

# **MARVEL COMICS IN THE 1960s:**

***AN ISSUE BY ISSUE FIELD GUIDE  
TO A POP CULTURE PHENOMENON***

***BY  
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# Introduction

**W**hy a “field guide?” Simply put, because there was a lot to like about Marvel Comics in the 1960s, when everything about the company seemed new and anything was possible. But all that was almost a half-century ago and Spider-Man, Hulk and their costumed cohorts have been with some of us since before we were born. By now, everyone knows all about them, they’ve become the latest cultural icons and have proven their staying power in movies, books, computer games, even theme parks. What need to go back to pre-historic times to find out more about them? The short answer is that most people *don’t* know all about them, the company that spawned them, and especially the creative minds of the editors, writers, and artists that invented them. Today, more than ever, with tens of thousands of people becoming newly interested in the universe of Marvel heroes, an easy to use handbook or “field guide” to their origins is indispensable.

That’s the reason this book was written (and its subsequent volume covering Marvel’s Twilight Years), to provide a handy, easy to use and, especially, fun reference volume for anyone, whether youngsters whose only familiarity with the characters is from movies or

the latest comics or those young at heart who’d simply like to reacquaint themselves with old friends after many years. Designed for the casual browser as well as those already familiar with its subject, the book can be read from the beginning or opened at any page for quick reference. What allows such versatility is the book’s unique format which includes a text divided into easily digestible, quick to read “capsule reviews” of hundreds of the most important (and a few not so important) individual issues of Marvel Comics from the 1960s. These capsule commentaries not only provide brief but succinct roundups of the action and significance of the comics discussed, but also who wrote and drew them, where the creators received their inspiration, what their backgrounds were and where it all fits into the pop culture scene of the times. Here, the reader will be introduced to pop-culture guru and mastermind of Marvel Comics, Stan Lee; the pulse-pounding art of action king, Jack Kirby; the inscrutable master of psychological and angst-ridden art, Steve Ditko; the cool master of psychedelia and fast track pop-art, Jim Steranko; the free form, near photographic realism of Gene Colan; Lee’s heir apparent and second editor



*BEFORE STAN LEE THERE WAS JOE SIMON:  
JACK KIRBY'S OTHER PARTNER THROUGH THE  
1940S AND '50S.*

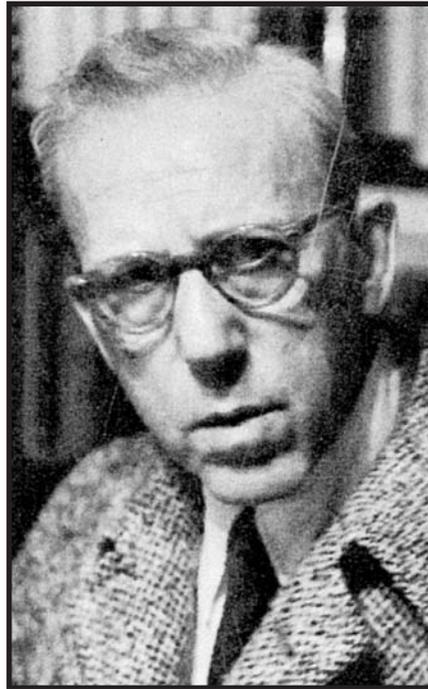
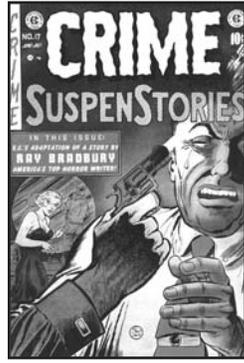
of the Marvel line of books, Roy Thomas; the pre-Raphaelite beauty of artist Barry Smith; and many others including artists Neal Adams, John Buscema, Gil Kane, Tom Palmer, Dan Adkins, Wally Wood, John Romita, and Don Heck.

But before plunging into the deep end of the pool, a reader might do well to first orient himself regarding just how Marvel Comics fit into the bigger picture of the comics industry itself. Even the company that was to revolutionize comics, after all, didn't spring full-blown from the brow of Stan Lee!

It all began in the late 1930s, when comic books in America and as a mass medium (million-selling titles were not uncommon in the 1940s) were viewed by the public at large, and with justification, as juvenile literature. This was especially true when comic books ceased to be the forum for reprints of widely popular newspaper strips and became, instead, the domain of colorfully costumed super-heroes. With the advent of Superman and his descendents, comic books became inevitably associated with children's entertainment. And so, when some publishers in the 1950s (most notably EC Comics) began to present comics whose content was primarily that of violence and gore, the wider public became concerned, and when even the federal government threatened to step in to regulate the industry, publishers were frightened into forming the Comics Code Authority in self-defense. Guided by strict rules designed to shield the nation's youngsters from harmful content, comic books came to be seen more than ever as the province of children.

Until, that is, Marvel Comics came along in the early 1960s.

As it would later turn out, the decade of the sixties was a time of vast social upheaval when many began to reappraise the status quo; rebellion was in the air regarding civil rights and justification of the Vietnam War. It even reached the art world where artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein began



*THE FUROR SPEARHEADED BY DR. FREDERIC WERTHAM'S SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT LED TO THE END OF EC'S POPULAR LINE OF HORROR COMICS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY.*

to open up the stuffy world of art criticism to include the creative products of pop culture.

Colliding with the rising popularity of Marvel Comics of the mid-to-late 1960s, these trends opened the public mind to the worth of such products of popular culture as comic books and the possibility that they could be more than disposable art created for children.

At the center of that sea change in popular perception was Marvel editor in chief, Stan Lee and his chief lieutenants, Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko.

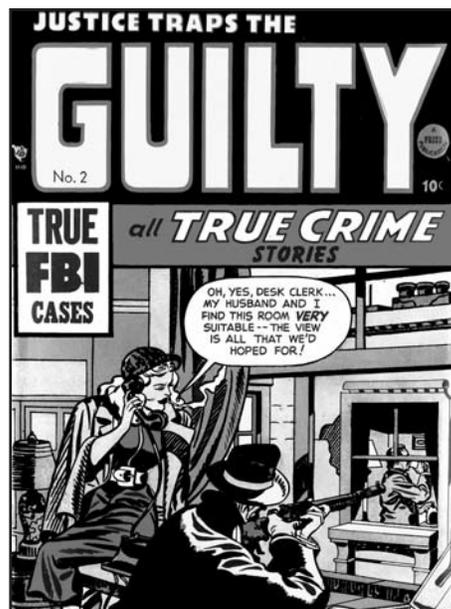
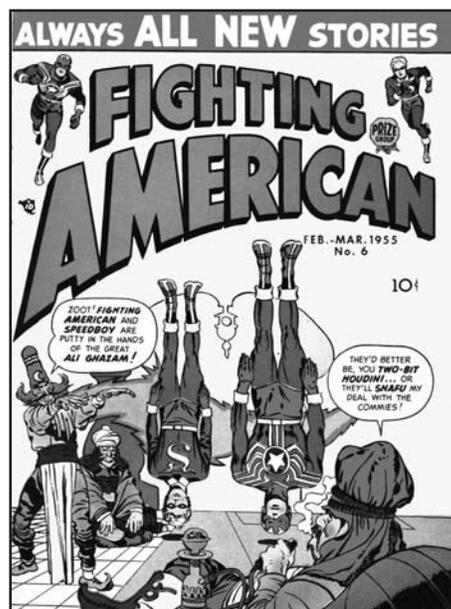
By the early 1960s, aside from a brief stint in the army and occasional attempts to break out

with newspaper strip features or humor books, Lee had spent his entire working career in the comic book field. He managed to get his foot in the door in 1940 when he was still known as Stanley Lieber, and Martin Goodman, his cousin's husband (or something like that) who was in the habit of giving jobs to his relatives anyway, hired him and set him to work with Joe Simon, editor of the publishing company's newly formed Timely comic book division.



*GOODMAN'S COMPANY WAS A GOING CONCERN IN 1942 WHEN THIS PHOTO OF ITS STAFF WAS TAKEN.*

At the time, Simon and his partner, Jack Kirby, were already big wheels in the comic industry. Both had spent time earlier in their careers in independently operated "shops" that contracted with publishers to provide them with fully rendered packages of completed comic book titles: editing, scripting, penciling, and inking were all covered and delivered to clients ready for printing. But publishers, always interested in finding ways to save money, soon figured out that if they could cut out the middle man and do the work themselves, they could save money. And so, when Goodman decided to do just that, he created Timely Comics and hired Simon to run it for him. Simon, in turn, brought in Kirby, and the two began a long and fruitful career as partners in the comics industry.



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*SIMON AND KIRBY KEPT BUSY THROUGH THE 1950s, SOMETIMES FOLLOWING TRENDS AND SOMETIMES BLAZING THEIR OWN TRAILS WITH TITLES SUCH AS BLACK MAGIC, JUSTICE TRAPS THE GUILTY, AND YOUNG LOVE.*

Together, Simon and Kirby co-created Captain America, the new company's first major star, and were riding high on that triumph when Lee entered the scene as office boy at age 17 doing everything from erasing Kirby's pencils after his art pages were inked to writing single-page text features to save Goodman on postage rates. His first text piece appeared in *Captain America* #3 and was signed as being by "Stan Lee." But not all was right at Timely. Suspecting that Goodman was shortchanging them, Simon and Kirby began to moonlight for other publishers, and when they were discovered, Goodman fired them. As a result, Lee suddenly found himself taking over as editor.



**TIMELY PUBLISHER  
MARTIN GOODMAN.**

Although Goodman had intended to eventually hire a more experienced replacement for Simon, he never seemed to get around to it, and anyway Lee seemed to be doing all right at the job. So there Lee remained as the Timely line of comics slowly grew. Acting as both editor and art director, he learned about the comics industry from every angle and developed a professional eye for art and an ear for a turn of phrase that would serve him well as

the company became one of the largest producers of comics in the industry. He was also on hand for the less savory part of the job when he had to tell employees and loyal freelancers that their services were no longer required because cousin Martin decided to cut back on production when inventory began to pile up.

