A SOUVENIR BOOK SPECIAL SECTION CELEBRATING THE CENTENNIAL OF THE KING OF COMICS
In August of 1917, Rose and Ben Kurtzberg, two immigrants from Galicia in what is now Poland, welcomed their firstborn child, Jacob. In the early 20th century, New York City’s Lower East Side was the most densely populated two square miles on the planet. Ben sewed pants in sweatshops. Rose did piecework at home, when not raising her sons.

Lower East Side kids played in the streets, and fighting was a favorite pastime. Kurtzberg’s gang, the Jewish kids of Suffolk St., would take on the Italian kids from another block or the African American kids from yet another block.

Jacob, now going by Jake, was small in stature and once had to rescue his younger brother David from an attack by a rival gang. Jake recalled it happening in slow motion, as if choreographing the whole fight in his head. Jake loved fighting so much that he once took a long subway trip to the Bronx to see if they fought any differently there.

Rose’s extended family were storytellers. Jake grew up hearing stories about demigods, werewolves, and vampires, learning about them long before they appeared in the movie theaters that were everywhere on the Lower East Side.

At 14, Jake found a science fiction pulp magazine in a rain-drenched gutter. The image on the cover changed him forever. He took the magazine home, read it, and it fueled his interest in drawing. The stories in the magazine reminded him of the tales his mother and her friends told but with new, hopeful, futuristic sensibilities. He began reading as much as he could, something he had to hide from his buddies, and took how-to-draw books out from the library.

Jake met his “second father,” Harry Slonaker, around this time. Slonaker graduated from the Boys Brotherhood Republic in Chicago and was assigned to New York City to start one there. The BBR helped boys in the worst neighborhoods learn responsibility and useful skills, and it had its own rules, government, and even media. Jake took up boxing and became the cartoonist for the BBR newspaper, signing his artwork with the name “Jack.”

While Jack’s mother wasn’t going to let him follow neighborhood hero, actor John Garfield (nee Jacob Garfinkle), to Hollywood, his time as an office boy in a newspaper cartoonists’ office showed him there was another way out of the ghetto. Most of his pals saw careers as policemen, politicians, or gangsters in their future.

Jack stayed less than a week in an art class at the Pratt Institute. Not only wasn’t he the kind of artist they wanted—he worked fast—but his father also lost his job, and Jack dropped out of school entirely to find work.

After a brief stint as a newsboy, Jack found work at the Fleischer Brothers animation studio, working on Popeye and Betty Boop cartoons as an in-between, filling in the necessary number of drawings to complete the illusion of movement. Jack’s steady work allowed the Kurtzbergs to move from the Lower East Side to Brooklyn.

Jack’s time with the Fleischers was short-lived. The environment reminded him too much of the sweatshops where his father worked, and the studio was relocating to Florida. He found work with some small newspaper syndicates, preparing his strips (Socko the Seadog, Your Health Comes First) at home on the kitchen table. One series, The Romance of Money, didn’t get syndicated but was collected as a small pamphlet for savings banks as a giveaway. Arguably, The Romance of Money was Jack’s first comic book.

With the success of Superman in 1938, there was a tremendous demand for new, original comic book content. Jack found his way to the Eisner and Iger Studio, preparing stories in a similar fashion to the single pages appearing in Sunday newspapers. Soon, he and his boss Will Eisner realized they were working in an entirely new, multi-page art form. Eisner recalled one incident where Jack got in the faces of mobsters who were shaking down the studio for a towel service payment. The goons left.

Unfortunately, Jack came up against too much of that “sweatshop” approach again at Eisner and Iger and soon found work as a staff artist in the office of Victor Fox, where he drew the first four weeks of the Blue Beetle newspaper strip. While at Fox, Jack hit it off with Joe Simon, and the two began collaborating on Blue Bolt. Simon and Kirby quickly produced Red Raven Comics for Martin Goodman at Timely, which contained a Mercury story where Jack first signed his name as “Jack Kirby.”
Kirby even worked at Hugo Gernsback’s Science fiction pulps such as Wonder Stories and Amazing. Simon and Kirby created a story that was set in the suburbs of Long Island’s Nassau County. Simons moved into houses across the street from each other in the suburbs of Long Island’s Nassau County. The first romance comic, debuted that year, was a bickering group of adult heroes. Kirby even had a 3-year-old Jacob (Jack), circa 1920: Rose (mother), Benjamin (father). The Fantastic Four. Kirby knew that such a powerful, threatening force would be... — "The Big G"—a euphemism for God. In one notable example, Lee and Kirby had discussed having the antagonist be "The Big G"—a euphemism for God. Kirby knew that such a powerful, threatening force would be preceded by a scout whom he drew as a cosmic surfer of the Spaceways. Lee loved Kirby’s new character and dubbed him the Silver Surfer, the advance scout of Galactus. Kirby’s vivid imagination, his heartfelt humanity, his love for science fiction and mythology, and his amazing dynamic visual storytelling all coalesced in his work for Lee and Marvel when he was in his 40s.

Kirby continued to pitch heroes. Lee had been publishing monster comics, so how about a monster as a lead character, the Hulk? A scientist from a previous story became Ant-Man. Mythology was one of Kirby’s favorites, so Norse god Thor came next. An urban hero who walked on walls came next, with Kirby bringing in a Spider-Man logo from the Simon and Kirby studio days in the early 1950s. Steve Ditko ended up with the assignment. Next came Iron Man with the origin story drawn by Don Heck, Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos, a young-up Boy Commandos, A-Men, a science fiction-based kid gang, and the Avengers, a list-making group of adult heroes. Kirby even had a hand in the creation of Daredevil, evoking his earlier Stuntman. In response to the assassination of President Kennedy, Lee and Kirby revamped Captain America. Marvel’s sales picked up. Lee’s snappy dialogue combined with Kirby’s stories, as well as the familiar, fan-club-like tone of Marvel’s editorial copy kept the baby boomers reading comic into their teens and college years. Soon, Kirby was producing so many stories for Lee that it became more expedient to eschew story conferences before the art was drawn. They’d briefly discuss the next issue, and Kirby would return with a fully drawn strip and describe to Lee what was happening. When even this became too time consuming, Kirby would include story notes on the edges of his artwork for Lee to use while preparing the dialogue script for the letterer. In one notable example, Lee and Kirby had discussed having the antagonist be "The Big G"—a euphemism for God. Kirby knew that such a powerful, threatening force would be preceded by a scout whom he drew as a cosmic surfer of the Spaceways. Lee loved Kirby’s new character and dubbed him the Silver Surfer, the advance scout of Galactus. Audiences’ minds were blown.

Kirby’s war experiences were more brutal, horrifying, and violent than anything he experienced on the mean streets of New York City. Kirby brought the team’s Challengers of the Unknown to National (DC) and started working for Goodman (Will Eisner) again. He also worked up a number of comic strip proposals. Eventually, through a connection made by Jack Schiff, an editor at DC, Kirby, with writers Ed and Dave Wood, began a newspaper strip that capitalized on the nascent space race, Sky Masters of the Space Force. With inking by Wallace Wood, the strips were beautiful.

Unfortunately, due to a misunderstanding of the financial arrangement with Schiff and what Schiff felt was Kirby’s using ideas from story conferences for Challengers of the Unknown in Sky Masters, Schiff sued Kirby. Kirby lost. He continued the strip for a while, but the financial arrangement made it a losing proposition, so he quit. He also lost DC as a client.

Jack soon found more work under Atlas editor Stan Lee, mostly on monster and science fiction stories. Simon and Kirby teamed up briefly at Archie Comics on the Double Life of Private Strong and Adventures of the Fly. Kirby even worked briefly for Classics Illustrated.

Inspired by his success with starting Challengers of the Unknown at DC, the success of the Archie heroes, and his son Neal’s interests, Kirby felt the time was again ripe for the Fantastic Four. Kirby’s vivid imagination, his heartfelt humanity, his love for science fiction and mythology, and his amazing dynamic visual storytelling all coalesced in his work for Lee and Marvel when he was in his 40s.

Comedic book quality experienced a sharp decline now that all books had to be “safe” even for the youngest of kids. Eventually, Joe Simon left the team for more lucrative and secure work in advertising and marketing for political campaigns. Kirby brought the team’s Challengers of the Unknown to National (DC) and started working for Goodman (Will Eisner) again. He also worked up a number of comic strip proposals. Eventually, through a connection made by Jack Schiff, an editor at DC, Kirby, with writers Ed and Dave Wood, began a newspaper strip that capitalized on the nascent space race, Sky Masters of the Space Force. With inking by Wallace Wood, the strips were beautiful.

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In 1976, Kirby returned to Marvel and Captain America. He also created The Eternals, Machine Man, the Black Panther, Devil Dinosaur, and an adaptation of 2001: A Space Odyssey. At the end of his two-year deal, he worked with Lee on a Silver Surfer graphic novel in the hopes it would be turned into a rock musical movie.

In 1978, Kirby was commissioned by producer Barry Ita Geller to design the sets for a movie based on Roger Zelazny’s science fiction novel Lord of Light. Geller’s idea was for the sets to act as a theme park called Science Fiction Land once shooting was complete. Royer inked the pieces to perfection, but the movie and theme park weren’t to be.

At this point, Kirby had enough of comic books and found work in the production of television cartoons for children. He finished his contract with Marvel by storyboarding Fantastic Four cartoons. He designed characters, props, and situations for Ruby-Spears, sometimes for existing shows like the Kamandi–leagues Thunder the Barbarian, but mostly for presentation pitches for new shows. Kirby made some of the best income of his life and, for the first time, even had health insurance benefits.

In 1981, Kirby returned to comics books with the first issue of Captain Victory and the Galactic Rangers. Published by Pacific Comics, Captain Victory and Silver Star were the first Kirby comics that bypassed newsstands for the comic book "direct market.”

In 1983, while having dinner with publisher Richard Kyle, Roz encouraged Kirby to change the subject from World War II to instead tell a story about growing up on the Lower East Side. Kyle commissioned Kirby to draw Street Code, Kirby's only explicitly autobiographical work.

To raise money for writer Steve Gerber's lawsuit against Marvel over the rights to Howard the Duck, Kirby drew Gerber's Destroyer Duck story pro bono. The comic was so successful, Kirby and Gerber would produce four more issues. After the last issues of Captain Victory and Silver Star, Kirby returned to DC to provide covers and editorial material for a new edition of New Gods. Among other things, he also produced the graphic novel The Hunger Dogs, bringing his Fourth World saga to a close.

