



JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR SEVENTY-FIVE PRESENTS:

**KIRBY & LEE**

**STUF'  
SAID!**

The complex  
genesis of the  
Marvel Universe,  
in its creators'  
own words





## CONTENTS

<i>Opening Arguments</i> .....	4
<i>The Rules of Law</i> .....	7
<i>1940–1960: Preliminary Findings</i> .....	9
<i>1961: The Blitz</i> .....	19
<i>1962: Personal Best</i> .....	25
<i>1963: All-Out Assault</i> .....	31
<i>1964: The Build-Up</i> .....	39
<i>1965: Collaborations' End</i> .....	47
<i>1966: Ragnarok</i> .....	63
<i>1967: Aftermath</i> .....	73
<i>1968: Distance</i> .....	83
<i>1969: Solitude</i> .....	91
<i>1970: Departure</i> .....	99
<i>1971–1974: Proving Ground</i> .....	107
<i>1975–1978: Comings &amp; Goings</i> .....	117
<i>1979–1994: Conflict</i> .....	129
<i>1995-On: Closing Arguments</i> .....	149
<i>The Verdict?</i> .....	158

[this page and previous] Detail panels from *Fantastic Four* #59.





Black Bolt finally speaks up in 1966's *Fantastic Four* #59. As you'll see, it was also the year everything changed for Kirby and Lee.

# OPENING ARGUMENTS

like Jack Kirby working for them. While Stan was the public face of Marvel, Kirby was a behind-the-scenes creative engine, helping steer the direction of virtually the entire line in the first few years of the 1960s. He not only brought an incredible sense of power and dynamism to Marvel's line-up, he came up with countless characters, settings, and concepts that are just beginning to be mined today by the Marvel films that are breaking box office records around the world.

As the 1960s wore on, Jack was doing more of the work, via the "Marvel Method," where the "artist" was responsible for much/most/all of the plotting and pacing of the stories, while the "writer" concentrated on the words in the caption boxes and balloons, *after* the drawn pages were completed and the story totally fleshed out. But Kirby was also seeing Lee get most of the credit—and since Lee was the editor, he had final say in making changes to Kirby's stories, even tales he had minimal or no involvement with from the outset. It led to irreconcilable differences between them, and by 1970, any semblance of a collaboration was over.

Add to that Marvel's shortsighted insistence on withholding Kirby's original art from him as a bargaining chip in the 1980s. They feared that his involvement in the creation of their characters would reflect poorly on them legally, and they'd have to pony up some equitable remuneration to him for all the creating he did as a freelancer. It was the perfect storm for a contentious battle, that inevitably reflected poorly on both men, as they disputed who actually created the Marvel Universe.

Long after Jack's death, that bitter fight culminated in September 2009, when the Kirby family took steps to reclaim rights on characters he was involved with between 1958–1963 at Marvel Comics. There was a protracted legal battle, in which I played a minuscule part, but Disney became an enormous player, due to purchasing Marvel at that time for \$4 billion. With that much money at stake, there was no way they were going to risk losing the copyrights on their investment without a fight.

As things stand today, following a 2014 settlement between Jack's family and Marvel Comics (now owned by Disney), an injustice that had existed for over half a century has been righted. Kirby is now recognized as a co-creator, with Stan Lee, of the Marvel Universe and its major characters. Marvel says it in their comics, Disney says it in their movies, and the world at large is slowly catching on to what learned comics fans already knew. Money has changed hands and legal documents have been signed, so as far as the general population goes, it's over. Kirby finally won—though I'd argue that Marvel, Disney, and Stan Lee also won, due to the goodwill this has and will generate for years to come.

But—and there's always a "but" in comics history, isn't there?—there's still one technicality that hasn't been resolved. Just who did what in that creation spree between Kirby and Lee in the 1960s? Kirby's most ardent supporters say he did 90% of the work, and Lee hogged all the glory. Stan's fans feel he came up with the basic ideas, innovated with his characterizations, and reined in Jack's wackiest notions with deft editing and slick Madison Avenue-style promotion.

So, who's right? If you take all the hard-core partisans of either guy out of the picture, is there a way to help the remaining body of people who care about such things, reach a consensus on the topic?

I don't know, but I'm going to give it the old college try in this book, named in tribute to Lee's signature "Nuff Said" catchphrase. Originally, I announced this project back in Summer 2014,

If you're at all knowledgeable about comic book history, you probably know that Marvel Comics got its start (at least as "Marvel Comics") in 1961, with the debut issue of the *Fantastic Four* by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. The company existed before that, dating back to the late 1930s under the names "Timely Comics" and "Atlas Comics," but *FF* #1 finally put Marvel on the map as an innovating company, after two previous decades constantly following others' trends.

In the 1960s, though Kirby was the top artist to informed comic book fans, Stan Lee became the breakout star to the general public, garnering attention in the press as the hip writer who changed comics and super-heroes around, with a newfound complexity to their characterization. Lee's m.o. was giving characters "hang-ups," like Iron Man's weak heart, Daredevil's blindness, Spider-Man's—well, acne, heartburn, post-nasal drip, allergies, chronic halitosis, and a dozen other maladies, depending on what Stan Lee interview you were reading. I've still never found most of those ailments in any of Spidey's comics, but the public got the idea—Stan was doing groundbreaking writing, for comics anyway. To his credit, Lee's dialogue did take the characters to new, hipper areas than readers had seen before, and he deserves the accolades for it. Marvel's comics were different than anyone else's, and by 1965, all their competitors were trying to copy the company, with little success.

A major part of the reason they couldn't duplicate Marvel's popularity was because they didn't have a visionary artist/storyteller

# THE RULES OF LAW



Detail from 1982's *Captain Victory* #6.

There are a few things to note in fully understanding my methodology for this book.

## ADDING SOME COLOR TO MY FONT CHOICES

This was originally going to be a black-&-white printed book, with all the quotes differentiated from my text by

using a **BLACK TYPEWRITER FONT**. But as I got further into it, I felt its “oral history” approach would be better served if there was a clear demarcation of who was saying what, without overwhelming it with “Stan Lee said...” and “Jack Kirby replied...”. So throughout, Lee, Kirby, and Ditko (the three main players) receive their own unique font treatment, for easy identification. Lee as “writer” gets that same typewriter font for his quotes, except that it’s printed in **RED**. Wherever there’s a quote by Kirby, since he’s such a bold artist, I use a sans serif font printed in **BLUE**. Ditko, being so idiosyncratic, gets a unique script font printed in **GREEN**. For any conspiracy theorists out there, please know there was no intentional biblical or political connotations to my color choices.



All of the “character witnesses” that are quoted remembering past events are announced with a word balloon, and their typewriter font is in **SEPIA**.

## FEELING A LITTLE TENSE

Since this is a chronological examination of an historical era, I’ve decided to put the main text of it in first-person tense, to better convey the progression of time. Where I interject a quote by Kirby or Lee that was spoken much later, I bracket the year it was said (i.e. [1969]) at the beginning of the quote, so it’s immediately apparent it wasn’t said concurrent with what preceded it.

## THE FINE PRINT

Yes, I know the footnotes and art captions are small. Again, this is an intentional choice I made, and not just to save space in this dense tome. As much as possible, I don’t want them to interfere with the flow of reading the main text chronologically. I’d like them to be more of a minor distraction, like a gnat, instead of a giant bumblebee buzzing around your head. But there’s good info there, so read them as you go along, if that works best for you.

## YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDERMAN (-)

Throughout this book, if “Spiderman” has no hyphen (as opposed to “Spider-Man,” the trademarked spelling of Marvel’s signature character), it’s intentional because either: 1) I’m talking about the version of the character before Steve Ditko’s involvement, which Kirby brought to Marvel in that unhyphenated form (more on this later), or 2) it’s Stan Lee (or someone else) spelling it that way mistakenly, or using it inconsistently. Since the original art for Spidey’s first appearance shows it was unhyphenated before lettering corrections were made, I think it’s important to the chronological

discussion to keep this distinction intact, rather than correct it.

## TAKE IT WITH A GRAIN OF SALT



Just like in a court of law, I want to present the factual evidence to be evaluated, with real-time quotes, and the memories of those who were involved. But there are instances where I’ve chosen to speculate, to help drive a point home or bring some clarity to the discussion.

Anywhere I feel I’m interjecting my own opinions forcefully or questioning the historical record, I preface them with this salt shaker icon. Feel free to completely ignore my ramblings and continue on with the “stuff said” by the key witnesses. I don’t mind being overruled.

## THE NEED FOR SPEED

To keep this truly chronological, unless it’s specifically indicated otherwise, all the dating and quotes in this book are in real-time—the time the stories were being *worked on*, not when they went on sale. The lead time with which Kirby, Ditko, and others were drawing their stories is important, so I’m making educated guesses. For Kirby at least, I’m assuming these were the average number of months that Kirby was drawing a story ahead of its publication date:

- 1958–1961 releases: three months ahead
- 1962–1964 releases (with annuals thrown in): four months ahead
- 1965–early 1969 releases (when he was also doing layouts for other artists, and later when his workload lessened to just three books per month): five months ahead on *Fantastic Four*, four months ahead on others
- March 1969 to late 1969 (after moving to California): six months ahead on *Fantastic Four*, four-to-five months ahead on others
- 1970 (after taking on more final work): back to five months ahead on *Fantastic Four*, four months ahead on others.

This list is a *very* rough guide, only showing a likely average time when Jack might’ve been working on each strip, based on anecdotal evidence. If you want to see the spreadsheet I used as my guide, you can download it here:

<http://www.twomorrows.com/media/KirbyMarvelDates.xls>

It’s likely got a lot of inaccurate listings, but can serve as a starting point for giving us some idea of what Jack was working on at the time some of his and Stan’s quotes were being made. At the end of the day, this faulty list should be good enough, as few of the dates are that critical, and if I’m off by a month (or three, or even more), we’re still getting a general sense of the sequencing of work to comment about it. Since no definite listing of Jack’s production schedule exists, this’ll have to suffice.

Stan’s lead time is much easier to pinpoint accurately. An average of three months prior to the release date is when he would generally start dialoguing an issue. Again, it could vary (Ditko recounts waiting 54 days once to get a dialogued Dr. Strange story back for inking), but I need a general guide, so that’s what I’m using. A Bullpen page or letter column was almost always written three months prior to the on-sale date (and four months at most), so those are easy to pin down. Comments in *Fantastic Four* #6 (1962), *Strange Tales* #137 (1965), *FF* #58 (1966), and my queries to Roy Thomas, let me pinpoint when most things were written in real-time.



## There are some exceptions to be aware of:

In *Amazing Spider-Man* #25 (the first issue with Ditko's plotting credit, on-sale date of March 11, 1965), Flo Steinberg apologizes for repeating a reader's letter in both #22 and #23. That means Flo's apology was inserted, probably at the last minute, into the letter column for #25 right after #23 went on sale on Jan. 12, 1965. That means the letters page for #25 went to press after the Jan. 15, 1965 on-sale date for #23 at the earliest, making it two months before the on-sale date. But I'm willing to write this off as a correction sent to the printer at the last minute, and not the normal timing.

I'm working backward from release dates, but Jack worked far ahead, and sometimes in a different sequence than issues appeared on the newsstands. For instance, he inexplicably has 5-page stories in *Rawhide Kid* #43 and *Kid Colt* #119 in 1964, over a year after he's stopped actively doing Westerns. Were these done a year earlier, and finally published in 1964? Or six months earlier? As a last-minute job Stan needed? There's no way to know for sure.

The job numbers on each story can help somewhat in ascertaining the sequence in which Jack does each story, but only a little. A new job number was assigned when the first activity on a story took place, and that wasn't necessarily Jack starting to draw it. It could be Stan assigning it to another writer (or himself) weeks or months before any actual work begins, and in that time Jack may've started drawing the job assigned the next sequential job number.

Also, Mark Evanier told me that Jack didn't necessarily work a regular schedule of *Fantastic Four*/*Thor*/*Captain America* this month, then another *FF*/*Thor*/*Cap* the next month, etc. When he finished one job, he'd ask Stan Lee what he wanted him to work on next. Since Jack was fast and worked far ahead, Stan would assign Jack's next job based on any number of factors. For instance, if Joe Sinnott was about to need inking work, Stan might tell him to go ahead and do another *Fantastic Four* issue. If Joe were running behind, he might tell Kirby to draw another *Thor* or *Cap* strip, or give him some rush or fill-in job that needed doing the most.

Jack and Roz took a couple of trips to California prior to Jan. 1969 to find a new home, check out schools, etc. So the latter half of 1968's schedule wouldn't fit a regular pattern.

More perplexing is Kirby's 1969 work, after his move. He's dropped *Captain America*, leaving only *Fantastic Four* and *Thor* on his schedule. The loss of that full book would've adversely affected his income, and based only on release dates, Jack was sitting around with one-third of his time in 1969 unfilled, thus one-third less money in his bank account that year. While that may've been the case some months, his work pace was constantly changing, and Mark Evanier said that at one point, Kirby may've done multiple issues of one strip in a row before jumping back on to another strip.

But there are a few key clues we can use, to pinpoint some specific dates. For instance:

- The letters page of *X-Men* #5 says that Stan and Jack will start on *Fantastic Four* #28 as soon as the letters page is completed. Since these pages were generally done three months prior to the ship-date of an issue, that notice was written Dec. 3, 1963, so Kirby would've started *FF* #28 around Dec. 9, 1963. Interestingly, that's also the first issue of *FF* that featured margin notes, so that helps date the onset of their use, since *FF* was the book most likely to be ahead of schedule.
- The first issues where Jack leaves margin notes on his pages for each strip, should all coincide within 1–2 months of each other. (There's no reason to assume he would add margin notes to *FF* pages, but not *Thor* pages done right after, or vice versa.)
- The same logic applies to the start of using the smaller 10" x 15" art boards, rather than the 12" x 18" "large art." If Marvel told artists on a given date to start using the new size, the first issue of each strip that has it, probably would've been drawn within 1–2 months of each other. (Unless, of course, Jack was doing multiple consecutive issues of one comic before jumping to the next one, which we have no way of determining.)

So we're making an awful lot of educated guesses on these dates, and you should take them all with a grain of salt. But regardless of where he deviated from a regular production schedule month to month, it would've eventually come back around to righting itself once deadlines loomed. So there is value here.

Jack came into the office initially, every other Friday. Since he could draw three pages per day easily, it would take him less than a week to draw a full issue. So each "story conference" would be for multiple books, to keep him busy for two full weeks.

## WHEN IS A SCRIPT NOT A SCRIPT, AND A WRITER NOT A WRITER?

Just as an "artist" can be two things (Van Gogh and Beethoven were both "artists", but only one of them was the kind of "artist" that actually generates paintings and sketches), so can a "writer." And in comic book parlance, a "script" can have multiple meanings.

Coming up with a story *idea* (or "plot") in comics, is different than creating the *dialogue* for a story. Lee often lumps it all together, and uses vague generalities for what an "artist" and "writer" are, when in reality, the writer may do either or both of those tasks. When Lee calls himself or someone else a "scripter" or "writer," it doesn't necessarily mean that person came up with the *idea* for the story (by themselves, or in collaboration with an "artist"); just that they wrote the final blurbs and word balloons on the printed page.

In the Marvel Method, the "artist" may contribute half, or all of the plot/idea for a story, and unless they specifically demand it, they usually don't get public credit for that effort. Just listing them as "artist" or "art by..." sells them short. Conversely, listing someone as "writer," "scripter," or "written by..." may over-inflate their contribution, since by default it implies that person came up with the story plot/idea. Unless there's a specific "plotted by" credit to

the contrary, the reading public assumes one person "wrote" it, and the other one "drew" it, with no melding of talents between the two. And that's not the way comics worked at Marvel in the 1960s.

Kirby was especially a victim of the lack of credit that the Marvel Method causes. Where other artists (Gene Colan, John Romita, Don Heck) would flesh out scenes with minor details and additions, Kirby fleshed out entire *stories* by adding new concepts and prominent characters. He plotted or co-plotted much of Marvel's output, even on stories where he only did basic stick-figure layouts for other artists to complete.

Examine these quotes from both men, and I think you'll see what I mean. Remember, Stan's in red, and Jack's in blue:

"You can call it **plotted**. I call it **script**. I **wrote** the **script** and I **drew** the **story**."

1985: An Interview with Jack Kirby by Leonard Pitts Jr. Date determined by Pitts' letter to Rand Hoppe at the Jack Kirby Museum.

"I did everything but put the words in the balloons. But all of it was mine, except the words in the balloons."

"Every word of dialogue in those **scripts** was mine. Every story."

"I can tell you that I **wrote** a few lines myself above every panel..."

"They weren't printed in the books."

"I wasn't allowed to write dialogue, Stanley. I wrote my own dialogue."

"Did you ever read one of the stories after it was finished? ...I don't think you ever read one of my **stories**..."

"Whatever was **written** in them was [insignificant]... it was the action I was interested in."