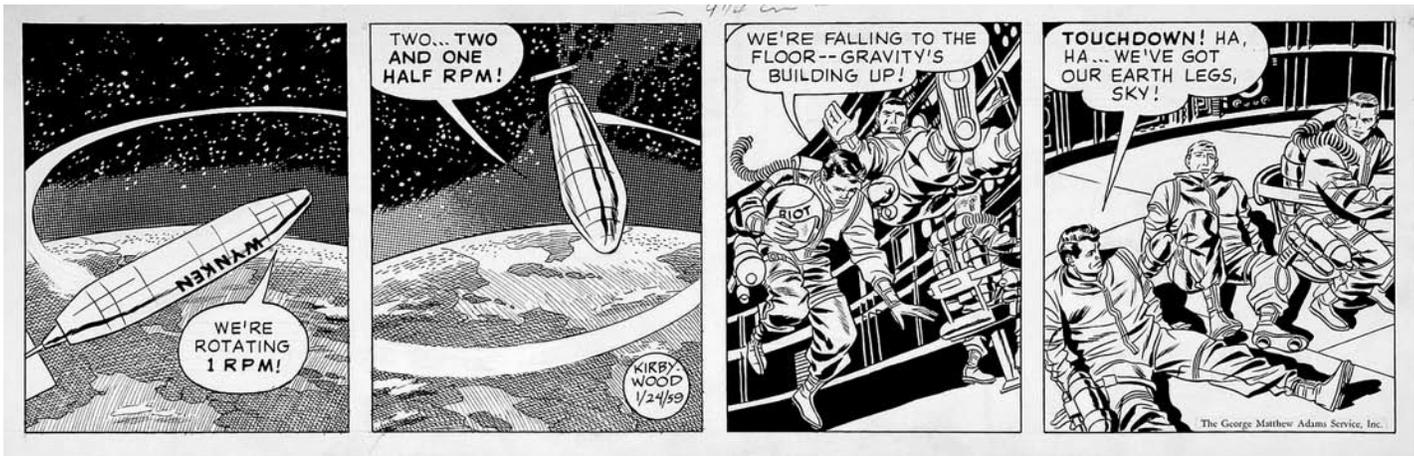
Lee himself was replaced once, and only briefly, while he served in the army, but when he returned he found his old job waiting for him, and throughout the 1950s he wrote thousands of comic book scripts for every imaginable genre, constantly honing his literary skills, finding different voices to tell his stories and even guided a failed attempt to bring back the company's super-heroes who had faded since the glory years of the 1940s. Throughout, however, Lee began to fear that he was caught in a rut, that his writing skills, keen as they were, might only be fit for the ghetto of comic books. He yearned to do some serious writing, a novel or a screenplay, but managed only a book on how to write for comics

and some mild successes with humor. By the late 1950s, he was working at moving out of the artistic basement of comic books and into the penthouse of newspaper comic strips, but with only limited success.

Meeting the same kind of disappointment was Jack Kirby, who, although returning from the war scarred by his experiences of battle, barely skipped a beat as he immediately hooked up again with Simon to reassert their place in the industry as the premier producers of comics. The two struck gold by adapting pulp magazine style romance to comics and managing to find a previously untapped vein of female readers. Next, they started *Black Magic*, a horror comic that was an early precursor of the deluge of even more virulent fare from other publishers that would eventually lead to congressional hearings and the establishment of the Comics Code Authority. In 1954, the pair went independent and started their own company under the Mainline label, but dissolved it along with their partnership only two years later.

Although Simon, never a shy sort, had no difficulty securing work in a string of editorial positions following the demise of Mainline, Kirby found himself increasingly at loose ends. Many comic book companies used the bad press that came out of the congressional hearings to cut their growing losses and dissolved their comic book divisions resulting in a stratification of the industry that was dominated by a handful of large publishers, each with their own "house styles." Styles that Kirby's unique brand of art seemed unable to fit. By the late 1950s, Kirby was lucky to get a few assignments from DC, for whom he had co-created many of its best-selling titles in years past.

It was while Kirby was keeping busy with weird fantasy stories, five-page back-ups of Green Arrow and introducing a new feature called "Challengers of the Unknown," that he partnered with the powerful Jack Schiff, a managing editor at DC, to create a newspaper strip called *Sky Masters*. Like Lee over at Atlas (or Marvel or Timely or Magazine Management, whatever Goodman was calling his company that week), Kirby had visions of breaking out of comics and into the far more lucrative and more prestigious field of newspaper strips. But although he had a strong start out of the gate, a falling out with Schiff over money and subsequent litigation sundered the relationship and ended that dream as well as his job at DC where he soon became *persona non grata*. Across what looked like an increasingly bleak comic book landscape, Kirby managed to pick up work here and there with Simon at Archie Comics and other



**AN ATTEMPT TO BREAK OUT OF THE COMIC BOOK GHETTO INTO THE MORE LUCRATIVE (AND RESPECTED) WORLD OF NEWSPAPER STRIPS, KIRBY'S SHORT-LIVED SKY MASTERS STRIP FEATURED LUSH INKING BY WALLY WOOD.**

smaller companies before finally approaching Lee for some freelance assignments. His timing was good, but not the best.

Atlas (or Marvel) had suffered another one of its reverses, but this time it was worse than ever. In a bad business move, Goodman had sold off his magazine distribution company and signed on with the American News Company which promptly went out of business leaving him with no way to get his magazines to the newsstands. Desperate, he brokered a deal with rival DC Comics that allowed him to remain in business but limited his comic book company to the production of only eight titles per month. The consequent "implosion" resulted in massive layoffs of both employees and freelancers, a catastrophe from which Lee as editor in chief of the company's comic book division was only beginning to regain his balance as the 1950s drew to a close. Thus, when Kirby knocked on the door in 1958, Lee was ready to take on more freelance help and finding himself able to afford the co-creator of Captain America, was more than happy to give the artist work.

As time passed, and the two began to test the waters for super-heroic characters again, they found the temperatures to their liking...and the readers'. Virtually unplanned, they discovered new wrinkles in the shopworn super-hero formula and in time, Lee in particular grew increasingly attuned with the times and realized that his comics (which he filled with a kind of self-deprecating humor that gently mocked the inherent seriousness of the super-hero as American icon and authority figure) were resonating

with young people on college campuses across the country. His consciousness having been raised, Lee began to include elements that gave his books an immediacy to his readers and a relevance to the times that were unheard of in comics before.

And so, Marvel Comics was able to transcend its juvenile, mass entertainment origins to become a staple of the counterculture, an emblem of coolness: film auteur Alain Renais worked on a movie script with Lee; the royalty of the San Francisco rock scene put on a Benefit Concert for (Marvel Comics character) Dr. Strange; magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Esquire*, which defined what was hip, often featured articles on Marvel Comics; and Marvel Comics itself became the preferred reading material between exams at college campuses across the country. The movement finally culminated in 1972 when Lee, accompanied by a line-up of pop-culture celebrities, hosted a Marvel Comics night at New York's Carnegie Hall.

That said, *Marvel Comics in the 1960s: An Issue by Issue Field Guide to a Pop-Culture Phenomenon* is intended to be a kind of history/handbook for anyone interested in finding out more about Marvel Comics and the origins of characters that are at last on the cusp of becoming genuine cultural icons. Making it even easier to use, the entries are divided into distinct groups representing the first three phases in the development of 1960s Marvel Comics: the Early Years, the Years of Consolidation, and the Grandiose Years. (The last phase called the Twilight Years will be featured in a second volume.) Although it's not necessary to start reading from the beginning to enjoy the book, doing so would provide the reader with a better sense of the beginnings of Marvel Comics, how it evolved under the guidance of Stan Lee, became a pop culture phenomenon and finally, after leading the industry for a decade, itself became what many of its readers most feared, the new establishment.

# Stan Lee



Before he was “the man,” Stan Lee was just plain Stanley Leiber, who picked up odd jobs all over New York City where he was born in 1927 before finally making a connection with a relative who got him in to see Joe Simon, an editor at cousin-in-law Martin Goodman’s Timely Comics. At loose ends, Stan had nothing to lose so he might as well have tried the slightly shady comics industry. At one time, Stan liked to tell the story of winning writing contests offered by the local newspapers, which may or may not have been true; more likely, the youngster spent hours reading practically anything he could get his hands on, and in the 1930s that usually meant

pulp magazines where the earliest versions of what would later be known as “super-heroes” and “super-villains” first appeared. Anyway, with his first official assignment at Timely, Stan’s knack for the written word soon made itself apparent: a text piece for *Captain America Comics* #3 (1941) that he signed for the first time as “Stan Lee.” Soon after, he jumped to straight scripting, coming up with his first super-hero creation, the Destroyer, and another called Jack Frost. Then fate took a hand. Simon and art director Jack Kirby left the company after a dispute with Goodman, and the next thing 19-year-old Stan knew, he was promoted and doing the work of both editor and art director. On a temporary basis, you understand. But months stretched into years, and except for a relatively brief hiatus in the Army, he stayed on the job for over three decades. During that time, he learned the nuts and bolts of copy editing and layout and wrote thousands of scripts in



every kind of genre, providing him a training ground in developing different literary voices, approaches to storytelling, and what things sold comics and what things didn’t. Experience that would be invaluable when it came time to flesh out personalities for the revolutionary characters that would make him famous during the Silver Age.

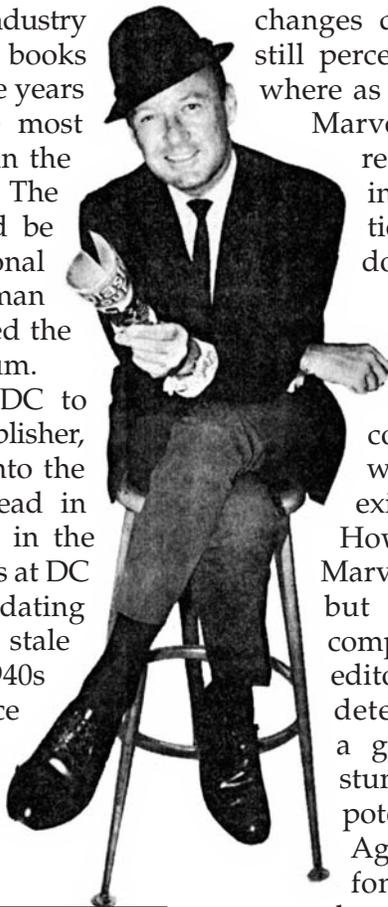


# Part I

## The Early, Formative Years

Judging by their impact on the industry over the last thirty years, those books published by Marvel Comics in the years between 1960-1973 remain the single most influential group of comics produced in the final decades of the twentieth century. The only other comparable example would be that of DC Comics, then known as National Periodicals, when it introduced Superman to the reading public in 1938 and turned the comics industry into a true mass medium.

The success of Superman helped DC to become the industry's most powerful publisher, a position it continued to enjoy well into the 1960s, and with which it took the lead in reopening the market to super-heroes in the previous decade. In doing so, the editors at DC led the field in innovations such as updating characters that had grown somewhat stale since their first appearances in the 1940s and paved the way for what has since been labeled the Silver Age of comics. Although what DC had done to update its heroes was okay so far as it went, the problem was that the



changes didn't go far enough. Comics were still perceived by the editors there and elsewhere as kid stuff. It was that blind spot that Marvel was soon to take advantage of, recreating the image of the super-hero in such a way that it solidified the position of the costumed adventurer as the dominant element in modern comics.

So powerful was Marvel's hold on the imagination of readers that the new kind of hero eventually swept aside almost every other kind of comics including romance, horror, western and war—all genres that had existed in abundance in the early sixties. However it started, the revolution led by Marvel in the 1960s began with the slow but steady progression of storytelling complexity as the company, helmed by editor Stan Lee, moved from an early determination to try something new, to a growing consciousness that it had stumbled onto something fraught with potentiality. This whole period (the Silver Age of comics, or Marvel Age as Lee was fond of calling it) marking Marvel's progress, breaks down roughly into four phases: the early, formative years; the years of consolidation; the later, grandiose years; and the twilight era.

