

The Lost Jack Kirby Stories

Chris Tolworthy

THE LOST JACK KIRBY STORIES

By Chris Tolworthy

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Introduction

“Jack Kirby came out of Stan’s office ... he seemed upset ... he had these drawings, he took them and he tore them in half and he threw them in a trash can”¹

Those torn up drawings featured The Incredible Hulk. They were the original version of an Incredible Hulk story from 1962 (probably issue #4). Almost nobody knew that these pages existed until they surfaced in 2004.² Here was proof of a lost Jack Kirby story! Four years later, in 2008, we learned of another lost story, known as “Fantastic Four: The Lost Adventure”. So there are at least two lost stories.

At that time, in 2008, I ran the world’s biggest Fantastic Four fan site.³ A lost Fantastic Four Adventure grabbed my attention. Were there other lost stories waiting to be found? I began to search for lost stories, with help from a fellow called James. James drew my attention to a number of lost Kirby stories that might be hiding in plain sight. Here is an example: the origin of Dr Doom.

Every comic fan knows that Victor Von Doom’s mother was a witch. Victor was trying to reach his mother in Hell when he had the accident that disfigured his face. That is the published story. But James pointed out that the art never shows Doom’s mother. The moment when Victor supposedly learns of his mother, he is actually looking at two very specific objects. James recognised the objects from two of Kirby’s favourite folktales. They explain

¹ Larry Lieber deposition, 7 January 2011, Marvel Worldwide, Inc. et al v. Kirby et al kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2015/08/10/according-to-kirby-2/

² See The Jack Kirby Collector #41, Fall 2004. At first three pages were known. Now we know of five: numbered 8,9,11,12 and 13. See kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2011/03/09/unusedhulkpages/

³ zak-site.com/Great-American-Novel/

why Victor's mother is never seen: she never existed! You will have to read this book to find out why.

The big breakthrough in searching for lost stories came a few years later. An individual who had access to some unpublished Kirby documents saw the Dr Doom theory on my website. Intrigued, they checked the unpublished documents. They were able to prove that James's hypothesis was correct. This was amazing! Through careful forensic analysis, James had reconstructed a lost story: the lost origin of Dr Doom.

That was the proof we needed: we had proven that careful detective work can recover lost Kirby stories. So we began to hunt for more lost stories. We examined original pencil notes in margins, we studied rejected pages, we analysed strange anomalies in the printed books, we discussed clues with other Kirby scholars. We went deeper and deeper down the rabbit hole.

In this book, I present more than forty possible lost Kirby stories. Some of these theories will be wrong of course. And there will be errors: because every time I start to fact-check one theory, I end up discovering something else, and research that instead! And so, for every error I fix, I add a new one. But I am not aiming for perfection, I just want to raise awareness. I want more people to know that there are dozens of lost Kirby stories out there. There may be hundreds.

Why are there so many lost Kirby stories? Mostly because Kirby's original stories were thought to be too sophisticated for young readers. Let us look at the examples mentioned so far: we'll look at Hulk #4, and The Lost Fantastic Four Adventure, and the origin of Dr Doom.

The original Hulk #4 was about abstract concepts: power and responsibility. In the story, Rick Jones, a teenager, found himself with great power: he controlled a monster. But if Jones made any mistake, then people could die. Apparently, the editor felt it might be confusing to focus on Rick Jones. The book was called "The Hulk", so he felt that the Hulk should be the hero. He did not want teenage angst, he wanted the Hulk to save people and hit things. So the story was changed to make the Hulk the hero.

The original Lost Fantastic Four Adventure was also about abstract concepts. It was about history and progress. Kirby told a story about how we face the same challenges today as we did back when civilisation began. To illustrate his point, Kirby used a story from 4000 BC, and updated it to modern times.

But most readers had no interest in the history of civilisation. So again, the story was changed to make it simpler.

As for the origin of Dr Doom, it was based on ideas from the alchemist Paracelsus, and from Jewish folklore. But most readers had no idea who Paracelsus was, and had no background in Jewish learning. So, once again, the story was changed to make it simpler.

Many people prefer the simplified versions. Because Kirby included many references to the classics, to science, to movies, and to history. This can be confusing until we become familiar with the same sources. Grant Morrison explained the problem, and why even professional writers can struggle to understand Kirby:

“A lot of people who have done Kirby don't have Kirby's reading list. They couldn't understand the stuff about the Kabbalah that Kirby was bringing up.”⁴

This is not an attack on the simplified, changed stories. They were very popular. But if you want the original stories, be prepared for a very rich world of sources.