"I don't think you ever felt that the dialogue was that important... you felt, 'Well, it doesn't matter, anybody can put the dialogue in, it's what I'm drawing that matters.' ...I don't agree with it, but maybe you're right."

"If one man is **writing** and drawing and doing a strip... you should have the opportunity to do the entire thing yourself. Create your own **story**."

Aug. 28, 1987: *Robert Knight's Earthwatch*, Jack Kirby radio interview conducted by Warren Reece and Max Schmid, WBAI New York.

Kirby and Lee both refer to the word "script" as meaning different things at different times. Sometimes it's a fully-written, detailed explanation of what should happen in every panel on every page, such as what Lee types up in the 1950s before the Marvel Method comes into play. Other times, it's Kirby's set of fully drawn pages that are turned in and ready for Lee to add the blurbs and dialogue. And still other times, "script" refers to a sheet of paper containing Lee's dialogue, to be added to Kirby's drawn pages by a letterer.

From his perspective, Kirby is "writing" the story when he takes a basic plot (either his, Lee's, or a combination of both) and breaks it down into a multi-page story, pacing it, setting the scenes, and adding whatever creative touches and characters he comes up with. He also considers his margin notes on the side of the pages to be the "script" for his "dialogue"; written in shorthand, yes, but adequate for someone to expand upon, to make more polished verbiage in the balloons.

Lee usually does more than just reword Kirby's margin notes, sometimes changing Kirby's meaning to make the story more in-keeping with his own tastes. He views that dialogue creation as "writing" the story.

So when you see words like "**script**" and "**write**" and "**story**" highlighted in this book, take a moment to really analyze what the speaker means. It's not always as apparent as it may seem. As you'll see, when Kirby or Lee misunderstand what the other is talking about, it can lead to a lot of conflict in stuff said.

# PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

1940-1960

THESE YEARS SEE **JACK KIRBY**, WITH PARTNER **JOE SIMON**, ACHIEVE UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS AS LEADERS IN THE COMICS INDUSTRY. AS SIMON WILL RECOUNT LATER, "JACK AND I, EITHER INDIVIDUALLY OR COLLECTIVELY, WERE NEVER AFRAID TO TRY NEW THINGS, AND A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE. IT NEVER OCCURRED TO ME TO BE AFRAID OF FAILURE, AS LONG AS YOU TRY."

ALL THE WHILE, **STAN LEE** IS TOILING AWAY AT A COMPANY KNOWN ONLY FOR FOLLOWING TRENDS, RATHER THAN SETTING THEM.

June 21, 1990: *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), interview with Joe Simon by Robert Rowe

## 1940

Jacob Kurtzberg and Joseph Simon collaborate for the first time on *Blue Bolt* #2. Kurtzberg's debut work for Timely Comics (the future Marvel Comics) appears in *Red Raven Comics* #1 (August cover date), with the "Mercury" feature. It is the first time he signs his work by the name "Jack Kirby" (one of numerous pen names he initially uses, but it's the one that sticks), and the team of Simon and Kirby is established. Sometime in late 1939/early 1940, Timely publisher Martin Goodman hires Joe Simon as the comics line's editor, and, outside the office, Simon and Kirby conceive of Captain America, which they pitch to Goodman, who agrees to share 25% of the profits with the team on top of their rate of \$12 per page. Kirby is hired as Timely's art director for \$75 a week.



"I'm sorry, Haines, but there is no place in this army camp for the likes of you. You have lied, cheated, spied, and stolen. Your conduct is no longer tolerable and I'm giving you a dishonorable discharge. Now get out!"

Private Steve Rogers, doing sentry duty nearby, was watching the scene interestedly. He had never seen Colonel Stevens so angry; and Lou Haines, too, was threateningly mad. The muscular giant shook his enormous fist at the Colonel.

"O.K. Colonel," snarled Lou, "I'll get out. But let me warn you now, you ain't seen the last of me! I'll get even somehow. Mark my words, you'll pay for this!" Haines walked toward

the camp gates, muttering insults under his breath.

Suddenly Haines felt a strong hand grasp his arm. He looked around into the flashing eyes of Steve Rogers! "I wouldn't act like that if I were you," murmured Steve, softly, "you were insulting a man in the uniform of the United States Army! Here are the camp gates; now beat it!"

Haines left, but there was a look of hate in his eyes which Steve could not help but notice!

Later that evening, Steve Rogers was sitting in his tent playing checkers with his young side-kick, Bucky, the camp mascot. Bucky looked disappointed.

"Gosh, Steve," wailed Bucky,

"don't you EVER lose a game? I've forgotten what it feels like to win."

Steve smiled cheerfully. "I'll tell you what, kid: suppose you borrow a book on 'how to play checkers' and read it. That'll give me a chance to get some shut-eye. You don't know how tired it makes me to beat you all the time!"

Steve ducked just in time to dodge the pillow that Bucky threw at him. "Why, you little squirt," he grinned, "I ought to put you over my knee!"

"Oh yeah, you big palooks? You and what other army?" Bucky picked up another pillow and was holding it ready.

Suddenly Steve's smile left his face and he put his fingers



Martin Goodman.

**JOE SIMON:**

"We created Captain America. We did the first full book of Captain Marvel for Fawcett Publications.

I also created *Blue Bolt*, a super-hero comic book, for Curtis Publications, the *Saturday Evening Post* people, all in one year. It's unbelievable; I just can't believe what we did in 1940.

"Jack and I turned out so much stuff that we had many work methods. At the beginning, I would write the story right on the art board, making very rough layouts. Then Jack would tighten up the drawing, and if he had to, help with the story. We were both prolific writers. Then I would ink it. That was the true Simon and Kirby stuff."

June 21, 1990: *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, NY), interview with Joe Simon by Robert Rowe

On December 20, Simon and Kirby's *Captain America Comics* #1 goes on sale and reportedly sells nearly half a million copies. Subsequent issues sell upwards of one million copies per issue. The title is an unqualified success and Timely's biggest seller to date. The series continues until 1949 and the character, with his trusty side-kick, Bucky, also appears in numerous other Timely comics.

## 1941

Stanley Martin Lieber's first professional comic book writing appears in *Captain America Comics* #3, a two-page text piece entitled "Captain America Foils the Traitor's Revenge." It's his first use of the pen name "Stan Lee," but won't be the last.

**JOE SIMON:**

"I hired Stan. [His] Uncle [Robert Solomon] brought him in and said, 'This is Martin's nephew' (or whatever he was). Back then, comics had to have a minimum of two text pages in them for Second Class Mailing privileges. Nobody ever read that stuff, you know. So whoever came along, I'd give them a job of writing the text.



Early 1940s photo at Coney Island: Joe Simon with his date, Jack and Roz Kirby, and unknown friends.

1941: *Captain America Comics* #3 text story by Stan Lee, his first published work in comics.



1961

ON FEBRUARY 25, KIRBY'S FINAL *SKY MASTERS* DAILY STRIP SEES PRINT. HE HAS BEEN GRADUALLY LOSING MONEY ON IT, DUE TO THE EXPENSES OF PRODUCING IT OUT OF HIS OWN POCKET, AND HAVING TO PAY JACK SCHIFF OVER HIS LAWSUIT LOSS.

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, HE'S "ALL IN" AT MARVEL. HIS FORTUNES COMPLETELY DEPEND ON THE COMPANY'S SUCCESS, AND HE HAS A PLAN: "I TRIED TO *BLITZ* THE STANDS WITH NEW STUFF. THE NEW STUFF SEEMED TO GAIN MOMENTUM."

Summer 1989 (published Feb. 1990): *The Comics Journal* #134  
interview conducted by Gary Groth

## SPRING 1961

Around April, Kirby draws *Strange Tales* #89, featuring Fin Fang Foom. Stan Lee's signature isn't to be found on any of the pages, so it's likely this issue is dialogued by Larry Lieber or someone else in the Bullpen—although the alliterative name screams Lee's involvement on some level, at least in plotting.

LARRY LIEBER:

"Stan made up the plot, and then he'd give it to me, and I'd write the script... I would follow from Stan's plots."

1999: Larry Lieber interviewed by Roy Thomas, from *Alter Ego* #2

But as well-regarded as Fin Fang Foom is among fans, something else is occurring at this point that will change comics forever: The beginnings of the Marvel Universe.

STEVE SHERMAN:

"Jack told me that he came up with all of the titles at once. He called it a 'blitzkrieg'. He felt if he put out a bunch of new books at once, it would make a splash. He had FF, Spiderman, The X-Men, Thor, and Hulk.

"[He probably said this] in the early '70s. I can't recall why it came up. I just remember Jack was very adamant about how he had to keep the doors open and how it required a complete revamp."

Feb. 2018: Steve Sherman e-mail to Patrick Ford, and June 2018: E-mail to John Morrow

## TURNING POINT!

Sometime between April-May, *Fantastic Four* #1 is conceived by Lee and Kirby, greenlighted by Martin Goodman, and drawn by Kirby. Jack has said he had been pushing for more super-heroes at the time:

[1969] "I tried to work it out with Stan, to hint about super-heroes. There were a few still going but they didn't have the big audience they had. There was a thing I was involved in, *The Fly*, which got a reaction and because of that I told Stan that there might be a hope for super-heroes. 'Why don't we try Captain America again?' I kept harping on it and Marvel was quiet in those days, like every other office, and then things began to pick up and gain momentum."

Early 1969: Kirby interview, conducted by Mark Hebert (published Nov.-Dec. 1976 in *The Nostalgia Journal* #30-31)

Lee has claimed repeatedly that Goodman heard *Justice League of America* was selling well at DC Comics, and he instructed Lee to create a team of super-heroes. Interestingly, there are marked similarities to the respective origins of DC's Challengers of the Unknown

# THE BLITZ

(another Kirby group of heroes) and Marvel's "first family."

Lee's two-page plot synopsis for the first issue of *Fantastic Four* is the subject of much controversy, which will be explored later in this book. It centers around its authenticity, but more so, about whether it is created before or after Lee and Kirby discuss the new *Fantastic Four* concept.



As much as I'm trying to avoid speculation here, I'm about to sprinkle a little bit in, to hopefully add some food for thought to the dispute:

[1986] "I came in with presentations. I'm not gonna wait around for conferences. I said, 'This is what you have to do.' I came in with Spiderman, the Hulk, and the *Fantastic Four*. I didn't fool around. I said, 'You've got to do super-heroes.' I took Spiderman from the Silver Spider—a script by Jack Oleck that we hadn't used in *Mainline*. That's what gave me the idea for Spiderman. I've still got that script."

May 1986: *Comics Feature* #44 interview with Jack Kirby, conducted by James Van Hise

When Kirby makes this comment in the 1980s, it raises a lot of eyebrows of skeptical fans—but then the unused Jack Oleck/C.C. Beck "Silver Spider" story surfaces, giving it some credibility. When considered at this point in the chronology, this quote instead raises some interesting questions. After all, wouldn't Lee need to present some sort of visual presentation to Martin Goodman, to get approval before his skeptical publisher would take a risk on canceling existing books, and trying something new? For a new character, wouldn't Jack have to submit something for his editor to approve, before starting on a full story?

Consider this scenario: Since Kirby doesn't have a direct line to Goodman, Lee is his go-between. So does Jack just show up one day unannounced, plop a bunch of presentation boards on Stan's desk, and expect him to take them into the publisher on the spot? More likely, Kirby broaches the idea of doing pitches with Lee first, to see if his conduit to Goodman is even willing to do it, before he spends time preparing them. In such an instance, Lee will likely take part in a preliminary conversation with Kirby, to determine what would appeal to Martin.

If Kirby has already been hinting to Lee about restarting super-heroes, and one day Goodman tells Stan that DC's *Justice League* is selling and he wants to try that genre again,



June 1961: Kirby celebrates at his son Neal's Bar Mitzvah.





Jack. Then, I think he was doing so much that he found it was better—and also, when you're working with a guy like Jack—Jack was very creative, and wanted to put a lot of things into it. Jack always welcomed doing it, I'd imagine, to some extent."

1999: Larry Lieber interviewed by Roy Thomas, from *Alter Ego* #2

That tendency of Kirby's to add things is the foundation for Lee using what will become known as the "Marvel Method" of creating a comic book:

[1975] "...I stumbled onto [the Marvel Method]. I'd be writing all the stories, and I'd be working on a *Fantastic Four* and the artist who's doing Dr. Strange would come and say, 'Stan, I've finished my script. I need another'. But I've got the type-writer going for F.F. and I couldn't stop. And I couldn't let him sit around doing nothing. So I'd dream up a plot for him, tell him to draw it any way he wanted, and then I'd put in the dialogue later. It was a measure of expediency, so I wouldn't be the bottleneck. Then I found out it worked better.

"The artists are great storytellers themselves. They know which sequence to enlarge upon, which to cut short because it's dull. They'd put in characters I knew nothing about."

August 10, 1975: Tallahassee Democrat (Tallahassee, FL) article, "Spider-Man is a Marvel, but Stan Lee is Marvel" by Peter Gornier, Chicago Tribune Service

That actual date Lee first uses the Marvel Method with Kirby is uncertain, but we will soon see some evidence that indicates it's undeniably underway.

On August 8, *Fantastic Four* #1 goes on sale. Some mechanism is in place for gauging early sales results (likely Martin Goodman talking to the distributor), based on Stan's August 29 letter to fan Jerry Bails (it has an inter-office stamped date of September 1, which is when the office files away a copy). Stan's letter provides a wealth of information from a key early point at Marvel, including his intent to gear the comics toward an older audience:

"Enjoyed reading ALTER-EGO and the COMICCOLLECTOR, and got a kick out of your little critique of THE FANTASTIC FOUR, written by Roy Thomas.

"Just to correct a few small inaccuracies though, I'm not a 'former' editor of Timely—I've been editor and art director of that redoubtable institution for the past 21 years, and hope to continue ad infinitum. Also, it is doubtful that Mr. Thomas is the 'only person who bought a copy' (although he said that humorously, of course) because judging by early sales reports, I think we have a winner on our hands!

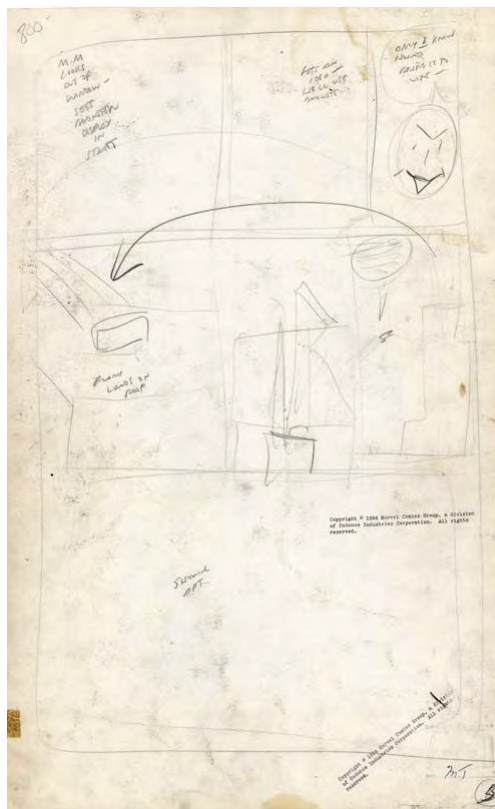
"As for the future of the F.F., we WILL have:

COSTUMES

A DIFFERENT TREATMENT (art-wise) OF THE TORCH  
ADDITIONAL NEW CHARACTERS IN MONTHS TO COME  
(Don't be too surprised to meet Sub-Mariner again, or Captain America! Who knows??)

AND A FEW MORE SURPRISES... so stay with us, pal!

"Would be interested in your opinion of another new mag



On the back of this page of original art for *Fantastic Four* #5, Stan Lee is clearly giving Kirby layout suggestions. The question is, why? Did he lack confidence that a 20-year veteran of comics like Jack could do it himself? Or was this done prior to the "Marvel Method"? More examples of FF #5 layouts are on the next page.



due to go on sale soon—AMAZING ADULT FANTASY. We think it's a smash.

"Regarding some of the various comments concerning the F.F., we have purposely refrained from letting invisible girl (oops, sorry!) Invisible Girl walk thru walls, and from giving TOO MUCH super powers to our characters, as we feel that effects like those are chiefly of appeal to the YOUNGER readers, and we are trying (perhaps vainly?) to reach a slightly older, more sophisticated group."

Stan Lee's Aug. 29 letter to fan Jerry Bails (Stamped Sept. 1, 1961)

*Amazing Adult Fantasy* #7 (cover date Dec. 1961), which takes over the numbering from *Amazing Adventures* #1–6, goes on sale Aug. 31, 1961, just two days after this letter is written. And Bails writes Lee back that very day, after picking up a copy.

## FALL 1961

When asked by a reader who the FF artist is, Stan gives this reply while writing the FF #3 letter column in September: "Considering that our artist signs the name JACK KIRBY on everything he can get his greedy little fingers on, I think we can safely claim that that's his name!"