In 1984, the comics publishers were realizing that it was unprecedented, and Infantino was looking to innovate. Once Jack Schiff retired, Infantino was free to bring Kirby aboard. Infantino had wanted Kirby to revamp Superman, but Kirby only took on the Jimmy Olsen series, adding an updated Newsboy Legion to the cast. Olsen was a newsboy, after all. Kirby pitched a new science fiction mythology that filled three ongoing series, but unlike his time at Marvel, this time he retained creative and editorial control, eventually bringing in Californian Mike Royer to provide inking and lettering.

New Gods, Mister Miracle, and the Forever People, his "Fourth World" comics, were unfettered Kirby at the top of his game, making comics for everyone, not just kids or teenagers.

Unfortunately, the Newsstand business was still corrupt, with distributors selling fan-favorite comics like Kirby’s comic dealers to sell at conventions without reporting those sales to the publishers. As a result, the sales reports for Kirby's comics were disappointing. Infantino then asked Kirby for a horror comic like the movies that were then in vogue and a kids' comic to capture the popularity of the Planet of the Apes movie series. Jack delivered. The Demon and Kamandi: The Lost Boy on Earth. Kamandi became Jack's longest running series for DC. But as the end of his DC contract neared, Kirby was unsatisfied with his prospects there.

Goodman charted licensing out Marvel characters, which led to Steve Ditko's departure since Goodman wasn't including him in licensing revenue. As a result, Lee tried to strengthen his relationship with Kirby, agreeing to a profile of Kirby and himself by the New York Herald-Tribune. Unfortunately, the profile failed. The writer admired Lee’s P.T. Barnum-like charicatory and demeaned Kirby's appearance and manner. Upset, Kirby kept producing stories and characters for Lee, but not for long. On one Fantastic Four story where Kirby introduced a new character, Lee ignored the notes and changed Kirby’s theme. After that, Kirby only delivered stories containing pre-existing characters.

Kirby couldn’t stop creating new concepts, though. He just kept them to himself. When Goodman sold Marvel to Perfect Film, a more corporate entity, Kirby was stung by the new owner not wanting to negotiate a contract. Kirby felt the need to break out of his situation, so he moved his family to Southern California and began talking to Carmine Infantino at DC.

Infantino, a Kirby protégé who had successfully updated Batman for the readers brought in by the TV show, was rising in the editorial ranks. For DC to have an artist in the editorial office was unprecedented, and Infantino was looking to innovate. Once Jack Schiff retired, Infantino was free to bring Kirby aboard. Infantino had wanted Kirby to revamp Superman, but Kirby only took on the Jimmy Olsen series, adding an updated Newsboy Legion to the cast. Olsen was a newsboy, after all. Kirby pitched a new science fiction mythology that filled three ongoing series, but unlike his time at Marvel, this time he retained creative and editorial control, eventually bringing in Californian Mike Royer to provide inking and lettering.

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Like all births, this year’s cover tribute to the 100th birthday of Jack “King” Kirby had about a 9-month gestation period. Knowing that Bruce Timm would be a guest for Comic-Con 2017, we thought he’d be the perfect candidate to do a Kirby cover, so we contacted him back in the fall of 2016. His idea was to do an homage to the King by re-creating the cover to Jimmy Olsen #141, the one with Don Rickles, but with Kirby in the center circle. Timm felt that particular cover was “fun, dynamic (and really odd). . . Also, it was one of the first Kirby covers I ever saw, so nostalgia had a lot to do with my fondness for it.

“Sometimes in early 1973, a neighborhood friend of mine gifted me with what I call the ‘Instant Comics Collection.’ It was a dresser drawer filled with comics—mostly Marvels and DCs but also a few Archies, Gold Keys, and Charltons—almost all of them from 1972 but a few older issues, too. My pal had gotten them from a cousin of his, and since he himself wasn’t all that into comics, he passed them on to me. I’d owned a few individual comics before, but acquiring that big pile of comics all at once was what really activated my Comics Nerd gene. From that point on, there was no turning back!”

Timm’s cover came together over a number of sketches. His first sketches included his own drawings of Kirby in the circle, but his final sketch included a photo of Kirby in the center circle (see below and the opposite page). It was always the plan to include a photo of Jack as an homage to the original photo of Rickles on the cover of Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen #141 (more on that on page 26). But when Timm submitted the original art, he included a fully rendered pencil portrait of Kirby, because he couldn’t stand to see that big white circle sitting there empty. (For Timm’s final cover art with his drawing of Kirby intact, see page 31.)

Timm works at the same size as the printed piece with markers: “Prismacolor and Copic, mostly. Plain old Sharpies, too (fine and super fine tips). I never could get the hang of painting with watercolors, acrylics, or oils. I started messing around with various markers, kinda liked ‘em, got better and better with them over time, and here we are.” For the decision to work same size, “Practically. It’s really difficult to lay down a flat, smooth layer of marker color on a large area.”

We asked Eisner Award-winning letterer Todd Klein to add some 1970s DC-style lettering to the mix, and lo and behold, a cover fit for a King! (See page 26 for Klein’s comments.)
**GROWING UP KIRBY**

By Neal Kirby

In 1961, I was the luckiest little kid on my block—or any block, any way. My father worked at home. Everyone else’s dad had to drive into Queens or Brooklyn or take the train into Manhattan. And it was not some boring old desk job; my father was Jack Kirby, the King of Comics, and—though his humble personality would have had him cringing to hear this—he is regarded as the greatest comic book artist and creator—ever. (Sorry, Dad.)

Of course, back in 1961, though well regarded in his field, he wasn’t yet crowned. He was just Jack Kirby—"Dad" to me; "Jack" to his wife, Roz; "laco" to his mother, Rose; and "Jankel" to his brother, Dave. Wanting a better life for his family (the foregoing story of how’s his, he packed us into the Studabaker, and we left Brooklyn for the green suburbs of Long Island in 1949, buying a house in East Williston, Nassau County, which became our home for the next twenty years. Through the years, memories of that house are still vivid for me, but what I remember most is my father’s studio. Buried in the basement, "The Dungeon was tiny (just ten feet across), and the walls that separated it from the rest of the cellar were covered in stained, tongue-and-groove knotty pine with a glossy varnish. Dad’s drafting table faced a beautiful cherry wood cabinet that housed a 10-inch black-and-white television.

To the left of the cabinet was a beat-up four-drawer file cabinet that was stuffed with Dad’s vast archive of picture references for, well, everything. I could sit for hours and just mug through musty old folders filled with images of bay-netts, battleships, medieval armor, cowboy hats, skyscrapers, satellites—countless files on countless subjects.

My father finally got his first color television in 1963. The first color television program I ever saw was at home! The famously brilliant, fantastically clever, and fantastically screwed-up Elvis Presley in the movie 'Gilligan's Island.' My father gave me the old TV so I could take it apart and explore it. I heard something bumping around inside the set when I dragged it across the basement floor, beyond the Dungeon’s door. Screwdriver in hand, it didn’t take long to find the loose object, but my jaw dropped when I studied the heavy disc. It was a 2,000-year-old Roman coin! "Dad, I knew the TV was old, but..."

My father couldn’t stop laughing. There was a lot of super-hero history flying across his drawing board around that time—remember, September 1963 was the date on the first issues of Amazing and X-Men—but it all backtook a backseat that day to the mysterious return of Caesar Augustus. Dad had no idea how that coin got inside the television but he did know how it first reached America. Back in 1944, he explained, he had been pulled from combat with a dangerous case of frozen feet and frostbite and then sent to a hospital in Britain. English farmers would plow ancient coins up by the dozeng, and while they kept the gold ones, they gave the lumpy lead coins to "the boys in the ward" as souvenirs of Europe.

Watching him work gave us a chance to talk about science and history, subjects we both loved, but it also gave me a chance to see history being made. In the spring of 1963, for instance, I remember standing over the drawing board as Dad created a truly cosmic hero—it was a brand-new character, but I was confused when I heard his name. Thor? The story was "The Stone Men from Saturn." My first reaction, before opening my mouth, was: "Why the hell is a hero fighting rock-pile aliens?"

Dad explained the whole origin story to me and how he would work in the entire pantheon of Norse deities in the future. Having either read or at least browsed through every book in his library. I thought I was pretty smart when I scoffed and asked him how Thor could ever hold his head up with two big iron wings attached to his helmet. "Don’t forget," Dad said, nodding toward his creations, "Superhero!"

My father’s drawing board and small taboret table now reside in my den, where they provide warm memories for me and a basis for stories for Jack’s great-grandchildren. I wish there was some way I could borrow Doctor Doom’s Time Platform and take the kids back to visit the secret headquarters of my father’s imagination, that smoky, panelled bunker of ink, conversation, bookshelves, creativity, and love. I’m a teacher living in California and think about Dad a lot lately, especially when I see Thor, Captain America, Magneto, or the Hulk on movie posters. My father drew comics in six different decades and filled the skies of our collective imagination with heroes, gods, monsters, robots, and aliens; most of the truly iconic ones are out of the first half of the 1960s, when he delivered masterpieces on a monthly basis. I wish there was some way I could have dreamed and drawn so much. The best answer I can offer is one I heard about 50 years ago: "Don’t forget: Superhero!"

Excerpted from an article that originally appeared in "Hero Comix" in the Los Angeles Times online, Nov 9, 2012. Reprinted by permission of Neal Kirby.
Hello all,

I am very pleased and excited that Comic-Con International is honoring my father, Jack Kirby, in celebration of what would have been his 100th birthday. My father and my mother, Rosalind (Roz), loved attending Comic-Con and looked forward to it every year! I remember as a young girl when Comic-Con was based out of the El Cortez hotel in San Diego, and it’s amazing how it has grown into a pop culture phenomenon! My father was grateful for his fans and enjoyed meeting them and answering all their questions. It seems he always had a group of people following him around the con. Both my mom and dad loved to chat and meet everyone; no one was ever turned away! My father was very passionate about his work and was humbled by the fact that he could entertain folks with his creativity.

The times I did attend Comic-Con, I noticed how happy both my parents were. They loved the excitement and the chance to mingle with fans and other artists, as well. By the end of the day, my mom had to make dad take a break because his voice was getting hoarse! He would have kept going all night!

On a personal note, I am so happy to know that my father is receiving recognition for the impact he had on the comic book industry. Both my parents would be honored and humbled to know that people are still being entertained by his work and that my dad has a whole new generation of fans.

Again, I want to thank Comic-Con International for honoring my father this year, and I hope everyone attending has a great time!

Jillian Kirby

Jack’s granddaughter Jillian never met her grandfather. But that hasn’t stopped her from being a positive force in comics fandom. In 2012, she started the Kirby4Heroes Campaign. Since its inception, Jillian, who is the daughter of Neal and Connie Kirby, has raised almost $70,000 for the Hero Initiative organization, which helps comic creators in need. Jillian, who is the daughter of Neal and Connie Kirby, has raised almost $70,000 for the Hero Initiative organization, which helps comic creators in need. Here’s Jillian on the legacy of her grandfather and her ongoing effort to raise awareness of Jack’s work and to help other creators.

