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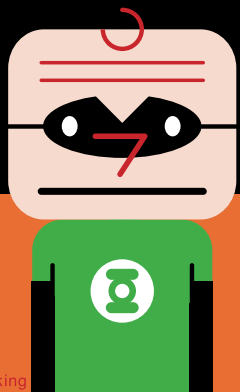
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THE INVENTION OF GIL KANE

Cover art by Gil Kane & Klaus Janson



WOODY LANTERN
CBC mascot by J.D. KING
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About Our Cover

Pencils by GIL KANE
Inks by KLAUS JANSON
Colors by GLENN WHITMORE



One of our favorite inkers on the pencils of Gil Kane is Klaus Janson, and we are delighted he agreed to delineate Gil's work on the back cover art for the "Giant Superhero Team-Up" *Marvel Treasury Edition* (#9, 1976). Art scan is courtesy of Heritage. The original inker on the published piece was John Romita. — Y.E.

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THE MAIN EVENT

The Invention of Gil Kane: *CBC* takes a comprehensive look at the life and times of the man born Eli Kacz. From a childhood growing up on the mean streets of Brooklyn and early entry into the nascent comics field, we chronicle his years as DC Comics' stalwart and witness an epiphanous breakthrough that transforms his work and ambitions into becoming among the first graphic novelists. The artist's tenure at Marvel, stretch as newspaper comic strip creator, triumphant return to DC, and stay in television animation are detailed, as are personal hardships and medical difficulties, all culminating into a quintessential American story of self-invention, constant refinement, and perpetual quest for excellence that made Gilbert Eli Kane into one of the greatest comic book creators of all time..... 20

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Note: Yet again, with honest regret, we were unable to include any number of items that have been prepared for recent issues, including this one, due to the excessive length of our cover feature. We will strive to be more precise in the solicitations and will do our best to include omitted material in future issues. We beg the indulgence of our magazine's understanding contributors and our readership.

Right: Detail from a Gil Kane presentation, pitched to DC (but not purchased), of a series called Zero-Man.



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An Enthusiastic Man

Remembering the passionate and generous artist, deacon, educator, and family man

by JON B. COOKE *CBC* Editor

The last time I saw my friend was at the Asbury Park Comic Con a few years ago. I approached his table, our eyes locked, a huge, tooth-filled grin erupted across his kind face, and my pal rocketed out of his chair to embrace me with an incredible hug. In those few minutes we had together, in that New Jersey convention hall, with typical Herb Trimpe exuberance, he shared the recent doings of his life and a newfound gratitude for attentive fans, and he introduced his wife, Patricia. Ever since my very first meeting the comic book artist, at another con, one of many years before, I liked Herbert William Trimpe. I liked Herb a lot.

Upon Trimpe's shockingly abrupt passing on April 30, at the age of 75, I've been mulling over *CBC*'s proper response, and when reading his book, *The Power of Angels*, written about the man's experience between 2001–02 as a volunteer at ruins of the World Trade Center towers (dubbed "the pile") I came across this passage:

I came to see that grief was not suffered best alone. Grief did not have to be buried within oneself like so much dead weight. It was something that needed to be shared. Grieving was a time to lean on others for assistance and comfort. Once that understanding becomes part of the grief equation the anger is cancelled out. Anger no longer serves as a defense mechanism to guard against the anguish. It no longer has to be a poisonous factor blocking the healing process. I came to understand that the number one priority at Ground Zero, as well as for life in general, was to care and share and to be there for one another.

That remarkably compassionate and spiritually resonant paragraph offered the most fitting approach: Ask those friends and family who loved and cared for him to share about the remarkable man.

Mutual pal Barry Windsor-Smith, the legendary storyteller whose relationship with the departed stretches back to the late '60s, related very simply, "Herb Trimpe was my oldest and dearest friend. I loved him unconditionally. He was a wonderful man." BWS also shared the photo at right.

Readers doubtless know the story of "Happy Herbie" (a nickname given by Stan Lee), who, just out of the Air Force and year in Vietnam, joined with the Marvel Bullpen in the 1967, soon to become the predominant artist on *The Incredible Hulk*. Along the way, he co-created Wolverine, another cash-cow for the House of Ideas, and Trimpe also became known for art stints on Marvel titles *G.I. Joe* and *Godzilla*.

Stan Lee said to *CBC*, "Herb was a great guy. He did so many strips for us, mainly the *Hulk*, but he could do anything. And he was a pleasure to work with. A nice, even-tempered, pleasant guy. I liked him." Trimpe was, indeed, a get-along kind of guy, and much more. His second wife, onetime Marvel writer now journalist Linda Fite, alluded to a "type of nobility" and "chivalrous element" to his make-up, aspects he shared with his close friend Barry Windsor-Smith. And Herb Trimpe was also a family man.

I asked the artist's children about their memories and his oldest, Melissa, daughter with first wife Merri-lee, offered, "My dad liked learning, his knowledge, and interest, changed and morphed as he experienced life. Lately, he

would tell me facts about the planets, like 'If the sun were the size of the Earth, the Earth would be the size of a basketball.' And he was fascinated by Saturn. You could ask him just about anything and he would know the answer.

"He liked to be busy, not idle. As he got older, he told me he didn't want to just sit around and wait to expire. He didn't get it that everyone didn't feel this way. 'Why don't they want to be productive human beings?' he would ask.

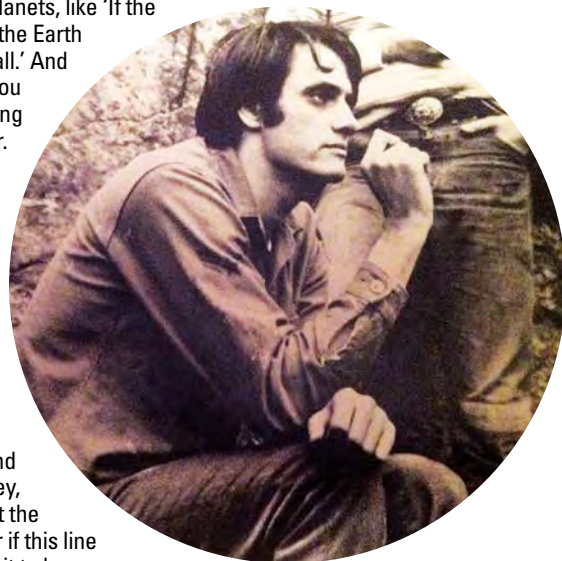
"In the '70s, he was a registered Republican and, as an idealistic kid, I would demand to know why. He would say, 'Hey, Melissa, it's good to know what the other side is thinking.' I wonder if this line of thought lead him in his pursuit to become a deacon in the Episcopal Church. I never asked, but when he was a Republican, he was also an agnostic.

"As for his time as a chaplain at Ground Zero, he spoke to me mostly about his experiences with the people, the first responders. He met folks from all walks of life, with all types of backgrounds, and I think the experience opened his mind and changed the palate he had known for so long to a much richer and colorful one. He wrote a book about his experience, *The Power of Angels*. The word angel in the title refers to the first responders and the folks who gave unconditionally of themselves in the aftermath of 9/11.

"My dad was free and he didn't care what you thought of his style. Later in his life, he took to wearing an arm full of braided macramé and leather bracelets that went from his wrist up his for arm — like a rock star, I always thought.

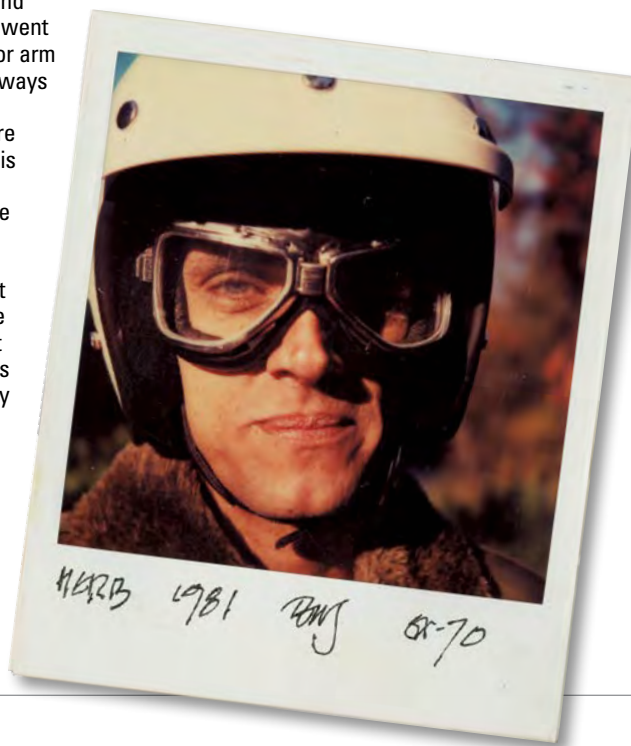
"He liked adventure and we had a few in his plane. Once, coming back from Bethany, we were forced to land in a big field because of weather, camped right there next to the plane to be awoken the next morning by the curious farmer and his son. My dad made fast friends of them. To say he was likable would be an understatement. People were drawn to him. He had real charisma.

"I think he saw the comics as a means to an end.



Above: A contemplative Herb Trimpe in an undated photo shared by Amelia, Herb and Linda Fite's oldest daughter.

Below: Barry Windsor-Smith sent this Polaroid picture of his best friend, snapped by BWS in 1981.



Eisner's Enduring Esprit

A chat with Paul Levitz about his latest, *Will Eisner: Champion of the Graphic Novel*

by JON B. COOKE *CBC* Editor

[Yours truly is happy to include this feature on friend and fellow historian Paul Levitz's new tome, *Will Eisner: Champion of the Graphic Novel* (published last fall by Abrams), but it must be disclosed that I helped out with the book, if ever so slightly, when the author asked for an assist. The interview was conducted by email this past July. — Ye Editor.]

One of the remarkable aspects of being on a first name basis with William Ervin Eisner was not only the rapt attention and respect he would grant you when speaking one-on-one, but also the ease and comfort in which he engaged differing points of view. Here was Will Eisner, certainly the true "elder statesman" of the comic book field, if ever there was one, a honest-to-goodness leader in this art form, with oodles of bona-fides to prove it, willing to earnestly listen and ponder even the most outlandish ideas... and he'd just as ardently — and graciously — refute any silly notions and set you straight. He was a class act.

Back in the day, when overwhelmed by some epiphany, I would be gripped with an urge to ring him up. (Understand, that was the thing with Eisner: besides possessing a demeanor that effortlessly commanded he be dealt with courtesy, promising the same in return, there were no egotistical vibes coming from the legend that

would prompt any hesitation in making the call). Y'see, folks, I just *had* to share my totally original and utterly brilliant idea, about which, upon hearing, he would unfailingly pause and — kindly, mind you, ever so kindly — render my scheme to smithereens. Will Eisner had thought it all out long before... and he suffered fools like me very nicely. And maybe, God bless 'im, I came out a little wiser for having the temerity to engage him.

The point is, I reckon, Will Eisner was a mensch, a good man who treated others well. And he was also smart, prescient, and vital. I guess this is a long-winded (if not incoherent) intro about how Paul Levitz's new book is utterly appropriate regarding the great graphic novelist. It is a beauty to behold and a joy to read. And Mr. Levitz, being a mensch in my estimation as well, was kind enough to chat about good ol' Will with yours truly and suffer through some of my foolish questions...

CBC: What was your first exposure to the work of Will Eisner, Paul, and what were your impressions?

Paul Levitz: I think I first saw *The Spirit* in Jules Feiffer's wonderful *Great Comic Book Heroes*, but I was too overwhelmed by the joy of discovery of the Golden Age super-heroes to focus on him. A couple of tastes in the early 1970s, with the bagged black-&-white reprints and the like, and then my friend Mark Hanerfeld got me hooked on Will. Mark sold me about half of *The Spirit* sections (his duplicates), and I started a futile quest for the rest.