*Fantastic Four* #3 letter column, written by Stan Lee

The reader's confusion is understandable, since every credit on FF #2–8 only says it's by "Stan Lee and J. Kirby."

Stan includes a notice stating they receive so much mail that it's impossible to directly correspond with readers—but this same letter column includes a fake filler letter from one "S. Brodsky" of Brooklyn, NY (Sol Brodsky is Marvel's production manager).

Jack Kirby draws *Fantastic Four* #4 in October. It revives Bill Everett's Golden Age Timely character, the Sub-Mariner, and effectively ushers in the "Marvel Universe," which interlocks the characters in a shared world. A blurb at the bottom of a page this issue says "The Hulk Is Coming!"



1962

THIS YEAR, MARVEL SELLS 19,740,000 COPIES OF ITS COMICS. KIRBY PRODUCES 1,158 PUBLISHED PAGES--HIS **PERSONAL BEST** IN A SINGLE YEAR. BY THIS POINT, KIRBY COMPLETES THE FIRST FIVE PAGES OF HIS VERSION OF **SPIDERMAN** (NO HYPHEN) AND TURNS THEM IN TO **STAN LEE**. LEE ASSIGNS **STEVE DITKO** TO INK THEM. DITKO MENTIONS TO LEE ITS SIMILARITY TO "**THE FLY**," AFTER WHICH IT IS REJECTED, AND DITKO IS GIVEN THE JOB OF REDRAWING IT.

# PERSONAL BEST



Journey into Mystery #101.

## JANUARY 1962

As excitement over Marvel begins to spread among comics' budding fan community, both Kirby and Lee take time out to correspond with letter writers: "Complete original comic magazine pages are difficult to obtain since they all wind up at the engravers and storehouses outside the vicinity of the publishing house... The size of the individual panels should depend on the artist's dramatic sense. Actually, you will find that scenes with the most movement will demand larger space."

Jan. 1962: Jack Kirby's letter to fan Richard "Grass" Green, published in *Alter Ego* #15

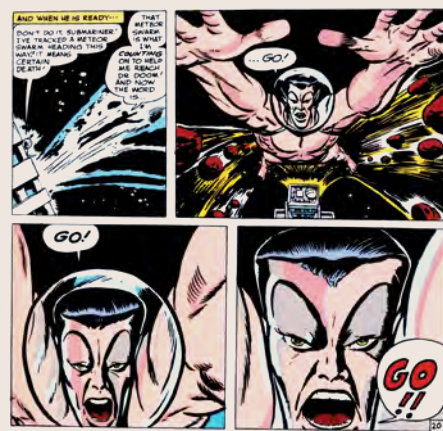
"...Jack Kirby and I have many ideas which we think are somewhat original for future issues."

Jan. 8, 1962: Stan Lee letter to fan Jerry Bails

Future bullpener Roy Thomas has his first fan letter printed in *Fantastic Four* #5, saying: "*FF* #3 was excellent! The feud angle made it all the better though, particularly the ending. The continuity in *FF* is all that could possibly be asked. I've just subscribed to *FF* for two years—I hope it runs much longer than that."

When a reader asks whether the *FF* should keep their human identities secret, Stan's reply shows his early intentions: "...remember us saying in an earlier issue that we wanted our stories to be different, and perhaps a bit more logical?" This letter column contains Stan's first use of the phrase "face front!"

*Fantastic Four* #5 letter column, written by Stan Lee



*Fantastic Four* #6 above, and *Sgt. Fury* #13, right.

## FEBRUARY 1962

Jack Kirby draws *Tales to Astonish* #35 and *Journey into Mystery* #83 (the debuts of Ant-Man and Thor, respectively), and Steve Ditko draws *Amazing Fantasy* #15, having taken over the Spiderman strip from Kirby.

NEAL KIRBY:

"My father was always very interested, he loved mythology, he loved studying religion and history, just knew all about it, his bookshelves were just loaded with that kind of stuff... we would have long discussions about it.

"I remember kind of standing by his drawing board... he had... either Thor or one of the other characters that had big

horns coming out of the helmet, and I said a real Viking wouldn't have big horns coming out of his helmet... my father kind of laughed and made some statement that, well, 'this isn't... Viking reality, it is a visual impact,' so he gave me a little art lesson there.

"We were talking... about Thor's costume and he was doing it for the first time... I had made some comment about the big circles on the front of the character and, you know, again my father was... jokingly referring to visual impact, other than possible reality of what a true Viking might have worn."

June 30, 2010: Neal Kirby's deposition, Marvel Worldwide, Inc. et al v. Kirby et al

[1970] "I got a kick out of doing the Thor legend, which I researched. I kind of did my version of it. They thought that Thor should have red hair and a beard, and that's not my Thor. So I just went my own way."

August 1-3, 1970: San Diego's Golden State Comic Con (San Diego, California)

At this point, in at least some instances, there are still full scripts being written, for artists to work from before laying pencil to paper. Lee may not've had time to write them, but his brother did.

LARRY LIEBER:

"Stan would give me a plot, usually typed. Just a paragraph or so. 'Thor does this and that,' and then he'd say, 'Now, go home and write me a script.' ...I never worked in what later became known as 'the Marvel style'."

January 28-29, 2008: Larry Lieber interviewed by Danny Fingeroth

"These were all scripts in advance... Jack I always had to send a full script to.

"Let me put it this way: I wouldn't swear to it, but I have no recollection of ever writing a story that had already been penciled. A full script is the only way I know how to write."

1999: Larry Lieber interviewed by Roy Thomas, from *Alter Ego* #2

Of course, the existence of a full script by Lieber, doesn't mean Kirby and Lee don't first have a creative conference, before Stan gives Larry a plot.

Jack Kirby seemingly draws and dialogues *Fantastic Four* #6, based on the overwhelming evidence in Mike Breen's article in *The Jack Kirby Collector* #61. To add a bit of further evidence, check out Kirby's margin notes on *Sgt. Fury*

#13, page 22 (written two years after *FF* #6). Jack clearly writes "GO! GO! GO!", in an amazing coincidence (?) to *FF* #6's distinctive three-panel zoom-in with the Sub-Mariner shouting, "And now the word is... Go! Go! GO!!!"



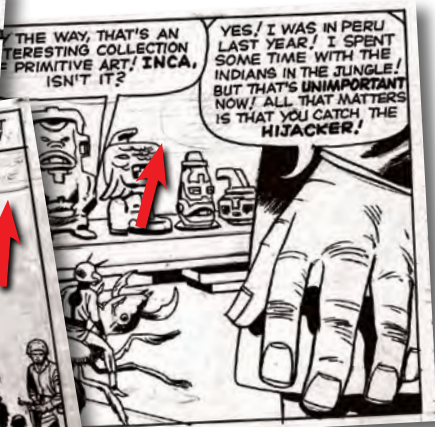
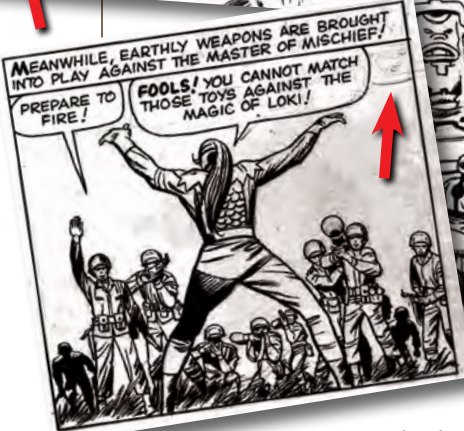




Although Thor possessed the ability to control weather, in seven initial issues (*Journey into Mystery* #83–89), Kirby didn't do much else with this *bona fide* god. That quickly changed after his return to the book in #101.

Looking closely at the original art, you can see vestiges of Kirby's handwriting under the final lettering in the balloons from *Strange Tales* #108 (with Robert Bernstein dialoguing), and *Journey into Mystery* #88 and *Tales to Astonish* #40 (both with Larry Lieber dialogue)—which begs the question: Did Jack simply copy Bernstein's and Lieber's pre-written script onto the artwork (and if so, why?), or did Kirby have a hand in writing the dialogue for these stories?

THESE PAINTS HAVE OTHER SUPERNATURAL POWERS! THEY MAKE AN ARTIST DRAW WITH MANY TIMES HIS NORMAL SPEED!



## MARCH 1962

Kirby draws *Fantastic Four* #7 this month, while Stan Lee is juggling his responsibilities, including finishing up the blurb page from *Amazing Fantasy* #15: “We hate to throw in the towel, but we find that it is simply impossible to produce a mag-

azine like **AMAZING** each and every month, containing five highly original and carefully plotted stories, without the quality eventually beginning to suffer. Rather than risk losing your confidence, we have decided to change **AMAZING** in such a way that it will **STILL** present the finest in fantasy—but in a different way!

“As you can see, we are introducing one of the most unusual new fantasy characters of all time—The **SPIDERMAN**, who will appear every month in **AMAZING**. Perhaps, if your letters request it, we will make his stories even longer, or have **TWO** Spiderman stories per issue.”

*Amazing Fantasy* #15 blurb page written by Stan Lee; lack of hyphens is in original version

Here's one of the earliest examples of Stan's struggle to keep coming up with plots. He's clearly saying it is expedient to only have to come up with one, or at most two, Spider-Man plots per issue, rather than five plots for short fantasy stories. Also, this shows, at the time of its writing at least, the plan is to continue running Spider-Man; Stan's oft-repeated story of “It was the last issue anyway, so we just decided to throw it in” doesn't hold water.

This month, Kirby draws the first Human Torch solo story in *Strange Tales* #101. It's not dialogued by Stan Lee, but instead by his brother Larry Lieber, resulting in major inconsistencies between this strip and the *Fantastic Four* comic. On some of these Torch stories, Kirby's handwriting can be seen in the word balloons, indicating either he was penciling in his own dialogue, or that of Larry Lieber, directly off his full script.

Also in March, the letter column of *Fantastic Four* #6 (with an on-sale date of June 12) states it's being typeset on March 14, 1962, so that dates its production to three months prior to the on-sale date.

In a letter to Jerry Bails, Stan Lee references *Fantastic Four* #7, which Kirby has already delivered the pencil art for: “The next FF yarn in the works is called ‘**PRISONERS OF KURRGO, THE SCOURGE OF PLANET X?**’ which should win a prize as the longest, if not the best title! Can't tell you what it's about because I haven't finished writing it yet. Some fun—still **writing the script**, and the mag was due to go to engraver a week ago.”

March 27, 1962: Stan Lee letter to fan Jerry Bails



In May 2008, an anonymous donor gave the Library of Congress the complete original artwork to *Amazing Fantasy* #15. Although corrected later, throughout the issue, the character's name was originally unhyphenated, just like Kirby's original Silver Spider-based version purported to be. The missing hyphen was standard in most early promos about the character as well.



1963

AFTER A RECORD-BREAKING 1962 OUTPUT BY KIRBY, MARVEL SELLS 22,530,000 COPIES OF ITS COMICS THIS YEAR.

MARTIN GOODMAN CONVINCES HIS NEW DISTRIBUTOR **INDEPENDENT NEWS** TO ALLOW MARVEL TO INCREASE THEIR MONTHLY OUTPUT TO 11 TITLES, INSTEAD OF JUST 8. THIS OPENS UP OPPORTUNITIES FOR KIRBY AND LEE TO BRANCH OUT WITH NEW SUPER-GROUPS--THE **X-MEN**, **AVENGERS**--AND A CHANCE TO FINALLY BRING BACK **CAPTAIN AMERICA**.

## JANUARY 1963

In another sign of how much Stan Lee is relying on his top artists to help steer the line, he extends his comments about Kirby being a *de facto* co-editor to Steve Ditko as well: "We regret that no letters can be answered personally, but we will print as many as possible each issue and you may rest assured that either Stan Lee or Steve Ditko, or both, carefully read each and every letter received here at the Web!"

Amazing Spider-Man #3 letter column, written by Stan Lee

At least one of those artists initially struggles with working via the Marvel Method, instead of from a full script:

**DON HECK:**

"I'd been so used to working from **scripts**, and then Stan said, 'I'm going to give you a **synopsis**.' Well, Jack Kirby was used to something like that because he was also a writer... he did some terrific stuff with all of these different characters, like back when he was doing

**Fighting American** and all the rest of his early stuff, so it was easy for him. For me it was suddenly that someone says, 'You're going to do it!' I said, 'I'll try it, but, I mean, it's your gamble, not mine. I'm going to get paid for this.' Then we started to work out the system, and then after a while Stan Lee used to, like, give you the first three pages, tell you who the character was you

# ALL-OUT ASSAULT

were fighting, and give you the last couple of pages so you'd know how it ended. And in between you'd put about 15 pages of stuff... And at the time, I thought, 'Oh my God! This'll never work!' But then I'd sit down and start to figure different things that these types of characters could do. Then when I went back to working from a **script** years and years later, sometimes I felt like I was a little closed in. I got used to the synopsis.

"Stan started giving me synopses about 1962. It could have been 1963. I don't think he started it with me as early as with some of the others up there. I'm sure Jack was doing stuff from synopsis a lot earlier than that."

1982: Don Heck interviewed by Richard Howell for *Comics Feature* #21

Stan continues to correspond with Jerry Bails, one of the prominent names in fandom: "You're right about Al Hartley's art work not being right for **Thor**. Actually, Al specializes in teen-age strips (he does the **Patsy Walker** mag for us) and simply pinch-hit **Jrny. Into Mystery** because it was an emergency—Jack was busy with an **FF** ish that was late, Joe Sinnott was tied up with another job, etc."



Steve Ditko in the early 1960s.



The Human Torch and Thing have a volatile relationship in *FF Annual* #1, but Lee and Kirby's isn't showing any sign of strain at this point.



Marvel titles in *Fantastic Four*'s letter column, and use the two extra pages in *Spider-Man* for "...longer stories, features, or what-have you! We'll do nothing till we hear from you, so let us know. But, as a special favor, we hope you'll tell us you don't mind."

Amazing Spider-Man #7 letter column, written by Stan Lee

As the month ends, the Lees host a lavish dinner party on June 29, which makes the local society column. Martin Goodman is one of the guests, and Stan is referred to only as a "Writer-Art Director." Instead of mentioning his comics work, the column plugs one of Lee's fumetti joke books.

July 4, 1963: *South Shore Record*, "Roslyn Reports" by Roslyn Davis, shown below

## JULY 1963

You can't win 'em all with fans, as Stan learns: "We recently received a letter from Jerry Bails, one of fandom's most articulate critics. Jerry has high praise for the Avengers, but considers the X-Men a dud, and suggests we discontinue it!"

Fantastic Four #22 letter column, written by Stan Lee

But Lee continues to develop his rapport with them, even at a co-worker's expense: "So the word 'amazing' gives us class, eh, Phil? Smiley and Stevie Ditko will be sorry to hear that! We'll expect him to wear shoes from now on when he visits the office!"

And in response to a reader who says Marvel plays up radiation too much in its stories, Stan replies: "We hope you fans don't make a big thing of this anti-radiation jazz, Kevin! Heck, how would we write comic mag stories without it?"

Amazing Spider-Man #8 letter column, written by Stan Lee

As you'll see later, Kirby will repeatedly mention, in interviews throughout the 1980s and 1990s, how radiation is his inspiration on strips like the *Fantastic Four* and *X-Men*.



Jack's mimeographed cover for the fanzine *Aurora* #4, edited by a young Len Wein. The October 1963 cover date means that Kirby drew this around the time he was drawing Captain America's official return in *Avengers* #4.

## AUGUST 1963

"Wanna hear how names are thought of? We needed a name for the villain of *X-Men* #3, and Stan and Jack were kicking a few around when a boy delivering sandwiches walked in and jokingly said, 'He looks like a big blob! Call 'im The Blob!' We laughed at that for a minute, and then Stan and Jack looked at each other and said, 'Why not?'. So there you have it!"

*X-Men* #3 would've been produced in June, but be shipping in November, the same time this mention would see print. Lee goes on to reveal more about how frantic things are at Marvel: "Can we level with you? We can't tell you what the next *FF* will be because we haven't decided on a plot yet. So we won't say 'Don't miss the greatest, most thrilling, etc. etc.' All we'll say is—we've got to dream up a story in the next couple of days, and have it drawn pronto if we wanna make our deadline!"

Fantastic Four #23 letter column, written by Stan Lee

A reader writes to complain about Ditko's art: "He would be a great artist if he could only learn to draw. All of his characters have square heads and bodies. The only decent looking one is the costumed Spider-Man. Even though Ditko's work isn't the best I've seen, I still think your mag is the greatest." Stan replies: "Y'know something? There may not be another issue of Spiderman! We won't have time to produce it—we'll be too busy burning all these letter pages before Steve can read them! Anyway, what's wrong with a square head and body? You should see ours!"

While this makes for an entertaining letter column, perhaps it isn't wise to run it in the first place, as it could easily be taken as insulting by Ditko, who by Stan's own admission reads the letters from fans. When another reader compliments Ditko's art, Stan's

flippant reply is, "Are we glad to see your letter! Steve was just about to send away for a mail-order course in drawing!"

