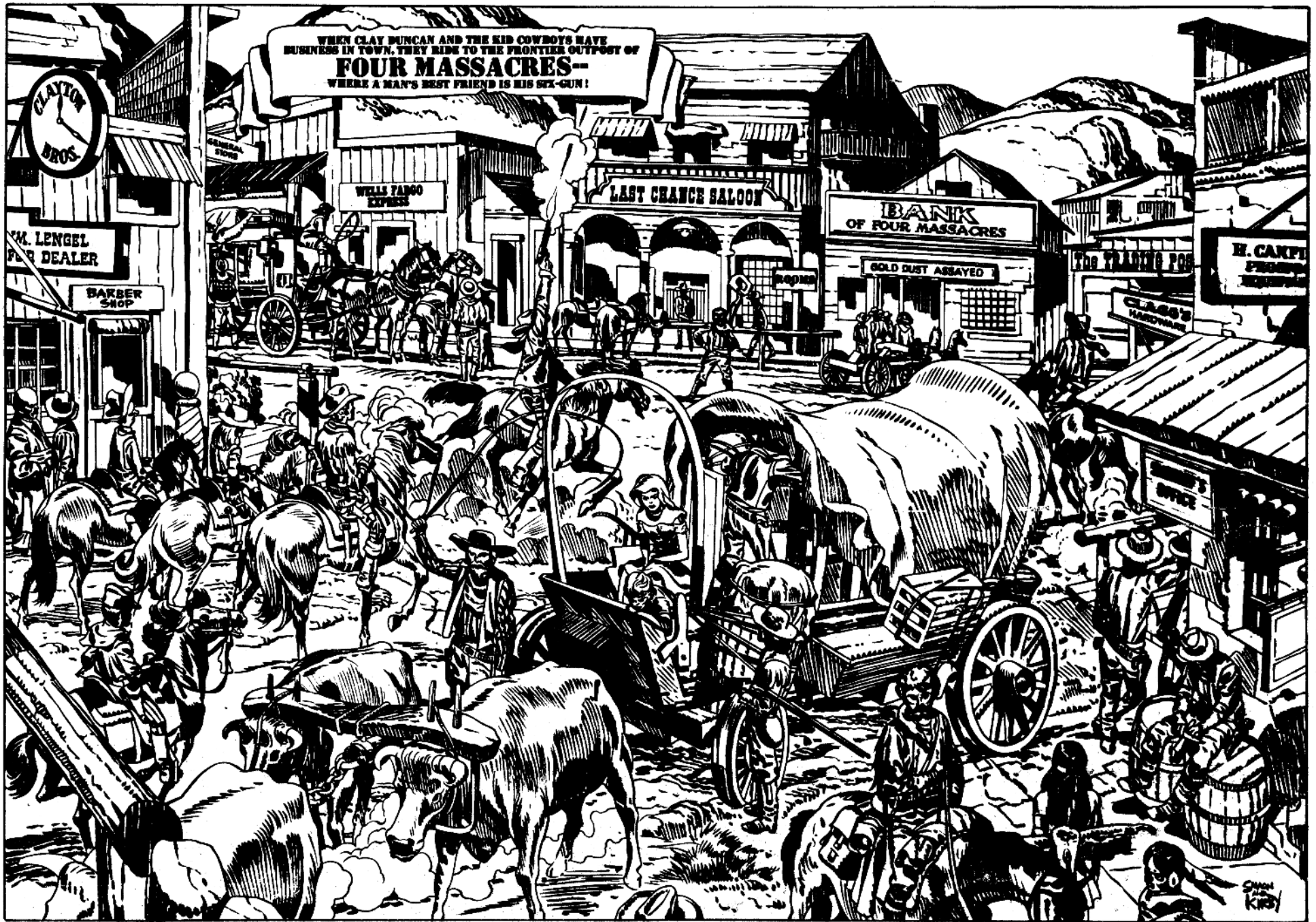
Finally, Simon and Kirby were called away from the drawing board, into service, and their DC strips were abandoned to others.