CBC: *The Spirit* had poked his head up from *Wildwood Cemetery* a few times during the 1960s — in an Israel Waldman one-shot, momentarily revived in a New York Herald Tribune magazine feature, in a reprint appearing in Feiffer's book, and in two glorious issues of a Harvey Comics resurrection. In your memory, and in retrospect, how were these sparse appearances received by comics fandom? Did they whet the appetite of readers or was there overall indifference?

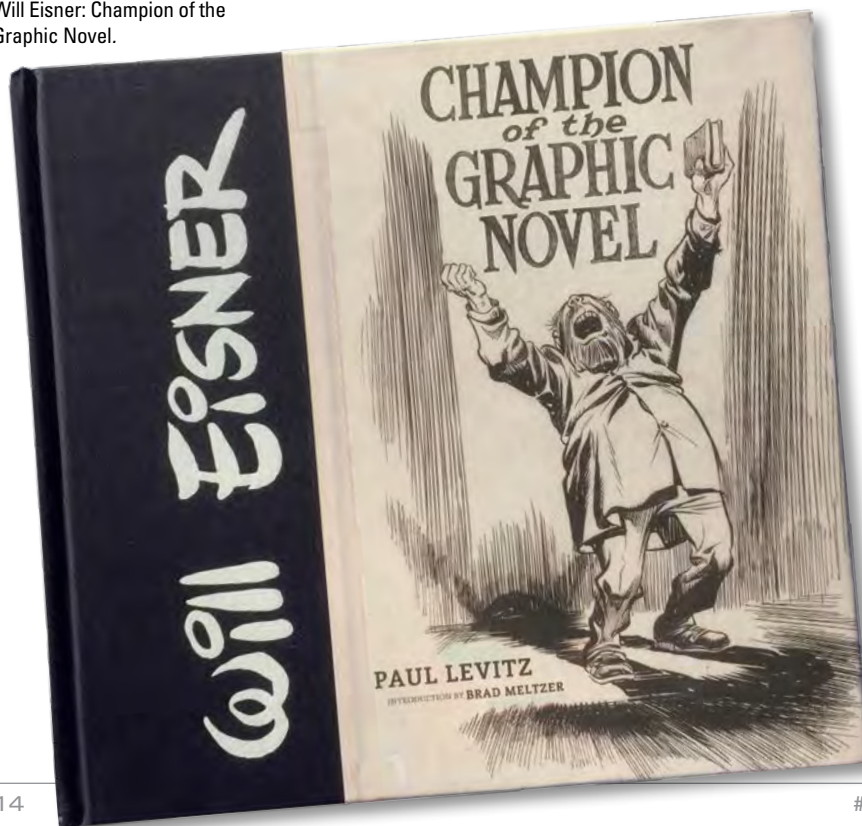
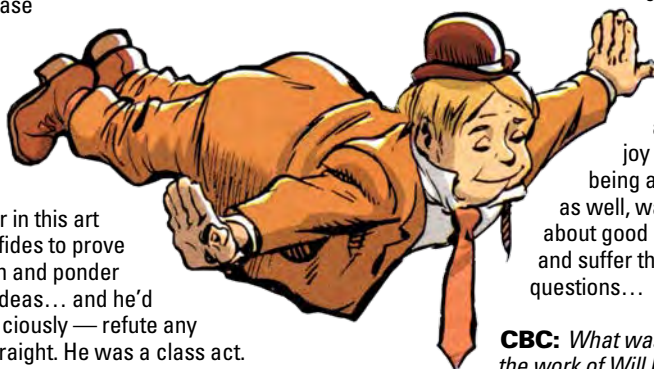
Paul: I'm a little later than that in my introduction to fandom. My first con was in 1971 and my fanzine reading only really goes wide just before that. By the time I come in, *The Spirit* has won an Alley Award (the first organized comics awards), and is being written about in early historical works, from Steranko's *History of Comics* to Richard Kyle's *Graphic Story* fanzine. The older fans are definitely holding it in reverence, and Will's regarded as a father figure already.

CBC: Can you describe what the atmosphere of the Seuling Comic Art Conventions were like in the early 1970s with some comparison to the mega-events of today? (To set the stage for the environment Will stepped into when encountering the field after his long absence.)

Paul: It was a magic time, certainly for me, but for others as well. In those pre-Internet days when even a



Above: Portrait of Paul Levitz by the late Seth Kushner. **Inset right:** Vignette of Gerhard Shnooble by Will Eisner, from *The Spirit* #34 [Sept. '87] cover. **Below:** Cover of Paul Levitz's *Will Eisner: Champion of the Graphic Novel*.





THE INVENTION OF GIL KANE

by Jon B. Cooke
Portrait by Greg Preston

*Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
"Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt*

— Robert Browning, *Andrea del Sarto*

As with all things, there was a time when comic books were new, and the form was born in a gray city, in a downtrodden country, amid a dispirited era called the Great Depression. Children of that glum period responded to the guileless, emerging medium with instant devotion and fervor; here, finally, was an entertainment wholly their own, easy to ingest, portable, and inexpensive. Some kids, those who could recognize that real, live human beings drew the pictures and composed the words in those four-colored exploits, vowed to become a part of the effluent scene, especially those whose families were desperate for any additional income.

In those early days, the nascent industry was in frantic need of talent, even if crude, to fill the pages of its publications. Adolescents willing to produce stories at often-abysmal page rates flocked to the Manhattan publishing houses, among them a teen-aged Latvian immigrant who resided with his Yiddish-speaking parents in the neighboring borough of Brooklyn. The boy, who ardently embraced the adventure milieu, whether newspaper comic strips, episodic radio programs, or the moving pictures, had become an impassioned aficionado of comic books, especially the violent and bombastic stories produced by Bill Everett and those by Jack Kirby. Eli Katz's ardor and devotion to the form's pulp affectations would last all of his 73 years, long after he had reinvented himself from a mouthy, exuberant ghetto kid into the erudite and debonair Gil Kane.

This is the story of Eli the boy as well as Gil the man, who melded to become one of the greatest of all comic book creators. The man-child possessed a remarkable talent and, over many years, he fashioned a new identity for himself, and yet, sometimes to his lament, would never shed his childhood mania for pulpish melodrama, heroic derring-do, and garish spectacle. For Gilbert Kane, the promise of comics was ever fresh and alive, a form perpetually rife with possibilities, and quite simply the medium he loved the most, always bringing to his dynamic work the same enthusiasm that consumed an impressionable Eli Katz when the boy opened his first comic book.

Portrait photography ©2016 Greg Preston.



Notoriously, around the same time the Katzs were just settling into their tenement apartment at 1675 Park Place,* Brownsville witnessed the birth of Murder, Inc., the mobster hit squad formed by Jewish gangsters Bugsy Siegel and Meyer Lansky, which would be responsible during its 1930s to mid-'40s reign for executing upwards of 1,000 murder contracts. Literary critic Alfred Kazin, born of Brownsville and son of a house painter, said of his environs, "We were the end of the line. We were the children of immigrants who had camped at the city's back door, in New York's rawest, remotest, cheapest ghetto... [W]e were Brownsville — Brunzvil, as the old folks said — the dust of the earth to all of Jews with money, and notoriously a place that measured success by our skill with getting away with it."⁴

"It was a difficult childhood," said Elaine about young Eli. And with the need for blacksmiths on the wane in the modern automotive era and unemployment rapidly ascending to catastrophic levels nationwide, father Max was in desperate need of a job. "They had no money," Elaine continued. "His dad had a rough time getting work. Apparently the family had gone to the beach and the father got an ear infection and they didn't have the money to do anything about it, and he lost his hearing. (He would have hearing aids and, if you would yell, he could hear you.) So that made life even more difficult."

The artist shared with friend Jim Woodring stories of childhood hardship. "Gil told me stories about the poverty of his youth that were hair-raising," Woodring said. "Such as three or four people using the same bathtub. I remember him telling me that he got hit in the mouth and broke some teeth, so it was suggested by his mother that he drink ice water to alleviate the pain. These stories didn't contribute to my sense of who he was as a person, but they were memorable stories. And he did change his tone when he spoke of the deprivations of his youth; he wasn't blithe about it at all."⁵

"We were terribly poor and we lived in a cold-water flat," Kane said. "We didn't have any heat, hot water, and we had an old iron stove. My mother and I used to have to go into the marketplace to find wooden fruit boxes and break them up to use as fuel because we couldn't afford coal."⁶ (Kane's boyhood friend Norman Podhoretz points out that for a Brownsville couple at the time to have only one offspring was not common. "It was unusual to be an only child of Jewish parents," he said. "There were at least



two kids in every family, usually more."⁷ The Wikipedia page, *History of Jews in Latvia*, hints at Latvian government restriction, the "limiting of the [Jewish] family size [between 1925–35] to one or two children by the majority,"⁸ though verification was not available by presstime.)

Perhaps exacerbating problems (though hardly unusual) was the fact that Yiddish, the everyday language of Eastern European Jewry, was the only language spoken in the household. "Gil said that when he started kindergarten," Elaine said, "he practically spoke no English, so that wasn't easy." Gil's son, Scott, recalled, "My grandparents continued to speak Yiddish throughout the rest of their lives."⁹ Still, with eight out of ten Brownsville residents being Jewish, daily life didn't necessitate adherence to goyish culture. "I thought the entire world was Jewish," Brownsville native and daughter of factory workers Lillian Elkins said. "I didn't realize I was a minority."¹⁰ But on the street, Podhoretz related, "Between us kids, we never spoke Yiddish to each other."

Birthplace of the reputable Hebrew Educational Society of Brooklyn, Brownsville was also home to many dozens of synagogues and a flourishing Jewish culture. "There was a thriving Yiddish theater in Brownsville," Podhoretz explained. "There was a theater on St. John's Place, right near Eastern Parkway, a sort of main drag, and the shows from Second Avenue would come there and it was

This page: Photos of Brownsville, including (top right) Helen Levitt's portrait of kids mugging for the camera and (above) street vendors selling out of their pushcarts. Below is the cover of Neil Kleid and Jake Allen's graphic novel, *Brownsville*.





This page: Above is Eli Katz in a photo after his discharge from the Army. Above right is 20-year-old Katz and friend Phillip Papp. Kane said that he did not, in fact, play the trumpet but was rather just horsing around. Prior to his enlistment, Katz worked for Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, drawing "The Newsboy Legion" and "Sandman." Whether he drew the *Star Spangled Comics* #32 [May '44] cover (below) is debatable, though inset right is a detail of his *Sandman* work from *Adventure Comics* #91 [Apr.-May '44].

leading books." The artist was now making the princely sum of \$17 a week, a two-dollar bump from his initial stay at the House of Archie. "I wasn't their pride and joy, but I got one assignment after another," he explained. "I was not too smart, and constantly mouthed off and didn't know anything."³⁷

Perhaps due to his being a smart aleck, the young artist lost his MLJ gig, and Katz hit the bricks yet again in search of a comics industry job. "There were a number of offices, I would just make the rounds and everybody turned me down," Kane admitted. "In fact, these agencies were like Ellis Island, you know? Coming into the business, you'd pass through these little agencies until you get to understand what was happening... unless you were really able to have a style strong enough to go directly to the publishers. But usually that didn't work out." Describing the offices, Kane said, "There were pencilers, inkers,

letterers, and background artists... It was exactly an assembly line. You could look into infinity down these rows of drawing tables." And while the young artist was frequently terminated, "Generally speaking," he said, "people weren't fired, art jobs were very hard to get, so something really calamitous had to happen to a person who was working there in order for you to find a space."³⁸

But there was a war on, and opportunity beckoned for those below draft age, sometimes to work, however briefly, for comic book legends. "I was hired [by Simon & Kirby] to do as many *Boy Commandos*, *Newsboy Legion*, and *Sandman* stories as I could," Kane said. "I was there for six months." With his induction into the Army, Jack Kirby handed the young Katz a batch of



scripts, but with the King off to fight the Nazis, DC editorial took back the assignments and showed the young artist the door. "They just threw me out," he said.³⁹

For a time, Katz would team up with a future antagonist, Carmine Infantino, a former classmate at the School of Industrial Art, who would go on to become the publisher at DC Comics in the late '60s and early '70s. They had worked together at Continental Comics in 1944. "I was doing pencils and they wanted to know about getting an inker so I got Carmine. Carmine and I had a partnership, but we were so competitive it was absolutely impossible," Kane confessed, adding, "We had a *great* dislike for each other... I think just we were temperamentally unsuited."⁴⁰ (Infantino even would later dispute that the pair had been a team.) And, just prior to entering the service, Katz said a studio with cartoonists Jack Sparling, Al Plastino, and Dow Walling.