Amazing Spider-Man #9 letter column, written by Stan Lee

And in another indicator of the hectic pace of production at Marvel, Lee's next-issue blurb states: "Smiling Stevey Ditko doesn't want us to tell you what the next Spiderman will be about! He thinks you'll get more of a kick out of it if you're surprised. (If you ask us, he and Stan just haven't written it yet!)"

## SEPTEMBER 1963

It's another big month, as Jack draws *Avengers* #4, featuring the real return of Captain America. This is just a month after Cap's tryout in *Strange Tales* #114 goes on sale, but it does time out such that initial sales figures and letters would've been received, before

Kirby puts pencil to paper on Cap's revival.

There's still more indications that it's an uphill battle staying ahead of deadlines on *Spider-Man*, as Stan states, "While we haven't worked out all the details of the plot yet, our next issue will shed further light on the strange secret of Betty Brant's past."

Amazing Spider-Man #10 letter column, written by Stan Lee

Plenty of Splash but No Dunking ... A gay poolside party and buffet supper Saturday evening was hosted by Writer-Art Director Stan Lee (Lieber) and his beauteous British-born wife, Joan, at their 125 year old Colonial home on Richards Lane - believed to be the oldest in Hewlett Harbor - formerly the gate house on the Auerbach estate, later the Seawane Club. Gotham Stockbroker Barney Strauss and his wife, Joan, were guests of honor.

Always decorative Mrs. Lieber, her blond tresses piled high, received in a long black and white checked gingham deshabille du soir - caught at the waist with a cluster of daisies.

The interesting, attractive and talented company included David Mansur, painter here from Colombia, S.A. on a Guggenheim Fellowship; Magazine Publisher Martin Goodman and his wife, Jean; Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bald (he's the artist for the Dr. Kildare Comic Strip); TV Commercial Announcers Kay Dowd and Stanley Sawyer, Sheila Sawyer; Bob Goodkind and his beautiful Edith, in a new pink, blue and yellow Empire styled long cotton frock with shoe string shoulder straps; Alex and Sylvian Rittmaster, Dick and Judith Goodkind, Herbert and Roz Fisher, Architect Sam Paul and his wife, Gladys, back from Europe, where they collected data for a book on European architecture he is writing; Gerry and Jean Iason, Ted and Lucille Tolces, Lee and Marge Ross, Don and Vivian Florence, Murray and Dorothy Platt, Lee and Marge Ross, the Stanley Elkins, the Irwin Jacksons, Attorney Jerry Perlis and his talented wife, Blanche, whose decorating skills are enhancing many New York apartments these days.

By the way, Stan Lee's second book of hilarious captions "More, You Don't Say", has just been published.



JOAN LIEBER



1964

THIS YEAR, MARVEL SELLS 27,709,000 COPIES OF ITS COMICS, WITH THE EXPECTATION OF 32,000,000 FOR 1965, SHOWING A NEARLY 50% INCREASE IN 3 YEARS.

102 KIRBY COVERS ARE PUBLISHED IN 1964 (THE MOST IN A SINGLE YEAR).

IN EARLY 1964, FAN LEN WEIN CONDUCTS THE EARLIEST KNOWN MARVEL-ERA INTERVIEW WITH KIRBY FOR HIS FANZINE, *MASQUERADER* #6, BUT SADLY, THERE'S NOTHING IN IT ABOUT KIRBY'S WORK FOR MARVEL COMICS.

# THE BUILD-UP



Ditko contributed the cover art for Len Wein's mimeographed 1964 fanzine *Aurora* #5.

cringe, practically cry—when the shelves got too crowded with artwork and scripts... we would just throw them out. I mean, the artwork was considered like, who needed it anymore? The artists didn't ask for it back. It was like throwing out a script...

We threw out tons of artwork.

There were all these things about all the Kirby art that people thought Marvel was holding onto, but we just used to toss it. And feel good there was a clean shelf to fill up again."

2011: Flo Steinberg interview with Dewey Cassell

At some point in 1964, Stan Lee sits down for an interview with fans, including inker Vince Colletta's son. The reference to Captain America getting his own title could indicate this takes place prior to August, when *Tales of Suspense* #59 goes on sale (if Lee takes this question to mean a literal standalone title, vs. Cap's shorter stores in *ToS*), but I'm dating it here since it likely wouldn't have taken that long for this interview to see print.

Q: Are you planning to give Captain America his own mag?

LEE: There is only one thing stopping us. Jack [Kirby] doesn't have the time to draw it, and I don't have the time to write it. But, sooner or later, whether it be a year from now, or ten years from now, we will find the time to do it!

It's a funny thing with Jack's artwork. You never know just how good Jack really is. If he gets a good inker, he looks good. If he gets a bad inker, he looks bad. But Jack Kirby's penciling is so magnificent—no inker can really do it justice!

Q: Do you save any of your original manuscripts?

LEE: As a matter of fact, there really are no manuscripts to save! The way I do it now, I write the story in synopsis form, and then give it to the artist. He pencils the drawings, and I get it back again. Then, I write the words above the panels, and these are eventually lettered in. So, we work so fast that there almost aren't any real manuscripts.

Q: What gives you ideas for stories?

LEE: Actually, there is very little inspiration involved. You just sit down and figure it out. Do I need a new villain? What haven't I used before? What do the readers like?

Q: What happens to the original artwork after a comic is finished?

LEE: We send it to a warehouse, and then it just sits there.

Crusader #1 interview with Stan Lee, by David Castromuovo, Peter Ricciardi, and Frank Colletta (published Dec. 1964-Jan. 1965)

Flo Steinberg's account of the disposition of original art pages at least partially confirms this last statement:

FLO STEINBERG:

"The books came out, and, in fact, sometimes—this makes people



Jack's margin notes are all over Dr. Doom's origin in *Fantastic Four Annual* #2.





hairdo again."

KIRBY: "What am I supposed to do, be a hair-dresser? Next time, I'll draw her bald-headed."

LEE: "Boy, I'm glad we caught you when you were in a good mood... Hey, what's all that commotion out there, Sol?"

SOL BRODSKY: "Why, it's shy Steve Ditko. He heard you're making a record, and he's got mic fright. Whoops, there he goes!"

LEE: "Out the window again? Y'know, I'm beginning to think he is Spider-Man."

This fall, the Merry Marvel Marching Society fan club is launched. No compensation goes to the comics creators, and the club eventually boasts 50,000 members, all paying \$1 each to receive the membership kit. Stan's secretary Flo Steinberg has to come into work on weekends to handle the volume of mail from it.

FLO STEINBERG:

"Nobody expected the fan-club to be so big. There were thousands of letters and dollar bills flying around all over the place. We were throwing them at each other."

1991: *Marvel: Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics* by Les Daniels



## SEPTEMBER 1964

"...one of the guys in the bullpen gave Stan an idea for a new D.D. story. The plot is so complicated, so off-beat, so utterly impossible to make any sense out of, that Stan immediately decided to adapt it for a script! ...Don't miss D.D. #7!"

Daredevil #6 letter column, written by Stan Lee

Is this "guy" Wally Wood? Issue #7 is the remarkable Sub-Mariner vs. Daredevil issue, which Wood illustrated.

"...we thought everybody knew that jolly Jack Kirby draws practically all our covers... as for the inking, whichever guy in the bullpen grabs the cover first, inks it!"

Avengers #13 letter column, written by Stan Lee

"As for signing the covers, we don't have room for all the signatures we'd usually need! (Like: Layout by Stan Lee. Penciled by Jack Kirby. Inked by Chic Stone. Revisions by Sol Brodsky. Lettering by Artie Simek. Coloring by Stan Gee.—get the idea?)"

Tales of Suspense #65 letter column, written by Stan Lee

This response implies that Lee usually does all the cover layouts, and Kirby only pencils what he is told to draw. It's certainly possible, even likely, that Stan and Jack routinely discussed what would be depicted on Marvel's covers, as Stan's role as editor is to make sure they are commercial and salable. But it's also not a stretch to think that any artist who reads that term "layout" will immediately think it implies Stan is giving Jack a literal rough sketch to work by, thereby lessening the level of credit Kirby deserves. To date, I'm not aware of any such sketches that exist, and Jack may well have viewed this as Stan trying to grab credit where he



This page from *Avengers* #12 shows Don Heck's own margin notes for Stan Lee to use when dialoguing the issue.



1965

IN REACTION TO NEW PUBLISHERS JUMPING ON MARVEL'S **SUPER-HERO BANDWAGON**--AND THE UPCOMING **BATMAN** TV SHOW--GOODMAN TELLS LEE TO COME UP WITH NEW BOOKS, TO KEEP FROM GETTING CROWDED OFF NEWSSTANDS.

LEE AND KIRBY DEVELOP THE **INHUMANS** AND **BLACK PANTHER** (ORIGINALLY NAMED **COAL TIGER** BY KIRBY), BOTH OF WHICH FEATURE A CHARACTER VISUALLY SIMILAR TO **BATMAN**. BUT DC CONTROLS MARVEL'S DISTRIBUTION, AND WON'T ALLOW ANY NEW BOOKS TO BE ADDED.

# COLLABORATIONS' END

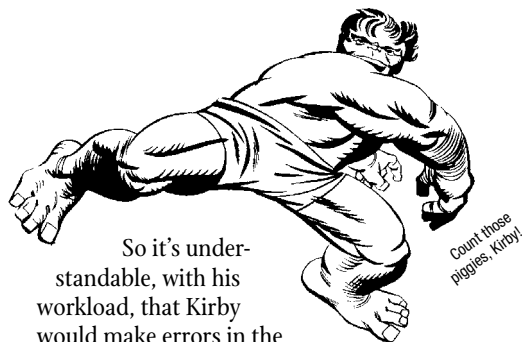
## JANUARY 1965



Kirby's creative influence continues to be felt across the line, even on books he isn't drawing. The cover of *Avengers* #19 features a standalone Kirby image of the new character The Swordsman, surrounded by after-the-fact circles with Don Heck-drawn heads of the Avengers; remove those Heck heads, and I'm convinced this is Jack's concept sketch of the character; since Kirby's original art is altered, it would've been done prior to the character's head-gear being changed for the story.

Another such example of Kirby influencing other books is related by Lee: "Wanna know how Stiltman turned out to be the villain he is? When we first kicked the idea around in the bullpen, wistful Wally [Wood] started sketching a fella wearing eight-foot tall stilts. Then, smilin' Stan came over to kibitz and suggested making his stilts at least 15 feet high! By the time we were done, jolly Jack Kirby cinched the whole thing by saying: 'Next thing we know, you jokers will have him high-stepping over a skyscraper!' Well, that did it!"

*Daredevil* #8 letter column, written by Stan Lee



So it's understandable, with his workload, that Kirby would make errors in the crunch of deadlines, as Lee pointed out to fans:

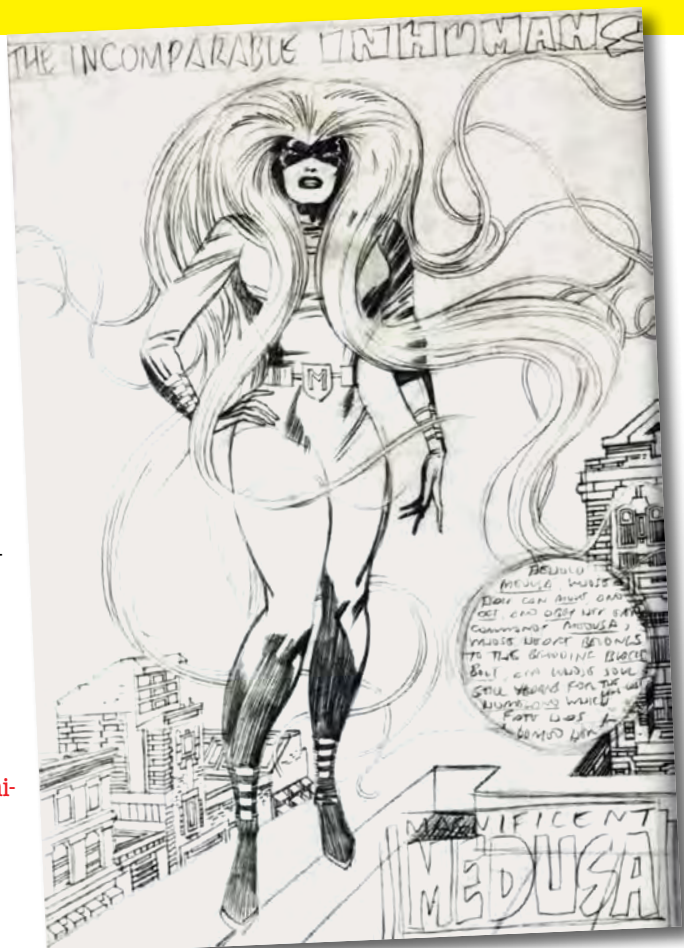
"Wanna know a secret? (Don't tell Jack we told you!) We were all set to send this month's strips to the engraver when we noticed something. Our green-skinned glamour-puss had only four fingers and toes! Patiently, calmly, lovingly, we tried to explain to jellyhead Jack that it's the Thing who has four digits—ol' Hulky has five! But, by that time, his baby blues were concentrating on the next F.F. mag, and we had lost him again! But don't worry... we fixed it in time!"

*Tales of Suspense* #69 letter column, written by Stan Lee

Kirby made this same mistake earlier on *Avengers* #2, shown above.

Stan's own, somewhat exaggerated account of the creation process reflects a little of what his experience must be like at the Marvel offices: "Producing these stories is a pretty lonely business—we lock ourselves up in a quiet room, writing and drawing furiously, hoping to get as much work done as possible before the phone rings, or our bullpen buddies start kibitzing."

In response to a letter writer suggesting Marvel bring back the Golden Age hero The Destroyer, Lee responds: "As for the Destroyer, he was a hero whom we featured so many



Were the Inhumans pin-ups from *Fantastic Four Annual* #5, repurposed concept drawings, used to present to Martin Goodman when the characters were being considered for their own series?



*Avengers* #19; the Swordsman is just one of many characters Kirby is contributing to books he isn't penciling.



analysis of Marvel Comics titled “Critical analysis of contemporary pop art, or hey, there’s a whole bunch of stuff about comic books,” written by “Jolly Bob” Wieder.

A Marvel reader in *Thor* #127’s letter column says they should tell more about the next issue at the end of each issue. Lee’s reply gives some insight into his plotting with Kirby: “We would, Thomas, we would—honest—if we ever knew any more about it ourselves! Usually, at the time one ish goes to bed, Stan and Jack have no more idea of what’s coming next than you do! So they make sort-of a game out of it—they pick a title out of thin air and then try to dream up a story to fit it! We’ll admit it’s a nutty way to do things, but then, this is Marvel, n’est-ce pas?”

Letter column for *Thor* #127 written by Stan Lee

While Stan has no idea what’s next, Jack is doing most of the plotting by this point, and knows full-well where he is heading in this epic story arc that begins in *Thor* #124 with the introduction of Hercules, and ends with the battle against Pluto in the Underworld in #130. This storyline marks a major turning point in *Thor*, away from the more mundane Earth-based stories with Don Blake, and toward more epic, cosmic sagas as Jack assumes near-total control of the creative direction of the strip.

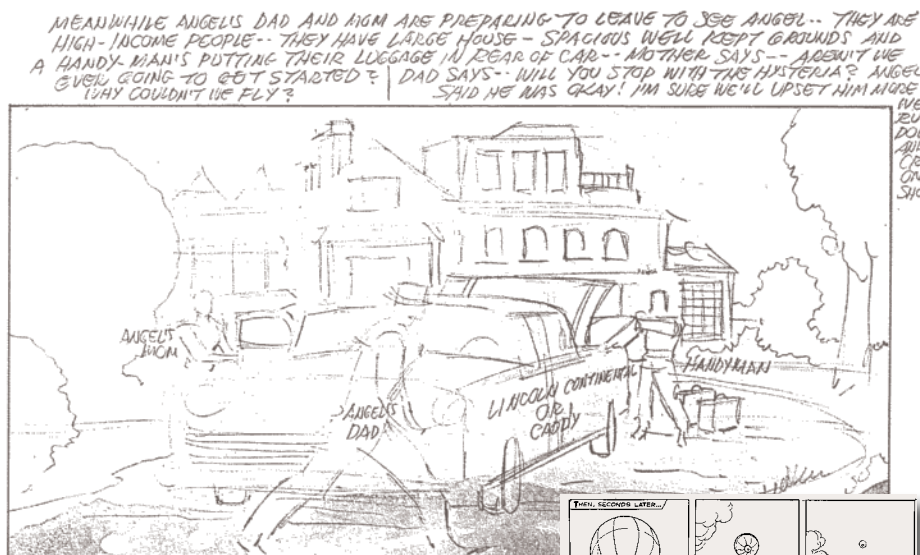
Meanwhile, Kirby is drawing *Fantastic Four* #52, featuring the debut of the Black Panther, revised from his original Coal Tiger concept drawing:

[1986] “I got to hemming and hawing—‘You know, there’s never been a black man in comics.’ And I brought in a picture of this costumed guy which was later modified so he could have a lot more movement. Actually, at first he was a guy with a cape, and all I did was take the cape off and there he was in fighting stance, unencumbered. The Black Panther came in, and of course we got a new audience! We got the audience we should’ve gotten in the first place.”