“My grandfather Jack Kirby died the year before I was born. Prior to entering my senior year of high school in 2012, I was searching for a way to make more of a personal connection with him. In addition to hearing family stories over the years, I had just read my father’s article, “Growing Up Kirby: The Marvel Memories of Jack Kirby’s Son,” published on the Los Angeles Times Hero Complex website, which brought tears to my eyes. The connection with my grandfather grew even more from this, and I wanted to take it one step further. I thought the best way to honor his legacy as a grandfather and as a creator in the industry he helped shape would be through some type of charitable work. This led me to look at charities benefitting the comic book industry. I was surprised to find there were only two: the Hero Initiative and the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. After researching the Hero Initiative, I found it so tragic when I discovered that there were so many people in the comic book industry without financial safety nets. The Hero Initiative, which is the only federally registered nonprofit organization that provides medical and financial assistance to comic book creators, writers, and artists, is definitely a cause that my grandfather would have championed.”

For more info on Kirby4Heroes, visit www.facebook.com/kirby4heroes/?.

(Excerpted from a 2015 interview with Jillian Kirby on Marvel.com (news.marvel.com/comics/25014/jack_kirby_week_kirby4heroes/))

My grandfather had an imagination that was out of this world. As a young child playing make-believe, I could barely keep up with him and his amazing stories. His ideas, his ideals, and his passion live on in every family member, friend, and fan who had the pleasure of knowing him in person or through one of his many creations.

To many, he will always be the King of Comics. To me, he was just the greatest grandpa in the world. Some of my fondest memories of growing up were at my grandparents’ house. I remember spending hours in my grandfather’s drawing room looking over all of his National Geographic magazines and pulp sci-fi books and trying to impress him with my horrible drawing skills. He was always encouraging.

Thanks, Grandpa, for letting me keep the light on when I was afraid to sleep in your “creepy” guest room, for drawing the coolest pictures for my school reports (way better than the Internet), for teaching me it was okay to be silly and creative in any artform, and for never being too tired to tell a story. You will always be my hero and my inspiration.

Tracy Kirby
Jack Kirby began the 1960s as the Atlas Comics line’s utility infielder: one of the small cluster of artists working with editor Stan Lee, a fast and versatile penciler who could turn around a bunch of four-to-seven-page romance or Western or horror stories every month and have them all look striking and forceful. He ended the decade as “King Kirby,” the greatest stylist in American comic books, the artist whose power and imagination provided the template for the look of the entire Marvel Comics superhero universe.

Kirby was already a two-decade veteran of comics when he returned to Atlas in 1958, just days after the company’s prolific artist Joe Maneely had died. For his first year or so there, he drew a little bit of everything: stories for Gunsmoke Western, Strange Worlds, Battle, Love Romances, and whatever else came along. Over the course of 1960 and 1961, as Atlas changed its name to Marvel, Kirby began to focus on horror/sci-fi anthologies. Journey into Mystery, Strange Tales, Tales of Suspense, Tales to Astonish, and eventually Amazing Adventures. Their bread and butter at that point was monster stories, one-off tales of enormous creatures and sinister aliens with names like Dragoom and Gargantus and Groot (yes, that Groot) and Thorr (no, not that Thor).

By mid-1960, almost every horror anthology comic the company published opened with a Kirby-drawn monster story, usually inked by Dick Ayers. They were remarkably formulaic in their structure—he had a hilarious-in-retrospect tic of including at least one panel in nearly every one that showed the Earth from outer space—but there was something oddly haunting about them, which had a lot to do with Kirby’s indelible designs for the monsters. (Many of them have hung around the Marvel Universe ever since, turning up most recently in Monsters Unleashed.)

Most of those stories were scripted by Lee and so were virtually every other story Kirby drew for the peak decade of his career. The working relationship between Lee and Kirby—and, in particular, the question of who “wrote” their comic books, the artist whose power and imagination provided the template for the look of the entire Marvel Comics superhero universe—collaborative work and created its characters—is the subject of a lot of strong opinions and conflicting accounts. It’s clear, though, that for the better part of the 1960s, they had an extraordinary creative synergy, and it’s fair to say that at the very least Lee was a hands-on editor with a remarkable eye for continuity: “I’m the one who ‘wrote’ their collaborative work and created its characters—it’s a subject of a lot of strong opinions and conflicting accounts. It’s clear, though, that for the better part of the 1960s, they had an extraordinary creative synergy, and it’s fair to say that at the very least Lee was a hands-on editor with a remarkable eye for continuity. He’s also shown working through midnight, which wasn’t an exaggeration: Kirby had rapidly become impossibly prolific. May of 1962 saw the first issue of Kirby and Lee’s Fantastic Four #1, cover-dated November 1961: the first superhero comic of their classic period. In retrospect, though, it’s surprising how close the initial Fantastic Four stories are, in look and tone, to Lee and Kirby’s monster comics. The second half of the debut issue might have been a slightly touched-up version of a story that was already sitting in Marvel’s inventory, something along the lines of “I Defied the Male Man’s Monsters!” And Fantastic Four #2’s shape-changing alien Skrulls recaptualated a very familiar theme from Marvel’s sci-fi anthology stories.

In any case, Lee knew what a genius he was working with. Kirby actually appeared as a character in Lee and Stan Goldberg’s Millie the Model #107, cover-dated March 1962, in which Kirby hires Millie to pose as the heroine for the next issue’s “Return of the Genie!” And Millie the Model #109, cover-dated March 1962, in which Kirby hires Millie to pose as the heroine for the next issue’s “Return of the Genie!”

Kirby’s artwork appeared in Tales to Astonish #65’s “I Am the Genie!” was a sequel to the next issue’s “Return of the Genie!” Journey into Mystery #62’s “I Was a Slave of the Living Hulk!” (no, not that Hulk) was followed, four months later, by “Return of the Hulk!” The first issue of 1961’s Amazing Adventures introduced Doctor Doom, a Kirby-drawn supernatural investigator who appeared in four subsequent issues. (When those stories were reprinted a decade later, he was renamed Doctor Druid.)

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Fantastic Four had been something of a risk—superhero comics were a niche market at the time—and it paid off so well that, within a year of its debut, Marvel’s weird-tale anthologies were mutating into a superhero line. The Fantastic Four #30 was altogether a monster comic, and the second half of that story is Kirby’s original artwork for Tales to Astonish #65’s “I Am the Genie!” was a sequel to the next issue’s “Return of the Genie!” Journey into Mystery #62’s “I Was a Slave of the Living Hulk!” (no, not that Hulk) was followed, four months later, by “Return of the Hulk!” The first issue of 1961’s Amazing Adventures introduced Doctor Doom, a Kirby-drawn supernatural investigator who appeared in four subsequent issues. (When those stories were reprinted a decade later, he was renamed Doctor Druid.)

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tic Four’s Human Torch got a solo slot in *Strange Tales*; Thor became the headliner of *Journey into Mystery*; Ant-Man, who had originally appeared in a one-off *Tales to Astonish* story, returned as its recurring star; and Iron Man debuted in *Tales of Suspense*. Kirby had a hand in all of those features early on—but not for long, since he had other ships to launch. As of May 1963, *The Incredible Hulk* was replaced on Marvel’s schedule by the war comic *Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos*, the first seven issues of which he drew.

Four months later, Kirby and Lee introduced two (initially) bimonthly superhero ensemble series: *Avengers*, which teamed up the stars of the anthology titles with the Hulk, and *X-Men*. In early 1964, Kirby returned to the Thor feature in *Journey into Mystery*, which he would draw for more than six years, and launched its backup series, “Tales of Asgard,” which delved deeper into Norse mythology and let him stretch out, usually drawing only four dramatic panels on each page.

Around the same time, Lee and Kirby reached back into the artist’s past to revive his most successful early co-creation: Captain America showed up in a Human Torch story, was revived for real in *Avengers* #4, and moved up to a Kirby-drawn backup spot in *Tales of Suspense* by the end of 1964. By that point, the monster and horror stories of a few years earlier were entirely gone—or, rather, they’d been absorbed into Marvel’s ongoing interconnected superhero narrative. And although Kirby still worked on covers and short stories for the remaining *Western* series and *Sgt. Fury*, he had become nearly a full-time superhero comics artist. “Jack (King) Kirby,” Lee started to call him in credit boxes and editorial notes.

Kirby had always been an innovative character designer, but now that he no longer had to bolt from beginning to end of a story in a handful of pages, he started to experiment more with other elements of his artwork. Photo collages began to appear in *Fantastic Four* looking as otherworldly in the context of his drawings as illustration looks in a photographic context, and conveying a sense of the incredible spaces around his characters. The relatively conventional technology he’d been drawing gave way to “Kirbytech”: mammoth, bulbous machines with mysterious pipes and gears blossoming out of them. His figures were constantly moving—not just running or punching, but hurtling through space, somersaulting, fantastically distended. His drawings’ jagged highlights grew thicker, their compositions more dramatically foreshortened, their faces and figures more stylized.

The pace at which Kirby had been working for the first half of the ’60s, drawing 100 or more pages a month, was unsustainable. As 1965 began, he settled into a groove of *Fantastic Four*, *Journey into Mystery*, and the Captain America half of *Tales of Suspense*. Those weren’t his only art credits: for a while, he continued to provide layouts for *X-Men* and a handful of other projects, notably the new “Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.” feature that had replaced the Human Torch in *Strange Tales*. Still, without the need to crank out three or four fully rendered pages every day, Kirby began to put more care and style into his core series. His artwork shifted from the relatively conventional layouts of a few years earlier, with three tiers and between six and nine panels on most pages to fewer, bolder images: three- to five-panel pages and even interior splash pages...
pages. It helped that he was working with inkers who genu-
inely got what he was up to. Most of the inking on Fantastic
Four’s peak period was done by Joe Sinnott, who stayed on
the series for more than a decade after Kirby left; Kirby’s most fre-
frequent inker on Journey into Mystery (retitled Thor in 1966) was
Vince Colletta, whose more delicate, featherly line work often
omitted penciled details but gave his pile-driving composi-
tions ethereal overtones.

Month after month, both series crackled with the Tesla-coil
force of Kirby’s visual innovations. Fantastic Four’s regular cast
expanded with the introduction of the mysterious Inhumans,
hidden away in a mountain range behind an impenetrable
dome, and then the godlike planet-eater Galactus. One char-
acter Kirby added to the latter story—the herald of Galactus, a
metallic humanoid on a sort of flying surfboard—became the
Silver Surfer, Lee’s special favorite among Marvel’s characters. A
1966 Thor storyline introduced Ego the Living Planet, a celestial
sphere with the face of an angry prophet.