That Norman Podhoretz: Somewhere in this mix, before or after a year's tenure with comic-book packager Bernard Bailey, Eli Katz sought out the help of a Brownsville acquaintance to create a feature for Hillman Publications, likely in 1942 or '43. "I got a job doing something called *Night Hawk* for [editor] Ed Cronin," Kane said. "Finally I wanted to write it and he said, 'All right, give me some scripts.' So I went to Norman Podhoretz, *that* Norman Podhoretz, and we worked out scripts. Norman could type in those days, I couldn't. I took the scripts in and they bought them! We did two of these scripts together. The money was too unsteady though, so he devoted himself to his studies and I did some additional penciling there."⁴¹

The political commentator and author, who would express amusement when referred to as "*that* Norman Podhoretz" when he read the *Comics Journal* #186 interview, did recall a short-lived collaboration with the artist. "Eli — or 'Elya,' as his parents liked to call him — lived about three short blocks from me," Podhoretz said, whose family apartment was on Pacific Avenue, around the corner from Park Place. "He was older than I was, by four years. I knew





him because his cousin Marty Elkin was my closest friend, who was also trying to break into the comic book world as he had some artistic talent." Elkin would work in the comics industry during the early to mid-'50s, contributing horror stories to Atlas (later renamed Marvel) and smaller publishers, though Podhoretz last heard that his childhood best buddy was, by the early '60s, working for the Avis car rental company.

"As I recall," said Podhoretz, "Eli was mainly inking at the time. He had a foot in the door of the comics industry, but he hadn't yet become a professional — he had no steady gig. I was 12 or 13 years old when we decided to create a comic strip of our own. The thing is, I can't for the life of me remember *anything* about it except that it was about a hero and a sidekick, a Batman and Robin type thing. But we did sell, if I remember rightly, three of the stories for about ten bucks apiece, my first published works! People have been trying to trace those things, but nobody seems to be able to find them."

Podhoretz did possess a creative streak and — importantly — access to his sister's Smith-Corona typewriter, a luxury for those of limited means in that era. "I learned to type when I was about eight years old," he said, "so I was writing poems and stories and all that, even at that age, and that's how Eli got the idea to have me write a story. He did, of course, the illustrations, and they were good enough to sell to a publisher."

The neocon pundit continued, "I would write the script and then we would revise it together while he did the sketching. I vaguely remember that Eli's goal was to make this a continuing feature — like Batman or Superman — and when it became clear that it wasn't



going to happen, he decided to drop it. As for me, I never had any desire to make a career in the comic book world." Podhoretz would confess that, as a youth, he did have a passion for the form. "I absolutely loved comics," he said. "What I remember are the famous characters, Superman and Batman, and I had a *lot* of comic books."

Besides a love of comics, the youthful team also said a yearning to make it in the shining metropolis across the East River. Podhoretz would later write, "One of the longest journeys in the world is the journey from Brooklyn to Manhattan — or at least from certain neighborhoods in Brooklyn to certain parts of Manhattan." They held, too, a mutual desire to transcend their roots. "The immigrant milieu from which I derive," the author wrote in his first memoir, *Making It*, "is by now fixed for all time in the American imagination as having been driven by an uninhibited hunger for success. This reputation is by no means as justified as we have been led to believe, but certainly on the surface the 'gospel of success' did reign supreme in the world of my childhood. Success did not necessarily, or even primarily, mean money; just as often it might mean prestige or popularity."⁴²

Despite the age difference — Katz would have been around 16 during this time — Podhoretz said, "Absolutely we were friends. At that age, four years difference is a big gap, so he was an older guy, but Marty, Eli, and I did a lot of hanging around.

This page: Top left is a portrait of a young Norman Podhoretz, the neocon pundit who had collaborated with Eli Katz as a youngster. This photo is from the cover of *The Norman Podhoretz Reader* [2003]. Try as we might, as have others who searched high and low for a "Night Hawk" series published by Hillman — the collaboration as purported by Gil Kane in his *Comics Journal* #186 interview — we just couldn't find such a series... and Podhoretz only recalls it was a hero and sidekick strip, akin to Batman and Robin. Above is a 1944 page by Katz for *Terrific Comics* #3 [May '44] and inset left is a detail of Katz's cover artwork for *Meteor Comics* #1 [Nov. '45].

in the service of an idea, it was an end in itself.”⁷¹

Dissatisfaction over his work was gnawing at the comics pro as the 1950s were ending. “My problem was that I didn’t have a single ‘role model,’” Kane admitted. “I liked artists who were diametrically opposed in values. I liked Louis Fine and Alex Raymond, but I also loved Kirby and [Mort] Meskin, I loved the poetic, lyrical potential at the same time as loving that powerful, direct, primitive quality — and it just took me years to reconcile those elements.”⁷²

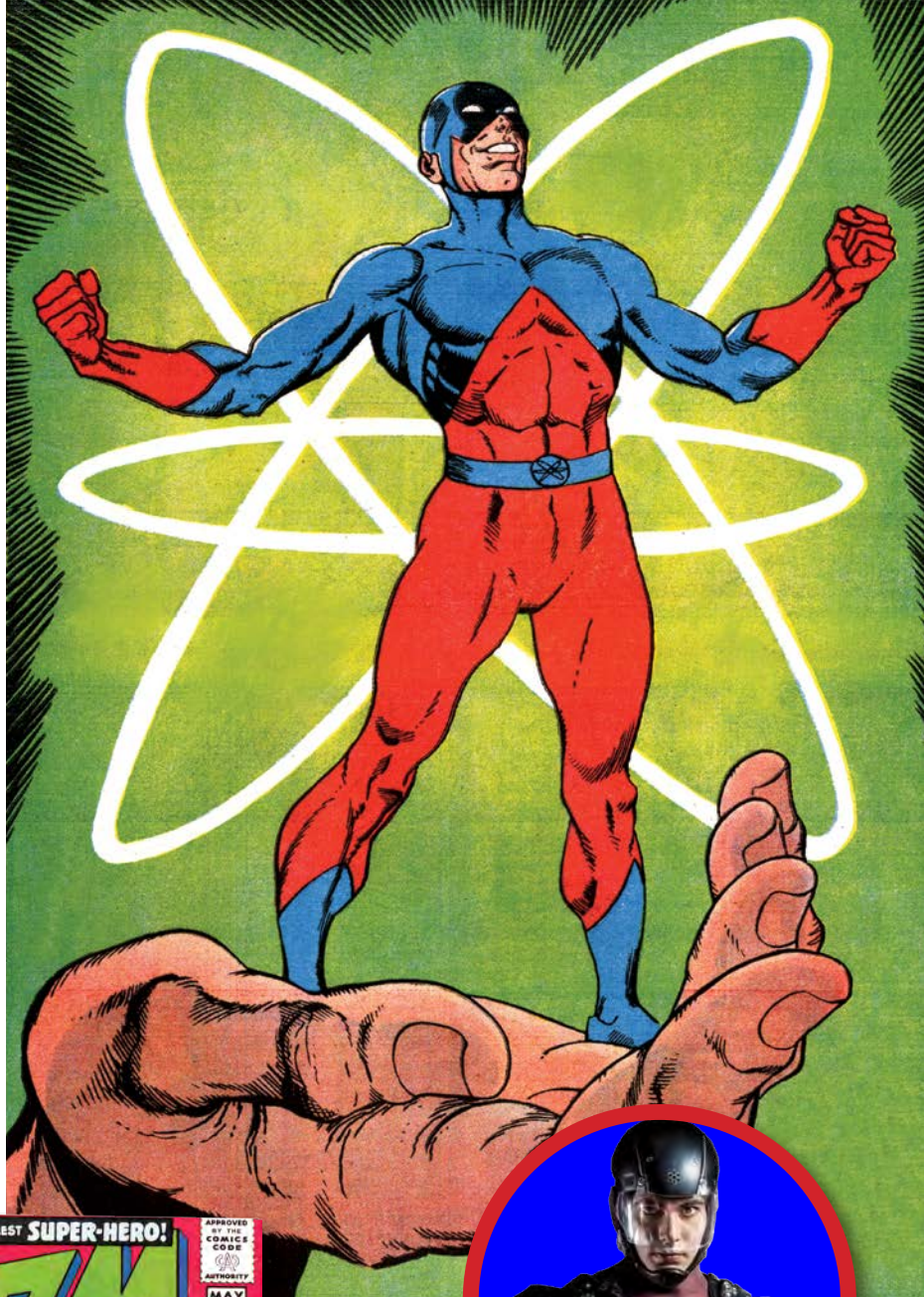
“I’ve always felt that if I had to characterize my own work,” he continued, “when it finally started to hit its stride and take on a style of its own, it looked like powerful gymnasts, ballet dancers, trapeze artists — you had a kind of lyrical quality to the body, a poetry of movement but at the same time a degree of power, strength. The artist I felt most analogous to was Reed Crandall — in the early days when he did *The Ray* and all that stuff for *Quality* before he went into the Army. His work had its focus on classic figure drawing — right out of Bridgman — and at the same time he had a great sense of movement — his figures were so powerful.”⁷³

By poring over Crandall’s work and that of the lauded cartoonist of *Captain Easy* and *Buz Sawyer*, Kane began to see how to improve his draftsmanship. “I just didn’t know enough,” he explained. “I was an action man who couldn’t support what I was doing. My figures weren’t strong enough, and my picture-making — I needed to understand more about design. So I took a long course for myself, mostly through Roy Crane. I studied Roy Crane obsessively, and that sort of opened up things. Finally I solved some of the puzzles about George Bridgman, who I had approached six or seven different times and been turned away. I couldn’t understand him. It *looked* like I could understand him, but when I tried to transpose that stuff into drawing comics, I couldn’t do it.”⁷⁴

George Brandt Bridgman (1865–1943) was a legendary anatomy and figure drawing instructor at the Art Students League, in New York City, and author of *Bridgman’s Complete Drawing From Life*, *The Book of 100 Hands*, *The Human Machine*, and *Constructive Anatomy*. Among his students were Norman Rockwell, Stan Drake, and Will Eisner. Said Howard Chaykin, “Bridgman was the guy who brought the concept of anatomical drawing into the 20th century.”⁷⁵

Sometime during the mid-’60s, Kane was thunder-struck. “Finally, all of a sudden, a key [thing] happened,” he exclaimed. “And it was through Reed Crandall, who of course was a George Bridgman man. And through the medium of Reed Crandall, I was able to get into George Bridgman and then all of a sudden the richness, and the power and the glory, and everything that Bridgman was, was open to me.”⁷⁶

In 1964, amid his revelation, the artist stumbled into an unexpected gig, as on-set storyboard artist for a weekly television series, the short-lived *Mr. Broadway*, the hour-long drama starring Craig Stevens. In his *National Cartoonists Society* Album entry, Kane noted, “For a while I worked with director Garson Kanin when he was



involved in TV... I created drawings which staged the action and composition for every foot of film.”⁷⁷ Elaine recalled, “Garson had no imagination at all and there was one point there’s a scene with [guest-star] Tuesday Weld and she is supposed to kick off her shoes and — Gilbert always told this story — they couldn’t figure the scene out, so he had to go in to show them how to shoot the scene!” The series, about a public relations man and filmed entirely on location in New York City, was broadcast on CBS for a mere 13 episodes. **Studio Space:** James Warren, the maverick publisher of *Famous Monsters of*



This page: After *GL*, *The Atom* is Gil Kane’s signature super-hero character, at least at DC Comics, a co-creation of the artist that has a somewhat convoluted history involving Kane, Julius Schwartz, Gardner Fox, and Jerry Bails... Read about it in *Alter Ego* Vol. 3, #2 [Autumn ’99]. Top is pin-up from *The Atom* #26 [Aug.–Sept. ’66], also with slight digital manipulation. Above is actor Brandon Routh as the character in the upcoming TV series *Legends of Tomorrow*. Left inset is new Atom smacking down old on the cover of *The Atom* #36 [Apr.–May ’68].

write *Savage* under the nom de plume Robert Franklin. On working with the artist, Goodwin later said, "Gil and I would get involved in the breaking down and laying out of the stuff and reshaping it. But we would always be reshaping it as we would go along because, by then, the deadline was on us."⁹⁰

The scribe described the pressure of getting *Savage* done. "When I would deliver [the script], it was like going into some emergency center or a camp under siege. Gil, Roger Brand, Michele Brand, Frank Giacoia, and Gil's partner, Larry Koster, were holed up in Gil's apartment on E. 63rd, grinding day and night to get the material done. And the only good thing about it was that I could walk out... But the rest of them were sort of trapped there, trapped with those pages and having to get them done."