Opposite: **NEWSBOY LEGION** and the **GUARDIAN**

Below: Joe Simon and Jack Kirby—1941







Double-page spread from **BOYS' RANCH**

KIRBY GALLERY

PAGE 25: FIGHTING AMERICAN was scripted by one of the writers in the Simon and Kirby shop, Jack Oleck, for Crestwood Publications. Oleck was Simon's brother-in-law and he saw the book as a latter-day **Captain America**. After a few stories, however, Simon and Kirby had turned it into a tongue-in-cheek hero fighting such incredible opponents as Invisible Irving, Rhode Island Red, Hotsky-Trotsky, Yuscha Liffso Long, Double-Header and Super-Khakalovich, Boy Has-Been. **Fighting American** lasted but a few, memorable issues and is fondly remembered as one of the few truly humorous super-hero spoofs. And it was appropriate that it be done by men lampooning their stock-in-trade.

Inked by Joe Sinnott, lettered by Mike Royer, colored by Tom Ziuko

PAGE 26-29: JACK KIRBY'S GODS was a poster set produced by Communicators Unlimited in 1972, reproducing watercolored paintings of four Norse gods done by Kirby in the 1960s. Shown are (in order) Sigurd, Balduur, Heimdall, and Honir.

Inked by Don Heck, colored by Jack Kirby

PAGE 30-31: MAN—MACHINE—MERGER, an outer space composition done in 1971. This piece was also used as the cover of a 1975 museum book detailing an exhibition of Kirby's work in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Inked by Mike Royer, colored by Tom Ziuko

PAGE 32: GOD as interpreted by Kirby in 1970. This is one of three views of God by Jack done in the early 1970s.

Inked by Mike Royer, colored by Jack Kirby

PAGE 33: TRIBES TRILOGY No. 2 is the second in a 1976 three-painting series for a concept about primitive people living during the time of dinosaurs—a precursor to Kirby's later **Devil Dinosaur** concept.

Inked and colored by Jack Kirby

PAGE 34-35: KIRBY DREAM MACHINE is a painting that began life as the inked cover art for the 1970 **Jack Kirby Portfolio** from Marvelmania, utilizing Kirby's graphic technique of rendering complex machinery. He expanded it to a diptych, completing the painting in 1975. The two halves shown here join to make a colossal painting, measuring over five feet wide.

Painted by Jack Kirby

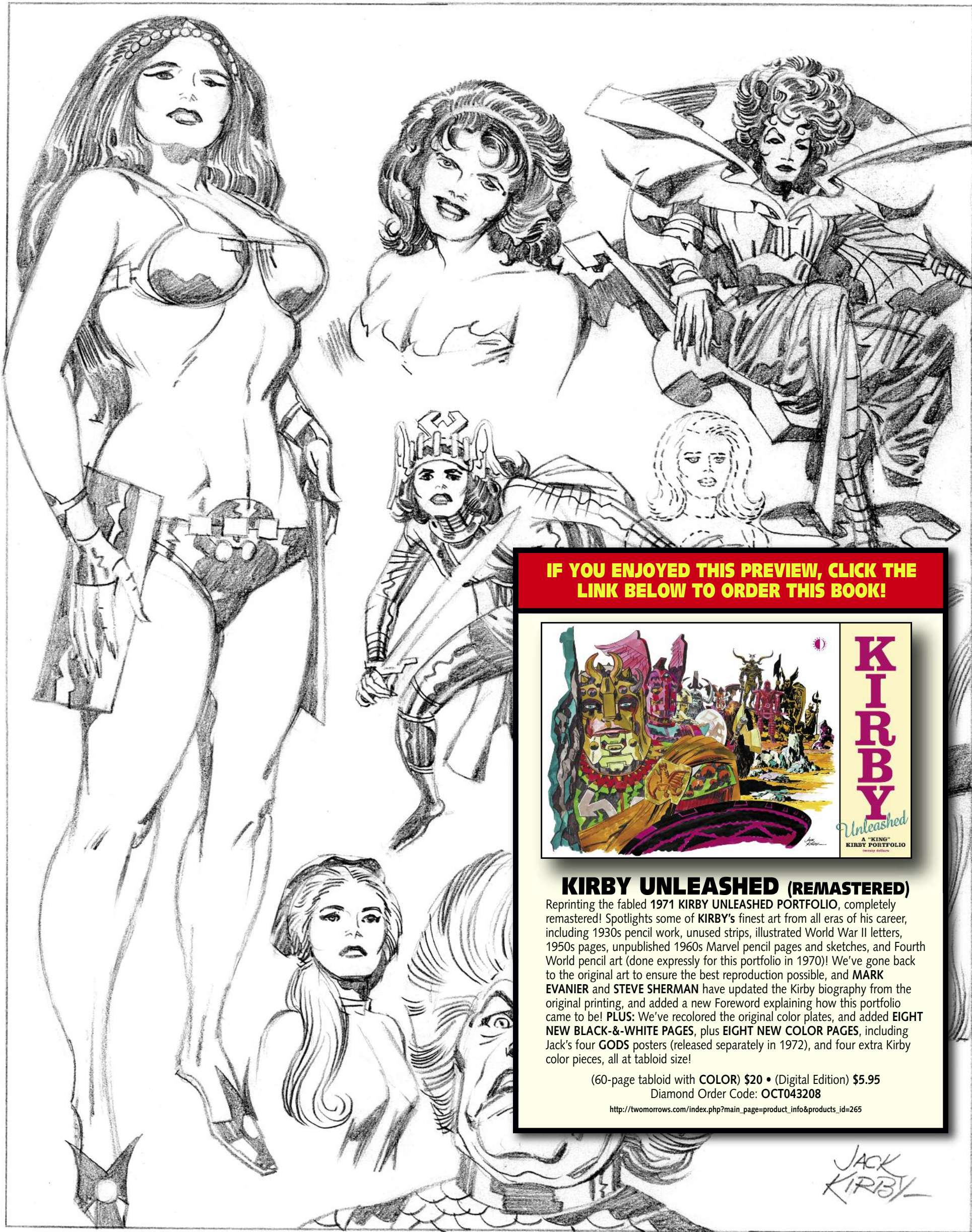
PAGE 36: THE FOREVER PEOPLE, Vykin the Black, Mark Moonrider, Big Bear, Serifan and Beautiful Dreamer, represent the youth of the war between New Genesis and Apokolips. Hailing from Super-Town, they came to Earth by way of Boom Tube, on their Super-Cycle and brandishing a device called "Mother Box."