Being the master of visual communication that he was,
Kirby began to draw as if the sheer bravado of his style was
as much a selling point as the plot or characters of his comics.
(Which, of course, it was.) Each of the King’s serials took on a
distinct visual tone. Fantastic Four still had its soap-operatic
relationship drama and an ensemble cast to balance. Thor was
open with no soap, triple-fortissimo clashes of the gods every
issue. And the Captain America stories in Tales of Suspense were
wall-to-wall bodies in motion, a years-long fight scene that
scarcely even paused for explanations.

As the ‘60s drew to a close, Kirby’s relationship with Marvel
gradually soured. (For most of 1969, he was only drawing
Fantastic Four and Thor—and consider that “only” drawing two
20-page comics every month would be an impossible task
for nearly any other artist.) Still, his pumped-up approach to
storytelling became Marvel’s stylistic hallmark: “Do it like Kirby
would do it,” Lee told new artists, meaning not that they should
imitate his peculiar approach to anatomy but that they should
find the most thrilling, dramatic way to stage every scene.

After Kirby left Marvel in 1970, though, his specific drawing
style (or an approximation of it) remained the “right” way to
draw both series. Thor scarcely got out from beneath Kirby’s
shadow until Walter Simonson took it over in 1983. Fantastic
Four arguably didn’t find a look that wasn’t directly indebted
to Kirby until Jim Lee rebooted it in 1996—even John Byrne’s
celebrated 1981-1986 run treated Kirby’s run as its North Star.

Most contemporary comics look almost nothing like Kirby’s
work on their surface, but every one of the characters that has
improbably survived the 50-s odd years since the King breathed
life into them in his golden decade bears the marks of his hand
in their design, their bearing, and the weird glories of the world
they inhabit.

Eisner Award-winning critic Douglas Wolk is the author of
Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean.
He is currently writing a book about reading all 25,000 Marvel
superhero comics.
You haven’t really experienced the power of Jack Kirby’s work until you’ve seen his original art.

SCOTT DUNBIER, the editor and mastermind behind IDW’s Artist’s Editions, shares his own memories of meeting Kirby and the artist’s impact on his life.

In 1972, I was nine years old and loved comic books. I lived in the East 80s in New York City, an area that used to be called Yorkville. Nearly dead center between my home and school was an incredibly small comic book shop called Supersnipe, one of the first in the city. The daily ritual when going home for me and my friend Lawrence was to get a chocolate egg cream from the local candy shop and then stop in at Supersnipe to paw through the books. It was here that I started to discover the history of comics and glimpsed my first original art.

One day, while looking at new comics and some back issues, I saw something that drew me like a moth to light—a fantastic cover of a flooded New York City, complete with a tilted Statue of Liberty. As a child of Manhattan, I was mesmerized. I bought it and took it home to read. It was, of course, the first issue of Kamandi, and I was hooked from the minute I saw it.
Set in a crazy future that was ruled by talking animals, while humans were their dumb pets... this was my kind of comic! I was a huge fan of *Planet of the Apes*, the Charlton Heston movie that had come out a few years before, but this was even better—ALL the animals talked in *Kamandi*, not just the apes and gorillas! Thus began my love affair with the work of Jack Kirby.

Shortly before my 16th birthday in 1978, my mom and I moved from New York to Los Angeles. I soon got a job, the better to support my growing comic collecting addiction. We lived in Woodland Hills in the San Fernando Valley, and there was a shop fairly close by called Fantasy Castle. One day, I was in the shop browsing and picking up some back issues. I brought them to the counter to pay and the salesperson looked at my stack and, seeing a number were by Jack, asked if I was a Kirby fan. I said something like, “Sure, of course.” Then, the guy who was helping me, for no reason I’ve ever been able to fathom, said, “You know, he lives near here and has a listed phone number.”

That was all I needed to hear. As soon as I got home I called up directory assistance and asked for the number of Jack Kirby. I jotted it down and, with the foolhardy bravery of youth, dialed the phone. A grizzled but not unfriendly voice answered. I don’t remember what we spoke about, but we wound up talking for more than 15 minutes. At the end of the call, Jack Kirby asked were I lived. When I told him, he said, “That’s not too far from here. Why don’t you get your mom to drive you over this weekend? Bring your comics along so I can sign them.”

My mom, God bless her, drove us out to the hilltop home of Jack and Roz Kirby in Thousand Oaks that Saturday. I remember walking around his home, looking at giant drawings on the walls, and talking about comics with him. I remember asking Jack who his favorite inkers were, and he said, “They’re all great, all of ’em.” Then, as my mom and Roz sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, Jack sat down at his drawing board and signed my comics. I was just a kid, I didn’t understand the proper etiquette about this sort of stuff; I brought way too many comics, more than 50. I remember Roz looking at the stack when we arrived and rolling her eyes. I did not realize until years later why. But Jack was unperturbed; he carefully opened each and every one of my comics and signed them on the first page. I was in Heaven. Afterwards, the four of us had lunch. When we were done, and it was getting late in the day, Jack gave me a few prints and a portfolio. Then he sat down and drew a sketch of Captain America holding his shield and waving, with a word balloon saying, “Hi, Scott!”

It wasn’t until years later that I realized how incredibly special that day was. Maybe I thought this was normal, that it happened to everyone. Here was the King of Comics, Jack Kirby, taking time from his huge workload to meet a fan—a fan who just called him out of the blue—and opened his home to him and his mother. It was a once in a lifetime experience for me, one I will never forget. But what really makes this so remarkable, so incredible, is that it was by no means unique. I mean, to me it was... but in the years since, I’ve heard similar stories from many people about how Jack and Roz Kirby opened their homes to complete strangers purely because it gave them pleasure. I wonder if they had any clue how it would affect people, how those wonderful moments would stay with us, influence us, sometimes even to be kinder and better people?

Our paths crossed a number of times after that. I was an original art dealer and I used to buy pages from the Kirbys and their agents to later sell at comic conventions or in the *Comics Buyer’s Guide*. So Jack and Roz were still aware of me, somewhat. But it still came as a great surprise and honor when I received an invitation to attend their 50th wedding anniversary party in Thousand Oaks in 1992. I was living in New York then, but when you are invited to an event like that, you don’t hesitate.
I happily flew out and attended. I remember, late in the evening, as people were starting to leave, Roz was in the middle of a small group, but oddly, Jack was standing by himself. I walked over to him, and I remember telling him how much his work had meant to me, and more importantly, how much his kindness all those years ago, when I was an imposing kid calling and pestering him, had meant to me. He smiled, said a few kindly words, and then he walked over to his beloved Roz.

Now, with the benefit of hindsight, I look back and see how much that brief encounter helped shape me as a person. For that, even more than for all the wonderful stories, I shall be forever grateful. Thank you, Jack.
Kirby’s original concept for Darkseid, the villain in his Fourth World storyline

In 1969, after spending his entire life in New York, comics legend Jack Kirby uprooted his family and moved to California, ostensibly to get better weather for daughter Lisa and wife Rosalind, both of whom suffered from asthma. And indeed, their health was a major reason for the move, but also behind it was a desire to break away from Marvel Comics, at least symbolically, as Jack had become increasingly disenchanted with his working conditions there. Legend has it that the last item to be put in the moving van was Jack’s drawing board, as he was finishing up a page right up until it was time to leave. And the first item off the van was likewise his board so he could get right back to work. Such was the life of comics’ most prolific creator and Marvel’s number one artist. It was unprecedented for comics at the time: a major talent who didn’t work in New York where he could hand-deliver his art and be on-call to editors. For a creator of Jack’s magnitude, exceptions could be made to let him work long-distance, but Marvel Comics’ publisher, Martin Goodman, didn’t offer the kind of remuneration befitting the artist who helped put the company on the map, and Kirby was ready for a change.

DC Comics’ head honcho, Carmine Infantino, had heard of Jack’s unhappiness at Marvel in the late 1960s and made a special trip west to visit his old friend in 1969. When Kirby worked at DC Comics in the 1940s and ’50s, he had ruffled some feathers, but his old adversaries on the editorial staff had just retired, and the door was wide open for him to return. After a decade of his Marvel work rapidly usurping DC’s market dominance, would he make the jump?

The answer became public knowledge in a March 12, 1970 “Extra” edition of Don and Maggie Thompson’s fanzine Newfangles with the headline “Kirby Goes to DC.” Jack had mailed in his final story for Marvel (Fantastic Four #102) and called Stan Lee to resign in early March. It sent shockwaves through the industry and comics fandom. The move resulted in an era of work that we’re only today starting to tap the potential of: Jack’s DC Comics period of 1970–75. The 1970 DC house ad pages were a bit vague at first: “The Great One Is Coming!” screamed the headline, trumpeting the arrival of something called “The Boom Tube” without mentioning Kirby by name—likely because the ads were prepared before Jack had wrapped up his Marvel work. Then, in July, the “Stan’s Soapbox” editorial in all of Marvel’s comics told of Kirby’s resignation, and the latter column in DC’s Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen #12 (at all places!) announced Kirby would be taking over that title with the following issue, to be released in August 1970. Fans wondered: surely Kirby wouldn’t leave behind the Marvel Universe he co-created just to work on a second-tier Superman title, would he? Any fears were quickly put to rest that summer, as Jack’s three new core DC books were highlighted in the San Diego Comic-Con 1970 program book. Mark Evanier and Steve Sherman had both become acquainted with Kirby through working on late 1960s Marvelmania projects and now were Jack’s official assistants for his DC work, helping on the new titles Jack was producing from his sunny California home.

And what work it was: an over-arching trilogy of titles (a quartet if you counted Jimmy Olsen), featuring a sprawling tale of two planets, New Genesis and Apokolips, and their cosmic war that spilled over to Earth. New Gods, Forever People, and Mister Miracle each played a distinct and important role in telling Jack’s epic, featuring such characters as Orion (spawn of evil Apokolips but raised on peaceful New Genesis), Scott Free (the exact opposite, traded at birth with Orion), and Kirby’s most imposing villain ever, Darkseid. After the last year or so of tepid Marvel stories, fans could see something new and powerful was happening, with Kirby’s art and storytelling more inspired than they’d seen in years. Despite DC’s insistence on having Kirby’s Superman and Jimmy Olsen faces redrawn by house artists, it was clear Kirby was reaching a new peak. That pinnacle reached even greater heights with the addition of Mike Royer as inker. Royer had inked his first Kirby piece for Marvelmania in 1969, just prior to Jack heading to DC, but in those early DC days, the home office was insisting they use their own guy (Vince Colletta) over Jack’s pencils. Finally, after four issues of each of Jack’s new titles, DC relented and Royer came on board for the most faithful inking Kirby had ever received. "The Boom Tube" without mentioning Kirby by name—likely because the ads were prepared before Jack had wrapped up his Marvel work. Then, in July, the “Stan’s Soapbox” editorial in all of Marvel’s comics told of Kirby’s resignation, and the latter column in DC’s Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen #12 (at all places!) announced Kirby would be taking over that title with the following issue, to be released in August 1970. Fans wondered: surely Kirby wouldn’t leave behind the Marvel Universe he co-created just to work on a second-tier Superman title, would he? Any fears were quickly put to rest that summer, as Jack’s three new core DC books were highlighted in the San Diego Comic-Con 1970 program book. Mark Evanier and Steve Sherman had both become acquainted with Kirby through working on late 1960s Marvelmania projects and now were Jack’s official assistants for his DC work, helping on the new titles Jack was producing from his sunny California home.