With Kable giving the greenlight, Kane informed DC that he was resigning the *Green Lantern* assignment, and the nascent entrepreneur dove into the project facing a tight deadline. The artist would later boast he produced the pencils for 40-page story, "Return of the Half-Man," in a single week. Working under such pressure proved to be liberating. "I see that it was a freeing thing," the artist said. "I take in consideration how quickly it was done and under [what] kind of pressure. It was the equivalent of penciling six or seven pages a day, when I think of what I had to contend with."⁹¹

To help with the inking of *Savage*, Kane enlisted stalwart comics journeyman Frank Giacoia, who received no credit, and commercial illustrator and frequent paperback cover painter Bob Foster produced the painted cover, which sported a dead-on — and unauthorized — portrait of Lee Marvin as the titular anti-hero, replete with smoking gun. (Though Kane would never hear any protest from the actor's representatives, for the *Savage* reprinting by Fantagraphics in 1982, the character's face, which was Marvinesque in the interior art, was altered therein to a more generic visage.)

Conan: Gil Kane long after insisted he hoped to have produced a companion magazine to *His Name is... Savage* featuring the first comics adaptation of Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian, years before the Marvel Comics series. In the '50s, the artist had become acquainted with a fellow Long Islander, Gnome Press publisher Martin



to the estate, "I have just completed a two-year lease for \$15 for 'The Valley of the Worm' with a Mr. Gilbert Kane to make a cartoon pix of it, and I herewith include my check for \$13.50 in payment thereof."⁹²

Savage's fingers locked over Bayard's gun hand, bending it back and up with the force of his leap. A squeal of fear was cut short by a flat, splintering crack as, like a steel-blue battering ram, the pistol barrel smashed through the Captain's teeth to slam against the roof of his mouth!



No.2 *HIS NAME IS... SAVAGE!*

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Gil Kane

MANAGING EDITOR
Larry Koster

CONTENTS



HIS NAME IS SAVAGE, PUBLISHED BY INDIVIDUALLY BY ADVENTURE HOUSE PRESS, INC., 1067, AUGUST 1968 PRICE 75¢ PER COPY. SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: 4 ISSUES FOR \$2.50 IN THE U.S. & POSSESSIONS. \$3.00. EDITORIAL OFFICES AT 204 EAST 13TH STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. SECOND CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 1000 NEW YORK, N.Y. POSTMASTER: IF YOU ARE A FOREIGN COUNTRY, ADD POSTAGE. © 1968 BY ADVENTURE HOUSE PRESS, INC. NOTHING MAY BE REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS WITHOUT PERMISSION FROM THE PUBLISHERS.

Greenberg, from whom Kane had purchased the Gnome editions of the Cimmerian's adventures, the first such collections ever compiled, stories which enthralled the artist. Through Greenberg, Kane made contact with the Howard estate literary agent, Oscar J. Friend, and, for at least one favorite REH tale, he optioned the rights to do a comics version nearly a decade before *Savage*. On April 19, 1959, Friend reported

This page: In 1968, industry forces were aligned in opposition to Gil Kane's effort to produce an adult oriented magazine, *His Name is... Savage* (on which Archie Goodwin, Frank Giacoia, Roger Brand (and wife Michelle), and even Kane's fiancée and son would help out). In 1982, after Fantagraphics publisher Gary Groth had struck up a friendship with the artist, the one-shot was reprinted as *Gil Kane's Savage*. The character would be updated for the '80s with a four-page, wordless story in *Anything Goes!* #1 [Oct. '86], as well as being featured on that benefit comic book's cover. Above is the splash page and unfinished table of contents page intended for *His Name is... Savage* #2.



ic pages, I got good enough to start getting work myself. I asked Gil if he thought I should stay in school or pursue art jobs full time. He told me, "You just got a break, so take it." I agreed that this was better than anything they could teach me in art school, so I left school and started working as a professional."

A New Comics Tradition: *His Name is...* *Savage* #1 was

published in the Spring of 1968 under Kane's imprint, Adventure House Press, and the magazine had a tumultuous time making it to the stands, a journey likely doomed from the onset. Industry forces, whether other publishers, a rival distributor, the Comics Code, or World Color Press (the Spartan, Illinois, monopoly which printed virtually every American comic book and most consumer magazines), appeared aligned against the artist's efforts. Rumors were spread that *Savage* was sexually explicit, though (while exceedingly violent) it was nothing of the sort. "I lost three of the printers that I had by having people make phone calls and suggest I was turning out a pornographic book, something that would bring great [disrepute] to the entire field and threaten the publishing of comics, by all the legitimate publishers."¹⁰³ Eventually the printer of *Ramparts*, a glossy, politically radical magazine, produced the 200,000 print run of *His Name is...* *Savage* #1.

For whatever reason, by Kane's estimate, only ten percent of the copies made it to the newsstand. Scott Kane recalled that his father personally made an effort to improve its chances. "He distributed copies of *Savage himself* to different comic book outlets," Scott said. "Its exposure was just so limited." Gil's then-fiancée was wholeheartedly behind the venture. "He did invest a lot of money and time into *Savage*," said Elaine, "and I supported him in whatever he wanted to do. I helped as much as I could."

Despite its failure in the marketplace, *Savage* did indeed make an innovative bid, as its cover subtitle trumpeted, to carry comics into a "new tradition." "Well,

the thing is," Kane said, "I did try. My ideas were this: They had less to do with content, which I didn't respect all that much, I didn't care; I was indifferent to content. But I was not indifferent to form. The thing that I tried all my life with comics was to adjust the form. I tried with *Savage* very earnestly to mix the kinds of prose that was typical of E.C. in the early days."¹⁰⁴

The content of *His Name is...* *Savage* #1 amounts to an intensely brutal knock-off of the James Bond espionage movies, starring a feral hero and the requisite adversary, a world-hungry super-villain, as well as the obligatorily doomed romantic interest, and an epic fight to the death showdown (including the presence of then-U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson, no less). While only this debut edition would see print, a finished second issue, featuring the work of Neal Adams (on a particularly gory crime story), as well as covers for *Savage* #3 and 4, would remain unpublished.

Today, *Savage* is recognized as among the first graphic novels. Rather than simply a long-form comic book, Gil Kane was striving for a mix of text and pictures that is considered unprecedented by some. Comic scholar R.C. Harvey writes in his introduction to a reprint edition, "A remarkable early attempt at a new form, *Savage* exploits the resources of its form about as thoroughly as they can be exploited. The fledgling [graphic novel] form emerged from the egg in full feather, already on the wing."¹⁰⁵

The tenacious innovator was hardly in retreat with the failure of *Savage*.

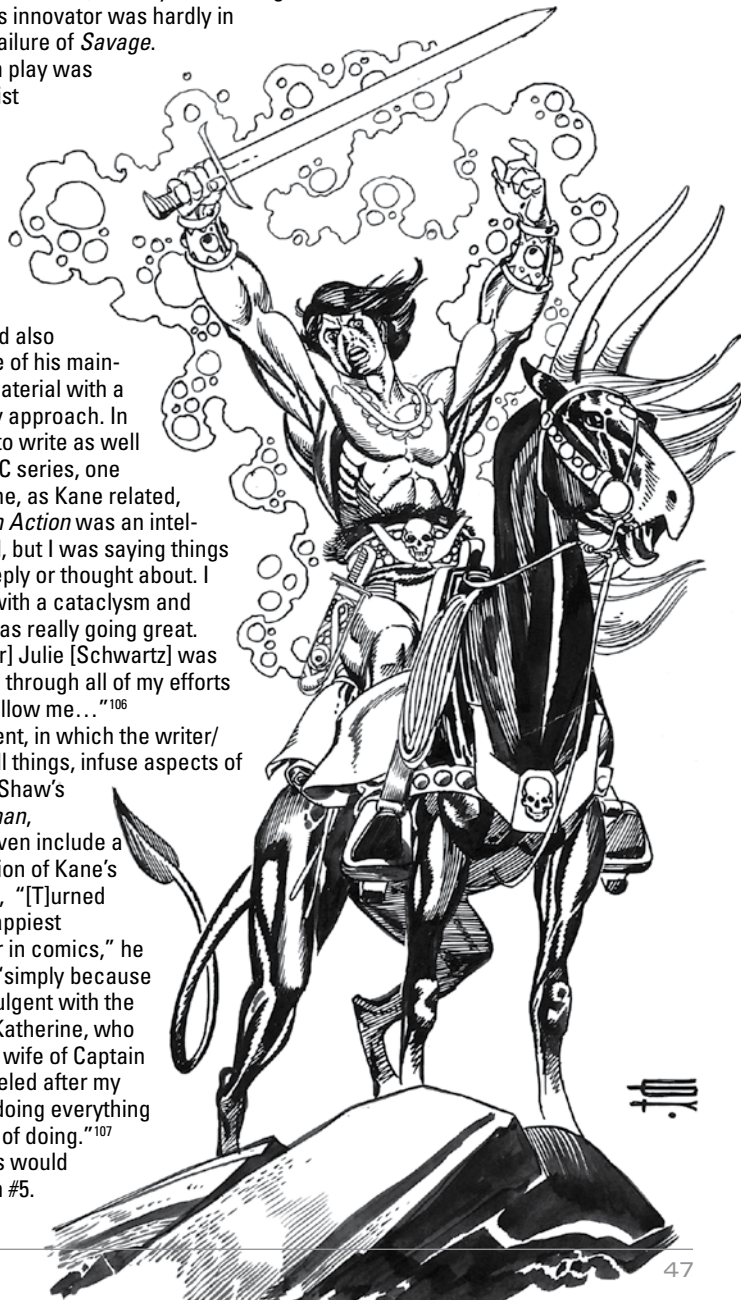
In fact, already in play was a push by the artist to bring original comics material to the paperback book market. Kane, bounding with enthusiasm, drive, and an elated sense of freedom, would also even infuse some of his mainstream comics material with a decidedly literary approach. In 1968, he lobbied to write as well as draw a new DC series, one based on a toy line, as Kane related, "Not that *Captain Action* was an intellectual strip at all, but I was saying things in it that I felt deeply or thought about. I started right off with a cataclysm and I thought that I was really going great. [The book's editor] Julie [Schwartz] was very sympathetic through all of my efforts when he would allow me..."¹⁰⁶

The assignment, in which the writer/artist would, of all things, infuse aspects of George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, Nietzsche, and even include a comic-book version of Kane's betrothed, Elaine, "[T]urned into one of the happiest experiences ever in comics," he said years later, "simply because I was so self-indulgent with the writing. The girl Katherine, who plays the ghostly wife of Captain Action, was modeled after my own wife. I was doing everything that I could think of doing."¹⁰⁷

But the series would end abruptly with #5. By that time, DC



This spread: Taking no time to lament the failure of *His Name is...* *Savage*, Gil Kane immediately began work on a proposed paperback book series, *Blackmark*, of which only one volume would be published by Bantam Books, in 1971.



who assisted on *Blackmark*, both with layouts and inks, was Neal Adams. "A couple of times, Gil pulled me in to help him out because he was jammed," Adams said, also referring to his time in the studio doing work on *His Name is... Savage*. "The money wasn't that good, but he did seem to be in a jam. It's a little hard for me to imagine why he would have someone like me, who draws so realistically and so tediously, to help a guy who can dash these things out so dramatically and so beautifully. How I could have been of help, I don't know, because if he inked it, he would end up changing it to look much more like Gil Kane."