*STAN LEE IN THE EARLY 1960S BEFORE HE BECAME A POP CULTURE GURU!*

The early, formative years grew out of a period in Marvel's history that was dominated not by super-heroes but by westerns, teen humor, romance and weird adventure comics. It was among these categories that many of the themes incorporated in the later super-hero comics were first explored: western heroes like the Two-Gun Kid and the Rawhide Kid were misunderstood outcasts just as Spider-Man and the X-Men would be, the

RAWHIDE KID 28 - P. 29



Hulk and the Thing were direct descendents of many of the brutes that roamed through scores of weird tales, and the desperate, paranoid characters who populated Lee and artist Steve Ditko's fantasy stories would later seek out the help of Dr. Strange or skulk in dark alleys for an unwary Daredevil. Here, at the dawn of the Marvel Age of comics, it was doubtful that even Lee himself had any idea of what he was starting with *Fantastic Four* #1. All he knew at the time was that he had a vague idea of doing something different with the old super-hero formula.

It was lucky then, that just when he was needed the most, artist Jack Kirby had reappeared at Marvel. At the time, Atlas, as Marvel was then known, had been forced to reduce its line of hundreds of comic book titles to

only a handful; so few in fact, that a single artist could almost cover them all by himself. How did it happen? In a move that probably made sense at the time, publisher Martin Goodman had divested himself of his magazine distribution network hoping to rely on an independent operator. Those plans fell through when the American News Company went out of business leaving Goodman with no way to market his comics. A deal with rival National Periodicals solved that problem...in a way. They would agree to distribute Goodman's books, but only eight each month. Thus, if it chose, by juggling its publishing schedule with a number of bi-monthly books, Marvel could produce up to 16 different titles every two months. Among them such old standbys as *Strange Tales*, *Tales to Astonish*, *Tales of Suspense* and *Journey Into Mystery*

RAWHIDE KID #28, PAGE 4. IN MARVEL'S PRE-HERO WESTERNS, LEE AND KIRBY EXPLORED SOME OF THE TERRITORY THEY WOULD LATER COVER IN THEIR SUPER-HERO STORIES. CHARACTERS LIKE THE RAWHIDE KID WERE OFTEN PORTRAYED AS OUTSIDERS, WITH COWBOY GARB THAT RESEMBLED COSTUMES AND PHYSICAL SKILLS THAT BORDERED ON THE SUPER-HEROIC.

were returned to the schedule in a different guise than their old blood-and-guts, pre-Code selves. Now they featured a variety of fantasy and “mystery” stories of aliens, ghosts and slightly sinister spirits all intent on providing fit endings to a bevy of deserving misfits.

Headlining each book, however, was something wonderfully different. Jumping onto the giant monster craze that dominated Hollywood in the 1950s, Lee instituted a series of wild and crazy monster stories with creatures sporting names far more outlandish than their grotesque appearances: Mummex, Bruttu, Spragg, and of course, Fin Fang Foom. That’s where Kirby came in. With declining fortunes having placed him at Lee’s disposal, Kirby was offered all the work he could handle and soon had the lead spot in all the mystery titles. But even with his legendary speed at the drawing table, Kirby was barely able to keep up with the workload and his art suffered, losing some of its polish but none of its dynamism. Even so, finding it difficult to turn down work, Kirby also became the major artist on westerns such as *Two-Gun Kid* and *Rawhide Kid*, often did back-up strips in *Gunsmoke Western*, *Kid Colt Outlaw*, the occasional war story in books such as *Battle*, and at least once even filled in on *Love Romances*.

But even with Kirby doing so much on so few books, he still couldn’t do it all. The shake-up at Marvel had left the company with only a handful of artists such as Paul Reinman, Al Hartley and Joe Sinnott, but just as a prospector might sift through soil to find gold dust, the shaking out of Lee’s staff still left him with a couple of sizeable nuggets in artists Steve Ditko and Don Heck.

While Heck had been a standby at the company for years, producing everything from war and crime to mystery and romance, Ditko was a relative newcomer who began working for Marvel intermittently in the mid-1950s. Like Kirby, the two artists seemed to become indispensable to Lee as they quickly took their places in the various mystery titles with Heck usually taking the second slot and Ditko bringing up the rear.

Although Heck was a fine draftsman, particularly when inking his own pencils, it would be Ditko with whom Lee bonded on an aesthetic level, even more than he had with Kirby. Ditko’s style was far more moody and atmospheric than Kirby’s and tended to emphasize the psychological motivations of his characters rather than what they actually did within a story. For that reason, Lee was attracted to Ditko and paired with him on assignments in these early years much more

than he did with Kirby. For instance, whereas he scripted almost all of Ditko’s assignments, even signing both their names on splash pages, Lee more often than not confined himself to throwing out plot ideas and delegating scripting chores for Kirby’s tales to his brother Larry Lieber. Lee even created a whole new mystery title, *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, dedicated solely to he and Ditko’s collaborations. Thus, by the time Goodman was prepared to reenter the lists in the super-hero arena, Lee’s working relationship with Ditko had already developed to the point of true collaboration, while only the foundation of the same kind of arrangement was in place between he and Kirby, a pair of circumstances that would prove both rewarding and contentious as the Marvel Age of comics progressed.



*AFTER JOE SIMON, THERE WAS STAN LEE, ALL GROWN UP AND NOW EDITOR IN CHIEF OF WHAT WOULD SOON BECOME MARVEL COMICS. LEE PARTNERED WITH KIRBY IN THE LATE '50S ON A STRING OF MONSTER, WESTERN, AND WAR STORIES THAT LED UP TO THE DEBUT OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.*

### **Fantastic Four #1**

*“The Fantastic Four!”; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), George Klein (inks)*

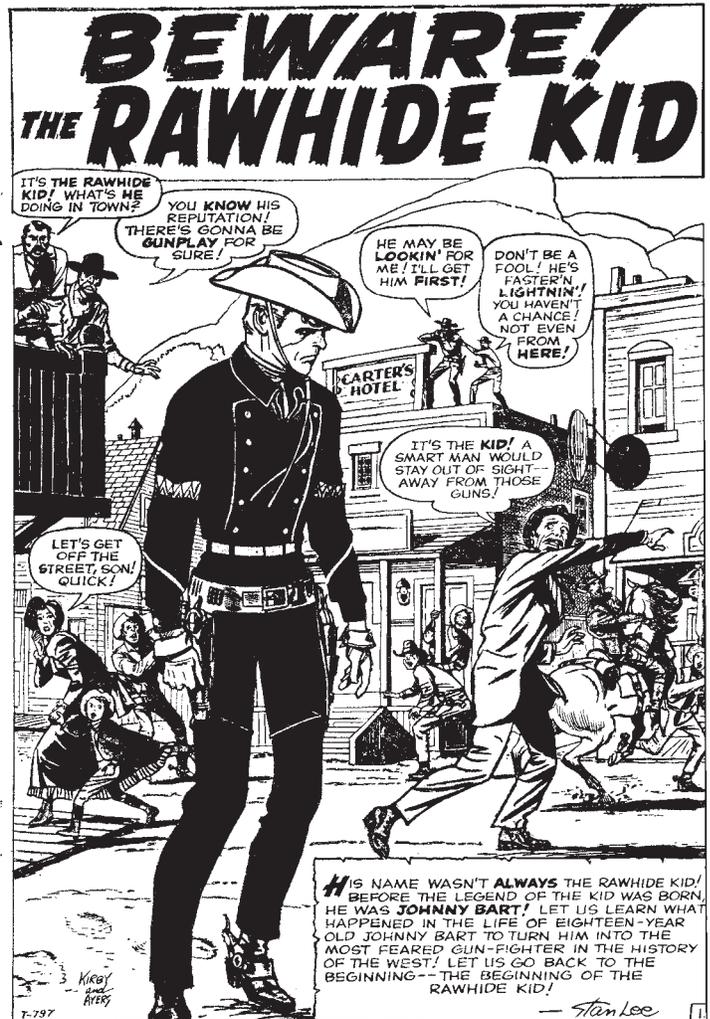
*“The Fantastic Four Meet the Mole Man!”; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), George Klein (inks)  
Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), George Klein (inks)*

What is there left to say about *Fantastic Four* #1 (Nov. 1961) that hasn’t been said before? Here’s the book that neatly divides the history of comics into two eras: everything that came before and the progeny of the Fantastic Four that came after. It was this book that rewrote the rules on comics and, in order to survive, all others eventually had to follow its lead. Right from the

start, its approach to the super-hero was radically different from what had become standard operating procedure for costumed characters since the creation of Superman in 1938: the heroes didn't live in a Batcave or come equipped with specialized gadgets, they didn't have secret identities or a headquarters, hidden or otherwise. They didn't sport colorful costumes, and they spent a lot of time bickering among themselves and dealing with the unexpected personal tragedies brought on by the possession of strange powers. Being a super-hero in something that resembled the real world, it seemed, wasn't what it was cracked up to be. But is it safe to assume that readers at the time recognized just how different the FF was compared to, say, their contemporaries at DC? Or were the first buyers simply interested in the big, green monster on the cover, a monster much like those in other titles Marvel, or rather Atlas, was putting out at the time? Was it that, or the book's familiar plot: a brilliant scientist and his friends rocket into space, are bathed in cosmic rays, return to earth only to discover that they've been given strange powers, and fall immediately into battle with the Mole Man and his legions of

giant monsters? It's hard to believe that with the more professional looking product the competition at DC was putting out, with its huge staff of better paid professional editors, writers and artists, that the crudely produced *Fantastic Four* book could possibly have a chance of being noticed by discriminating readers. Matters certainly weren't helped by the book's artwork, which was done by longtime professional Jack Kirby, who had a track record for almost always producing top quality work. But for the first few issues of the *FF*, in contrast with his concurrent work on Marvel's westerns and monster books, it seemed as if the artist was on auto-pilot. Which was strange for Kirby, who'd been in comics almost since the industry began in the mid-to-late 1930s. Early in his career, Kirby had been in on the creation of Captain America

*NOTICE THE LACK OF DETAIL AND BACKGROUNDS AS WELL AS THE SIMPLE LAYOUT OF THIS PAGE FROM FANTASTIC FOUR #1 AND THE MORE LABOR INTENSIVE ART IN THE PAGE FROM RAWHIDE KID #17. DID KIRBY HAVE MORE FAITH IN WESTERNS THAN HE DID IN THE IDEA OF COSTUME-LESS SUPER-HEROES?*



# Jack Kirby

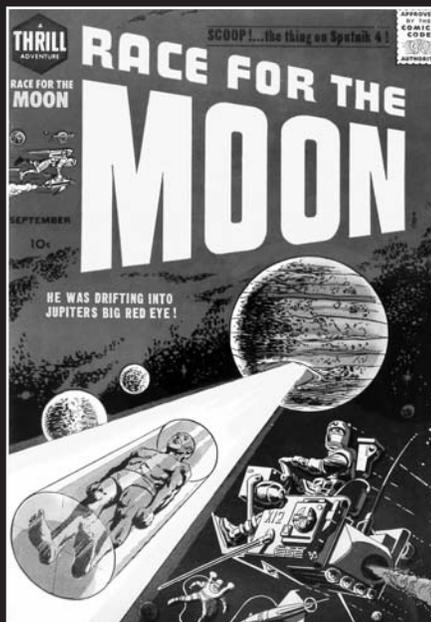


When Jack “King” Kirby, nee Jacob Kurtzberg, came into the world in 1917, it was rumored that he entered it with a pencil in his hand, and though that may not have been true, he probably started drawing very soon after that. Graduating from scrawling on the walls of the tenement where his family lived, Jack started drawing for a local boys’ club before finding employment doing fill-in cartoons for newspapers and later, animation work for the Fleischer Studios. Getting tired of the repetitious in-between work, the young

artist discovered the comics industry and joined the Eisner & Iger shop (where he became Jack Kirby). It was around 1940 while working at Fox Features Syndicate that Jack met Joe Simon. The two soon formed a partnership and secured a lucrative deal with Timely publisher Martin Goodman. With Simon as editor and Jack working as art director, the two thrust their most famous creation into the world with *Captain America Comics* #1 (1941). A dispute over compensation forced the two to leave Timely for DC where Jack was instrumental in creating such popular features as “Boy Commandos” and “Manhunter.” Then the Army called, and Jack found himself in the infantry where he almost lost his legs from frostbite.