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Onward this “Fourth World” (as it came to be nick-
named) progressed, with Kirby introducing new charac-
ters and concepts in every issue. From the Black Racer
(basically Death on flying skis) and the Mother Box
(an iPhone on steroids, long before even the personal
computer was invented), to cloning (humans, not just
sheep), and the Anti-Life Equation (solve it and you can
control the mind of everyone in the universe)—Kirby’s
latest concepts made it clear these weren’t ordinary
superhero comics.

At the same time, Jack produced a unique set
of more adult magazine concepts to be marketed
alongside mainstays like Time and Newsweek. In the
Days of the Mob and Spirit World were the only ones
actually published (with True Divorce Cases and Soul
Love romance titles abandoned entirely by DC), but
they proved too ahead of their time and only made it
through their first issues.

Still, the creative drive to produce new material
never left Jack as he dove further into his Fourth World,
creating such key stories as “Glory Boat” and “The Pact”
in New Gods and “Himon” in Mister Miracle, influen-
cing a generation of creators to follow. Kirby even took
a satirical swipe at his old Marvel Comics collaborator
Stan Lee, depicting him as the con man “Funky Flash-
man.” He went for downright bizarre when he cameoed
comedian Don Rickles in Jimmy Olsen, and his concepts
extended across the line to other non-Kirby books like
Lois Lane, expanding their overall impact.

But DC expected the top creator in comics to
produce the top sales in the industry, and when this
complicated series didn’t immediately deliver quite as
they’d hoped, DC pulled the plug on it before Kirby had
the chance to bring it to a conclusion. Jimmy Olsen went
back to its stale pre-Kirby look and feel, and New Gods
and Forever People were cancelled outright after eleven
issues. Only Mister Miracle remained, but Jack was forced
to move it away from its Fourth World ties and focus on
more ordinary, run-of-the-mill superheroes. Still, Kirby
didn’t let this crushing blow keep him down creatively.

Instead, Jack went on to create innovative replace-
ment strips in The Demon and Kamandi, The Last Boy on
Earth. While The Demon had a respectable 16-issue run,
Kamandi would survive beyond Jack’s tenure at DC and
carry on with other creators after he departed the com-
pany. After Mister Miracle had run its course, Kirby next
came up with OMAC (the One Man Army Corps, which
wouldn’t see print till over a year later), and took over
the Our Fighting Forces series to pen a dozen memorable
war stories of the Losers, calling on his own World War II
Army service for inspiration.

To fulfill his DC contract, Kirby also created a slew
of short-lived series, the potential of which remains
untapped to this day. The try-out series, 1st Issue Special,
gave us Kirby’s take on the Atlas myth, a reworking of
his 1940s DC character Manhunter, and his final kid
gang group, the Dingbats of Danger Street. While the first
Dingbats story was played strictly for laughs, sadly,
the second and third stories were completed but remain unpublished to this day—and both feature much more serious, and memorable, stories.

A couple of brief forays into working with other scripters culminated in one issue of Richard Dragon, Kung Fu Fighter and a trio of tales of Justice, Inc. The Sandman, done as a last hurrah with former partner Joe Simon but bearing no resemblance to the character he and Joe created in the 1940s, and Kobra, Jack’s first comic headlined by the villain instead of the hero.

By this time, Kirby’s DC contract was up. The early promise of creative freedom had long since faded, and he was ready to leave. On March 24, 1975, Kirby signed a contract to return to Marvel Comics one last time. Other hands were quickly brought in to continue Kamandi, the longest-running of all Jack’s DC titles, while almost all his other titles were dropped rather than have them carry on without him. The final issue of OMAC was perhaps the most painful victim of Jack’s departure as his story was stopped midway through a three-parter with DC adding a hastily-prepared last panel to its final issue, which didn’t properly wrap up anything. In retrospect, Kirby’s time at DC Comics in the 1970s could be seen as hit-and-miss. Certainly Kamandi outlasted all the other series, but today it’s viewed with less respect than his other, shorter-lived series. Still, from the less imaginative work with other scripters, to the groundbreaking Fourth World, it was anything but boring to follow Kirby’s DC work of that era. And it’s a safe bet that, as DC’s modern film universe continues to expand, we’ll all be seeing a lot more of Kirby’s 1970s DC characters up on the silver screen.

John Morrow is editor of the Jack Kirby Collector magazine, now in its 22nd year of celebrating the life and career of Jack Kirby. He’s co-author and editor of KIRBY100, a centennial tribute book to Kirby that’s debuting here at Comic-Con. He’s also the founder and publisher at TwoMorrows Publishing, which is creating the future of comics history through its award-winning line of books and magazines. Find out more at www.twomorrows.com.
It was a dark and stormy night, not a fit night out for man or beast. In the sinister shadows cast by a swiftly setting sun, I locked my studio door and began to imagine. My mind wandered to the late 1968 evening in Southern California. The wife and kids were at their regular spots, and I was anticipating the return of my waterlogged family, and as I walked across the yard separating my apartment from theirs.

Okay . . . all right . . . it was just a late evening pretty much like any other. But there was something . . . something different about this night. The wind was howling, and the rain was pouring down in sheets. It seemed like the world was coming to an end.

The next morning found me at the Kirby home, and after being shown the artwork, I was surprised and somewhat intimidated. I believe this “baptism of fire” was my audition, and he wanted to see if I’d passed the test. I asked, “Do you want me to bring this back to you tomorrow?” He said, “Yes!”

Having seen the occasional pencilled and un-inked pages of Jack Kirby’s art in fanzines, I had often thought “Why doesn’t anyone ever ink Jack? Why are they interpreting and changing his work?” I’d often fantasized about having an opportunity to “complete” his pencil statements in a way, in my humble opinion, that had not been done by most inkers other than Kirby himself, and now he was asking me if I’d like to ink his Marvel merchandising art.

The next morning found me at the Kirby home, and after being shown the piece he wanted me to ink, I asked, “Do you want me to bring this back to you tomorrow?”

“Why don’t you just sit here and do it now?” he answered, pointing to his drawing board. So, sitting at the King’s fabled drawing board, surrounded by his creations, I started to ink his self-portrait, which was intended for his bio in the Marvelman fanzine. I believe this “baptism of fire” was my audition, and he wanted to see if I’d handled pressure and to ensure that it was my inking over his pencils. Periodically he would come into the room and look over my shoulder to view my progress. Talk about pressure, but half-way through this “try out” we broke for a lunch of sandwiches prepared by his wife, Roz, and I was introduced to some of the family. For me, it was truly a day to remember. As history shows, that first day was the beginning of a “familial” relationship that lasted even beyond his unfortunate passing in 1994.

Jack Kirby is still alive in the memories, hearts, and minds of those of us who were privileged to be part of his “extended family.” He was, of course, a giant of visual storytelling, but more than that, Jack Kirby was a giant of humanitry and humility, a devoted family man and a supportive friend. He may have been “Jack Kirby, The King of Comics,” but to many of us he was “Jack Kirby, The Man.” As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of his birth, let us reflect on this man whose like we will never experience again and raise our glasses in a toast to one who has and will always be an inspiration to us in so many ways. "Happy Birthday, friend!"

Mike Royer is a Comic-Con International 2017 special guest. For more on Mike, please see page 16.

Memories of the Best

Jack Kirby and the San Diego Comic-Con sort of go hand in hand for me. I first met Jack in 1968. I was 19 years old, going to college, and working part-time at Marvelman. I had never considered working in comics. I wasn’t even a collector. I was more into animation and special effects. My younger brother Gary was a big fan, though. The summer of ’68, we discovered the Los Angeles Comic Club and first met Mark Evanier, Bruce Simon, Barry Siegel, and Steve Finklestein, who would all become lifelong friends.

In 1969, the Marvelman office was visited by Shel Dorf, Scott Shaw, Barry Alfonso, and the rest of the “San Diego Five.” They wanted to know if we would be interested in coming to their little convention in San Diego. Of course we would; it was the start of a tradition that is now almost 50 years old.

And in 1969, I again saw Jack. He had come to L.A. from his home in Thousand Oaks. He took Mark and me out to lunch and told us, in strict confidence, that he was leaving Marvel and going to DC to do new books. He asked if we would like to be his “assistants” in helping with editorial duties. As Captain Marvel (or Gomer Pyle) would say, “Shazam!”

It was amazing to be working with such a legend. At the time, there wasn’t much in the way of comic book history to be found, so it was a revelation to learn about the creation of Captain America, the Fantastic Four, the Incredible Hulk, X-Men, and all of the other characters Jack had done. For the five years that Jack was at DC, we worked on a variety of projects. Not all of them panned out, but I learned a lot from Jack, mostly from his work ethic and his idea that originality is not “re-inventing the wheel,” but also from his way of looking at things from different angles. While the hours were long and the work was demanding, I truly think Jack was happy and most in his element. In the quiet hours of late-night and into dawn, Jack would let his imagination roam. He couldn’t wait to put down on paper what he saw in his head.

After DC, when Jack went back to Marvel, we worked together on two non-comic projects—Captain America and the Solar. I was intended to be the films, but Jack turned them into comics when he got a chance to publish through Pacific Comics and retain ownership. I find it hard to believe that this is his 100th birthday. I still see him as when I first met him—sitting at the drawing board, crafting a Thor story, his pencil flying over the Strathmore paper. He was the best.
ON THE SHOULDERS OF A GIANT

BY KEVIN EASTMAN

CO-CREATOR, TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

I never before had seen an original page of Jack’s work, and as far as I was concerned, this was the Holy Grail. We bonded over Jack Kirby immediately, a connection we have never lost. The Losers page shown on the opposite page is THAT page. Peter gave it to me years later. It is the greatest and coolest gift I have ever gotten, from someone I will always consider my best friend. It hangs behind my drawing board in my studio, next to a signed photo of the man himself. I feel un worthy but proud that Kirby is always looking over my shoulder, inspiring me to work harder.