Inked by Mike Royer, colored by Tom Ziuko

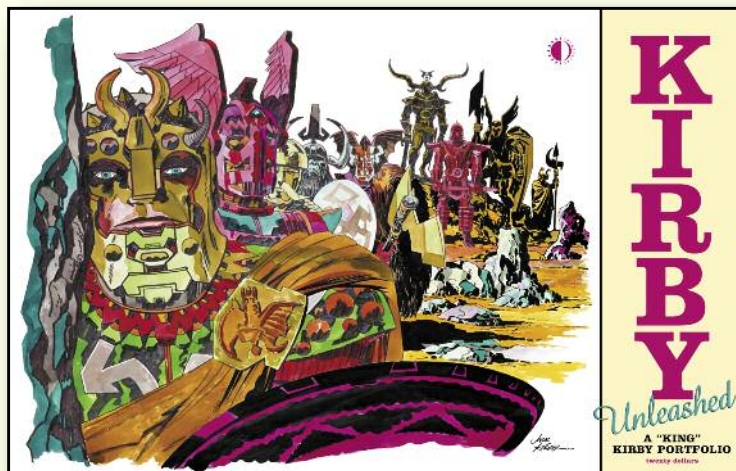








IF YOU ENJOYED THIS PREVIEW, CLICK THE LINK BELOW TO ORDER THIS BOOK!



KIRBY UNLEASHED (REMASTERED)

Reprinting the fabled 1971 **KIRBY UNLEASHED PORTFOLIO**, completely remastered! Spotlights some of **KIRBY's** finest art from all eras of his career, including 1930s pencil work, unused strips, illustrated World War II letters, 1950s pages, unpublished 1960s Marvel pencil pages and sketches, and Fourth World pencil art (done expressly for this portfolio in 1970)! We've gone back to the original art to ensure the best reproduction possible, and **MARK EVANIER** and **STEVE SHERMAN** have updated the Kirby biography from the original printing, and added a new Foreword explaining how this portfolio came to be! **PLUS:** We've recolored the original color plates, and added **EIGHT NEW BLACK-&WHITE PAGES**, plus **EIGHT NEW COLOR PAGES**, including Jack's four **GODS** posters (released separately in 1972), and four extra Kirby color pieces, all at tabloid size!

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