Following the war, he rejoined Simon and pioneered horror and romance comics as well as other super-hero features until the two mutually agreed to end the partnership. But by the late 1950s, it seemed as if comics had run their course. Jobs were harder to find and after returning to DC and an abortive attempt to break out into the world of newspaper strips, Jack found himself back at Timely, now renamed Atlas and later Marvel.

There, instead of becoming a footnote in the history of a dying industry, he ended up in another partnership that was destined to achieve iconic status and make the name of Jack Kirby synonymous with pop art and unrestrained excitement.



(who would prove to be one of Marvel's most popular characters), and since then, had bounced from one company to another, always turning in solid work while at the same time earning a reputation as the industry's most dynamic storyteller. Just about his last stand before returning to Marvel in the late fifties was made at DC where he created the *Challengers of the Unknown*, a strip with vague similarities to the FF. Writer Stan Lee, on the other hand, entered the industry through privilege. Related to Marvel's publisher Martin Goodman, he began his career at the company as a writer/office boy when Kirby (and his partner Joe Simon) were associate editors there in the early forties. After Simon and Kirby left, Lee's star began to rise until not only did he become editor himself, but was responsible for writing a great many of the company's books. By the time the sixties rolled around, Lee was ready to quit. The comics portion of the company was at its lowest ebb, headquartered in a tiny office with barely room enough to fit both Lee and his secretary. Clearly, after 25 years, comics, for Marvel at least, were on the way out, and Lee had nothing to lose in taking a chance or two.

Claiming in later years that the FF was Marvel's attempt to cash in on the latest comic book fad (rival DC had been having some success with a new super-hero team book called the *Justice League of America*), Lee decided to use the new title to break some of the old rules that had built up around the hoary concept of the super-hero and try a new approach that he'd had in mind for a long time. With the debut of the *Fantastic Four* in 1961, readers somehow saw through the story's standard plot, recognized its unconventional elements, and gave Lee the chance he needed. At first unsure (except for this vague notion of unconventionality), Lee would eventually become more conscious of the larger potentialities of the new direction and, over time, the *Fantastic Four* would become he and Kirby's main vehicle for some of the most amazing advances (and adventures!) in comic book storytelling as well as the spearhead that would drive Marvel to the forefront of an emerging sixties' pop culture movement.

## Fantastic Four #2

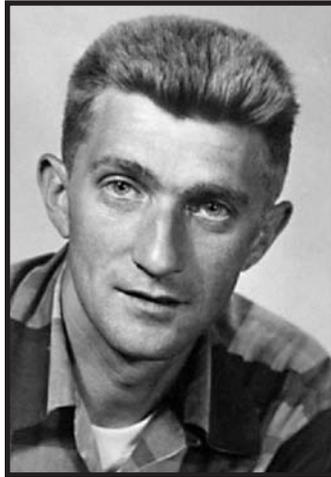
*"The Fantastic Four Meet the Skrulls from Outer Space!"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), George Klein (inks)*

*Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), George Klein (inks)*

In an early example of how close to the surface public fear and resentment of super-heroes would be in the emerging Marvel universe, *Fantastic Four #2* opens with what appears to be members of the FF involved in villainous activity: the Thing sinks an offshore oil drilling platform, the Invisible Girl steals an expensive gem, Mr. Fantastic cuts power to New

York City and the Torch melts down a statue just as it's being dedicated. In no time the confidence of the public won in issue #1 is gone and the FF "have become the most dangerous menace we have ever faced!" The readiness of the fickle public to go from outright adoration of the celebrity-like FF to fear and resentment would be repeated often, albeit usually with the heroes being set-up by a villain such as they are here by the Skrulls, alien shapeshifters bent on conquering the Earth. But the point wasn't that they were being framed, rather that it was so easy to turn

the public against them. Time and again, especially in these early, formative years, the public would be swayed by a parade of rabble rousers who, seemingly more sensitive to the insecurities of the ordinary citizen than the heroes, would have little trouble making life miserable for the good guys. And the FF would be easy targets. Throughout the coming years, whenever the team would leave its midtown skyscraper headquarters, or its emergency flare appeared in the sky, or real estate was destroyed in a battle, passersby in the street would point and wonder on how many zoning codes the team were breaking by launching their pogo plane, jet cycles, Fantastacar or even ICBM (!) from their building? And though over the years this theme of just below the surface public hostility became less obvious, it would always be there, prompting some heroes like Spider-Man or the Thing in this issue, to lose their tempers. "...The whole country is hunting us as though



**EARLY INKERS ON KIRBY FOR THE FF, GEORGE KLEIN (LEFT) WOULD LATER ENJOY GREAT SUCCESS INKING OVER GENE COLAN ON DAREDEVIL AND JOHN BUSCEMA ON THE AVENGERS WHILE SOL BRODSKY (RIGHT) WOULD DRIFT MORE INTO THE PRODUCTION SIDE OF THE BUSINESS.**

# Part II

## The Years of Consolidation

**A**lthough editor Stan Lee had made a start in his new approach to super-heroes, Marvel's early, formative years had still been marked by a faltering sense of experimentation, without firm pattern or purpose. The seeds, however, had definitely been planted for the full flowering of the Marvel style that would bloom in the later, grandiose years. But what about the two years or so that separated those epochs? Those years would be filled by an era of consolidation during which Lee considered what had already been accomplished and began a conscious effort to adapt the new style not only to existing titles, but to new ones specifically created for that purpose. And so, it was during these years of consolidation that Lee and his stable of artists, particularly Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, began to actively exploit the disparate elements that had defined the nascent, but increasingly popular Marvel style and to deliberately weave them into a coherent "universe." What especially characterized these years of consolidation? Mostly the deliberate

attempt by Lee to tie his growing universe closer together, to develop its own internal consistency and to give it a semblance of verisimilitude. To do that, Lee employed a number of literary tools, including the



*SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT: AS THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION BEGAN, SALES WERE PICKING UP AND LEE BEGAN A DELIBERATE PROCESS OF FITTING THE PIECES OF A GROWING SUPER-HERO UNIVERSE TOGETHER.*

crossover and the continued story. With their reliance on multi-issue stories that sometimes went on for a year or more, continued stories would become a hallmark of the later grandiose years, but they had their start during the years of consolidation when more modest two-part stories were the norm. Also important in these years were the more elusive elements of fun and excitement which Lee's writing, honed over years of scripting everything from teen humor to adventure comics, put across with breezy effortlessness. Making all this easier was the fact that Lee took upon himself the scripting for all the super-hero titles and in the process, found a way to simply have fun with the universe he and his artists had created.

Artists like Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, whose close working relationship with Lee became

increasingly important as the years of consolidation progressed, took easily to a less traditional way of producing comics that involved working from an outline or synopsis supplied by the writer and plotting and adding details to the story as they drew. Dialogue and captions would be added only after the art was finished. Later called the "Marvel method," it was really nothing new (Lee had used it now and then in earlier years); what was different was its broad application on so many different titles at once. By working in this fashion, Lee could write every book in Marvel's burgeoning lineup of super-hero titles; at the same time, being editor, he could also maintain an unusual consistency and quality control. While some artists would find it difficult if not impossible to adapt to the new operation, for artists such as Kirby and Ditko, the method brought out inherent talents for creativity that would have remained bottled up using full scripts. Their success with the Marvel method soon granted them a kind of superstardom and eventually they were credited as co-plotters in the books they produced with Lee, an unusual concession in the comics industry. Kirby in particular, was much in demand by Lee not only for his plotting skills, but his action-oriented compositions which were considered part of the formula for Marvel's success. Consequently, other artists were asked either to infuse the same kind of dynamism into their work or complete very simple

pencil layouts dashed off by Kirby as guides until they caught the hang of it. At the same time, Kirby became Lee's utility infielder, in on the developmental stages of almost every new feature, designing costumes or dreaming up powers, doing cover roughs and corrections when he was in the office, penciling the first few issues of new features before they were continued under other artists and drawing the covers to virtually every book in the line-up (even the westerns) when he wasn't.

Adding uniformity to Kirby's pencils (especially on all those covers) and the whole Marvel line during the years of consolidation was Chic Stone. Although artist Dick Ayers had been frequently assigned to ink Kirby in the early years, Stone would become the first of a new group of regular inkers whose own individual styles would interpret Kirby's work in different ways that became somehow appropriate for whatever book he and the inker were working on; examples include such team-ups as Kirby and Vince Colletta on *Thor*, Kirby and Joe Sinnott on the *Fantastic Four*, and Kirby and Syd Shores on *Captain America*. But before Colletta, Sinnott and Shores, there would be Stone, whose simple but firm brush strokes were the first to present Kirby's pencils in their best light across the board. Also contributing to the look of the years of consolidation was colorist Stan Goldberg whose off-centered color separations and rich gradations that had blues darkening to purple and reds to maroons, made

Marvel's covers easily recognizable from the flat, overly bright, two-dimensional presentations of its competitors.

But as new books were added to Marvel's list of titles, including *Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos*, *Avengers* and *X-Men*, each of which were launched with Kirby's full pencils, the artist was finding himself with less and less time on his hands. Ditko and Heck could pick up some of the slack, but neither was as speedy as Kirby, and as the years of consolidation ended, Lee began casting about for new talent. Bringing in such veterans as Jack Sparling, John Severin, Alex Toth, Bill Everett and Werner Roth, he soon discovered that most could not, or would not adapt to the Marvel style and left after only short stints. In the end, Lee had to go all the way back to the days when Timely/Atlas was riding high to recruit the next wave



**BY THE TIME THE YEARS OF CONSOLIDATION ROLLED AROUND, THE NASCENT MARVEL UNIVERSE HAD EXPANDED SUCH THAT ANNUALS DEDICATED TO SPECIFIC CHARACTERS COULD FEATURE ENTIRE ROGUES' GALLERIES OF COLORFUL VILLAINS OR NECESSITATE REPRINTING A COMPLETE SLATE OF ORIGIN STORIES TO BRING NEW FANS UP TO DATE.**

of artists who would not only stay on, but blossom in unimagined ways under the company's new Marvel aegis.