1985 was my first trip to San Diego Comic-Con (I still have the original poster from that trip). I could not have been more excited. I had only heard about SDCC. It seemed like a magical place, and neither of us had even been to the West Coast before. The first time I ever put my feet in the Pacific Ocean was at Mission Beach in that same year.

I'll never forget that. I’ll never forget the man, and I can simply NEVER repay him. He loved to look you in the eye and say “Keep on drawing, kid—imagination is the greatest adventure!” There is not a day that goes by that I don't think of him, as mentioned above. He's always looking over my shoulder as I work. I hope, in some small way, I am paying my respects because I can never repay my gratitude.

Happy 100th, King. You are missed and so dearly loved. I said to myself that day, “If I am lucky enough to have one single fan in my lifetime, I will ALWAYS treat them with the same respect Jack did with his fans.”

This coming year at Comic-Con will be my 32nd. I have never missed one since that first time and will never miss one. Over those years, we got to share several moments with Jack and Roz Kirby at the show. Of MANY precious moments, five minutes with the King and Queen were life changing and the best of the best. I honestly don’t think he completely understood the impact he had on the next generation of storytellers—maybe deep inside he did, but on the outside, he just LOVED what he did. He loved to be with all these “kids” who could barely speak in his presence, and he loved to look you in the eye and say: “Keep on drawing, kid—imagination is the greatest adventure!”

I’ll never forget that. I’ll never forget the man, and I can simply NEVER repay all that Jack Kirby has done for me and how much he has inspired me. He helped me realize and follow a dream. There is not a day that goes by that I don’t think of him, as mentioned above. He’s always looking over my shoulder as I work. I hope, in some small way, I am paying my respects because I can never repay my gratitude. Happy 100th, King. You are missed and so dearly loved.
I would like to celebrate what would be Jack Kirby’s 100th birthday. I always remember Jack’s birthday, August 28, as it is the day my older brother, Sgt. Jack Sinnott, was killed in France during World War II in 1944. Jack Kirby was a master creator and had a brilliant mind, effortlessly turning out page after page of iconic characters. I was always thrilled to see what new characters would be appearing in the pages that would be arriving for me to ink. I had the pleasure of working with Jack on over 50 issues of Fantastic Four. We collaborated on such characters as the Inhumans, Galactus, the Silver Surfer, the Black Panther, and the first appearance of Doctor Doom. I also had the pleasure of inking the very first appearance of Thor in Journey Into Mystery #83 (1962). In recent years, Marvel has turned Jack’s characters into Hollywood productions, bringing them to life on the big screen. I know that Jack would be thrilled and in awe to see the movie adaptations of his characters. The movies have bridged the gap from the older comic book fans to the younger generation, bringing enjoyment to all age groups for years to come.

Happy 100th Birthday to you, Jack. Thanks for all of the great memories.

JOE SINNOTT
INKER, FAN, FRIEND
LONGTIME KIRBY INKER AT MARVEL COMICS

LONG LIVE THE KING!
COMICS WRITER AND INKER
BY JIMMY PALMIOTTI

My earliest memories of comic books were of the ones that Jack Kirby drew. I had started collecting the Fantastic Four at about issue #100 at 9 years old and spent a lot of time delivering papers, shoveling snow, babysitting, and selling illegal fireworks on the streets of Brooklyn for years to afford my new hobby. So, what didn’t spend all of this hard-earned, and at times illegal, cash bounty on you may ask? I spent every single cent on buying the back issues of Kirby’s Fantastic Four comics from a comic store in Brooklyn called My Friends Book Store on Flatbush Avenue. Once I completed my collection, it seemed Jack’s work was still on everything new that was coming out, and I couldn’t have been happier or more excited. It was an exciting time because DC had just started putting out titles by him and Kamandi was one of my favorites. I remember hunting down each and every issue as they came out and wanting to be a comic artist myself. I did my best to recreate his work, but it was next to impossible. All I could do was to render in the many ways he represented energy and destruction… says too much about me, to be honest. Jack was one of those untouchable artists that no one could really copy or figure out how to recreate, and that is one of the main signs of a truly unique talent.

Years later, I was at a comic convention in a basement of a hotel in New York. I think one of those many Phil Seuling shows, and I was able to buy a page of Jack’s art from an issue of Fantastic Four for 10 bucks, a lot of money at the time for me, but this page sat on my wall for years. I learned a lot about inking from that single page, with inks rendered by the amazing Joe Sinnott. A year later, Marvel had their first comic convention, and Jack Kirby was there, and I made sure I got a ticket and go in with a copy of Fantastic Four #1 to sign. I finally got to the head of the line, and he had a bandage on his hand and told me he couldn’t draw anything but signed the book as best he could, and I could muster up the nerve to say him was “I think you are the greatest comic artist ever,” and he smiled, said “Thanks, kid,” and I went on my way. I never got to meet him again, but the special standout memory lives on. It’s very hard to put into words what someone’s lifetime of work means to you, but I think later becoming a professional comic artist and then a writer in comics is probably a good way to show it. When my wife, Amanda Conner, has trouble rendering action on a comic page, we always go back to the phrase, “How would Kirby do it?” and eventually solve the problem! The funny thing is that after all these years, Amanda and I finally got to put all of our Jack Kirby knowledge to use on an actual Kamandi comic book recently for issue #3 of a series called The Kamandi Challenge, and I hope whoever Jack may be in the universe, he gets a kick out of all the hard work we put into it. Jack was, and will always be, the king in my eyes and his work will continue to inspire generations to come. Long live the King!

JOE SINNOTT

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER
BY BILL SCHELLY
AUTHOR, HARVEY KURTZMAN

As I was wandering around the convention floor of the San Diego Comic-Con in 1992, I suddenly noticed Jack Kirby standing by himself at the end of a nearly empty aisle. The con was about to close for the day, and the crowd had thinned out, the only reason why he didn’t have the usual crowd of fans around him. He seemed to be a little uncertain, as if he was either waiting for someone or trying to decide where he would go next.

This, I thought, is my big chance to meet him. Here’s my recollection of our conversation as best I can remember it.

Gulp ing a little, I walked up to him and delivered the phrases that he had doubtless heard thousands of times before “Hello, Mr. Kirby I’m a big fan of your work!” I reached out my hand. He seemed a little distracted, but the shook hands with me.

“Tommy! You mumbled. “I’m sure you don’t remember, but you kindly sent me an original sketch of Captain America back in 1965 when I wrote you a fan letter. I still have that sketch and treasure it.”

Now he was focusing on me. “I’m glad you liked it.”

I ventured, “I love everything you’ve done, but the Fantastic Four is my favorite. Especially that Fantastic Origin of Doctor Doom?” in the second Fantastic Four Annual! Victor von Doom is such an interesting character.”

An amused, slightly impish expression came over Kirby’s face. “Yes, Doom was a fascinating fellow. He had his own point of view and his own problems, unlike most people don’t make.” He spoke as if Doctor Doom existed in the real world.

“He was competitive with Reed Richards…” I managed.

“No, they actually exist, ” he responded. “I know them intimately. ”

I wasn’t sure I understood his point, but I didn’t care. Jack Kirby had just shared an insight into one of his characters with me. That’s what mattered. By that point, “Yes, because you’d feel like the scars would prevent you from getting the admiration that you deserved, ” he said. “But Doom wouldn’t accept his fate. He would be amused and in awe to see the movie adaptations of his characters. The movies have bridged the gap from the older comic book fans to the younger generation, bringing enjoyment to all age groups for years to come. Happy 100th Birthday to you, Jack. Thanks for all of the great memories. Your inker, your fan, your friend.

JOE SINNOTT

My first San Diego Comic-Con, long ago, sitting in the basement of the El Cortez by the pool at night, listening to Jack. I can’t remember a word of the stories he told that night, and I shouldn’t have been starstruck (I was already a professional; we’d been acquainted for a couple of years; he’d even done a cover for my fanzine), but tell that to my younger self.

This was a first, an infrequent moment with one of the true legends. And all I can recall is the gravelly tone of his voice, and the fatherly warmth behind it.

PAUL LEVITTZ
AUTHOR,
75 YEARS OF DC COMICS

I love everything you’ve done, but the Fantastic Four is my favorite. Especially that Fantastic Origin of Doctor Doom?” in the second Fantastic Four Annual! Victor von Doom is such an interesting character.”

“Hey, you don’t know what his real problem was?” I shouted my head.

“My name was a perfectionist,” Kirby’s smile was working, and he had a twinkle in his eye, almost as if he were “pulling my leg.”

“So… I was trying to get Jack’s point. If you’re a perfectionist… and you have a scarred face… then you’d be angry…?”

“Yes, because you’d feel like the scars would prevent you from getting the admiration that you deserved,” he said. “But Doom wouldn’t accept his fate. He wanted to overcome it.”

I wasn’t sure I understood his point, but I didn’t care. Jack Kirby had just shared an insight into one of his characters with me. That’s what mattered. By that point, another fan or two had come up to listen. “These characters do exist, you know,” Kirby said. “In your mind.” I said, “They must be very real to you!”

“No, they actually exist,” he responded. “I know them intimately.”

How to respond to that I don’t think I did. When I hesitated, others started asking him things, so I just caught his eye, smiled, and moved away. I was so awestruck to be talking to him that I didn’t even think of asking for his autograph. But then, I had it on that Cap sketch he’d done for me, a quarter of a century before.


PAUL LEVITTZ
AUTHOR,
75 YEARS OF DC COMICS
I was in love with Jack Kirby’s art long before I knew who Jack Kirby was. It started with the earliest comics I read and a parade of monsters with wild sounding names like Googam and Monsteroso but each drawn with a design and power that made them oddly terrifying.

After awhile, the creatures gave way to superheroes, and still not knowing him by name, I followed Kirby over to titles like Fantastic Four, Thor, And, and Avengers by picking up reprints and old issues that featured his visionary work. It wasn’t until I found my way over to DC Comics that I stumbled on an ad heralding “The Great One Is Coming” and warning us to “Look Sharp, Look Up, and Look Out.” It was just a matter of time before I put it all together. The Great One was actually the King himself, and his arrival at DC promised a level of energy and excitement even greater than of all his others.

At this point, I was reading Kirby comics as they were coming out, and every week, there seemed to be a new Kirby book. Think about it: Jack Kirby was writing, drawing, and editing four books a month. It was an unprecedented display of sugar Kirby and prowess that stands unrivaled to this day, and not even one of his greatest creations, the Fourth World, could contain him. Through New Gods, Kamandi, and The Demon, he took me to places beyond my imagination and created a desire to dream as big as the stories he told.