Adams continued, "It's just an opinion here, but I think he wanted company. I don't think I contributed very much. I did the best I could for him and he paid me for the work that I did, in a conservative way. But he liked to have someone to talk to. And the conversation really had to do with his personal life, which was first a tragedy, then a comedy, and then a wonderful story. I think I was there to be a sounding board and maybe to give him some advice about life, rather than just be an artist who helped him out... I really, honestly, in my heart of hearts, think that he just wanted to talk."

About the time working on the Bantam paperback project, Adams said, "On a personal basis, I had a lot of fun and I rose to the challenge. In *Blackmark*, for example, there are pages where it is very, very easy to tell that I did them, but there are other pages that you would be hard pressed to recognize that I did them. Because, after a while, I learned how to do that Gil Kane thing, and people can guess half the pages, but they never guess the other half, because I was able to get it."

The audacity of this particular comic book artist breaking into book publishing didn't surprise Adams. "You have to remember that Gil Kane was also an intellectual adventurer and he knew more about the European graphic novels than anybody that I was aware of," he said. "In fact, he was the one who introduced me to European graphic novels; I had no idea that people actually drew pictures in Europe! He showed me *Asterix* and *Lieutenant Blueberry* and all the rest of this stuff. You could tell, after thinking about it and listening to what he was saying, that he was interested in doing this too. If he wasn't going to get a syndicated strip, he would do a graphic novel in America, and even though America wasn't the artistic place to be as a comic book artist, he still would make the best of it. Where everyone else was grubbing to do pages for DC and Marvel and whatever they could do, he was not only doing that but also putting together graphic novels like they did in Europe. It had to be different, of course, because the formats weren't there, but Gil was essentially a European artist trapped in America. He wasn't going to go to Europe to do this stuff, but that was sort of where his heart was; this was not the business that he wanted to be in."

Though *Blackmark* would earn the creator a "Special Recognition" award from the Academy of Comic Book Artists in 1971 and feature some of Kane's finest drawing to date, only one volume would be published by Bantam. The paperback format, at 4 1/4" x 7", was simply too constrained to give readers an adequate

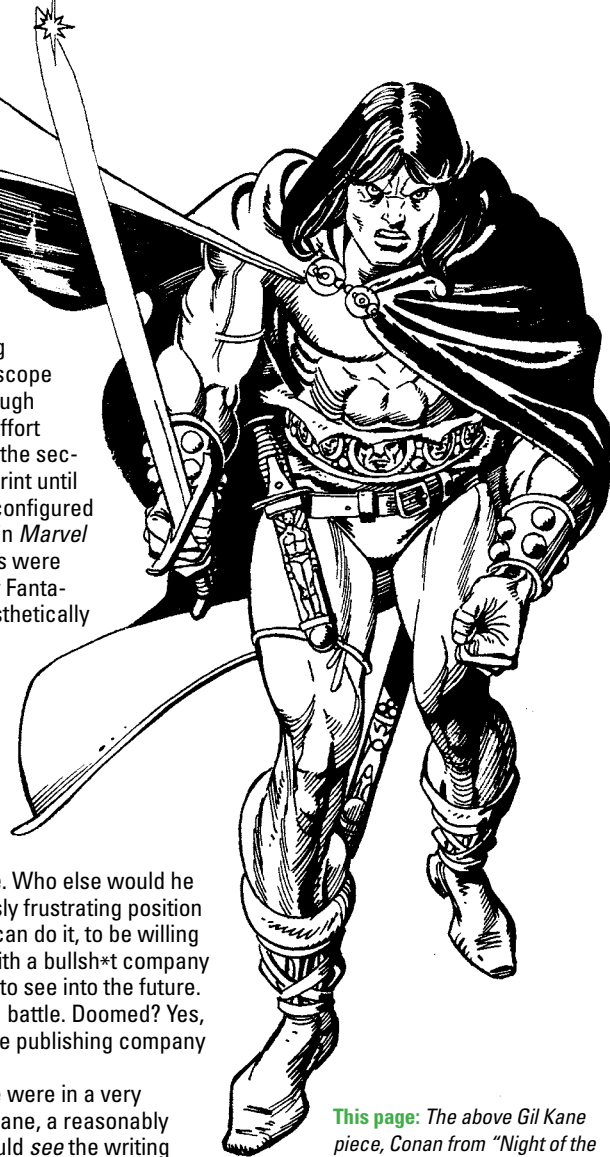
presentation, as cartoonist Burne Hogarth exclaimed to the creator at the time.

"It was too small," admitted Kane. "Everything was squeezed... It needs scope and it needs range."¹¹⁶ Though completed when the first effort was on the stands in 1971, the second volume wouldn't see print until the end of that decade, reconfigured for regular magazine size, in *Marvel Preview* #17. Both chapters were posthumously collected by Fantagraphics, in 2002, at an aesthetically pleasing 6" x 9 1/4".

"The failure of *Blackmark* wasn't due to Gil," Adams insisted. "It was due to Bantam. They didn't have big enough eyes and they didn't have enough ambition. You could only go to the publishers who were there. Who else would he go to? That's a tremendously frustrating position to be in: To know that you can do it, to be willing to do it, and then to do it with a bullsh*t company who didn't have the ability to see into the future. So he was fighting a losing battle. Doomed? Yes, mostly by the inability of the publishing company to think."

Adams continued, "We were in a very primitive business, so Gil Kane, a reasonably civilized individual who could see the writing on the wall, who could see the syndicated strip guys, because he went to their meetings, who could see the European guys because he recognized what they were doing before anybody else in the States. He was tremendously frustrated because he had this tremendous ability and nowhere to go. What do you do with that?"

Regarding the historical impact of Gil Kane's experiments, comics scholar R.C. Harvey wrote, "In the stories of *Savage* and of *Blackmark*, he showed the potential of the form — in many instances, deploying that potential about as fully as it could, at the time, be envisioned."¹¹⁷ And while the creator would put aside his independent projects for a spell and focus on page-rate jobs to cover for his ever-increasing debt, Kane did bring his newfound storytelling exuberance to the work-for-hire game, undeterred by the setbacks and excited by the prospect of collaborating with a young, admiring writer with pulp sensibilities that matched his own.



This page: The above Gil Kane piece, Conan from "Night of the Dark God" (*Savage Takes* #4, May '74), appeared as cover art for the Harvard Journal of Pictorial Fiction [Spring '74]. Inset left is Kane's cover art for Conan the Barbarian #45 [Dec. '74], sporting inks by Neal Adams and the Crusty Bunkers. Below is Frank Frazetta's killer cover art for a Lancer paperback edition. It was Frazetta's breathtaking work that was no doubt a factor for folks to write letters to Marvel, suggesting a series.



idea, loved the resilience, loved the anger — the character was always in a rage and, taking on the Amazing-Man persona, he became insane and a homicidal maniac! I just loved it!”¹²⁹

Cover Man: Gil Kane would become, from the early to mid-’70s, the predominate cover artist for the entire line of the Marvel Comics Group, producing an phenomenal number of pieces that number, by this writer’s impromptu count, over 800 published covers. The images represent nearly every genre being published at the time by the House of Ideas, including super-hero, horror, sword-&-sorcery, war, monster, science fiction, literary and movie adaptations, jungle, leased properties, and — his favorite cover subject — Westerns. Infused with his Kirby-inspired approach and often embellished by an astonishing array of talented inkers (including Bill Everett, Ralph Reese, Tom Palmer, and Joe Sinnott, among many others), Kane’s artistry would symbolize that era at Marvel as no other artist.

The reason for the profusion of Kane covers was purely financial, yet on any number, the trouper would give it his all, though his own assessment could be less generous. “Sometimes I would do five cover pencils in a day,” he said with a chuckle. “It wasn’t great stuff. But I managed to get a couple of nice covers out of the batch, though I would also do a lot of stinkers.”¹³⁰

Kane’s favorite of the 800-plus covers would be for a reprint title, *Mighty Marvel Western* #44 [Mar. ’76]. “They always allowed me to ink my own Western covers,” the artist said, “and, at first, I wasn’t that great with the inking, but then I caught the hang of it. I think I turned out the *best* Western cover I ever did. It’s Kid Colt lying in a ditch of water, with his hand scooping the water up to his face — but in the water you can see the reflection of a gunman with a gun pointed at Kid. I was drawing like a son-of-a-bitch in those days!”¹³¹

But Kane admitted that by focusing on the better-paying one-off assignments, “I made a bad mistake: I didn’t stick with any one character but was an opportunist, just jumping to the next best opportunity. I missed the chance of being identified with a character, whether *Spider-Man*, *Conan*, or any of those features, like I held on to *Green Lantern*. Every time there was an opportunity, I would jump. The covers paid more than anything else, so I would jump to the covers. The only thing is that nobody collects covers and you have a million guys who are connected to *Spider-Man*, and locked-in. If I think about all the characters I did, and had put in two or three years on each one, I would have a following. When people recall me, it’s always from *Green Lantern*.”¹³²

The artist described the cover sessions, when he would make a weekly visit to the Marvel Bullpen. “I would come in and, in one morning, Roy and I would plot 25 covers. I would go home and do ‘em, come back at the end of the week and that was it. Once in a while I would take a break and do a book for them.”¹³³

Roy Thomas recalled, “Gil would come in some afternoon, Friday probably, and I would have the large, full-size photocopies of the stories there, and we would go through them to find a cover scene. We would do it as quickly as possible, because we would often have five or ten of them to get out, and Gil would sit there and do a very fast sketch. Sometimes I had a particular scene in mind, sometimes he would find something, and sometimes we would go for a symbolic image because we couldn’t find exactly something

worthy. We would try to keep them varied. I would keep trying to have Gil make the poses different from cover to cover, as his figures were often like gymnasts as opposed to Kirby’s body-builder types... but I don’t think I succeeded. But, other than that, I really liked the covers that he did. If you would use different inkers on them and different copy, that worked out pretty well. Maybe it would have been better to have the regular artists do their own covers, but if you’re going to have only one person do a great majority of the covers, Gil was certainly as good a choice as you could have had in those days, especially with Jack not available to us.”