And just as the number of titles was getting too large for Kirby, Ditko and Heck to manage, so too was it for the line's single writer. Although early on, Lee had farmed out some of the scripting chores to brother Larry Lieber and other old time Timely/Atlas stalwarts, what he needed was a good staff writer whom he could groom to take over some of the line's lesser titles. But until Roy Thomas walked in the door at the tail end of the years of consolidation, he would have to make do with the others whom he slowly began to marginalize in the company's westerns and teen humor titles.

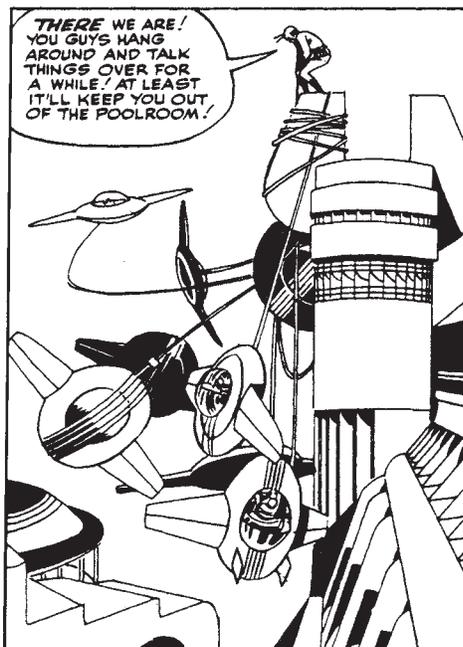
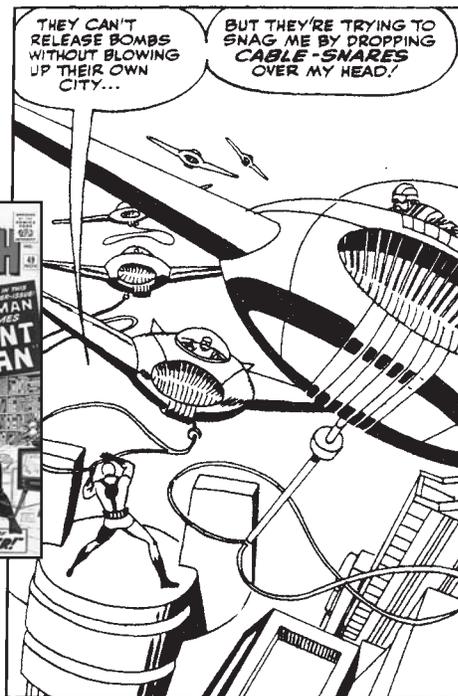
Although the years of consolidation conveyed the impression that Lee and his artists were still flying by the seat of their collective pants, making things up as they went along, caught up in the increasing pace of climbing circulation figures, a new self-consciousness was also taking hold, one that would allow Lee to pull up on the reins enough to get things under control and pointed in the right direction. But to continue the analogy, the horse was out of the barn and even though it might be kept from veering from side to side, its momentum continued as strongly as ever, carrying the company into strange new territories of the imagination that would only be fully revealed in the later, grandiose years.

And the beneficiary of it all was a young but enthralled readership who would grow up with Marvel comics and with whom Marvel, and particularly Stan Lee, would increasingly identify.

### Tales to Astonish #49

"The Birth of Giant-Man"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Don Heck (inks)  
Cover: Don Heck (pencils & inks)

Jack Kirby and fellow artist Don Heck kicked off the years of consolidation by teaming up to produce *Tales to Astonish* #49 (Nov. 1963), in which Lee converts Ant-Man into a completely different super-hero by adding two letters to his name. And so, in less than three pages, Ant-Man became Giant-Man! The augmentation in the character's powers was an obvious



*TALES TO ASTONISH* #49, PAGE 15. KIRBY'S USE OF BIG QUARTER PAGE PANELS ON THIS PAGE HAVE THE EFFECT OF PUTTING THE READER INTO THE CENTER OF THE ACTION.

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attempt by Lee to jazz up a faltering character and as usual, Kirby was called in to jumpstart the strip. Heck, who up until now, had been the regular penciler, remained as inker. Giant-Man however, hardly has time to get used to his new powers before the "Living Eraser" shows up. It seems the denizens of the dimension from which the Eraser has come have learned of Earth's atomic bomb and would like one for themselves. Using a transporting device that simulates "erasing," the Eraser kidnaps Earth scientists, including Henry Pym, in order to force them to build a bomb for his masters. Pym slips away to become Giant-Man and readers are treated to a fantastic, no holds barred fight where Kirby lets out all the stops. Throughout, Heck's delicate inks perfectly complement Kirby's pencils, proof perhaps that he was an even better inker than

penciler, especially on page 15 where Kirby uses big, quarter-page panels to have Giant-Man lassoing alien aircraft from the top of a skyscraper! Lee comes up with a totally unpretentious plot that the artists just have a ball working on. Truly, an unsung classic!

### Tales to Astonish #50

"The Human Top"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Steve Ditko (inks)

Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Sol Brodsky (inks)

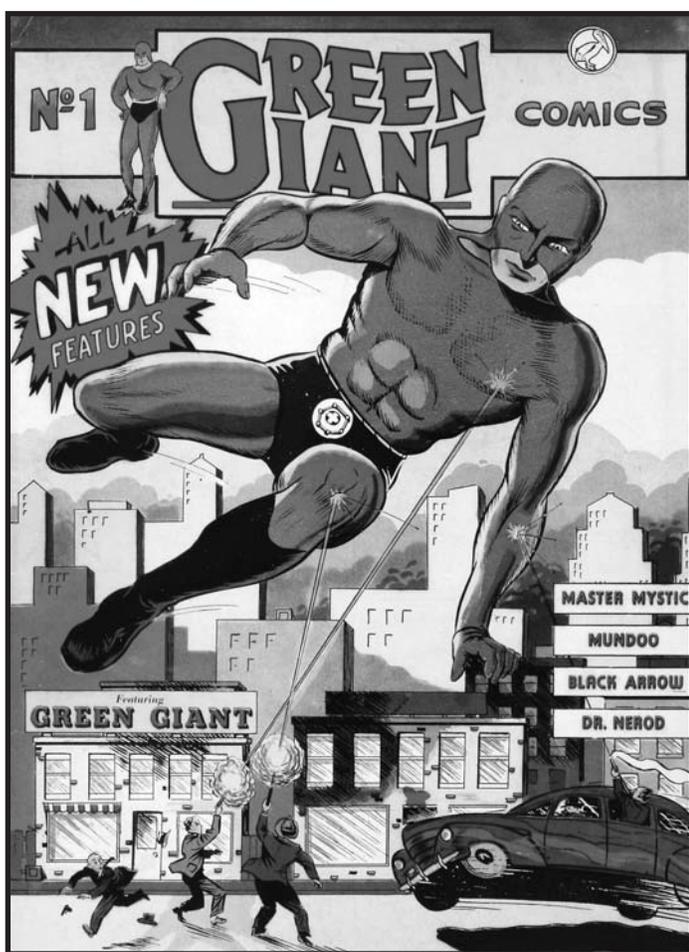
Replacing Heck on the inking chores in *Tales to Astonish* #50 (Dec. 1963) (the first issue following Ant-Man's change to Giant-Man) with Steve Ditko, Lee and Kirby followed the origin story of Giant-Man from the issue before by moving immediately into a "novel length" two-part story featuring a new villain called the Human Top (who proved to be an early mutant). It was such things as Marvel's depiction of a super-hero, unused to his new found powers, stumbling about the city, making a public fool of himself, that separated the company from its competitors. Marvel's heroes were still human beings, and it was such a formula that Lee tried to infuse into the "Giant-Man" strip that it had been lacking before. Consequently, readers had a chance to see the heroic Giant-Man crashing through the city, smashing through fences, knocking down signs and running into lamp posts as the Top scampers just out of reach, taunting him unmercifully. Finally, tiring of the game, the Top just takes off, leaving a defeated Giant-Man in his wake. Lee has succeeded in making the hero, despite his power, a sympathetic character in the mind of the reader. And as the issue draws to a close, we see Giant-Man desperately practicing to catch a giant mechanical top in preparation for his next encounter with its human counterpart. But unbeknownst to him, the sympathetic Wasp has set the device to only half-speed, how can Giant-Man possibly beat the Top? Tune in next issue to find out!

### Tales to Astonish #51

"Showdown with the Human Top"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks)

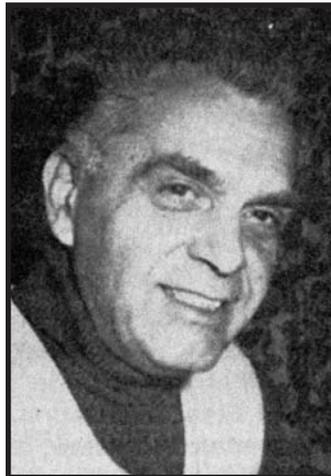
Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), George Roussos (inks)

*Tales to Astonish* #51 (Jan. 1964) begins with a nice Kirby action cover highlighted in bright purples and greens (with the artist's increasingly hectic schedule no doubt the reason for numerous errors in Giant-Man's costume). Dick Ayers replaces Ditko's inking of Kirby as the contest between Giant-Man and the Human Top continues from the previous issue. Once again, Giant-Man manages to catch up with the Top, only to again fall prey to his own giant size. The interesting contrast in super-powers impresses itself on our hero as he realizes that it will take more than brute strength to



**GREEN GIANT COMICS #1. IRREVOCABLE PROOF THAT NOT EVERY IDEA FOR A SUPER-HERO CHARACTER IS AN ORIGINAL ONE. CHARACTERS COULD HAVE THE SAME POWERS, BUT TO ENDURE, THEY HAD TO BE INTERESTING OUT OF COSTUME TOO AND HAVE A CAST OF SUPPORTING CHARACTERS WHO COULD PLAY UP THEIR FOIBLES. NOTWITHSTANDING THE WASP, IT WAS SOMETHING LEE FAILED TO DEVELOP FOR THE "GIANT-MAN" STRIP.**

defeat his opponent. When next the Top appears, a section of the city is closed off and evacuated, trapping the villain inside a cordoned-off area with Giant-Man. Then follows a fun-filled three-page chase sequence that ends with Giant-Man finally corralling the Top. One of the earliest examples of the two-part story, what made *Astonish* #s 50 and 51 distinctive, was Lee's willingness to take a chance with the magazine distribution system as it existed in the early 1960s. Before the rise of the comic book specialty shop and the direct market in the late 1970s (which ensured that comic shops could carry every title without fail), the way magazines were distributed was a haphazard affair, especially for comic books. Comics, because of their low cover price, presented stores with an unusually narrow profit margin, much smaller than that for regular magazines. Consequently, store owners with only limited shelf space, if given the choice, would rather put up a \$1 copy of *Life* magazine rather than a 12-cent *Fantastic Four*. As a result, for a kid in the 1960s, seeking out his favorite comics became a time-consuming adventure. Riding his trusty Schwinn from store to store, if he was lucky, he might be able to find all the titles he was expecting to be on sale for that particular week. Sometimes there were books he'd never find, leaving him forever wondering how Thor managed to get his hammer back from the Cobra and Mr. Hyde or how Iron Man escaped from the clutches of the Mandarin. And so, it's easy to understand why publishers generally shied away from running continued stories and how chancy it was for Lee to try it, especially with a line of books that was still struggling to get out from under the shadow of its giant rival, DC (who also happened to control their distribution). But the early attempts by Lee to sell continued stories must've proven successful, because not only did they become more prolific as the years of consolidation continued, but by the time of the grandiose years, whole series such as the *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* would turn into virtual serials, going on almost endlessly for months, even years, at a time.