One of my greatest regrets is never getting the opportunity to meet “The King” himself. But I’ve talked to so many who have, and with that, my admiration for him has grown. Following a lunch with the legendary Joe Ruby, I felt the pleasure of seeing unused designs Kirby made for the animation company Ruby-Spears, and though this was “discarded work” and created late in his career, it still had all the power and inventiveness seen in his earlier works. I also heard the stories on how he helped train fellow artists to his industry standard and worked relentlessly under the constant weight of endless deadlines. You would think that with time things would get easier, but that was never meant to be the case. Tales of his frustration over the perceived lack of respect for all his creative contributions were well known and that became our industry’s shame. He was “The King” our king, and he should have been treated as such. This one man created and co-created characters that inspired generations, and that acknowledgment should have been an afterthought but a right.

But like all great art, time only makes them greater. So here, on the anniversary of his 100th birthday, we celebrate the man and all his amazing work. There’s never been another like him and I doubt there ever will be. Happy birthday, Jack, and thanks for everything.

For my husband Don and me, Jack Kirby’s work was just . . . well . . . always there from the time we first began to read comic books. Frankly, we pretty much took his work for granted. He seemed to be everywhere; he’d co-created Captain America, but he certainly wasn’t just about superheroes. When Don and I first began to discuss our favorite comics, we shared our enthusiasm for the short-lived Boys’ Ranch, a Western that featured a terrific team of teens, perhaps our favorite of Jack’s pre-Silver Age work. It may not have influenced many writers or artists who came later, but those who had followed the series tended to admire it the way we did.

Though Jack was acknowledged to be one of the most influential voices in the entire comic book field, one of the most impressive qualities of the “King of Comics” was his kindness toward all his admirers. He communicated with them, he connected with them, he welcomed them as his friends, and he went out of his way to be the guiding light that illuminated the lives of so many.

And, as not by the way, the same goes for Roz Kirby, who put up with what must have been an overwhelming mass of adults and kids who each yearned for their own moment with someone with whom they might have met. She made it possible for him to give us his best—and her easy accommodation of adoring fans made us feel as though we weren’t an annoyance, even as she saw to it that he was able to work despite our distractions. (Somewhere in my files is a charming photo of Roz, smiling and relaxed, making “bunny ears” behind his head.)
I have to make a confession. I was never a big Jack Kirby fan. I was born after his peak work of the 1960s had been published. To me, he was always like the Beatles for my generation—someone you were constantly told was great, but someone whose greatness you never got to experience firsthand. He seemed like a talent from a bygone era, one that may have been influential but whose influence was for a generation past.

It wasn’t until I started discovering comics history and back issue bins that I started to come across some of Kirby’s more . . . unique . . . creations. While everyone knew of and raved about his classic work with Stan Lee on Fantastic Four, Incredible Hulk, Thor, and X-Men, few spoke about his 1970s work. Through the magic of comic book shops, I was able to look through old comic book bins and find some unique and unheralded creations. I recall seeing a Black Panther series in which the Panther searches for King Solomon’s Frog (huh?), or Captain America’s Bicentennial Battles, in which Cap travels through American history to have a philosophical discussion with Mr. Buda (say, wha—?!?). I remember reading a 2001: A Space Odyssey adaptation by Jack Kirby before I saw the feature film. Kirby’s creations were like nothing I had seen in mainstream comics and, out of sheer curiosity, I needed to seek out more.

Following his Marvel peak in the 1960s, Kirby moved over to the Distin-guished Competition in 1970 and created a whole new universe of characters all his own. “The Fourth World” was an interconnected mini-line of comics at DC, spanning across four titles:Forever People, New Gods, Mister Miracle, and Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen. Kirby created big, big, big concepts. His heroes were gods who were changing the world, fighting against demons from other worlds. And here were Jimmy Olsen and Superman caught in the middle.

Meanwhile, Kirby also had time to create Kamandi, a futuristic tale of “the Last Boy on Earth,” and The Demon (‘nuff said). While individual issues never caught my eye, over time I learned to appreciate the sheer scope of what Kirby was attempting to do (which was to create a whole Kirbyverse within the DC Universe).

After completing his DC contract, Kirby returned to Marvel in 1975 to create what are some of my favorite comics now, a most unusual collection of anti-heroes and misfit toys. Kirby took over both Captain America and Black Panther, whose adventures were truly that—adventures. He turned the characters into explorers, both on missions in different worlds where both were our eyes for the strangeness that unfolded. This was not your simple “hero vs. villain” that we had grown accustomed to in 1970s comics, nor was it like any Captain America comic that came before (or after). In these stories, Cap and T’Challa seemed all too human, facing wacky threats and completing impossible journeys with colorful sidekicks. One thing can be said about these stories: once read, they will never be forgotten!

Meanwhile, fulfilling his contract with these marquee characters, Kirby was given the opportunity to create some new ones. And, boy, these were gems—lost and forgotten titles that remain fan favorites (and among my now most treasured books). First up was The Eternals, a hybrid Inhumans/New Gods title about a lost race that now must battle gods to survive and save our world. This was right in the Kirby vein: big concepts, world threats, and unusual characters and storytelling. When the Eternals crossed the Hulk or Thor or the Celestials, the big concepts and challenges suddenly became more personal and smaller, which was Kirby’s magic.

Next up was Machine Man, a sweet tale of a machine that sought life. The
purple costume and extending arms and legs (along with the cool eyes/glasses) was such an individual look that it didn't matter where Aaron Stack went—we were along for the ride with Machine Man! The fascinating thing about this character is that after Kirby left the title, Steve Ditko took over, as he did in the 1960s with the Incredible Hulk.

Many will also fondly recall Devil Dinosaur, what I would consider a boy's adventure series. Moon Boy, a caveman, met a powerful, red, T-Rex-like dinosaur, and the two bonded and fought in the Paleolithic era. Moon Boy's odd way of speaking (almost narrative) was, and still is, striking. And who wouldn't want his or her own pet dinosaur? Also striking were Kirby's essays on the letters page, talking about life, the world, the universe, and other big thoughts.

Howard the Duck, this was not! What's interesting is that Devil Dinosaur (now along with Moon Girl) is today one of Marvel's most popular titles. Unfortunately, Kirby's return to Marvel was all too short. After 1978, he moved on to TV animation, ending his wonderful and wacky Marvel return.

Fortunately, he reappeared in 1981 with Pacific Comics, a young upstart company that gave legendary comics creators the ability to create their own new characters and own the rights to them. Kirby came out swinging with Captain Victory and the Galactic Rangers (as great a title as they come in comics). The series was a futuristic combination of Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon in Kirby's own distinctive style. This was Kirby unbridled, living in his own universe, a groundbreaking creative choice for its time. The title lasted 13 issues (plus a Special), all too short yet completely magical. Simultaneously, Kirby produced a second Pacific title, Silver Star in 1983-84, the story of . . . well, I don't know if I could accurately describe what it was about! A man gets transformed into Homo Geneticus to fight cosmic foes. It was a bizarre and wonderful "kitchen sink" approach that I fondly recall, if only for the sheer wackiness and pure "Kirby-ness" of it.

In the end, through exploring the magic of '70s and '80s Kirby comics, I discovered that I really was a Kirby fan . . . of the unfettered, unfiltered, undiminished Kirby. I loved when his mind was set loose and his very personal, very bizarre situations and characters could roam free. The sheer sense of adventure and discovery seems to have been lost in comics. Taking an afternoon to read some classic late-era Kirby work will provide hours of entertainment, mind-spinning visions, and genuinely help you appreciate and love Kirby.

I guess I really am a big Jack Kirby fan after all.

Scarlet Karimian is a writer and producer residing in Glendale, CA.

ABOVE: Kirby continued to be incredibly prolific once he returned to Marvel in 1976 with Captain America #193 (top left). He continued his run of big concepts at the publisher with Captain America’s Bicentennial Battles, Black Panther, The Eternals, Machine Man, and Devil Dinosaur.

BOTTOM ROW RIGHT: Kirby was on the cutting edge of creator-owned comics when he launched Captain Victory and the Galactic Rangers with Pacific Comics in 1983. He followed it with Silver Star in 1983.

Captain America, Black Panther, The Eternals, Machine Man, and Devil Dinosaur © & ™ 2017 MARVEL

Captain Victory and Silver Star © the Jack Kirby Estate

JULIANNE DIBLA SI BLACK • Dunedin, FL

PAUL BUTCHER • Lytham St. Annes, UK

JOHN STEVENTON • Westerville, OH

DAVID FLORES • Chihuahua, Mexico

 männlicher, über die Länge der Hand ausgewachsenen Arme und Beine (mit der Kostüm der Locken und brillen) war ein so individuelles Bild, dass es nicht auf einer Art, wo Aaron Stack ging, wir waren mit Machine Man! Die interessante Sache an diesem Charakter ist, dass nach Kirby dem Titel, Steve Ditko dann übernahm, wie er es im 1960er Jahren mit der Incredibile Hulk tut.

Viele werden auch die Erinnerungen an Devil Dinosaur, was ich ein Jungs Abenteurer-Serie. Moon Boy, ein Caveman, traf einen mächtigen, rote, T-Rex-artigen Dinosaurier, und die beiden bondierten und kämpften im Paläolithikum. Moon Boys ungewöhnliche Art zu sprechen (fast Narrative) war, und ist immer noch, schaffend. Wer würde nicht gerne seinen oder ihren eigenen Dinosaurier haben? Auch prägender waren Kirbys Essays auf den Briefseiten, über die Welt, die Welt, die Welt, und andere große Gedanken.


Ich glaube, ich wirklich bin ein großer Jack Kirby Fan nach all.

Scarlet Karimian ist ein Autor und Produzent, die in Glendale, CA lebt. 


Captain America, Black Panther, The Eternals, Machine Man, and Devil Dinosaur © & ™ 2017 MARVEL

Captain Kirby and Silver Star © the Jack Kirby Estate

JULIANNE DIBLA SI BLACK • Dunedin, FL

PAUL BUTCHER • Lytham St. Annes, UK

JOHN STEVENTON • Westerville, OH

DAVID FLORES • Chihuahua, Mexico
ABOVE: A rare jam piece by Russell Meyer (Broom Hilda), Charles Schulz (Peanuts) and Kirby from 1972, featuring his new DC Comics character, The Demon.

LEFT & RIGHT: Kirby art featuring The Eternals (1976) and Captain America (1977), both inked by Dave Stevens. Characters TM & © 2017 MARVEL.
I can’t tell you exactly when he said it, but he said it: Jack Kirby was the first person to realize what Comic-Con International would eventually become. It was the early ’70s; that, I know. It might have been right after the first one in 1970. That one was called the Golden State Comic-Con, as was the second one in 1971. Or it might have been after San Diego’s West Coast Comic Convention in 1972 or the San Diego Comic-Con in 1973 or 1974 or 1975. The convention finally got its now-and-probably forever name of Comic-Con International in 1995, but the amazing thing Jack said about it was it was more like ’73 or ’74, back when 2,500 people in the place was considered a smashing turnout. And what he said then was this…

“This convention will get to be so big that it will eventually take over all of San Diego during the days it’s held. It will be the place all of Hollywood comes to sell the movies they made last year and to find out what they’re going to make next year!”