“Some of the best memories I have of Gil,” John Romita said, “are from when he was doing the lion’s share of Marvel covers. He would come in once every ten days or so and Gil, Roy



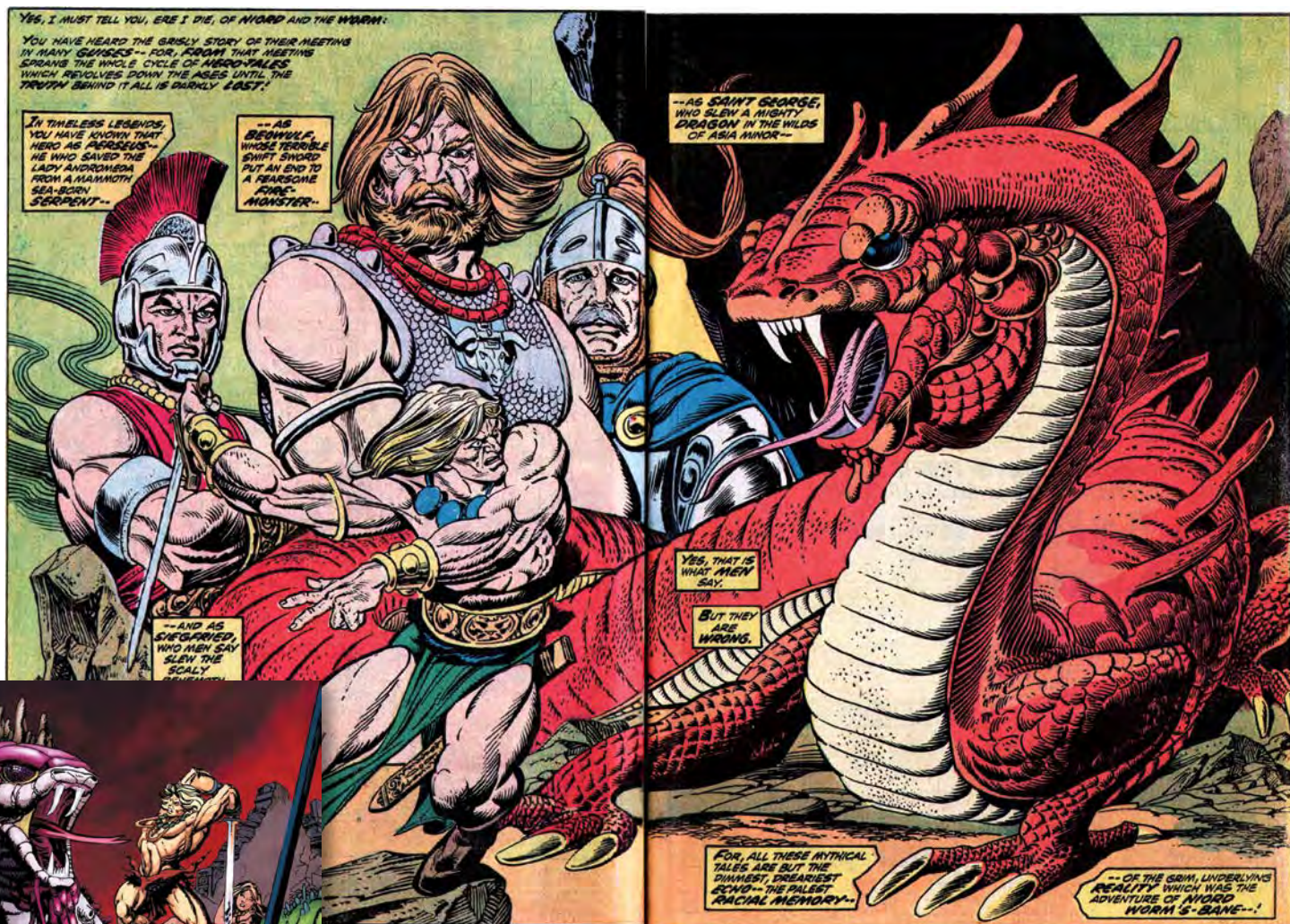
Above: Perhaps history will prove that their most successful creation was Thomas and Kane’s *Iron Fist* (given the Netflix TV series set for 2017), who debuted in *Marvel Premiere* #15 [May ’74]. Cover detail from *Iron Fist* #5 [June ’76].



Thomas, and I would kill an afternoon planning ten covers or so; Gil would sit there with a ballpoint pen and scribble these quick shapes and Roy Thomas would accept them as sketches. I would get a little apprehensive and say, ‘They’re all starting to look alike,’ or something like that, to which Gil would reply, ‘Don’t worry, my boy. Everything will be fine.’ Then I’d get the covers from Gil, three at a time,” he added with a chuckle, “and have to spend a day and a half adjusting the costumes, putting cloaks on characters, taking them off others...” The onetime Marvel art director was sure to add, “Gil’s covers were always dynamic; he never did a dull cover in his life. He was one of a kind.”¹³⁴

About whether cover work paid better than the rate for interior pages, Thomas was unsure. “I don’t know if we had a special cover rate,” he said. “I think he got a page rate, but it was just one drawing and that’s what Gil really liked. He may have gotten a little something extra for doing

Inset: Warlock was a particularly creative property originated by the Thomas/Kane team. Part Jesus Christ Superstar, part extrapolation of various Jack Kirby concepts, the character was conceived to have a finite existence. This detail is from Kane’s *Marvel Premiere* #1 [Apr. ’72] cover. Inks by Dan Adkins.



This page: Two pet projects of Gil Kane were his adaptations of Robert E. Howard's "The Valley of the Worm" (above) and Edmond Hamilton's "He That Hath Wings" (below). They would respectively appear in *Supernatural Thrillers* #3 [Apr. '73] and the first issue of *Worlds Unknown* [May '73].

A lot of people can succeed without being great, but he was so talented in his storytelling, drawing ability, composition, in his use of negative/positive space — Gil had the entire arsenal in the requirements to be great. He's my favorite American artist, and I learned so much from him not just by studying his work, but by working on it. I inked the very last job that Gil penciled, the *Legends of DC Universe* two-parter, and only then did I think that I finally figure out how to ink him correctly."¹³⁸

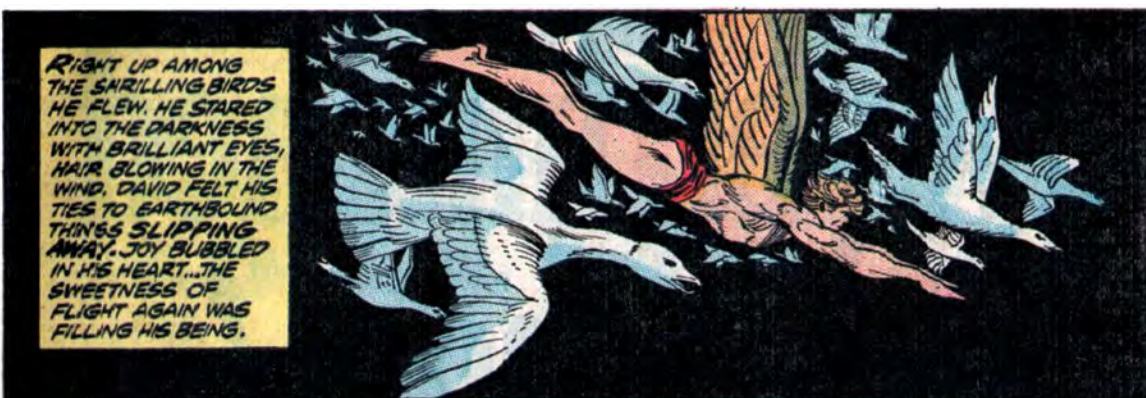
Janson explained that Kane was integral in his finding work as a professional. "Gil was directly responsible for my inking career," he said. "I first met him at a Phil Seuling con in New York, when he was coming out of one of the hotel's ballrooms. I had pages with me that I had drawn and inked, and I stopped him. I thrust the pages in front of him — like we all do when we're at that age — and he looked at them. I remember he was very tall and kind of intimidating, and I

asked him, 'What do you think?' He said, 'Well, you know, not that bad.' I asked, 'How long do you think I need to practice before I can break into the field?' He said, 'Maybe a year or two for your penciling, but your inking is really good, and you probably can get work right now.' So that changed my career trajectory because I needed to get work. In a lot of ways, Gil was responsible for me becoming predominately known as an inker before developing a penciling career."

"Like all great artists, he was just amazing!" Janson enthused. "I don't know what else to say about him. And I think, frankly, he's a little underrated at this point. He had the power and dynamics of Kirby, but he also had the lyricism and poetic figures of someone like Hal Foster or Alex Raymond. The elegance of his work combined with the power of Kirby made him quite unique in this industry. Howard Chaykin told me that Gil loved ballet and appreciated movement and the elegance of the human body, and

you can see that in Gil's work and in the warm-up sketches he would do. So when you hear that he loved ballet and all dance, it makes sense."

For Janson, the essence of Kane was his well thought out approach. "If you look at some of the pages that he did in *Amazing Spider-Man*," Janson said, "the Gwen Stacey funeral sequence, there wasn't that in-your-face Kirbyisms that



JASON DRUM

At the beginning of the 1970s, Gil Kane still yearns for creator-owned success. Despite their commercial failure, the artist/writer had relished his experience of almost total artistic freedom with his graphic novels, *His Name is...* *Savage* and *Blackmark*, projects the comic book artist had pursued while becoming more and more dissatisfied with the mainstream comics publishers. Ever hoping to become a creator who retained ownership of his creations, Kane perceives opportunity an ocean away.

In '71, the artist meets with Michel Regnier, better known as the cartoonist Greg and, since '65, the editor of the European comics anthology *Tintin* (as well as artist/writer of *Achille Talon* and writer of the comics *Bernard Prince*, *Comanche*, and *Bruno Brazil*). That same year, Kane had produced some sample pages for a science fiction/fantasy project called *Jason Drum*, which he offers for sale to *Tintin*.

The Franco-Belgian comics weekly seems to half-heartedly accept the project since it prints only four panels of *Jason Drum*'s first two pages, illustrating "2000 Magazine section #44" (dedicated to the astronauts of the year 2000), in *Tintin* #1203 [Nov. 18, 1971]. Though it shares similarities with *Blackmark* and Kane's version of *Gulliver Jones* (which would appear a year later at Marvel), *Jason Drum* is an obvious swipe of John Carter, the Martian dwelling hero of Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Barsoom" novels.

In July 1978, Gil meets with Greg again, at the San Diego Comic Con. By now, Greg is living in the United States, as head of the American branch of Dargaud, selling French series to U.S. publishers, as well as purchasing U.S. properties for the European market. After meeting with Kane, Greg convinces new *Tintin* editor André-Paul Duchâteau to finally publish *Jason Drum*, which had been gathering dust at the *Tintin* office. To Kane's delight, the series triumphantly debuts in the Belgian edition of a renewed *Tintin* weekly, making the cover of #202 [July 1979], an issue only made available to French subscribers.

But between the end of 1978 and March '79, a medical emergency drastically slows Kane's productivity. Very late with his obligations, Kane has to employ ghost artists Howard Chaykin and Ernie Colón on his main assignment at the time, *Star Hawks*. For *Jason Drum*, Kane reaches out to Joe Staton to help with layouts and, starting with *Tintin* #205, uninked

penciled pages are sent to France by Kane... but soon no more pages arrive from the States. Deadlines force Duchâteau to find a new artist to finish up the series and he writes the scripts himself. Belgian artist Franz (with whom Duchâteau collaborated with on *Hypérion*) inks five pages of Kane's pencils and pencils and inks the last five of the story himself (in #206 and 207 [Aug. '78]).

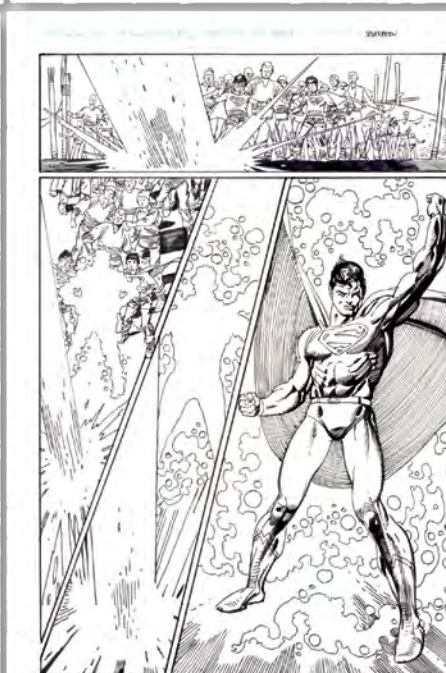
After his recovery, Kane loses contact with Duchâteau and succeeds Russ Manning as artist on the *Tarzan* Sunday comic strip and, thanks to Greg (who promoted the syndicated comic strip in France), three albums of *Star Hawks* are published in the early '80s. Surprisingly, the first are printed in black-&-white by Les éditions du Square and not Dargaud (probably due to bad feelings between Kane and the *Tintin* publisher). But the next two albums are full-color and sport the Dargaud imprint, replete with new covers by Kane. In 1981, Kane attends the Angoulême comics festival to promote the collections.