1986: *Comics Interview* #41 interview, conducted by Mark Borax



Kirby's original Black Panther concept (named “Coal Tiger”), and an unused first cover for his debut in *Fantastic Four* #52.



The top row of page 19 of *X-Men* #17 was pasted over with redrawn art. Shown here are Jack’s unused pencil layouts and margin notes that remain under the paste-up.

[1970] “There was no pressure [to add a black character]. I thought it was time to do it. I found that there was a lack in myself. I found that I, myself, had not been doing it, and I felt it was my responsibility to do it, and I did it, because I’d want it done for me. It was as simple as that. And it’s going to remain that way, as far as I’m concerned.”

August 1–3, 1970: San Diego’s Golden State Comic Con (San Diego, California)

[1970] “I made up the name Black Panther before I was conscious that there is a militant group called the Black Panthers.

And I didn’t want to make it seem that we were espousing any particular cause. And because of that we’re not able to push the Panther as much, although we’re still using him.”

Jan.-Feb. 1970: Stan Lee interviewed by Mike Bourne for *Changes* magazine (published April 15, 1970)

But as major of an event as this will turn out to be, events are shaping up behind-the-scenes at Marvel that will create one of the most dramatic changes of the 1960s.

“All we know about next month’s D.D. is that it’ll co-star your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man! We don’t know how, where, or even why—we haven’t drawn it, written it, or even plotted it out yet!”

Daredevil #15 letter column, written by Stan Lee

By guest-starring Spidey with Daredevil, drawn by John Romita, is Stan already anticipating Ditko’s departure from Marvel—or planning to take the strip away from him and give it to Romita?

JOHN ROMITA:

“We would have a verbal plot together. First it was two or three hours, then it was an hour.



considered the writer? You can argue the point, Steve argued that it wasn't. And because of his new philosophy or social order, he felt it was criminal for someone to take credit for something he didn't do. That's what led to the break-up with Marvel and Steve Ditko."

2000: Dick Giordano interviewed in *Comic Book Artist* #9 by Jon B. Cooke

**BOB BEERBOHM:**

"Back in early 1969, my friend Steve Johnson and I called up Steve Ditko on the phone... and he tells us a tale of WHY he left Marvel. He put it forth plain and simple. He had been promised royalties if/when Spider-Man took off, which it did. Martin Goodman made promises of royalty sharing through Stan Lee—the latter acting as conduit for his boss."

Bob Beerbohm, Aug. 31, 2011 on the *Comics Journal* website

Beerbohm's recollection includes a fascinating tidbit, that goes directly to how Kirby is feeling during this period: "...during a [1977 or 1978 San Diego Comic-Con]... during the course of this dinner... I first asked Jack, along with Roz, about Ditko's aforementioned claim regarding 'royalty' concepts... [and] that Ditko had tried to get Kirby to walk at the same time.

"Jack corroborated... Initially agreeing to walk, then backing out at the last moment. So did Roz. The thought pattern as envisioned by the two which Ditko had presented to them, was paralyzing Marvel so Goodman would finally listen.

"At first Kirby told Ditko 'yes' he would, then backed out at the last sec. Jack wanted to, but felt he could not as he had kids to worry about."

Bob Beerbohm, Feb. 11, 2012 on the *Kirby Museum* website

Ditko himself would remain mum on the exact reason until fifty years later, and Giordano's account is actually pretty accurate: [2015] "Why should I continue to do all these monthly issues, original story ideas, material, for a man who is too scared, too angry over something, to even see, talk to me? ...My next visit to Marvel, I told Sol I was quitting Marvel. Sol told Stan. The only person who had the right to know why I was quitting refused to come out of his office or to call me in. Stan refused to know why."

Sept. 2015: *The Four-Page Series* #9, Essay #45: "Why I Quit S-M, Marvel" by Steve Ditko, published by Robin Snyder

## DECEMBER 1965

This month, Lee uncharacteristically invites Kirby to join him to be interviewed for the *New York Herald Tribune*—no doubt jumping on the media bandwagon started by the *National Observer* article. In it, Stan comments to interviewer Nat Freedland about Federico Fellini returning "in January." The inked art that accompanies the article is from the cover of *Fantastic Four* #49, and the page mentioned in the first paragraph is from *Fantastic Four* #50, which would be on newsstands February 10, 1966, and is in final production in December. Based on the anecdotal evidence, I'm confident this interview takes place in December, after Ditko's resignation. The plotting conference at the end of this article, such as it is, appears to be for *FF* #55, an issue just after the most prolific period of new character creation on the series.

**STEVE SHERMAN:**

"Jack told me the details of that famous interview with Nat Freedland. Jack said that Stan basically put on a show. As Jack said, 'Stanley was jumping on the desk, waving his arms like a crazy man. I just sat there on the couch and watched him. It was nutty. When it was over, I said a few words and went back to work. The article comes out and the guy writes what an amazing writer Stanley is. Who could work like that? By the time he was through jumping around, I had three pages done'."

February 25, 2015: Steve Sherman, by e-mail

This supposed *Fantastic Four* #55 plot conference has Lee mentioning Dr. Doom has caught the *FF* while the Thing is battling the Silver Surfer. However, in the published *FF* #55, Dr. Doom is nowhere to be found, and doesn't actually show up for two more issues (Klaw is the villain in #56, making an entire other episode before Dr. Doom appears). So this casts some doubt as to whether this is an accurate representation of a plot conference (if so, Stan skipped an entire issue's plot, and Kirby stretched a few sentences from Stan into *FF* #55–60, and tossed in the Klaw issue and subplots himself).

In the *New York Herald Tribune* interview, Lee says: "I don't plot Spider-Man any more. Steve





1966

ON JANUARY 12, THE FIRST EPISODE OF THE ADAM WEST *BATMAN TV SERIES* WILL AIR, ROUGHLY THE SAME DAY *FANTASTIC FOUR* #49 GOES ON SALE.

GARY FRIEDRICH AND DENNY O'NEIL FIRST BEGIN WORKING FOR MARVEL COMICS THIS YEAR, SOON TO BE FOLLOWED BY ARCHIE GOODWIN. AND THROUGHOUT 1966, MARVEL'S SALES CONTINUE TO INCREASE, CLIMBING TO 33 MILLION COPIES SOLD.

# RAGNAROK



Publicity shot similar to Kirby's on the previous page. It matches a later 1966 photo in this chapter, so all three may've been done for upcoming articles in *Esquire* or the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Either way, it confirms Lee was including Kirby in Marvel's publicity in 1966.

authenticity of the FF #1 synopsis, there's simply no hard evidence to support this theory.

ROZ KIRBY:

"I'm not gonna take anything away from Stan. He was a talented man. He did well with the books, with putting in the words and things. He was always very friendly with us... I think we went to Stan's house once. We met Stan's wife Joan a couple of times. She was a very sweet lady. She didn't get mixed up with the comics too much. She didn't go to the conventions like I did."

December 12, 1995: Roz Kirby interview conducted by John Morrow for *Jack Kirby Collector* #10

JOAN LEE:

"Roz was the perfect mate for Jack; protective, caring, always at his side. I couldn't imagine him being married to any other woman. The rift between Stan and Jack was so incredible because they started with such an exciting thing.

"They had the first big write-up in the magazine section of the *New York Herald Tribune*. The reporter wrote something like, 'Stan came into the room—this slim, Rex Harrison look-alike with blah, blah, blah, and Jack Kirby was a roly-poly man who looked like he wore a girdle.' When Roz and Jack read that the next morning they thought Stan had given him that, but of course it had nothing to do with Stan—nothing at all, but their hurt must have been intense. I believe that's when that rift first started. Roz never got over it, until the very end when we talked.

"It was so horrendous of that man to write such a thing, but none of us had a chance to read it beforehand. I was always amazed the newspaper editor allowed such a cruel and unfair comment to appear. I think that article that put Jack Kirby down bothered Stan more than anything ever written or said about Stan."

Circa 2001: Joan Lee interview conducted by Blake Bell for *I Have To Live With This Guy!*

From this point-on, Lee seems much more concerned with giving Kirby credit in public appearances and interviews, now that Jack

This year begins an era when Lee's assistants may've occasionally been writing some of the letters page responses and Bullpen Bulletins, to lighten his editorial workload. Since Roy Thomas confirms that Lee continues actively doing much of the editorial work through 1970—and at the very least will read, edit, and approve it—I'm still attributing these quotes to Stan, as the overseeing "voice" of Marvel Comics in the 1960s.

By early this year, Marvel's presence in the media has grown tremendously. According to the Bullpen Bulletins page in *Thor* #130 (which Lee would've written in February), Tom Dunn of CBS News and Mike Wallace of CBS Radio have recently interviewed Stan. Also, more than a hundred newspapers will have run articles on Marvel, including the *Chicago Daily News*, the *Akron Beacon Journal*, the *Topeka State Journal*, the *Altoona Mirror*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, the *Beckley Post-Herald and Register*, *Radio-Television Daily*, and the *New York Post*. While many are simply re-running late 1965's syndicated article, it's still an impressive amount of coverage.

In one such article, reflecting back on the early days of 1960s Marvel, Stan Lee quips what is becoming his trademark recollection: "I was bored with writing the same sort of thing for over 20 years, and I decided to write the kind of story I would like to read. I figured that today's kids were more sophisticated and would like a more sophisticated and offbeat type of story."

1966: *Cleveland Press* article by Don Thompson

## TURNING POINT!

### JANUARY 1966

On January 9, the *New York Herald Tribune* article appears, causing a major rift in the Kirby/Lee relationship. Stan Lee receives an angry phone call this morning from Jack's wife Roz Kirby, livid about her husband's portrayal in the article. Every little jab or slight, real or perceived, up to this point could've played a role in this reaction. Some have even speculated that Martin Goodman may have influenced the reporter to shade the article so Lee, his relative and company employee, comes out looking like the sole creator of the Marvel Universe, thereby helping Goodman's chances of selling his company—but as in questioning the





York Herald Tribune article. Also, Donruss' *Marvel Super-Heroes* set of 66 trading cards is released, using Kirby art. The artists are not paid for either the paperbacks or bubble gum cards. So it's not surprising that Jack Kirby would draw his first *New Gods* concepts at this point, but not show them to Marvel.

At this juncture, Kirby also does his final layouts for another artist—in this case, for his friend Jim Steranko, for the "S.H.I.E.L.D." strip in *Strange Tales* #153.

## JULY 1966

This month, as part of his effort to secure his company for a possible sale, Martin Goodman offers Myron Fass \$6,000 for the copyright on his Captain Marvel character, but Fass refuses.



Between Joe Simon's reputation for hits, and Harvey's strong distribution, Goodman was worried about the "Harvey Thriller" line crowding them off newsstands.

By this time, the word is out that Joe Simon is developing a line of super-heroes for Harvey Comics to publish, to directly compete with Marvel. On July 12, to help his chances of selling the company and to fight Joe Simon's Captain America lawsuit, Goodman convinces Kirby to sign a legal statement to support Marvel's case, in return for a payment matching whatever Simon will eventually get from his suit. Kirby's statement says:

"I do not have any of my sketches of the original Captain America, Bucky and other illustrations because I never took them from the office. I felt whatever I did for Timely belonged to Timely as was the practice in those days. When I left Timely, all of my work was left with them."

On July 23, Jack Kirby gives the keynote speech at the New York Comicon, offering some insight into his work: "I'll make The Thing tragic and I'll make The Hulk kind of frustrated because he is a hulk and can't be anything else, and it kind of keeps the story pot boiling. So there, actually, is the core of what keeps the artist going, and I think that's what keeps the writer going too because the writer and the artist and the editors are men who can see things in a wry or a dry manner.

"Recently, we tried to raise the level of the story to where the format of the story becomes a little more complex and science-fiction and we find that too

much food for thought leaves you static on one particular page, and that's not as satisfying as running through the entire magazine without being able to grasp the story in its entirety. So experimenting in this fashion, we find that there are limits there and so we simplify the stories more, and we've simplified the gadgets a little more and we've given them more intricate designs, but we've given it to you so it's palatable and it's entertaining and you would still like us."

## AUGUST 1966

Kirby signs an amended affidavit for Goodman's legal statement on August 17, while Joe Simon, attempting to ride the wave of comic book popularity, releases *Fighting American* #1 and *The Spirit* #1 at Harvey Comics. Both feature reprints and new material.

Simon also oversees the first of the Harvey Thriller line of super-hero comics.

Marvel's popularity is even more evident this month as *Fantastic Four* #55 is published, which includes Marvel T-shirt and poster ads, using Kirby art to sell merchandise (without paying the artist for its use).

As Stan writes the Bullpen Bulletins page that will appear in *Fantastic Four* #59, he mentions Jack's July 1966 NY Comicon appearance and speech in glowing terms. Kirby returns the favor, writing an essay which would be published in the Fall: "While working on Captain America for Marvel Comics in the

dawning 'forties,' I was producing at a furious rate. I remember slowing down only once, when a young rascal, peering into my cubicle, suggested that I show more of Cap's home life, his aged, kindly mother, his wicked Aunt Agatha, and the stark, heart-rending background of Cap's early years. 'Begone!' I cried, sorely put to drubbing him. 'Take off and become an editor or something!' Well, by golly, he did. But before he got the name Stan Lee on his office door, I was

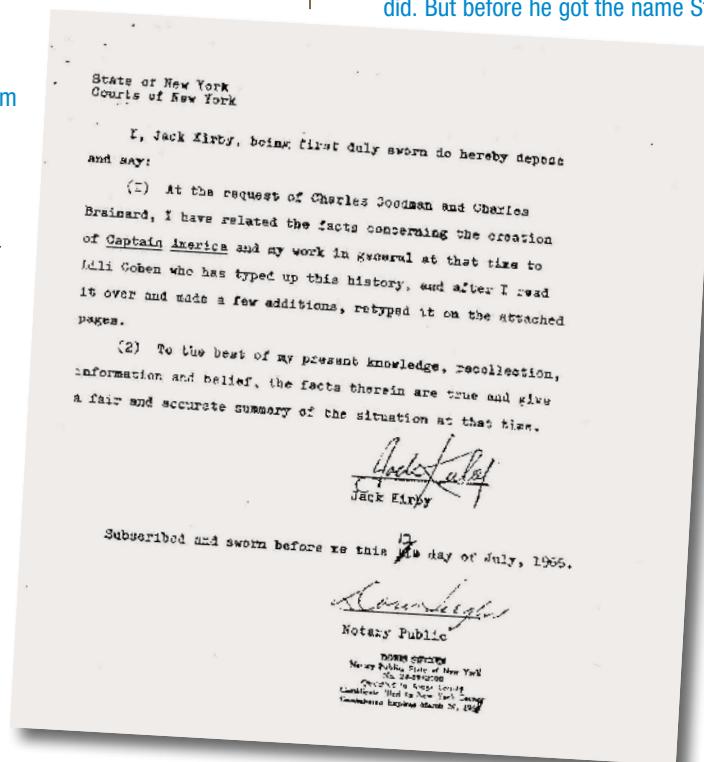
busily engaged elsewhere with the Boy Commandos, Newsboy Legion, Sandman, Manhunter, and other features.

"Returning to Marvel Comics was like re-entering the Halls of Ivy. In charge of comics was that young rascal, and now, a bit of an older rascal, Stan Lee. We now share ideas, laughs, and stubby cigars."

1966: *The Merry Marvel Messenger* #1

## SEPTEMBER 1966

On September 1, *The Marvel Super Heroes* cartoon show debuts on TV, using actual art from comics, with no payment to the artists. Robert Lawrence of Gantray-Lawrence, which produces the show, accompanies Stan Lee on





1967

## AFTERMATH

WBAT RADIO IN NEW YORK PRODUCES, WITH STAN LEE'S APPROVAL, A *DR. STRANGE* RADIO DRAMA. *PERFECT FILM AND CHEMICAL* IS FORMED AND SETS ITS SIGHTS ON BUYING *MARVEL COMICS*. BUT *JOE SIMON* FILES A NEW LAWSUIT FOR THE RIGHT TO RENEW THE *CAPTAIN AMERICA* COPYRIGHT, WHICH COULD AFFECT ANY DEAL. *KINNEY NATIONAL CO.* BUYS *DC COMICS*, AND *CARMINE INFANTINO* IS APPOINTED ART DIRECTOR. *JACK SCHIFF* RETIRES, OPENING THE DOOR FOR A POSSIBLE *KIRBY* RETURN.