That is not a verbatim quote, but I swear to you, that’s the gist of what he said. I vividly remember him saying it, not once but many times, just as I vividly remember the response it got. Everyone, myself included, thought it was one of his odder, more unrealistic notions. This was before we realized that Mr. Kirby’s odder, more unrealistic notions had a way of actually happening…eventually.

We nodded and humored him at the time—“Yeah sure, Jack! Whatever you say!”—and then watched it come true before our very eyes. If you’re reading this Souvenir Book at the convention, take a look around you right now; wherever you are. I’ll wait.

See what he meant?

Others in this book are writing about how important Jack was to them and to comics. I decided to write about how important he was to this comic convention. He was very important.

When plans were being drawn up for the very first one in ’70, one of the first things the convention organizers did was to pay a visit or three to Jack and Roz Kirby, who, along with their kids, were then new residents of Southern California. Jack’s enthusiasm for the idea—and his promise to be a guest of honor at the first gathering—were of great importance to making the convention a reality. (Another impact of those visits: Several of the con planners wound up as characters in the comics Jack was then writing and drawing for DC.)

At that first con, Jack was not only the most impressive guest who created comic books, he was daim near the only one. A distant runner-up was a friend of mine named Mark Hanerfeld, who worked for DC Comics in New York…only he really didn’t. Mark loved comics so much that he would hang around the DC offices and do odd jobs, occasionally for a speck of pay. He later became an assistant editor there, but at the time, he was one notch below an intern. Still, the closest thing to a comic book professional who came to the con from the East Coast was probably Mark DC. Did not pay his way there. He paid his way there. And then he went back to New York and told everyone in the business about this wonderful new convention in far-off San Diego. The next year, folks who lived back there began coming out here for the convention. Before long, it was a trek you almost had to make if you worked in comics. That was Mark Hanerfeld who started that. Jack and Roz Kirby and some of their kids drove down to that first convention on Saturday morning, August 1, 1970. I remember Shel Dorf, who was sometimes called the con’s founder, in an absolute panic around 11:30 we because the Kirbys hadn’t arrived.

I was working for Jack at the time as a largely unnecessary assistant and Shel kept running up to me and asking, “Have you heard anything? Have you heard anything?” In the days before cell phones, it was highly unlikely you’d hear anything in a situation like that. I hadn’t, but sure enough, the Kirbys showed up in plenty of time for Jack’s scheduled talk.

It was not in a meeting room. It was more of a foyer—an open area you might pass through on your way to some other spot in the hotel. The hotel, of course, was the U.S. Grant and we were in the basement, which was undergoing serious renovation. To get from the film room to the tiny dealers’ room, you had to walk on painters’ tarpas, past temporary plywood walls. (At this year’s convention—the one for which this is the Souvenir Book—there are individual exhibitors whose displays would not even fit into that dealers’ room.)

Maybe a hundred people gathered to hear Jack’s talk. At the time, he had just left Marvel and was working on new comics for DC, which had not yet come out. Just before he was to address the throng, he called me over and asked me to go up and introduce him. Since some present didn’t know about him quitting Marvel, he wanted me to mention that and also to announce that he would not be taking questions about why he left.

I was momentarily terrified. Today, I’m okay with speaking before a group of people, but back then, I hadn’t done much of it, and, besides, no one knew who I was. I repaired to a corner to quickly figure out what I’d say. I only had a minute or so.

Then Shel Dorf walked up to Jack and said, “Are you ready, Jack? I’ll introduce you.” Jack said to Shel, “Thanks, but I want Mark to introduce me.”

He meant me, but Shel immediately turned to Mark Hanerfeld and said, “Jack...
It's been that way since '94. Jack is not here and yet he's very much in evidence all around the hall. His influence, his vision, the continued existence of an industry and all the labor that he revolutionized not once but several times in his career. It's all on display at this glorious, city-filling convention that none of us ever thought would become what it's become . . .

Mark Evanier was one of Kirby's assistants in the early 1970s and wrote Kirby: King of Comics, which is being republished in time for Comic-Con. For more on Mark, see page 9.
His August 28th will be the 100th birthday of Jack Kirby, as great and bewildering an artist as the comic book medium has seen. We know a lot about Kirby as an artist and a man, yet how he could do what he did remains a mystery. His work continues to provoke and inspire. That we have so much of it to learn from and enjoy seems improbable, even miraculous—a premise as wild as any he dreamt up in his own fictions. But it’s true.

I know I’m not alone in having Kirbymania—it’s a common condition. Kirby, after all, is the unofficial patron saint of Comic-Con. He animates the thinking and doing of many, many people. But Kirbymania is unpredictable in its effects and can feel very personal. We each get the bug in a different way, it seems. In my case, a big chunk of my reading and writing life orbits around the idea of Kirby, and in one way or another, I’ve been following his work for most of my years. My thinking about Kirby has taken the form of, so far, writing articles for the Jack Kirby Collector; writing an academic book, Hand of Fire: The Comics Art of Jack Kirby (2011); and curating an exhibition of his art, Comic Book Apocalypse (2015). But this activity is rooted in a way of thinking that started I don’t know when—sometime before I turned 10, I’d say, because 10 is about when Jack Kirby became my absolute favorite comic book artist.

Even when I stopped collecting comic books a few years later and got rid of most of what I had collected, I held on to most of the Kirbys—and my interest spiked again in my mid-20s when I belatedly discovered comic shops and began to chase down Kirby books I had not seen as a kid. Since then, I’ve thought about and grappled with Kirby in waves and can mark off phases of my life based on how my view of Kirby changed. Sometimes, he has been the very center of my interest in comics; at other times, a persistent background. The terms of my attention keep changing. But as I get older, as my thinking about Kirby has turned into a program of academic work, my interest has stayed constant and intense, and I do not see that changing. I can’t help but feel that I’m not done with Kirby and never will be.

I bet a lot of people feel that way—but each of us has our own story.

The truth is that Kirby’s work and career remain a mystery. We know the broad strokes of what happened; we’re even lucky enough to have some vivid scenes of Kirby at work at his drawing board as told to us by his family and colleagues. But how he could have done it all remains hard to understand. There is so much to take in: The crushing hardships of his life, that he refused to be crushed by; his rare and intense gift for comics storytelling; the push and pull of contrary feelings and the sometimes gear-grinding clash of ideas in his work; his galloping imagination and yen for Big Things; and above all, the great, unstinting generosity of his talent and temperament, which transformed deadline-crazy freelancing into an amazing outpouring of art that was always surplus to requirements. How can someone do that? How can that be possible, to wring work so generous and lively from a life steeped in memories of poverty and violence—the rough streets and tenements of the Lower East Side, the bloody fields of World War II? Work so free of cynicism, even when it ventured into the darkest places?

Kirby still has me baffled, and I don’t believe I’ll ever get him all figured out. Lord knows I’ve tried. It was Kirby who drew me into trying to figure out, in Hand of Fire, the art of cartooning: a commonplace, everyday sort of art that yet remains mysterious. Kirby taught me to see cartooning as a mix of figuration, symbolic visual language, and rapturous physical handiwork, all driven toward simplification and typification by narrative intent—but never reducible to an intent that could be adequately paraphrased in words. It was Kirby who got me past the habit of formal analysis (breaking things down into bits, a good grad school habit) and back into thinking about the wild sweep of the
Or some of us may know Kirby best from his saluted days with Joe Simon, back in the early 40s, or slightly later, on into the early 50s, when the Simon and Kirby studio became trendsetters and standard-bearers of the comic book bookiness. That was the pre–Comics Code era of unrestrained genre experimentation, an era of trying everything, everything, to see what would stick—breathless, unabashed, hell for after. Jack Kirby came of age professionally then, hungrily and sharply, when the comic book medium was just getting established as a staple element of American pop culture. From acrobatic superheroes like Captain America and Manhunter, to kid gangs like the Newsboy Legion and the Commandoes, to the romance comics explosion of the late 40s—Simon and Kirby outsold most other comic book makers, taking up different genres, establishing some, redefining others. You had to be an opportunist and pretty much on your feet to thrive in those days, and they were. They adapted and moved around. If Simon and Kirby had not done Young Romance in 1947, how different would the history of comics have been? Kirby shored up the entire comic book business in those years, just as he did again in the 50s.

Me, I remember Kirby best for his post-1950s period, first at DC Comics, and then again back at Marvel for a while, where he consolidated past ideas—kid gangs, crime stories, superheroes, demigods—but put them in starting new frameworks. In that time, he created his sadly abbreviated Fourth World (New Gods and its sister titles), an experiment in epic scope that anticipated the comic books and graphic novels of the 80s. The brightished chapters of the Fourth World are inescapable, giving free rein to Kirby’s yen for the technologically sublime: High-tech vistas that overawe the reader, shocking the senses and unsettling the mind, a tendency already visible in his 40s work but now overflowing. No one else could take the familiar stuff of superheroes and push it to such mad heights. At the same time, the Fourth World stories are often un- canny—a cut above routine questions that Kirby cared about deeply. To me, these are the apes of his work: the comics that set my young mind on fire. That was the pre–Comics Code era of untrammeled genre experimentation, the near-apocalyptic savagery (but also dizzy satire) of The Spirit. The second spirit of the late '40s—Inter-Force (Kirby’s “Street Code, ” Harkness—on and on, a gushing IP libraries in all of mass culture. All in a day’s (or week’s) work for Kirby the storyteller.

I've left out a lot, I know. When the story you're trying to retell is the career of Jack Kirby, you're bound to leave stuff out. There's too much: from the mid- 40s Bop explorer (a small-scaled but ably balanced project), to The Spirit, to The New Gods (Simon and Kirby's offering to the horror comics craze); from Kirby's Science Land concept drawings (designs for D'ohman, the late-'70s Marvel Comics of OMAG (a future Captain America but in a post-patriotic world), to kid gangs like the Newsboy Legion and the Commandoes, to the romance comics explosion of the late-40s—Simon and Kirby outsold most other comic book makers, taking up different genres, establishing some, redefining others. You had to be an opportunist and pretty much on your feet to thrive in those days, and they were. They adapted and moved around. If Simon and Kirby had not done Young Romance in 1947, how different would the history of comics have been? Kirby shored up the entire comic book business in those years, just as he did again in the 50s.

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SPECIAL THANKS FOR THEIR HELP WITH THE KIRBY CENTENNIAL SECTION

JOHN MORROW • THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR MAGAZINE • RANDOLPH HOPPE • JACK KIRBY MUSEUM & RESEARCH CENTER
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