**LEAKAGE FROM THE EARLY YEARS CONTINUED WITH KIRBY (LEFT) CONTINUING TO BE INKED BY PAUL REINMAN (RIGHT) ON THE AVENGERS AND X-MEN. SOON, HOWEVER, A MEASURE OF UNIFORMITY WOULD TAKE HOLD WITH THE HEAVIER BUT SLICKER WORK OF CHIC STONE WHO WOULD BECOME KIRBY'S DEFAULT INKER.**

### Avengers #3

*"The Avengers Meet... Sub-Mariner!"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Paul Reinman (inks)  
Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Paul Reinman (inks)*

Was it a continued story within a continued story or the first multi-title crossover in comics' history? Whatever it was, the earliest struggle between the Hulk and the rest of Marvel's heroes presents the perfect example not only of a key element of the years of consolidation, but of the possibilities inherent in a shared comic book universe. And although having a single writer/editor and artist in charge of a limited number of titles would make it easy to juggle so many characters at once, it's more than likely that at this early stage, neither Stan Lee nor Jack Kirby had quite planned the way this story would eventually turn out. Okay, now pay attention: It begins in *Avengers* #3, side-tracks into *Journey into Mystery* #112, continues in *Avengers* #4, picks up again in *Fantastic Four* #s 25 and 26 and concludes in *Avengers* #5. Got that? Now to confuse things even further, the story actually

has its real beginning at the end of *Avengers* #2, following the team's defeat of the villainous Space Phantom, when the Hulk realizes that his teammates don't really trust him. Never having quite fit in with the group, the short-tempered Hulk quits, leaving the others wondering when and how he'll strike next. Now, if a reader's taste ran to "bludgeoning battle" issues, then they couldn't possibly go wrong with "The Avengers Meet... the Sub-Mariner" in *Avengers* #3 (Jan. 1964). Here, Kirby's art transcends Paul Reinman's uninspired inks as he and Lee craft a 25-page story that seems much longer about Iron Man, Thor, Giant-Man and the Wasp as they combat the Sub-Mariner, who's managed to coerce the Hulk into joining his campaign to conquer the human race. The Avengers begin their search for the Hulk by visiting almost every super-hero in the Marvel universe, seeking information on the whereabouts of their wayward member before moving west for their first round of action. The confrontation is inconclusive until they meet the Hulk again in the bowels of the Rock of Gibraltar. There, the

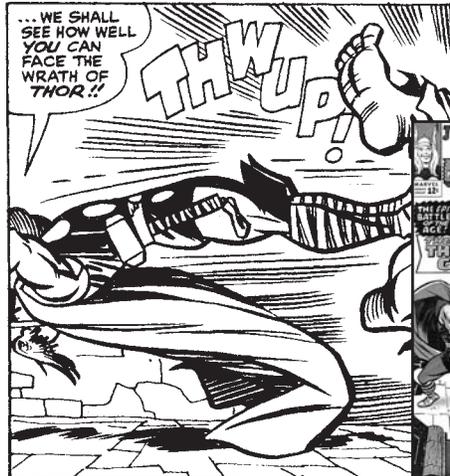
Avengers finally come to grips not only with the Hulk but also with his new ally, the Sub-Mariner. In the ensuing mayhem, battle is joined as both sides take advantage of a variety of left-over World War II military hardware to keep their foes at bay. As usual in these circumstances, nothing is decided as a stalemate forces both parties to break off the action. But that's not the end of this story, not by a long shot! The Avengers continue their pursuit of the Sub-Mariner in their next issue and of the Hulk in FF #25.

## Journey Into Mystery #112

"The Mighty Thor Battles the Incredible Hulk"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Chic Stone (inks)  
 "The Coming of Loki!"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Vince Colletta (inks)  
 Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Chic Stone (inks)

This next entry is actually a retroactive chapter in the Avengers/Hulk storyline, because *Journey Into Mystery* #112 (Jan. 1965) appeared nearly a year following the conclusion of the events in *Avengers* #3. Billed as "The Epic Battle of the Age" (and featuring

page after page of action as Thor duking it out with an enraged Hulk deep beneath the Rock of Gibraltar, who's to argue?), the story is recounted by Thor in order to help settle a debate between two groups of kids he finds arguing over who was stronger, the thunder god or the Hulk (not coincidentally, the same argument that had been raging among Marvel's readers for months). As Thor tells it, he and the Hulk were separated during the events of *Avengers* #3 and ended up conducting a private match between themselves before finding their way back to their teammates. With crossovers like this, Lee and Kirby were able to draw the elements of their growing universe of heroes closer together while creating in their readers' minds a greater sense of its realism. In addition, they provided a solid base on which to build more complex stories in the future. And just who turned out to be the strongest, Thor or the Hulk? That would be telling! But wait! That's not all frantic fans would find in



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*JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY* #112, PAGE 10. CHIC STONE HAD BEEN INKING OVER KIRBY'S PENCILS SINCE *JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY* #102. THIS POWER-PACKED PAGE IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW STONE'S CLEAN LINES SERVED BOTH TO PRESERVE ESSENTIAL DETAILS WHILE GIVING WEIGHT TO KIRBY'S FIGURES.

# Part III

## The Grandiose Years

**M**arvel Comics' Silver Age stretched across at least ten years (1960-1970) and over that time developed from the self-contained, single-issue stories common in the industry, to longer tales involving mature subjects and more complex themes. Dividing the company's progression over this period into four phases allows for a clearer understanding of how editor Stan Lee, aided by his stable of artists, moved from one phase to the next. Although far from proven, it's the contention here that in the first phase, the early, formative years, Lee was not working according to any plan beyond approaching superheroes in a more realistic way. It was in the second phase, the years of consolidation, that he became conscious of themes he'd inadvertently raised in the first. Using such literary tools as the continued story and crossovers, he extended these new ideas to all the company's heroes and in the process created a multi-textual shared universe.

In the grandiose years to be considered here, with the

foundation of the Marvel style in place, Lee would pursue a deliberate sense of humanism, adapting his comics to the spirit of the times (the 1960s) which resulted in comics written and conceptualized in such a way as to appeal to adults as well as children. Furthermore, it seems that in the first two phases, Lee was pretty much in the driver's seat, directing the

course of his entire line of new books while infusing them with doses of "reality" in the form of characterization, continuity and real world problems. To be sure, in Kirby and Ditko, Lee had a pair of protean talents, each of whom needed guidance of one kind or another. Nevertheless, it was Ditko, perhaps due to his closer partnership with Lee during the pre-hero days, who became the first of the two artists to be allowed strong input on the strips he was assigned. From the very beginning, he placed his stamp on the *Amazing Spider-Man*, inventing many of the details of the character and soon after becoming heavily involved in the book's plotting and characterization. By Lee's own admission, it



*IN THE GRANDIOSE YEARS, EDITOR STAN LEE WOULD KEEP INCREASINGLY OUTSIZED STORY CONCEPTS GROUNDED IN OVERARCHING HUMANIST SENSIBILITIES.*



**WHAT HAD BEEN LARGELY A FICTION IN THE EARLY YEARS HAD BECOME A REALITY IN THE GRANDIOSE YEARS: THE MARVEL BULLPEN IN THE LATE 1960S/EARLY 1970S.**

was Ditko himself who suggested the idea of Dr. Strange and who worked at least as an equal partner with his editor in developing the strip. Meanwhile, although certainly contributing to the books he worked on, Kirby's wild talent presented Lee with a problem beyond simple collaboration. A fount of creativity, Kirby was less able to control the excesses of his imagination and had little time for the nuances of characterization and the subtleties of psychological motivations. He required a firmer editorial hand, and throughout the grandiose years Lee supplied that. As a result, the two working together, became the greatest creative team in the history of comics.

But just as Marvel was poised to enter upon the era of its greatest artistic achievement, the roof fell in when Ditko unexpectedly left the company. Although little was said officially beyond wishing the artist luck, in reality Ditko's departure was cause for real concern, especially for the *Spider-Man* strip which was really beginning to take off in popularity. Luckily for Marvel, Lee had already been reaching out in search of new artists and among them recruited former Timely penciler John Romita who, unlike other artists that failed to adapt to the Marvel style of storytelling, quickly found his footing first on *Daredevil* and then when he replaced Ditko, on *Spider-Man*. Other incoming talent included John Buscema and Gene Colan among the veterans and as the grandiose years drew to a close, newcomers such as Wally Wood and Jim Steranko.

Meanwhile, Lee found himself caught up in the growing popularity of the Marvel phenomenon as he

embarked on speaking tours to college campuses around the country, gave interviews to newspapers and otherwise became not only the voice, but the face of Marvel Comics. Although he continued to script the company's major books and had writer Roy Thomas filling in more of the gaps, Lee was spending less time in the office tending to his editorial duties.

Thus, with the company abandoned by Ditko, with decreasing oversight by Lee and little creative competition from the new artists, it was Kirby's vision, fully awakened to the new way of doing comics that became the undisputed, active force behind the full flowering of Marvel's evolution into its grandiose phase. With the freedom given by stories that could be continued from issue to issue for as long as the plot demanded,

strengthened by the use of a shared, coherent, self-contained universe, and imbued with a semblance of realism, Marvel was now able to take its readers either to the ends of the universe in cosmos-spanning adventures or to the streets of New York City to experience the anguish of drug abuse, racism and environmental pollution. The resulting mix would change comics forever.