## JANUARY 1967

Future movie critic Roger Ebert pens an article titled "New Comic Book Craze: A Super Hero With Problems?" for the *Chicago Sun-Times Special* magazine, and it is syndicated in papers across the United States, giving Lee an ever-widening scope of influence: "For years, we had been producing comics for kids, because they were supposed to be the market. One day, out of sheer boredom, we said—let's do something we would like. So we tried to get rid of the old clichés. Comics were too predictable. Why not accept

the premise that the super-hero has his superpower, and then keep everything else as realistic as possible? If I were Spider-Man, for example, wouldn't I still have romantic problems, financial problems, sinus attacks, and fits of insecurity? Wouldn't I be a little embarrassed about appearing in public in a costume? We decided to let our super-heroes live in the real world.

"What we were doing was creating fairy tales for adults. I think we were responsible for the Pop Art bit. College students started reading our books back in 1961, and eventually the word got around that comic books were popular again. But the average newspaper feature writer didn't read the new comic books, and so what books did he think of? *Batman* and *Superman*. But only kids read *Batman* and *Superman*. Marvels are for intelligent people."

January 7, 1967: *Express and News* (San Antonio, TX)

In the article, Ebert mentions that Stan "and his artist" created the FF, meaning either Ebert knows his Marvel history well, or Lee makes a point of mentioning Kirby while being interviewed, and Roger (or an editor) neglects to name-drop Kirby.

At this same time, Lee writes his "Stan's Soapbox" column for July 1967 cover-date releases, and includes a letter by future Kirby assistant Mark Evanier, who gives ranks to members of the MMMS.

## TURNING POINT!

## FEBRUARY 1967

This is the point where Jack Kirby draws *Fantastic Four* #67—the final issue of the "Him" storyline, where Stan changes the direction Jack is heading with the plot. Kirby, inspired by episodes of the *Outer Limits* television series and the 1955 film *Forbidden Planet*, is giving his take on Ayn Rand's school of Objectivist thought—something Steve Ditko ascribes to. But Lee turns it into something different.

MIKE GARTLAND:

"The story that Jack wanted: 'Create a superior human and he just might find you inferior enough to get rid of,' became through Lee another 'bad guys try to take over world and get their comeup-



Detail from the final page of *Fantastic Four* #67. The look of the "Him" character is inspired by a race of beings called "Metrons" (a name Kirby will use later at DC Comics) from the *Star Trek* episode "Arena" [see photo at top].

© Paramount

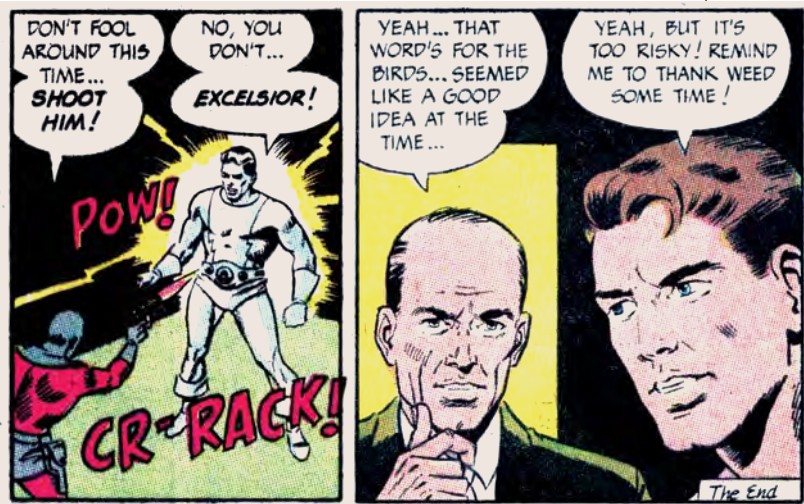


Splash page from *Fantastic Four* #66, the start of the "Him" saga.



is superior, he knows that Marvel has quite a number of readers, and if we were to tell him that we are humble and that we're not quite number one, he won't believe it. He really will not believe it."

March 3, 1967: "Will Success Spoil Spider-Man," on New York's WBAI-FM radio, transcribed in *The Stan Lee Universe*, 2011.



Shortly after this interview, on March 15, *Dynamo* #4 goes on sale, containing the story "The Secret Word Is..." from Tower Comics. This story is credited as script by Ralph Reese, pencils by Joe Orlando, and inks by Wally Wood and Dan Adkins, but Wood oversees the production of all of Tower's Thunder Agents material. In this story, Dynamo's power belt is modified so that, instead of having to manually switch it on and off, he can control it by saying the word "Excelsior." After the voice control of his belt causes problems, the story ends with the "Excelsior" trigger being deactivated, and Dynamo's boss proclaiming, "That word's for the birds..."

"Excelsior" is the motto of the state of New York (adopted in 1901), and it was also used as a sign-off by humorist Jean Shepherd (known to today's audiences as the writer and narrator of the holiday film *A Christmas Story*), on his radio show on station WOR in New York, which ran from 1955–1977.

## APRIL 1967

As Kirby draws *Thor* #145 this month, he includes the final "Tales of Asgard" back-up, titled "The End." This represents, for all practical purposes, the end of Kirby contributing new characters and concepts to Marvel, with the artist still producing stellar artwork and engaging plots, but instead stockpiling possible new properties for use at a later date—and for a more generous publisher.

Meanwhile, Stan Lee continues his college speaking tour on April 21 with an event titled "Stan Lee—The Legend in His Own Time":

The editor of Marvel comics, will hold forth in the Cloister Club of Ida Noyes

Hall, University of Chicago, at 4pm Thursday. General admission, 50 cents.

April 21, 1967: *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL) event listing

## MAY 1967

On May 7, Lee (dubbed "creator of the Marvel Comics Group") participates on a televised roundtable discussion titled "The World of the Comic-Strip Hero." The discussion centers around how readers identify with super-heroes and anti-heroes, and includes Milton Caniff (creator of *Terry and the Pirates* and *Steve Canyon*) and Marshall Stross, press director of the Lutheran Church in America.

Sunday, May 7, 1967 TV listing, *The Billings Gazette* (Billings, MT), Channel 2, 11am, color. TV show: *Directions*.

While Stan is out promoting Marvel Comics, Jack is drawing *Thor* #146, with the new Inhumans back-ups replacing "Tales of Asgard." These are rumored to be previously-created, unpublished stories meant for the denied Marvel expansion back in early 1965, but Mark Evanier feels they were created specifically to replace "Tales of Asgard."

This is the first *Thor* issue to switch to the smaller 10" x 15" art size (vs. the older "large art" size of 12" x 18"). On the original art for the *Thor* splash page, Marvel's production manager Sol Brodsky writes this note: "Widen page proportionately to fit—HE DID IT AGAIN!". Jack is apparently having trouble adjusting to the new page proportions, so staffers have to add 3/16" of extra art to the right side of the page.

## JUNE 1967

On June 12, Stan Lee appears on television's *The Mike Douglas Show*. Per Joe Simon's book *The Comic Book Makers*, Adam West is the lead guest, and Stan Lee makes an appearance dressed as Captain America.

Back at the Marvel offices, while writing the Bullpen Bulletins page that would appear in *Fantastic Four* #69, Stan includes a note wishing Jack and Roz Kirby a happy 25th wedding anniversary. He also gives a reason for the change in *Thor* back-ups: "We've plum run out of Tales of Asgard (in *Thor*, natch!) so we're replacing that time-honored feature with another little doozy that'll really rock the roost! Starting now—we're highlighting a 5-page featurette starring—hold on, now—none other than the Incomparable INHUMANS!"

Surely Kirby doesn't "run out" of "Tales of Asgard" ideas. And why aren't those Inhumans stories instead considered for a spot in one of Marvel's "split" books like *Tales to Astonish* first, where they'd get a cover feature?



Kirby and Lee both spoke at the 1967 New York Comicon. Photos by Mark Hanerfeld and Andy Yancus.



1968

MARVEL IS SELLING SOMEWHERE BETWEEN 50-60 MILLION COPIES THIS YEAR. THE FINAL EPISODE OF THE BATMAN TV SERIES AIRS, SIGNALING THE COMICS CRAZE IS DYING. DISTRIBUTOR CURTIS CIRCULATION BECOMES PART OF PERFECT FILM AND CHEMICAL, MAKING A MARVEL TAKEOVER EVEN MORE LIKELY. AND AS LEE'S STAR CONTINUES TO ASCEND, KIRBY REPORTEDLY TRIES UNSUCCESSFULLY TO NEGOTIATE A BETTER CONTRACT WITH MARVEL PUBLISHER MARTIN GOODMAN.

# DISTANCE

## JANUARY 1968

Either Lee or Goodman (or both) sees value in marketing Stan as a "brand," and prepares an ad which will run in *Thor* #153 and other Summer issues, selling an autographed portrait of "Stan the Man." It's preprinted with Lee's signature and new catchphrase "Excelsior," and though the ad promises photos of other Marvel stars, they never materialize, although Marvel's upcoming fan club will offer a Bullpen photo kit with other creators included.

This month sees Kirby working on *Thor* #154, the first chapter of his four-part Mangog epic, which will potentially lead to Ragnarok, the death of all the old Norse gods. It's been rumored that Kirby wants to end *Thor* at this point, and transition to his own set of "new" gods, the genesis of which is a series of character concepts he's been working on since 1966. I don't know how seriously Kirby pushed for this, if at all, but Lee and/or Goodman never would've approved of ending a successful book like *Thor*, and Kirby ends up saving his ideas for later use, as we'll see.

Lee is interviewed on WFMU Radio in New Jersey about his and Kirby's work at Marvel: "...Jack is the greatest artist in the world. He also is a great story man. He does all the breakdowns and basic plots and I dialogue. We didn't start that way but Jack and I think so much alike. It isn't the same with every artist. Some artists I have to sit with three or four times and sit down

and type out a detailed **script**.

"I have always been a good hack writer. I've always been able to write whatever has been necessary. For example, in the Army I used to write training films and I had never written films before. But they turned out great. I've written advertising, novels, just about everything. My style has changed only recently when we started our new line. The style I am writing in now is the one I am suited for, though."



Faux-autographed photo of Lee, sold in 1968 ads.

January 1968: WFMU Radio (Jersey City, NJ) interview with Stan Lee, by Joel Scott

LARRY LIEBER:

"[Stan's] change in his style really came, I think, with *Fantastic Four* and *Spider-Man*. Before that, he didn't have that kind of style... later on, he got his style, and I didn't particularly want to go with that style myself. I continued to write whatever way I did write. Later, when I did the Westerns, they were not written in Stan's style."

1999: Larry Lieber interviewed by Roy Thomas, from *Alter Ego* #2

## FEBRUARY 1968

*The Baltimore Sun* features an article interviewing Lee: "We don't cater to any special age group. But we do cater to a special intellectual level. Our readers, no matter what their ages, have proved to be bright, imaginative, informal, and sophisticated."

Stan must've made a point to mention Jack's name here, for the reporter to have included: "Marvel entered the super-hero field in 1963, [sic] when Lee and artist Jack Kirby introduced 'The Fantastic Four'."

Feb. 6, 1968: *The Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD) article "Collegians Go For Comics," by Jackie Harper



To keep Marvel's comics appealing to the college crowd, Lee has Jack's "tough juveniles" described in *Thor* #154's margin notes, redrawn as hippies.

As the *Batman* TV show dies, the last vestiges of the 1960s comics craze are playing out, as publishers like Gold Key see there's more to copying Marvel Comics' success than just slapping super-heroes on your covers. © Gold Key Comics.



back, it might be that particular plot, or he might have changed fifty million things. And then I take it, and I try to write it and pull it all together. Whatever he has drawn, I try to tell it in my own way. So what happens, I think, is the reader gets the benefit of the best artistic efforts of both the artist and the writer. The artist is uninhibited. He's not following an actual script, so he can go home and draw whatever he thinks are the most interesting, most dramatic pictures. Then the writer takes those drawings, and he's uninhibited by any real preconceived notions, and he just writes his dialogue to suit the drawings. So I'd like to feel, when we're all finished, it's rather a perfect marriage of art and script, you see."

August 12, 1968: Stan Lee interviewed by Neal Conan on New York's WBAI-FM radio

While Jack is working on this multi-part Dr. Doom story, a couple of fans find his address in the phone book, and bicycle to Kirby's Long Island home, where he shows them a page (possibly page 19) from *Fantastic Four* #85 on his drawing board. Kirby tells them he plans to reveal that Dr. Doom's face is only slightly scarred, not horribly disfigured under his mask. The unmasking scene does not play out this way in the published issue, either due to Jack changing it, or Stan. But on page 15 of the issue, there are what appear to be distinct likenesses of some young boys—perhaps added by



Visitors to Jack's home?

[right] On this stat from *Fantastic Four* #85, Stan leaves a note for Sol Brodsky to contact Kirby about adding more detail in the large, circular "buttons" that hold Dr. Doom's cloak to his armor, saying: "In close-ups such as this, I think the big 'buttons' should have more detail, pattern, or modeling. They look too unfinished, too cartoony this way."

Kirby as a tribute to his unidentified visitors, although Len Wein and Marv Wolfman were also known to stop by, so it may be them.

1997: Per John Parrett's letter in *Jack Kirby Collector* #16

[1970] "I had a hand in creating Doctor Doom... Doom is a very tragic figure... I like Doom. Doom has got a lot of class, he's got a lot of cool. But Doom has one

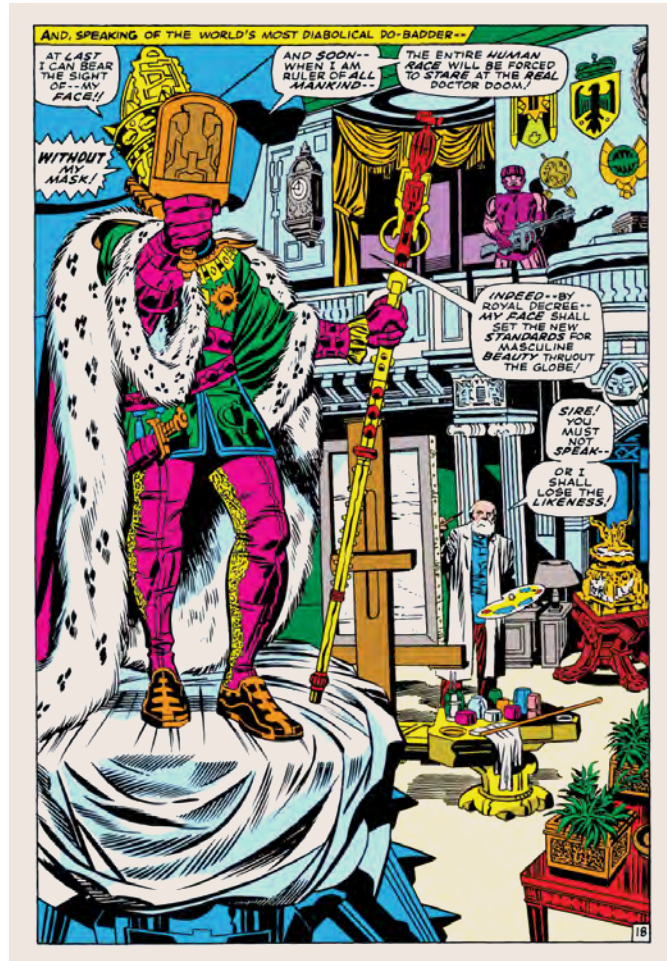
fallacy; he thinks he's ugly. He's afraid to take that mask off. Doom is an extremist; he's a paranoid. He thinks in extremes. He can't think, 'Well, I've got a scar on me, but that doesn't make me repellent...'. Actually, Doom is a very handsome guy with a scar on him that he got from acid when he was a child. But Doom is an extremist, he's a paranoid. To him, he's extremely ugly. If Doom were to lose one hair, he'd put on a wig. And if Doom had an enemy, he'd have to wipe him out. And if Doom thought that anybody was smarter than himself, he'd kill 'em, because Doom would have to be the smartest man in the world. He's an extremist; but, y'know, he has good manners..."

August 1-3, 1970: San Diego's Golden State Comic Con (San Diego, California)

Back at WBAI radio, Lee goes on to give more credit to Kirby for his input: "I've got the worst memory in the world, but I have a feeling, when Jack Kirby named [The Silver Surfer]—he started out as a guest-star in *Fantastic Four*. Jack and I can never really remember which of us came up with most names. He wasn't even supposed to be in the story. When I plotted it with Jack, it was just Galactus and so forth. And when I got the story from Jack to write the copy, he had drawn this fellow on the surfboard, and I think he called him 'the Surfer' or 'the Silver Surfer,' and the name was certainly euphonious, and we decided to keep it. And we all fell in love with him. Well, you see, this is loosely translated. In his own language, obviously, he said something else.

"[Ego, the Living Planet] was Jack's idea, too. I remember I said, 'You've got to be kidding.' He said, 'No, let's get a living planet, a bioverse.' Well, I didn't want him to think I was chicken. I said, 'All right, you draw it, I'll write it.' And, yeah, I think it turned out pretty good.