In 2006, during this investigation, this writer contacted Fantagraphics publisher and Kane friend Gary Groth, and after some delving into the artist's archives, he discovered a *Jason Drum* file, which revealed an astonishing discovery. It turns out that the science fiction/fantasy graphic novel was evidently finished, with 44 fully inked and dialogued pages of pure Gil Kane still waiting to be published! One can only hope a publisher will make the *Jason Drum* collection a reality soon!

— Jean Depelley

The writer acknowledges the kind assistance of André-Paul Duchâteau, Frank Le Gall, Claudine Sterlin, Jérôme Allard, Gwenaél Jacquet, Louis Cance, Patrick Gaumer, Tristan Lapoussière and the Pimpf Forum. This article is dedicated to the memory of Tibet (1931–2010), whose precious help and generosity was crucial to this research.





Previous page: Kane's Superman collaboration with writer Marv Wolfman gave us an artist at the peak of his powers. The spread at top ballyhooing the series, appeared in DC Sampler #1 [1983]. Below is a detail of *The Comics Journal* #78 [Dec. '82] cover featuring Talos of the Wilderness Sea, originally planned as a 12-issue series written by Jan Strnad in the early '80s. Alas, Kane's animation career would stall that project and, in 1987, a one-shot special would appear from DC. **This page:** Pages from the remarkable Kane/Wolfman story, "What if Superman Didn't Exist?," *Action* #554 [Apr. '84].

with Adam Warlock: I came up with Warlock and he came up with Adam.) The one name I have always felt guilty about, which lodged in my head but hadn't recalled that it was on Gil's list, was Cage, which ended up being the name for a Marvel character, Luke Cage, and [subsequently] an Academy Award-winning actor, Nicholas Cage! I guess I subconsciously borrowed that from Gil's list, and it was only *after* I had suggested it to Stan as a name for the character in the Marvel series when I realized that. I apologized to Gil, who took it in stride. And I remember that the name 'Chane' was on that list. I thought it was one of his best, but I don't remember any of the others."

"It would have been good for him to have stuck with a character," Thomas said. "The closest he came was Spider-Man, but with that character Gil was always aware that he was filling in for John Romita and that was certainly true in Stan's eyes. So he got some association as a Spider-Man artist, but nothing like he had with *Green Lantern* and *The Atom*. I think it would have done him good,

but it just wasn't in the cards. If he had worked at it, he probably could have, but he always had so many irons in the fire that it was sometimes very hard for him to focus on the one character on which he needed to concentrate. Partly that was due to the fact that he wanted to work on other things and make his mark, but they weren't always bringing in money. He was constantly driven from pillar to post between his artistic needs and economic requirements. I think it's amazing that he did the great work he did considering the things that were tearing him apart. Of course, a lot of those things were of his own making, but that's true with most of us."

Back in Action: By '82, the artist was contributing equally to the top two comics publishers, but in June, Kane signed an exclusive contract with DC, resulting in his being the main cover artist for a spell, as well as taking on some interior jobs. *The Comics Journal* reported at the time, "As a full-time DC artist, his assignments will probably include both writing and drawing the German editions of *Super-*

man. Kane is also said to be developing a new super-hero concept with Len Wein and his own mini-series concept, but neither has been approved by publisher Jenette Kahn as yet."¹⁶⁰ The proposal was a limited-run title entitled *Talos of the Wilderness Sea*, which collaborator Jan Strnad described to *Amazing Heroes*. "It's kind of like 'Moses the Barbarian,'" the writer quipped, "but it's a little better than that."¹⁶¹

Alas, the story wouldn't see print until years later and, even then, in truncated form, as a one-shot special. "Jan was enthusiastic and wrote a comprehensive development of my outline," the artist explained in *Talos of the Wilderness Sea* #1's text page. "*Talos* would be twelve issues, a maxi-series with a real epic quality, a true saga,"¹⁶² but difficulties arose prompting Strnad to bail from the job.

"What happened with *Talos* was this," Strnad explained. "I was trying rather desperately to make a living as a comic book writer without a continuing series. I like telling stories with beginnings, middles, and ends, and I wasn't sure how good I'd be at sustaining a monthly book, (which is why I turned down an ongoing *Sword of the Atom* series)."¹⁶³

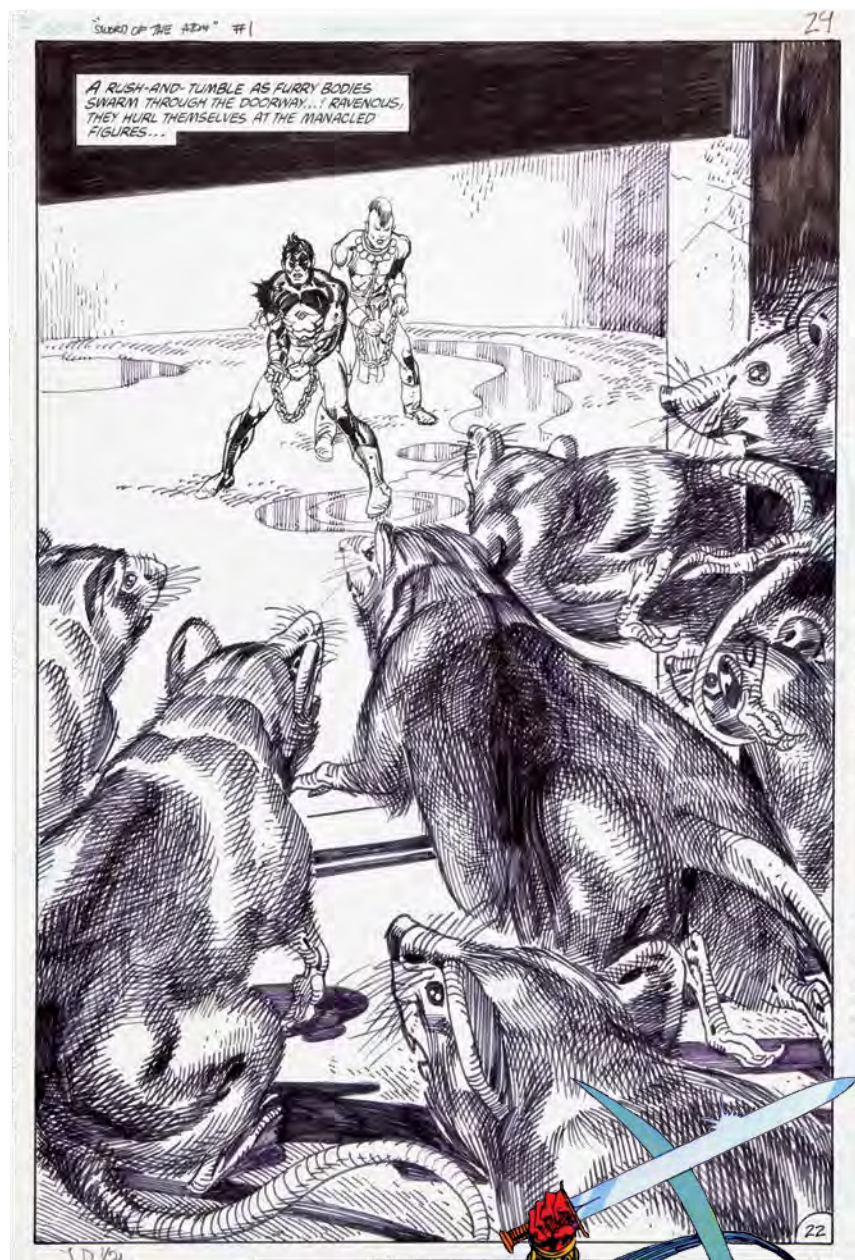
"Anyway," the scribe continued, "we had the bare bones of the *Talos* story and a contract with DC to produce it, and I began writing, but Gil kept going off to do other things such as covers and concept art for animation houses. The animation work was particularly well-paying compared with comics, and he produced some gorgeous work that was largely seen only by development executives (and bore little relation to the resulting cartoon series)."

The crux of the problem was their method of collaborating. "I worked 'Marvel style' with Gil, rather than writing full scripts," he explained, "so I didn't actually get paid until I'd turned in a final script based on the artwork. Only Gil wasn't producing the art! It was very frustrating to me and to DC both. Then one day, [DC executive editor] Dick Giordano called to talk about *Talos* and he offered to let me out from the contract. 'Let you out from the contract' might have been an offer or it might have been a kinder way of saying, 'We're killing the project,' I don't know. But I took Dick up on it, so I could quit being mad at Gil and concentrate on other work. We later managed to squeak out a one-shot of *Talos*."

During that era, any number of Kane's fellow comic book stalwarts were beginning to slow down. Jack Kirby was winding up his comics career with some creator-owned work at Pacific. Increasingly focused on his titular art school, Joe Kubert resigned as DC Comics editor and concentrated on more personally satisfying material. Alex Toth had all but vanished from the field, devoted instead to correspondence and, if whim would have it, the rare art job. Harvey Kurtzman was beset by illness with only enough energy to finish up *From Aargh! To Zap!* Comics history book and a few other projects, to some just lending his name. Yet while his peers were taking it down a notch, in his own way, Gil Kane was just getting started.

Two of his 1980s assignments stand out as particularly excellent examples of his finest work-for-hire material, produced when his inking was improving tremendously. "[A]t one point," Kane said, "when I felt it was essential to assert myself and to start by becoming competitive, I made an effort, through *Superman* and *Sword of the Atom*, to do work that was on a more competitive level artistically. But it didn't represent, from my point of view, my best effort; it simply represented the effort I was capable of, considering the amount of time I was spending on it."¹⁶⁴

Between 1982 and '84, Kane penciled, inked, and co-plotted, with writer Marv Wolfman, a stunning run on *Superman* in *Action Comics*. "I thought our *Superman* collaboration was the best thing we ever did together," Wolfman opined. "I always got the impression Gil didn't think much of my work — or me — but when we worked together, it was magic. Because I was such a huge fan of



his, I was so aware of Gil's strengths and, whether he realized it or not, I always wrote to them."

Wolfman continued, "By this time, Gil seemed to need to hurry through his work, which resulted in a lot of stock poses, but his *Superman* was brilliant and different, and he kept finding new ways to portray *Superman*. I had very firm ideas as to what *Superman* was and should be, and I still have. But we were limited in doing everything I wanted, because there were other *Superman* titles being published at the same time, and our *Superman* couldn't be radically different from theirs. But, considering that, I thought we did some really good work and would have loved to continue with Gil. And by the way, I was told our *Superman*, which appeared in *Action Comics*, outsold the main *Superman* title for the first time in decades."

Aside from the invigorated artistry of Kane and a prevailing sense that an epic was in the building, of note was the team's re-invention of *Brainiac* (rede-





signed by Ed Hannigan) as a malevolent robot and also a story, appearing in *Action Comics* #554, that imagined a universe without the Man of Tomorrow... a tale that co-starred two of the most renowned creative teams in the history of comics.

"As for the 'If Superman Didn't Exist' story," Wolfman confessed, "it's my absolute favorite from that time. It's also one of those stories that was not at all planned. I went into the office and pitched [editor] Julie [Schwartz] the story I originally meant to write that issue (don't ask what it was; I no longer remember). As always, Julie and I went over it with lots of give and take, and, maybe an hour later, we finished and I left his office, assignment in hand. Then something happened and this new story suddenly came to me. Complete from beginning to end. I went back to Julie's office and said I decided on doing a different story instead and pitched the 'If Superman...' story. That Julie was willing to drop a story he already approved to listen to my new idea still boggles the mind."

Wolfman continued, "Julie okayed it and I went home to write out the full plot. As I did with all my collaborations with Gil, we were doing it plot style rather than full script. The entire idea was simple: the memory of Superman — and, in fact, all super-heroes — was removed from our collective memories by an alien race. The heroes no longer existed. Even more than that, the heroic ideal no longer existed. That's the way the aliens took over worlds: they removed the very concept of heroism, so nobody would think to resist them."