### **Marvel Tales Annual #1**

*"Spider-Man"; Stan Lee (script), Steve Ditko (pencils & inks); reprinted from Amazing Fantasy #15*  
*"The Coming of the Hulk"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Paul Reinman (inks); reprinted from Incredible Hulk #1*  
*"Return of the Ant-Man"; Stan Lee (plot), Larry Lieber (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks); reprinted from Tales to Astonish #35*  
*"The Birth of Giant-Man"; Stan Lee (script), Don Heck (pencils & inks); reprinted from Tales to Astonish #49*  
*"Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandoes"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks); reprinted from Sgt. Fury #1*  
*"Iron Man Is Born"; Stan Lee (plot), Larry Lieber (script), Don Heck (pencils & inks); reprinted from Tales of Suspense #39*  
*"How Iron Man Created His New Thinner Uniform"; Stan Lee (script), Steve Ditko (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks); reprinted from Tales of Suspense #48*  
*"The Stone Men from Saturn!"; Stan Lee (plot), Larry Lieber (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks); reprinted from Journey Into Mystery #83*  
 Cover: Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby (pencils), Steve Ditko and Frank Giacoia (inks)

What, a reprint to lead off the most important, most influential, and perhaps most fertile period in comics' nearly sixty year history? There are no clear demarcation lines dividing the four phases of Marvel's development, only the more problematic overlap of themes and ideas as each title in the company's line evolved at its own pace, but in casting about for some sign, some visible evidence of the shift in Marvel's fortunes there couldn't be a more handy example than *Marvel Tales Annual #1* (1964). First, with barely two, maybe three years of superhero comics production under its belt, the release of this jumbo, 72-page book seemed to indicate a steady rise in the company's readership. Furthermore, part of that demand probably grew out of the fact that Marvel's heroes were all part of a shared universe and more importantly, possessed individual backgrounds that continued to develop over time. When new readers began buying *Tales to Astonish* for instance, they would eventually discover that Giant-Man had once been Ant-Man (who didn't have the Wasp to whisper sweet nothings to!) and that Iron Man had once sported a dull-gray robotic look before his newer, more up-to-date red and gold armor. Those readers, which the company was constantly attracting, needed to be brought up to speed! And so this issue's collection of somewhat edited reprints of the origin stories of Spider-Man, Hulk, Giant-Man, Thor, Iron Man and Sgt. Fury. A second, and perhaps even more significant element in this book was the utterly unique addition of a two-page spread featuring photos of the Marvel bullpen. Almost from the start, Lee had included credits for the creators of his comics which included the writer, artist, inker and even letterer. No other comics company (with minor exceptions) had ever done that before. Coupled with a friendly, open editorial voice used on letters pages, upcoming news items and self-deprecating copy on the covers of his books, Lee managed to create a rapport with readers unique in comics (save perhaps for the EC comics line of the 1950s which was still a far cry from the intense loyalty Marvel would instill in its fans). To millions of readers, Lee himself became as familiar to them as their own teachers, scout leaders or perhaps even their parents. Soon, they wanted to learn more about Lee's extended "family," adorable Artie Simek, Jack "King" Kirby, sturdy Steve Ditko and even fabulous Flo Steinberg, Lee's secretary! Without giving too much personal information away, Lee obliged over the years with details dropped here and there and in particular, with this issue's photo feature putting faces to such names (which had become familiar to every Marvel fan



**FLO STEINBERG, LEE'S GAL FRIDAY, LEFT MARVEL BY THE GRANDIOSE YEARS TO STRIKE OUT ON HER OWN IN THE WORLD OF UNDERGROUND COMICS.**

even by 1964) as artists Jack Kirby, Don Heck, Dick Ayers, Joe Orlando, inkers Paul Reinman, Chic Stone, Vince Colletta and letterers Sam Rosen and Artie Simek. Pictures even included those for Flo Steinberg, the subscription department's Nancy Murphy and the company's college "campus representative" Debby Ackerman! Of course, a cigar-smoking Stan Lee was also represented (significantly, in second place behind publisher Martin Goodman!) looking sporty in a jauntily cocked fedora. These were also the months which saw the launch of

Marvel's first fan club, the MMMS (Merry Marvel Marching Society) and soon, its first, infamous foray into television animation. So in a development that was far from cut and dried but whose elements were being eagerly identified and embraced by an ever growing readership, this issue of *Marvel Tales* can serve as a convenient signpost of things to come: the end of the period of consolidation as Lee prepared to launch his line of now successful comic books into their most fecund period, the most remarkable in the whole history of comics.

### **Journey Into Mystery Annual #1**

*"When Titans Clash!"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Vince Colletta (inks)*  
*"Trapped by Loki, the God of Mischief!"; Stan Lee (plot), Larry Lieber (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks); reprinted from Journey Into Mystery #85*  
*"The Mysterious Radio-Active Man!"; Stan Lee (plot), Robert Bernstein [as R. Berns ] (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Dick Ayers (inks); reprinted from Journey Into Mystery #93*  
*"The Demon Duplicators!"; Stan Lee (plot), Robert Bernstein [as R. Berns ] (script), Joe Sinnott (pencils & inks); reprinted from Journey Into Mystery #95*  
*"The Mighty Thor Battles... the Lava Man"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Don Heck (inks); reprinted from Journey Into Mystery #97*  
*Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Vince Colletta (inks)*

Another signpost on the road to the grandiose years

was *Journey Into Mystery Annual* #1 (1965) which featured the first meeting of Thor and Hercules. Appearing as the regular "Thor" series was still in the final months of the more lighthearted years of consolidation (when the inking of Chic Stone over Jack Kirby's pencils was still what defined the look of Marvel's books at the time), "When Titans Clash" was actually nothing more than a full-length episode of the "Tales of Asgard" feature that had been appearing in the back of the regular *Journey Into Mystery* title since that book's issue #97. Like those stories,

the action takes place at an indeterminate time, but obviously before Thor had learned his lesson in humility for which Odin had banished him to Earth in the guise of crippled Don Blake. But the most important thing that separates this story from the series' regular run was the inking over Kirby of Vince Colletta. Although Colletta had been assigned to work over Kirby's pencils for "Tales of Asgard" almost since its beginning, up to now he'd not yet contributed to the regular "Thor" strip. This story, more than any other, probably cemented him in Lee's mind as the perfect inker to take over the

regular Thor feature from the soon to depart Chic Stone. Sure, his work on "Tales of Asgard" had given those stories the epic, antique feel they demanded, but it was here, for the first time, that Colletta's hair-thin,

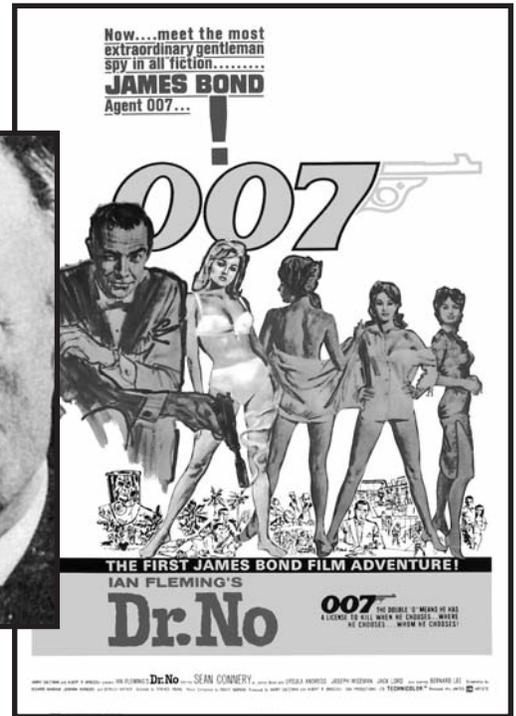
inking style (that seemed devoid of large areas of black used to give figures weight and heft, but that was also an artistic concept yet to be fully explored by the time of the Middle Ages, an era whose crude woodcuts most reflected the art style needed by the "Thor" strip) captured the elusive quality of otherworldly drama that the strip would increasingly demand as Lee and Kirby took it away from the everyday world of super-villains to a mythic plane where the forces of evil were on a far more gargantuan scale. Despite the serendipity of the two men's styles, Colletta would later be criticized, with good reason, for compromising Kirby's artistic vision by eliminating much of the detail that the artist put into his work. Be that as it may, what Colletta chose to keep, he rendered



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**JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY ANNUAL #1, PAGE 11. MYTHOLOGIES CLASH AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION CLASSES WILL NEVER BE THE SAME! THE SON OF ODIN DUKES IT OUT WITH THE SON OF ZEUS.**

in such a way that showed off aspects of Kirby's art that no inker before or since has ever been able to reproduce. In this issue's story for instance, where Kirby has chosen to lay it out in big, quarter-page panels, Colletta outlines the bulky figures of Thor and Hercules in thin, scratchy lines that reflect more accurately the original look of the penciled art than heavier blacks would have done. With Lee's use of wording that convincingly suggested what the high-flown language of the gods must've sounded like, the team's combined effect gave fans the feeling that they weren't reading just another comic book story, but an adaptation of actual legend. Even the story's set-up seemed vaguely legendary: wasn't there an old story about two stubborn characters encountering each other from opposite ends of a bridge and, each refusing to yield to the other, end up fighting over it as a point of honor? Robin Hood and Little John maybe?



### Strange Tales #135

"The Man for the Job!"; Jack Kirby (plot & pencils), Stan Lee (script), Dick Ayers (inks)

"Eternity Beckons!"; Steve Ditko (plot, pencils & inks), Stan Lee (script)

Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Frank Giacoia (inks)



As the years of consolidation drew to a close, Lee seemed to take stock of everything that'd been accomplished since the advent of the FF. From their beginnings, he'd been the writer of the *Fantastic Four*, *Spider-Man*, the *Avengers* and *X-Men* and *Sgt. Fury*. Now, as the growing popularity of Marvel's hero titles became more important to the company, he'd begun to take over the scripting chores on the remaining strips, too: "Thor" in *Journey Into Mystery*, "Giant-Man" in *Tales to Astonish*, "The Human Torch" in *Strange Tales*. Next, he dropped the last remnants of the company's five-page mystery stories and replaced them with new hero strips such as "Captain America," "Dr. Strange" and a revived "Hulk." But when taking over the writing of some of the older features failed to strengthen them, Lee adopted more draconian measures. Thus, in the final months of the years of consolidation, "Giant-Man" was replaced in *Astonish* by a new "Sub-Mariner" strip and the "Human Torch" feature was dropped from *Strange Tales* #135 (Aug. 1965) in favor of an entirely new concept: *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Obviously an attempt to take advantage of the interest at the time of anything to do with spies was a motivating factor in the creation of this new super-espionage strip (the James Bond films were an

**CAPTURED IN A SERIES OF WILDLY POPULAR FILMS, IAN FLEMING'S JAMES BOND CHARACTER DOMINATED POP-CULTURE IN THE 1960S AND ENABLED THE LAUNCH OF ONE OF MARVEL'S MOST DURABLE CONCEPTS.**

international success and were followed by a legion of imitators on both the big and silver screens). On the other hand, the idea was a natural as a starring vehicle for Nick Fury whose present day position as an agent for the CIA had already been established as early as *FF* #21. Lee, as he'd done in the past, assigned Kirby to kick-start the series, and together the two not only dreamed up some of the wildest concepts any spy series could have (life model decoys or LMDs, a suped-up Porsche 904 that made Bond's XKE look like a kiddie car, and an impossible, giant, flying "heli-carrier" headquarters!), but in Hydra, also provided SHIELD with the most perfectly realized and long-lasting group of international bad guys this side of Bond's Spectre (as a matter of fact, they were a lot better!). Unfortunately, Kirby was only on the strip for its first installment, and although John Severin performed good service on the next few chapters (with Kirby himself providing layouts), the strip

would suffer from a parade of less successful efforts by a number of artists until the arrival of Jim Steranko with #151. Not to be forgotten, this issue also includes the latest chapter in an ongoing Dr. Strange serial as the master of the mystic arts finds himself on the run from Baron Mordo and the minions of the dread Dormammu. Lee and Ditko by this time had the good doctor down pat with Ditko especially fine penciling, inking and plotting the feature (for which he was, as with *Spider-Man*, getting credit on the splash page) filling it with hypnotized figures, phantom wraiths, fog-bound mansions and portals to other-worldly dimensions, all as Dr. Strange ranges the globe in search of the mysterious "Eternity!" Comics didn't come any better than this 12-cent bargain!