"...I was at some college, I think it was Princeton, and we had recently completed the stories with Galactus and the Silver Surfer, I think they were originally in three consecutive issues of *The Fantastic Four*, and apparently they made a great impression on these students at Princeton who were interviewing me. And the first time they mentioned the three issues, they referred to them as 'The Galactus Trilogy,' you see? And they said, 'Referring to the Galactus Trilogy, who did you originally?' blah-blah-blah. Well, to me, these guys calling it the 'Galactus



Doom's vanity shows in *Fantastic Four* #85. Kirby viewed him as only having a small scar, while Lee saw him totally disfigured.



1970

## DEPARTURE

IT'S ALL BEEN BUILDING TO THIS POINT. MARVEL'S SALES ARE UP TO 60 MILLION, BUT KIRBY CAN'T GET A BETTER DEAL FROM ITS NEW OWNERS. LARGE AND SMALL SLIGHTS, FROM LEE AND GOODMAN, HAVE ACCUMULATED OVER THE LAST DECADE, AND KIRBY FEELS THE SITUATION AT HIS "HOUSE OF IDEAS" IS UNTENABLE. HIS CONTINUED LACK OF PROPER CREDIT FOR HIS CREATIONS, AND HIS INABILITY TO CONTROL THEIR FATE AND USE, LEADS HIM TO HIS DECISION TO DEPART THE COMPANY HE HELPED TAKE TO THE NUMBER ONE POSITION IN COMICS.

## JANUARY 1970

Jack Kirby draws *Silver Surfer* #18 instead of *Thor* #178. The switch served multiple purposes: To give a shot in the arm to the failing *Surfer's* comic, as a lead-in to Kirby's upcoming Inhumans series (those characters are guest-stars), and to give John Buscema a try-out on *Thor*. A fourth rationale may've been considered: To assign Jack the *Surfer* book as a too-little, too-late peace offering from Stan, who's discouraged that his own Christ-like take on the character has flopped. Whatever the case, the relationship is unrepairable at this point, and the final page of *Silver Surfer* #18 [below]



perfectly sums up Kirby's frustration with his time at Marvel Comics.

Lee puts his best spin on recent events as he preps the Bullpen Bulletins page for July 1970 cover-date releases: "We just had a visit from JACK (KING) KIRBY, who winged his way eastward from sunny California to rap it up with Stan about the new INHUMANS series the Jolly One will be producing in the forthcoming *Amazing Adventures*. Sly ol' Stan not only conned Jack into doing two yarns at once, but even cajoled the King into doing the ~~script~~ as well as the penciling for this great new series."

I'd assume, instead of being talked into it, Kirby insisted on dialoguing "The Inhumans," so any plans he had for them wouldn't be usurped, like his ideas for the *Silver Surfer*, *Him*, and *Galactus* had been.

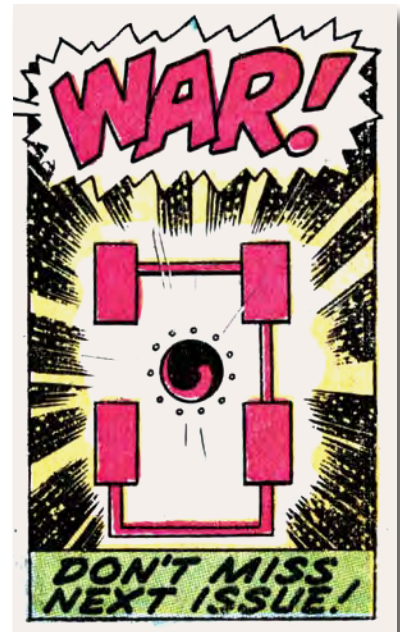
In his "Stan's Soapbox" column, Lee states this about most of his non-Kirby collaborations: "It takes about half a day to create the plot for an average 20-pager. That includes the hour or two spent in discussing the various story angles by the writer and penciler. Then, the penciler begins to draw the strip, and most pencilers average about two pages a day of peerless drawing. Of course there are speed demons like Kirby, Colan, and Buscema who can whip out three pages daily... Finally, the writer gets the penciled pages and usually spends about two full working days putting the dialogue and captions into a 20-pager. (Averaging 10 pages daily.)"

But there's been no two-hour plot conferences with Kirby in years, as the recent stories in *Fantastic Four* show. As Lee shapes up the *FF* #100 letter column, he inserts an almost hopeless-sounding "Personal Note From Stan And Jack" to kick it off: "Stan and Jack hereby pledge to continue unabated their efforts to see that the *FF* continues to earn its title as 'the World's Greatest Comics Magazine!'"

The number of recent pan letters must've provoked this response, to stem the tide of negative responses about the lackluster *FF* title of late. Does Stan not have enough *positive* ones to



It's clear what's on Kirby's mind; final panels to *Amazing Adventures* #1 [above] and [below] *Fantastic Four* #102.





1971-74

MARVEL'S *FANTASTIC FOUR* #108 IS PUBLISHED, USING KIRBY'S ORIGINAL *REJECTED FF* #102 STORY--THE SAME MONTH THAT *DC COMICS* PUBLISHES KIRBY'S *MISTER MIRACLE* #1 AND *JIMMY OLSEN* #136.

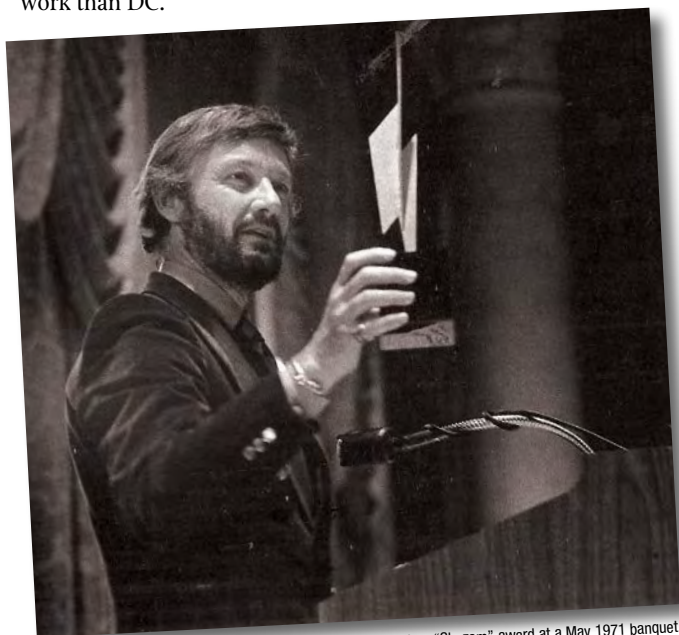
BY MID-YEAR, AFTER DISCOVERING DC INKER VINCE COLLETTA HAS BEEN SHOWING *NEW GODS* PAGES AROUND MARVEL'S OFFICES BEFORE PUBLICATION, AND BEING SHOWN HOW COLLETTA OMITTS DETAILS IN HIS INKING, KIRBY INSISTS ON MIKE ROYER AS HIS NEW DC INKER.

# PROVING GROUND

Kirby sketches by his backyard pool in 1971.  
Photo by Bill Bridges.



From the time Kirby leaves Marvel for DC, through the end of 1972, DC publishes 48 titles with Kirby's work, compared to 106 titles at Marvel with Kirby reprints—more than a 2-to-1 ratio in Marvel's favor. It actually gets worse later in Kirby's stay at DC. In 1973, Marvel will unleash a third wave of reprint titles including such series as *Marvel Double Feature*, *Marvel Spectacular*, *SHIELD*, *Tomb of Darkness*, *Human Torch*, and *Journey into Mystery*, in addition to the continuing titles such as *Marvel's Greatest Comics*, *Marvel Super Heroes*, *Special Marvel Edition*, and *Mighty Marvel Western*, all frequently featuring Kirby covers and stories. There is never a time in Kirby's five-year absence that Marvel isn't publishing more Kirby work than DC.



Lee accepts a "Shazam" award at a May 1971 banquet.  
Photo by Sal Amendola.

## JANUARY 1971

On January 20, Lee speaks at a National Cartoonists Society gathering in New York City: "I would say that the comic book market is the worst market that there is on the face of the Earth for creative talent, and the reasons are numberless and legion. I have had many talented people ask me how to get into the comic book business. If they were talented enough, the first answer I would give them is, why would you want to get into the comic book business? Because even if you succeed, even if you reach what might be considered the pinnacle of success in comics, you will be less successful, less secure, and less effective than if you are just an average practitioner of your art in

### television, radio, movies, or what have you."

January 20, 1971: National Cartoonists Society Roundtable discussion at the Lamb's Club in NYC, with Stan Lee, Gil Kane, Will Eisner, John Goldwater, Sid Jacobson, Denny O'Neil, Murphy Anderson, and Howie Schneider.

JOAN LEE:

"I do remember one thing [Stan] was frustrated about that had nothing to do with comics, and that's when they brought out the magazine called

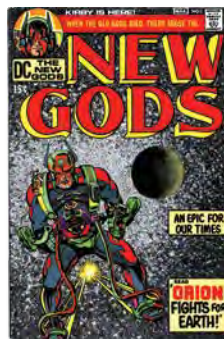
*Celebrity*. It was truly spectacular—done on a shoe-string budget—everyone loved it, but Martin was unwilling to put enough money into it to give it the right distribution. Stan felt it could have been another *People*. Stan had always thought Hollywood and films, but Martin Goodman would never put any money into it. It became a dead end for Stan."

Circa 2001: Joan Lee interview conducted by Blake Bell for *I Have To Live With This Guy!*

On January 31, Kirby gives an interview in Carmine Infantino's DC Comics office in New York, where he's asked how long he's had the idea for *New Gods*: "Well, I guess for several years it's probably been in the back of my mind, but I've never sat down and worked it out, though I've always known it's been there."

On why he didn't use these new ideas at Marvel, he says: "It's not that I was cramped, but there were limitations which stopped me from going on. Over here I have the chance to go beyond them; I feel that whatever story there is to this 'gods' business, the 'new' gods or the 'old' gods, I feel that there is a story to them. I feel that there was an actual replacement of the 'old' gods by new ones which are relevant to what we see and hear.

"I was involved in what I was doing there and I feel that this would never have fit into what they were doing. This is a whole new interpretation and it cannot be told with shields



Kirby used a 1966 idea he formulated while still at Marvel, as the basis for his DC Comics *New Gods* series, and utilized his concept art on the first issue's cover.





1975-78

IN EARLY 1975, KIRBY PRESUMABLY TALKS WITH STAN LEE, REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS RETURNING TO MARVEL.

BUT EVEN AFTER HE RETURNS, KIRBY FACES PUSHBACK FROM THE NEW YORK OFFICE, NOW POPULATED BY A FEW FORMER COMICS FANS TURNED PRO. SOME GO OUT OF THEIR WAY TO MAKE HIS TENURE DIFFICULT, BY BAD-MOUTHING HIS BOOKS, AND REPORTEDLY STACKING HIS BOOKS' LETTER COLUMNS WITH NEGATIVE MAIL.

# COMINGS & GOINGS

## FEBRUARY 1975

Lee discusses the departure of Kirby, and whether he could've done his *New Gods* books at Marvel: "He could have. I don't really know why he left. I think it was a personal thing. Jack never told me. I think it could be as simple as the fact that he got sick

of everything he did saying 'by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby'. Maybe he just wanted to do his own thing and have the books saying 'by Jack Kirby.' But, as far as I was concerned, if he'd have told me he wanted to do his own book, I'd have said fine, and let him write it and draw it, but he never said it to me. I've heard that he was tired of doing things that he never owned, to copyright his characters, shares of the profits, and so on. I wish I'd had the same thing, I don't blame him. But what surprises me is that he doesn't have any copyright now at National, as far as I know.

"So, I really don't know why he left. And I will say, in all honesty that I'd like Jack to come back, I want him

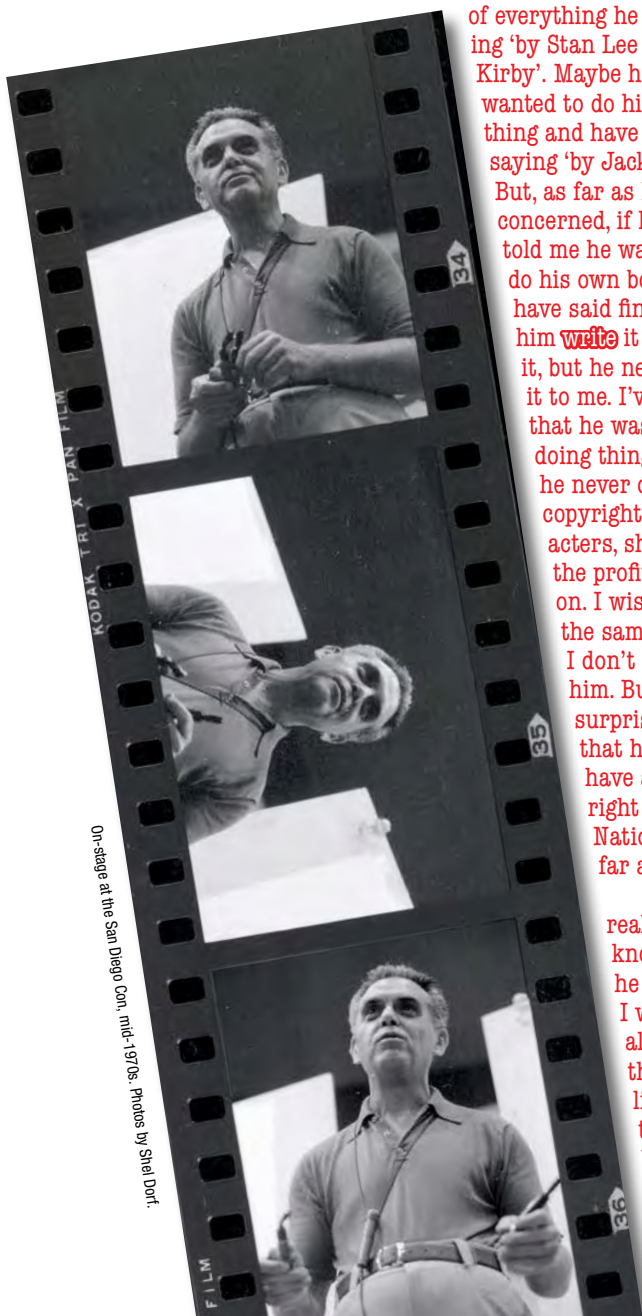
to come back eventually. I sort of half-expect that he'll come back when his contract ends—I think he'd be making a mistake not to come back. I'd say he did his best work at Marvel, his style is pure Marvel. Also I must admit that he has had so many books at National that have failed, whereas if they'd been for Marvel, I think they would still be being published—especially *New Gods*.

"The thing about Jack is that though he's a good story man, and a good artist, I feel he needs some control, some editing. He tends to get so wrapped up in what he wants to do, that he forgets



One of Kirby's few solo assignments in the 1960s, from *Fantastic Four Annual* #5 (1967).

what the readers might want. I think his material was a little better with us because we exercised some control. I remember on the very first issue of the *Fantastic Four*, I'd suggested in the synopsis a monster, and Jack drew a hundred red monsters. I said, 'Jack, it's more dramatic to have one monster that the reader worries about, than a hundred monsters.' The trouble with Jack is that he's so imaginative he tries to put every idea he can think of on every page. He tries to make every page a whole new original thought and action. That isn't good story. You have to build up a mood. You've got to take one idea and stretch it over a few pages and milk the utmost drama out of it. It's a matter of pacing—you don't have a chance to catch your



On-stage at the San Diego Con, mid-1970s. Photos by Shai Dorf.



On May 1, Kirby officially begins his new contract with Marvel Comics.

## SUMMER 1975

In an interview done just prior to this July's New York Comic Art Convention, Jack discusses his late 1950s and early 1960s work: "The [Challengers of the Unknown] issues I did were still formative and I can't answer for what DC did with them. But they were heading for the super-hero image when I left. In many ways, they were the predecessors of the FF.

"[At Marvel] I was given monsters, so I did them. I would much rather have been drawing Rawhide Kid. But I did the monsters... we had Grottu and Kurrigo and It... it was a challenge to try to do something—anything with such ridiculous characters. But these were, in a way, the forefathers of the Marvel super-heroes. We had a Thing, we had a Hulk... and we tried to do them in a more exciting way.

"I felt, for a while, like I was doing them all. The stuff I wasn't penciling, I was doing layouts on. I got the books going—I think that was mainly my function—so that, as Marvel acquired a top-notch staff, they could keep them going. You should remember that prior to this the entire staff consisted of Stan Lee, Sol [Brotsky], and Artie [Simek]. Artie was in the most secure position, because no matter what, the books had to be lettered."