Thinly veiled childhood versions of Superman co-creators Jerome Siegel and Joseph Shuster are introduced into the story. "But despite [the otherworldly meddling], two kids from Cleveland, Jerry and Joe (no last names) started coming up with ideas to stop the aliens," Wolfman explained. "Jerry would come up with the ideas and Joe would draw them. Step by step, they thought about what was needed if one was to stop the aliens, then solved them by developing their new fictional hero, Superman. Once the kids' character existed in Joe's art, the heroic ideal returned and Superman was re-created and defeated the aliens. All because two kids had imaginations and used them to save the world. At the end of the story, two other unrelated kids, Joe and Jack (Simon? Kirby?) started coming

up with their own hero ideas. The concept of the hero was back in force, and the idea of people having imaginations would never be stifled again."

About the artwork, the writer enthused, "Gil did an incredible job, although since he was working from a plot he took some really cool action at the end as Superman destroys the alien fleet, and simplified it more than I had hoped. But, nonetheless, it's my favorite of all my Superman stories with him. (By the way, Jerry Siegel wrote an incredible fan letter thanking us for story. I still have it. As Superman was/is my favorite comic book super-hero, to get a gushing fan letter from his creator, saying he and Joe both loved the story, was a total thrill.)"

The Kane/Wolfman team would last for 10 issues of *Action Comics* and Kane's two German *Superman Album* stories (one of which he scripted) were translated and reprinted as *Superman Specials* in '83 and '84. About the material, Howard Chaykin said, "I loved Gil's Superman work. It didn't look anything like Jack Burnley or Wayne Boring; his was from another world. I've never been a constituent of Curt Swan and never understood the appeal of his work. Gil's stuff gave the character an energetic balance."

Atom Strange: Another eye-popping and imaginative collaboration of that era was Kane and writer Jan Strnad's radical reboot of the diminutive super-hero the artist had introduced in 1961. Regarding *Sword of the Atom*, Kane said, "What I decided was that we might resurrect him as a sword-&-sorcery character, and in effect we would have all his qualities except that he would be frozen at the six-inch size and would have to deal with all the dangers that a strip set in the Amazon would provide."¹⁶⁵

"I met Gil [in 1982] at a convention in Dallas," Strnad said. "He told me of a project that he had in mind, involving the Atom, and wondered if I would write it. I said, 'Sure, great!' I was tickled pink because Gil... was one of my favorites when I was a kid and I loved the old Atom he did. So I was real excited about it and took him up on it, of course." He added, "[I]t sounded more interesting to me because it was going to 'un-super-hero' the Atom."¹⁶⁶

"Gil's pitch to me," the writer said, was 'The Atom's lost in the Everglades and trapped at his six-inch size. He finds an alien civilization and falls in love with an alien princess.' That was about it, and it was plenty. I changed his size to one-inch and changed the Everglades [setting] to the Amazon, but otherwise it's Gil's premise."

Fans were incensed about one aspect of the revision, the writer revealed. "One of the controversial changes at the time was that Gil ripped off the top of the Atom's cowl. The effect was more dynamic than the smooth dome of the original. Once a fan was complaining to Gil about it and he replied that, as the designer of the original costume, 'I giveth and I taketh away.' I always appreciated the new look."

Indeed, the character is trapped at *Incredible Shrinking Man* stature, given a blade to wield, frog to saddle, and damsel to woo. Surprisingly, though, the four-issue mini-series and subsequent three annual specials are more than a mere sword-spectacle, the faux real-life and decidedly non-pulpish subplot of the dissolution of Ray and Jean Palmer's marriage adds an unexpected poignancy, which speaks to the strengths of Kane's newest collaborator, who also teamed with artists Richard Corben (on *Mutant World*) and Dennis Fujitake (on *Dalgoda*). "I felt his quality would be right," Kane said, "a turnaround from the standard approaches to writing super-hero material. There was always a great deal of character and mood in his work, and

This spread: Presentation work from Gil Kane's tenure in the animation industry during the 1980s and early '90s. The two vignettted figures are for a show called *Future Force* (courtesy of Tim Burgard). Whether the top right is a character redesign for *Captain Planet* is unknown (piece courtesy of Heritage). The top left, obviously Kane's work, was erroneously included in the Jack Kirby: The Unpublished Archives trading card set from Comic Images.

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about all of that!" Thomas exclaimed. "He wanted to bring in the *Nibelungenlied*, the Teutonic epic version without any gods or supernatural elements. Not that he wanted to get rid of the gods, but Gil wanted to bring in various things, in particular the father and son, I think Sigurd and his father, running around with wolf-heads for headdresses, and while I wasn't against that if it fit in visually, I fought tooth and nail to maintain fidelity to Wagner and not be half-Wagner and half-*Nibelungenlied* or part-*Volsunga Saga*, which I'd also read. He fought me to bring those other things in, but later on he was grateful that I kept over-ruling him, because we would never have gotten the great reviews in *Opera News* if we had done it his way, a mish-mash of the different versions."

Indeed, the 1989-90 four-issue series (colored, as it happened, by his newfound friend Jim Woodring) was lauded by the mainstream press, with John Rockwell of *The New York Times* writing, "This comics version treats [Wagner's] operatic texts with faithfulness and intelligent care... [it's] more faithful to the composer's vision than a genteel, gravity-bound stage production could ever be."¹⁷⁸ *Opera News*' Jeffrey Hildt opined, "The graphics are powerful. But most important to the opera fan, these books are remarkably faithful to Wagner. It's almost startling to encounter the stories in this context, unfolding just as we expect them to in scene after scene."¹⁷⁹

About that stage of his life and *The Ring of Nibelung*, Kane revealed, "I was doing the best I could, making the living that I needed to make — which wasn't an extraordinary living, but it was comfortable. As a result, while I enjoyed everything about the material, and towards the end of the material, on the last book, I found out that I had cancer, and in fact I wasn't able to finish the inking on the last few pages. On the day that last book was finished, I went into surgery."¹⁸⁰

Part Six: Decline

Cancer, Round One: Roy Thomas recalled, "I only learned Gil had gotten sick late into the period when we worked on *The Ring*. Alfredo Alcalá had to ink some of the last pages of the final volume. He kept his illness a secret from almost everybody in the industry because he was so terrified that the w

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pitch for the *Captain Planet* show. Gil penciled, I inked and colored, and, in one case, we carved a hole in the illustration board in the shape of a computer screen and ran a

PROLOGUE:

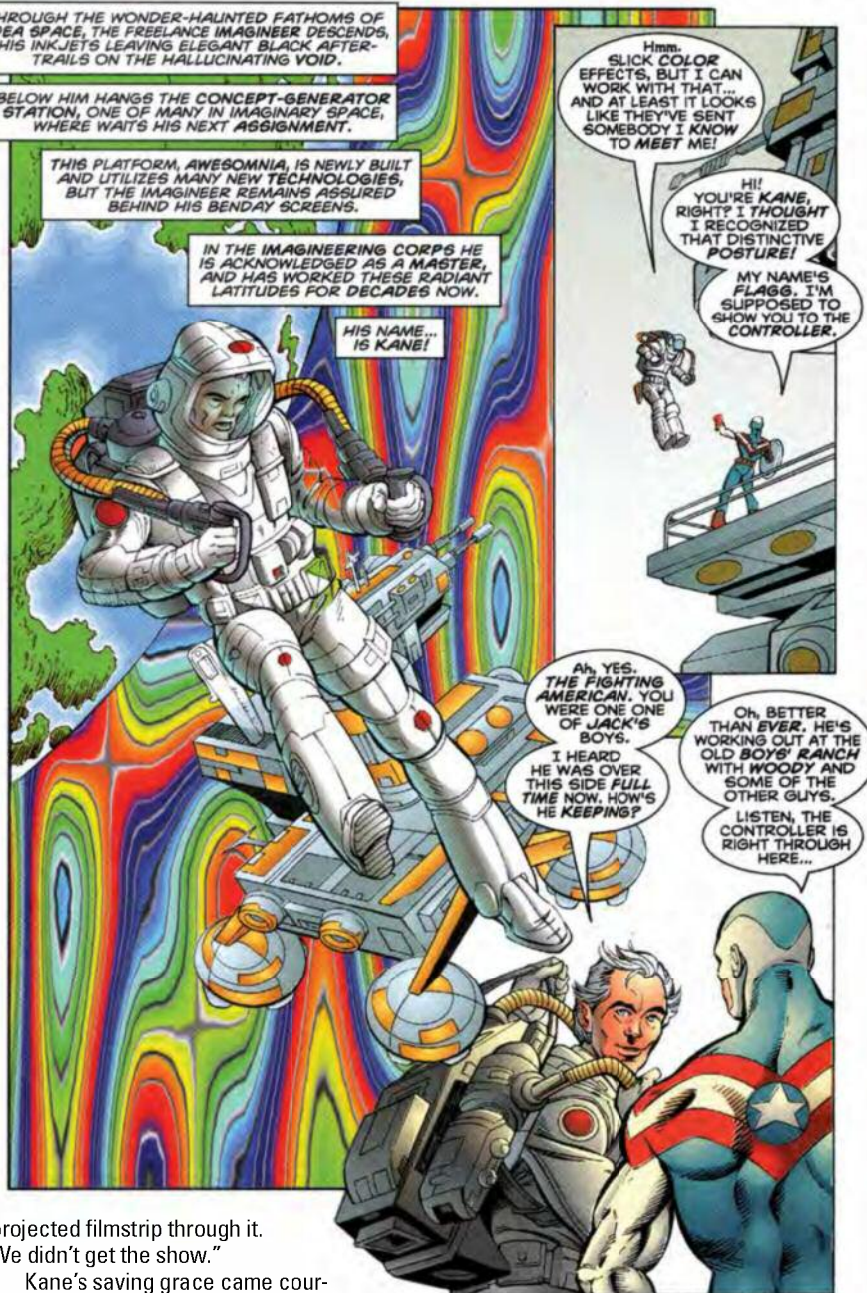
THROUGH THE WONDER-HAUNTED FATHOMS OF IDEA SPACE, THE FREELANCE IMAGINEER DESCENDS, HIS INKJETS LEAVING ELEGANT BLACK AFTER-TRAILS ON THE HALLUCINATING VOID.

BELOW HIM HANGS THE CONCEPT-GENERATOR STATION, ONE OF MANY IN IMAGINARY SPACE, WHERE WAITS HIS NEXT ASSIGNMENT.

THIS PLATFORM, AWESOMNIA, IS NEWLY BUILT AND UTILIZES MANY NEW TECHNOLOGIES, BUT THE IMAGINEER REMAINS ASSURED BEHIND HIS BENDAY SCREENS.

IN THE IMAGINEERING CORPS HE IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS A MASTER, AND HAS WORKED THESE RADIANT LATITUDES FOR DECADES NOW.

HIS NAME... IS KANE!



projected filmstrip through it. We didn't get the show."

Kane's saving grace came courtesy of his old Ruby-Spears art director, as the artist explained, "John Dorman came to my rescue. He hired me to do the character design and some of the presentation work on a show called [*The Pirates of Dark Water*]." ¹⁸² Burgard was also part of the art department. "Surprisingly, we were kept on to work on another show that had a toy deal attached," Burgard said, "with the difference being our crew designed everything and the toys would be based on what we came up with. This was *Pirates of Dark Water*. Gil did a series of 'splash pages,' or bumper art, for the show, most of them used to illustrate individual episodes. Legendary illustrator and [animation art department] head of Hanna-Barbera, Iwao Takamoto, tightened the pencils and put the characters more on-model. I inked and colored them. If you are familiar with the mini-series Marvel published, they sported bad reproductions of that art. I had a lot more to do on that show, but we're talking about Gil here. He was recovering from cancer treatments at that time and it was a wonder he could work at all. Unfortunately, like many classic comics artists, he still had to work."

Above: One of Kane's final jobs was to draw himself in Alan Moore's *Judgment Day: Aftermath* ['98]. **Inks by Mario Alquiza.** **Below:** Gil Kane's interview in *The Comics Journal* #186 [Apr. '96] was nothing less than a monumental document.

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