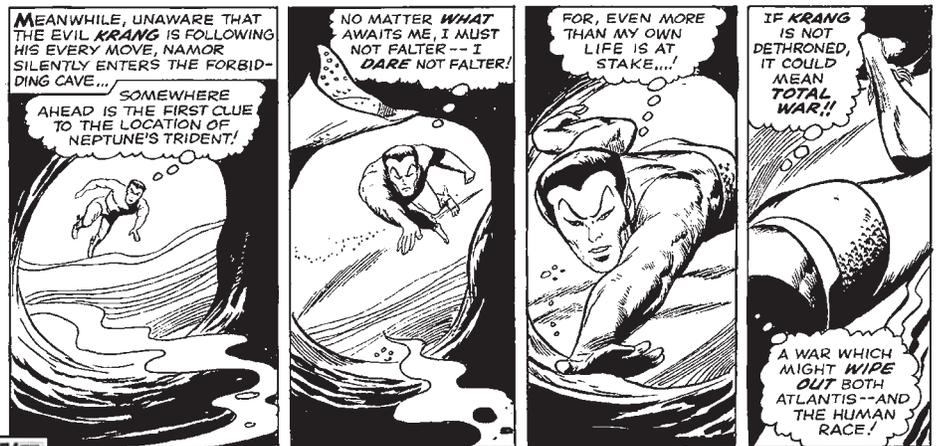
### Tales to Astonish #70

"The Start of the Quest!"; Stan Lee (script), Gene Colan [as Adam Austin] (pencils), Vince Colletta (inks)

"To Live Again!"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Mike Esposito [as Mickey Demeo] (inks)  
Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Mike Esposito (inks)

The same month the "SHIELD" strip began in *Strange* #135, the Sub-Mariner received his own berth in *Tales to Astonish* #70 (Aug. 1965). A number of factors seemed to set the stage for Namor's own solo adventures. Gaining steadily in popularity since his first Silver Age appearance in *FF* #4 and in the process being freed at last from the romantic triangle formed between himself, Sue Storm and Reed Richards, the sea prince had since fallen more solidly into the

camp of super-heroes rather than super-villains. And like the Human Torch, Namor had also had a strong popular background during the 1940s which may have, in Lee's considerations, further enhanced his potential as a headliner. Unlike most of the company's other strips however, Kirby wouldn't be called on to set the tone for the new feature. As usual, he supplied the cover, but the insides sported the art of Adam Austin, a newcomer to the Marvel bullpen (although not necessarily to the company itself, having done some work for it in the 1950s). Austin (as any alert



TALES TO ASTONISH #70, PAGE 10. ANY COMICS FAN WHO FAILED TO SEE THROUGH THE ADAM AUSTIN BYLINE AND RECOGNIZE THE UNIQUE ART STYLE OF ATLAS VETERAN GENE COLAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN REQUIRED TO TURN IN THEIR MMMS CARD!

comics fan was sure to notice due to his distinctive art style), was really Gene Colan who would later go on to do yeoman service for Marvel, especially in its twilight years, which he virtually dominated. The choice of Colan to do the art, proved serendipitous as his fluid, even rubbery figure work went well with depictions of Namor's hazy underwater world. Again, Vince Colletta was assigned to do the inking, and like his work on "Thor," added weight and power to Colan's figures while his work on all the various subsea monsters Namor would combat over the course of the series was especially good. Meanwhile, Lee, slowly learning the value of tailoring his scripting style to particular strips,

gave the whole feature an air of royalty and grandeur from Namor's all too frequent outbursts of "Imperius Rex!" to his depiction as an aloof monarch that had much too high an opinion of himself. With the substitution of the "Sub-Mariner" for the "Giant-Man" strip, *Astonish* now featured the unique pairing of two of Marvel's strongest hero-villains. Both strips were written as serials, but where Namor's would unfold in the form of a quest with the hero directing his own actions, the Hulk merely reacted to whomever (whether the Leader or the military) forced their attentions on him. Here, drawn by Kirby (who'd taken over the strip from Ditko in #67), the action follows the Hulk's escape from the evil Leader who wastes no time in hatching another scheme to earn a quick billion dollars from the Soviet Union in exchange for destroying the US missile base where Bruce Banner is stationed! Like *Strange* #135, a reader couldn't get a better deal for 12 cents than a book like this!

### **Fantastic Four #44**

"The Gentleman's Name Is Gorgon"; Stan Lee (script), Jack Kirby (pencils), Joe Sinnott (inks)  
Cover: Jack Kirby (pencils), Vince Colletta (inks)

Whether anyone knew it or not, the grandiose years began in earnest here, with *Fantastic Four* #44 (Nov. 1965) and the opening chapter of the Inhumans saga. In

fact, it's unclear from this issue whether Lee or Kirby themselves knew the full extent of what they were doing. For instance, although it was a neat idea to reveal that Madame Medusa, the female member of the Frightful Four, was actually a member of a hidden civilization of super-powered beings, the personality (and looks!) of Gorgon (who's hunting Medusa down to forcibly return her to the great refuge) was seemingly out of character in light of the true state of affairs in Attilan (which would be revealed in later issues). The problem might lie in the working relationship between Lee and Kirby. In the early, formative years, Lee had written full scripts including complete plot, script and

maybe even directions for layout from which Kirby then drew a story. As time passed and Marvel moved into its years of consolidation, the collaborative method changed, giving Kirby more control over story direction. This was the beginning of the "Marvel method" in which Lee would provide Kirby with a bare plot (perhaps hashed out in personal story conferences or over the phone), allow him to fill in the gaps and then supply the script himself upon receipt of the artwork. Still later, perhaps around the period of this issue, Lee may have provided Kirby with even less direction. The result was an increasingly loose plot structure that Kirby

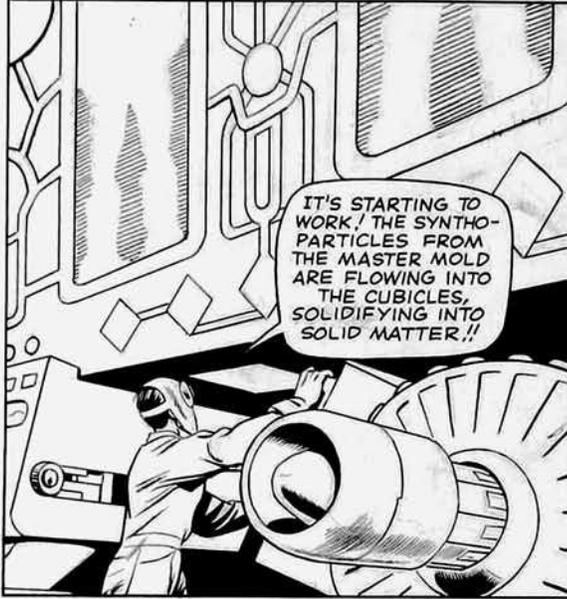
would take longer and longer to resolve. Where some stories had once become two-parters in the years of consolidation, they now became in the grandiose years, long and rambling. Stories, sometimes composed of more than one plot unfolding at the same time, began to stretch across four or more issues, sometimes it seemed they never really ended, merging as they often did from one to the next. And far from reining Kirby in, Lee, seeing that the process didn't hurt the bottom line, began to adopt the style for himself, producing multi-part epics with other artists on strips such as *Daredevil* and *Spider-Man*. In any case, the rambling, endless plotlines seemed to have their beginnings as far back as *FF* #38 (which featured the Frightful Four's defeat of the FF), the subsequent loss of the FF's powers



**UNSUNG HEROES DEPT: IF KIRBY WAS MARVEL'S FASTEST, MOST PROLIFIC PENCILER, IMAGINE HOW FAST THESE GUYS HAD TO BE TO KEEP UP WITH HIM! IF ANYONE WANTED TO FIND OUT JUST HOW IMPORTANT THE ROLE OF LETTERER WAS TO A SUCCESSFUL, GOOD LOOKING COMIC BOOK, THEY NEEDED TO LOOK NO FARTHER THAN LOW BUDGET CHARLTON THAT SETTLED FOR THE SERVICES OF "A MACHINE" INSTEAD OF THE WARM, EASY ON THE EYES STYLE OF ARTIE SIMEK (LEFT) AND SAM ROSEN!**

SCIENTIST LOOKS UP AT CUBICLES -- GLOW IS BEGINNING TO TAKE HUMAN FORM -- SYNTHO-PARTICLES FROM MASTER MOLD ARE FLOWING INTO CUBICLES -- SOLIDIFYING INTO X-MEN / GELID MATTER

CHARACTER IS ALIVE WITH FEELING POWER -- SCIENTIST IS WIRE-EYED ANXIETY -- SMALLER VERSIONS OF MASTER MOLD ARE TAKING SHAPE IN CUBIC LGS 20.



IT'S STARTING TO WORK! THE SYNTHO-PARTICLES FROM THE MASTER MOLD ARE FLOWING INTO THE CUBICLES, SOLIDIFYING INTO SOLID MATTER!!



ONCE THE PROCESS HAS STARTED, THERE'LL BE NO STOPPING IT! IF ENOUGH ENERGY IS BUILT UP, THE MACHINE COULD RUN FOREVER!

THEY'LL EVENTUALLY OUTNUMBER THE HUMAN RACE! THEY'LL ENSLAVE ALL OF MANKIND! THEY'LL BE THE MASTERS OF EARTH!

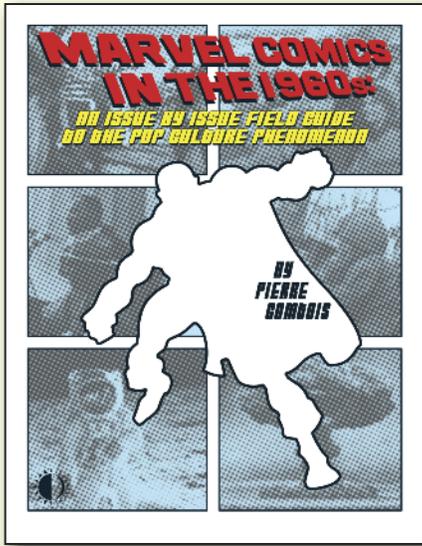
AND ALL BECAUSE OF ME!! IN MY IGNORANCE, MY FEAR, I CREATED AN EVIL FAR GREATER THAN THE MENACE IT WAS BUILT TO DESTROY!



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