July 1975: New York Comic Art Convention booklet, "Jack Kirby: In His Own Right / Kirby Kirby Kirby" with Steve Sherman and Mark Evanier

An excerpt from his upcoming book *Son of Origins of Marvel Comics* runs, giving Stan's account of creating Daredevil all by himself, including his baton weapon, after which he goes in search of the right artist—Bill Everett—to whom he "mentioned the general idea of Daredevil." But for the creation of Galactus and the Silver Surfer, Lee describes it as much more collaborative with Kirby:

"Jack Kirby and I were wracking our brains for a new antagonist who would offer an even greater challenge than any of those encountered so far... We named him Galactus.

"After we discussed the storyline for a Galactus trilogy, Jack spent the next few weeks roughing out the first 20-page installment. When he brought it to me, I was surprised to find a brand-new character floating around the artwork—a silver-skinned, smooth-domed, sky-riding surfer atop a silver surfboard."

July 27, 1975: *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson, AZ)

At the 1975 San Diego Comic-Con, Kirby hints that he may be returning to

work on the Silver Surfer: "I have my

own ideas about the Silver Surfer, and I won't discuss them myself until I talk with Stan about them, and when the opportunity arises, I'm certainly going to give him my views, and accept his views, and possibly we'll come up with something very, very interesting. Like I say, I would follow the Marvel magazines, and we might spring some surprises on you."

Jul 30-Aug 3, 1975: The 1975 San Diego Comic Con, "Jack Kirby/Jim Steranko panel"

At this same 1975 San Diego Comic-Con, Lee recounts the

creation of the Silver Surfer: "I better watch what I say, 'cause I never know; Jack may be here. I'm not noted for always telling the truth, but at least people don't usually catch me at it. But Jack may remember this, so I'll be careful.

"I did not really create the Silver Surfer. Those of you who are historians or archivists, take note.

Jack and I were doing the

Fantastic Four, and we came up with this plot; something to do with Galactus and our usual crazy stuff. I was telling Jack, he wasn't listening, and I wasn't paying attention to what he was saying. He went off and drew something. The way we worked, for those of you who don't know, is not the way they work at other companies, where the writer writes a script, and it's given to an artist, and the artist draws it, and that's the end of it. With us, it's a marriage of talents. The artist and the writer will discuss the plot together, then the artist goes off to his little nook where he works, and he—without benefit of script—only with this vague, ridiculous plot that he's discussed, goes and draws the whole story all by himself.

"So following the basic plot, the artist draws it. Then, when the writer has to put in the copy, just imagine how much easier it is to look at a drawing and suit the dialogue perfectly to the expression of the character's face—to what the drawing represents—than to try and write perfect dialogue when you're looking at a blank sheet of paper, trying to imagine what the drawing will be like. So it worked out as the fastest way to work. It also gives us the best results. And you're all sitting there thinking, 'What does this have to do with the Silver Surfer?'

"Here's what it has to do. Jack and I had discussed a story dealing with Galactus. All I remember is we were saying, 'We've already had Doctor Doom, we've already had Sandman, and all these powerful villains. What can we do to top what we've done? The only thing to do is get a villain who's practically a god... who doesn't want to conquer the Earth; a villain who destroys whole planets!' Well, that sounded good.

"It was easy for me to say it; now it was up to Jack to go home and draw it. I don't remember; Jack may have come up with the name Galactus, or I might've. I probably wanted to call him Irving. The thing came back, and lo and behold, Jack had Galactus, and I loved it. Well, I love everything Jack does. I'd look at these drawings and I couldn't wait to start writing the copy. All of a sudden, as I'm looking through the drawings, I see this nut on a surfboard flying in the air. And I thought, 'Jack,



Portrait done for the *Silver Surfer* Graphic Novel.





1979-1994

# CONFLICT

BOTH LEE AND KIRBY'S FUTURES ARE NOW IN HOLLYWOOD, BUT WHILE STAN SEEKS THE LIMELIGHT, JACK WORKS BEHIND-THE-SCENES IN ANIMATION, WHILE KEEPING A HAND IN COMICS BY CREATING COMICS FOR THE BUDDING DIRECT MARKET OF COMIC BOOK STORES.

SADLY, KIRBY'S TWILIGHT YEARS ARE PLAGUED BY A BATTLE WITH MARVEL COMICS, OVER THE RETURN OF HIS 1960s ORIGINAL ARTWORK, WHICH HE HAS BEEN QUIETLY ASKING FOR OVER THE COURSE OF SEVERAL YEARS, WHILE GETTING STONEWALLED BY MARVEL.



Here, Lee is inexplicably equating inkers, colorists, and

letterers—who despite their talents, are all basic production people—with the penciler of the strip, who actually contributes to the creation of story and plot. Does this give us insight into his own valuation of anyone who's not handling the writing end of a comic book?



## WINTER 1979

While Kirby entrenches himself in the animation industry, *People Magazine* interviews Lee for a feature article. The headline reads: "Stan Lee, creator of Spider-Man and The Incredible Hulk, is America's biggest mythmaker."

Jan. 29, 1979: *People Magazine* interview with Stan Lee by Barbara Rowes

Men's magazine *Genesis* interviews Lee:

"Comics are a team effort. I can say I created Spider-Man, but Steve Ditko, the artist who worked on it with me, will say: 'Hey, what about me? I drew it, and I helped with some of the plots.' And that goes for the inkers, colorists, letterers, and editors. It's such a complex process, how the hell do you know whom to pay for what?"



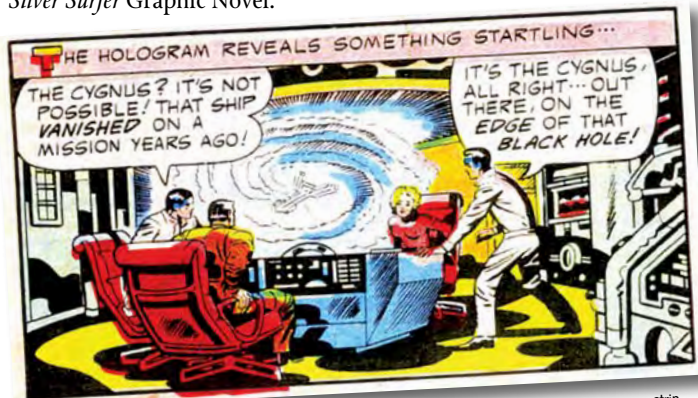
Lee with friends from the 1979 *Genesis* magazine interview.

February 1979: *Genesis* magazine, Stan Lee interview by Steve Swires

## SPRING 1979

On March 30, Jack Kirby has a cameo as a police sketch artist on *The Incredible Hulk* TV show episode "No Escape" [above].

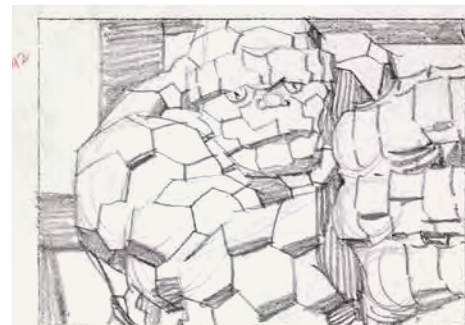
In May, Lee's New York apartment is robbed while he is in Los Angeles, giving him more reason to move to LA permanently. Stan is in talks with Lee Kramer, Olivia Newton-John's manager and boyfriend, to produce a big-budget Silver Surfer movie, inspired by the *Silver Surfer* Graphic Novel.



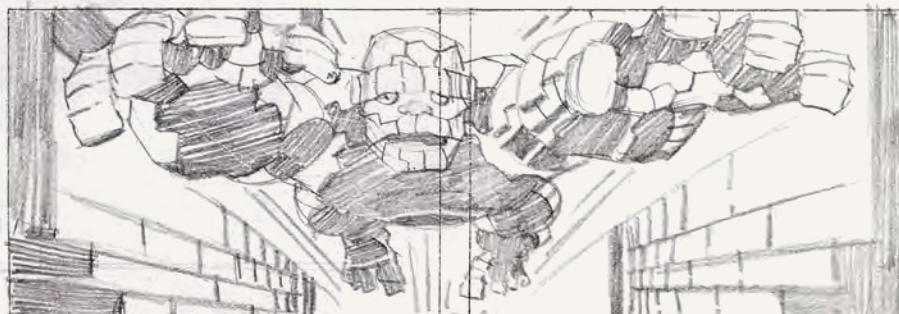
Panel from the third week of the *Black Hole* newspaper strip.

## FALL 1979

Lee and John Buscema collaborate to produce the first issue of *The Savage She-Hulk*, and a Silver Surfer story for *Epic Illustrated* #1, while Kirby goes back to his early newspaper roots and draws the comic strip adaptation of Disney's film *The Black Hole*.



With these.



BEN LEAPS AT FOE!!!

As this year begins, Kirby had just wrapped up work on Depatie-Freleng's 1978 *The New Fantastic Four* animated series, doing storyboards such as the above example. Kirby rehashed old *FF* comics for these 13 episodes, and both Lee and Roy Thomas provided dialogue, but Jack didn't work directly with either of them.





Kirby draws at the 1980 San Diego Comic-Con.

## 1980

After 41 years in New York, Lee moves permanently to Los Angeles. His publisher-chairman title at Marvel is intact (though partly emeritus), but he has new goals: Improving Marvel's position in Hollywood, and setting up an animation studio.

As Lee's star ascends, a bitter Wallace Wood slams Lee and the Marvel Method, in an essay about an editor named "Stanley": "Well, he DID come up with two sure-fire ideas... the first one was 'Why not let the artists WRITE the stories as well as draw them?'... And the second was... 'ALWAYS SIGN YOUR NAME ON TOP... BIG.' And the rest is history... Stanley, of course became rich and famous... over the bodies of people like Bill [Everett] and Jack [Kirby]."

1980: Wallace Wood essay "What Makes Stanley Run?" in the *Woodwork Gazette* #5 newsletter

In February, Irene Vartanoff takes a full inventory of what original art is currently stored in Marvel Comics' warehouse, while Kirby begins work on the *Thundarr The Barbarian* animated series, launching a long association with the Ruby-Spears animation studio. Unlike his time at Marvel, for the first time he has job benefits, including health insurance.



Kirby's work on *Thundarr* leads to steady work as an animation conceptualizer for the remainder of his working career.

## 1981

This year, Kirby's fight with Marvel Comics over the return of his original art begins in earnest. In the early '80s, he is asked by his legal team to make some notes about his work for the company. According to Mark Evanier, Kirby dictates the notes to Roz before signing them. In addition to details of creation and credit, he touches on the circumstances that brought him and



October 1981 (Feb. 1982 cover date): *The Fantastic Four Chronicles*, published by FantaCo Enterprises, Inc., "Questions and Answers With Jack Kirby, Version Two," interview by Roger Green

the company back together in their time of mutual need: "When I arrived at Marvel in 1959, [sic] it was closing shop that very afternoon, according to what was related to me by Stan Lee.

"The comic book dept. was another victim of the Dr. Wertham negative cycle + definitely was following in the wake of EC Comics, The Gaines Publishing House.

"In order to keep working I suggested to Stan Lee that to initiate a new line of 'Super Heroes' he submit my ideas to Martin Goodman, the Publisher of Marvel.

"To ensure sales I also did the writing which I was not credited for, as Stan Lee wrote the credits for all of the books, which I did not contest because of his relationship with the publisher Martin Goodman.

"Although I was not allowed to write the 'Balloon' dialogue, the stories, the characters + the additional planning for the scripts progress was strictly due to my own foresight + literary workmanship.

"There were no scripts. I created the characters + wrote the stories in my own home + merely brought them into the office each month."

Source: Handwritten notes signed by Jack Kirby, Justia, Dockets & Filings, Second Circuit, New York, New York Southern District Court, Marvel Worldwide, Inc. et al v. Kirby et al, Filing 97, Exhibit RR.

The above is the best example I've come across of the confusing nature of authorship terminology in comics. Kirby takes credit for the "script's" progress, while saying there were no "scripts." He obviously means two different things, depending on the word's context, so all his comments need to be closely examined, to avoid any misunderstanding of what he is saying.

Summer sees Kirby's debut issue of *Captain Victory and the Galactic Rangers* published by Pacific Comics, making it Jack's first comic published specifically for the Direct Market of comic books stores. This launches a new distribution model for comic books, which is still being used today.

## FALL 1981

In September, *Fantastic Four* #236, the 20th anniversary issue, is published. It includes, without his permission, Kirby's storyboards created for the 1978 Depatie-Freleng *New Fantastic Four* cartoon show repurposed as a story, with dialogue by Lee and tightened pencils and inks by ten artists. When he learns of it, Kirby demands the removal of his name and likeness from the cover, citing unauthorized use of his *Fantastic Four* storyboards inside for nefarious "celebratory purposes."

When approached to be interviewed for fan publication *The Fantastic Four Chronicles*, Kirby declines to answer the first round of questions sent to him, which focus on his 1960s Marvel work. He also expresses his dismay to the interviewer over Marvel's uncompensated reuse of his *Fantastic Four* animation storyboards to make a "new" Lee/Kirby story in *Fantastic Four* #236: "The trouble is that 'Marvel wants it all.' It worked that way in the past. But I'd like to see a more equitable future where deals can be worked out to the benefit of all who work for sales."

On November 2, comics great Wallace Wood dies, of a self-



# CLOSING ARGUMENTS

1995-ON

IN FAIRNESS TO KIRBY, WHO ISN'T AROUND TO HAVE HIS SAY AFTER 1994, I'M LIMITING LEE'S QUOTES HERE TO ONLY **PIVOTAL ONES** THAT PROVIDE **NEW** INFORMATION TO THIS DISCUSSION. MANY JUST REPEAT THE **SAME ANECDOTES** STAN PERFECTED OVER THE YEARS.

AS MARVEL COMICS GOES FROM ITS 1996 **BANKRUPTCY** TO BECOMING A FACTOR IN THE STOCK MARKET, LEE CONTINUES BUILDING HIS **HOLLYWOOD PRESENCE**, AND SOLIDIFIES HIS LEGACY IN RECEIVING **CREATOR CREDIT**.

Starting in the late



Lee: "The Comic Man" documentary, © A&E Television Networks

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"). While he never hesitates to mention Jack, most of Lee's from this era are, to varying degrees, deftly worded to give the art to Kirby (and Ditko), but to emphasize that the started with him. Some examples:

IN LEE: "...It was the day Jack Kirby and I created the e Four. Even as I described the characters to Jack, I almost see the wheels spinning in his brain..."

fantastic Four #400

"I remember the conversation I had with Jack Kirby I told him about the Hulk..."

Stan Lee: "The Comic Man" documentary, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vgapiQek7I>

I came up with [The FF's] powers in my crowded lit- rkroom in my house on Long Island, 30+ years ago, e. But their design was created by the legendary Jack in his own home, also on Long Island."

in Lee's "Soapbox" column

would say, "Look, Jack, here's the story I want you to and Jack would bring back the story I had given him, but ld also add a lot of imaginative things of his own..."

1998: "Spider-Man in the Marketplace," Jules Feiffer, *Civilization*

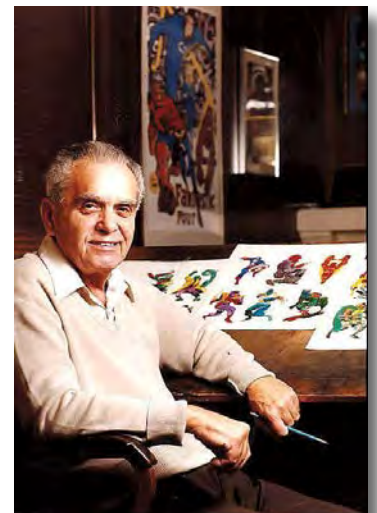
told Jack about it and when I saw the way he drew Thor ust wonderful... the outfit he gave him... the hammer. d him to have that

hammer, and I came up with a plot so he could..."

July 1998: Stan Lee interview by Bob Brodsky in *Comic Book Marketplace* #61

"In the beginning, I would give Jack the idea for the character. I would describe the characters and give him an idea on how I wanted them to be. Jack would then draw the story and give me the exact rendition that I was looking for in the character..."

Apr. 2, 1999: "Writing for Himself: Stan Lee Speaks," by James Cangelosi, *Comics Buyer's Guide* #1324



At a time when most people slow down or retire, Lee's own journey seems to be just getting started. In 1998, he signs a contract making him Chairman Emeritus of **Marvel Comics** for life. Peter Paul and Lee begin a new internet-based super-hero creation, production, and marketing studio, **Stan Lee Media**, which ends up filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in February 2001. That same year, Lee, Gill Champion, and Arthur Lieberman form **POW! (Purveyors of Wonder) Entertainment** to develop film, television, and video game properties. Lee attaches his name to various comics-related print ventures throughout the 21st century, none of which has generated anything lasting as of this writing. He also licenses his name to a comic book convention in Los Angeles. But while he produces no notable creations in this era, he's tireless at what he's always been superb at: Marketing Stan Lee.

I performed an internet search for "Stan Lee Interview" and got almost 27 million hits (as opposed to about 5 million for "Jack Kirby