Now for a word or two about Kirby's famous editor, Stan Lee. Lee simplified Kirby's work in the 1960s. He called himself the “writer”, because he re-wrote the stories, and therefore physically penned (or at least caused to be penned) the final printed words. This can be confusing. So wherever possible, I refer to Kirby as the writer, and Lee as “Kirby's editor”. Because the process of rewriting is more usually called “editing”. For more about Stan Lee, see Abraham Riesman's book, “True Believer”. For the details of the Kirby-Lee relationship, see Michael Hill's “According to Jack Kirby”.⁵

The forensic evidence in this book might sometimes look weak. But the more you read Kirby, the more the evidence jumps out at you. For example, James knew the significance of not seeing Dr Doom's mother. Most readers would say, “That doesn't prove anything.” But James had studied Kirby's work for a long time. So James knew that if Doom's mother mattered to the story, she would be drawn. Also, James recognised the importance of the two objects

⁴ Grant Morrison, Jack Kirby Collector #49, p.70

⁵ lulu.com/en/us/shop/michael-hill/according-to-jack-kirby/paperback/product-v7dnyy.html

that Victor found in the old trunk. Most readers would say, “Those are just random artefacts”. But James was familiar with folktales and movies that Kirby loved. So, those specific objects stood out like beacons.

Finally, you will notice that I don’t include many images in this book. That is for legal reasons. I would need to reprint hundreds of pages, and that pushes “fair use” beyond breaking point. It would also make the book prohibitively expensive. Besides, most readers of this book will already own published versions of these stories. And if you don’t own copies of the stories, “Marvel Unlimited” (marvel.com/unlimited) offers a free seven-day trial, and it includes most of them. It doesn’t include the pencil art, but most of what is public is on whatifkirby.com/gallery and kirbymuseum.org

Thanks for reading this book. I hope you find something of interest.

The lost Fantastic Four stories

The lost Dr Who story

(Fantastic Four #1, November 1961)

Summary: The original Fantastic Four was like Dr Who, but three years earlier. Here are the clues.

Remember, for legal reasons (and to keep costs down), I will not reprint the stories here. If you want to check these claims, you will need the stories open next to you.

Clue 1: no powers in the Mole Man story

In Fantastic Four #1, page 19, panel 1, Johnny Storm is lost in the dark. Yet, he was supposed to be the “human torch”. On page 18, the last panel, he has to be rescued from falling. Yet, he is supposed to be able to fly. On page 23, Reed fights the Mole Man using a stick. Yet, he is supposed to have stretching powers.

Every time the team exhibits powers in the Mole Man story (with two exceptions) they achieve nothing. For example, on page 18, the last panel, Reed forms his body into a parachute. But on page 22, under the exact same circumstances, the Mole Man does not need a parachute. So the power serve no purpose. The story is more exciting without the pointless powers, because the characters are in more danger without them.

Now let’s look at the two exceptions, where the powers are useful. On page 18, panels 3-5, Mr Fantastic forms his arm into a lasso. But the art is strange, as if Kirby forgot how to draw. Panel 5 is especially weird: how could Kirby

possibly have intended that? The story would work better with a real lasso. The only other time when powers matter is pages 20-21, where Ben fights a monster that is about to attack Sue. Those pages were almost certainly not in the original, as we will see in the next clue.

Now consider page 14 (the Mole Man splash page) where Johnny flies around the monster's head. Compare the monster's head here to the head on the cover, or on page 24. The head looks badly drawn, as if either Kirby forgot how to draw, which makes no sense. Or... he had to squash it to make room for Johnny, who was not flying in the original story. And as usual, flying achieves nothing. It is only there to say, "Look, he has powers". None of this makes sense, unless the powers were not in the original story.

Clue 2: two pages do not fit

Pages 20-21 are different from the other pages. First, the momentum stops and moves backwards. Second, the whole section can be removed without making any difference to the main story. Kirby never did that in his original stories: all his pages matter. Third, this was the only part where Ben matters to the story. Elsewhere in the book, he is squashed into the side of a frame or does not do anything. Fourth, this is the only part where we see Sue looking sexy. Elsewhere, she either looks young, or her curves look badly edited. See page 18, panel 1 for example, where the curve of her thigh is wrong.

So it appears that these pages were added later, to show Sue looking grown up (in all other Mole Man pages she looks younger), and to give the Thing something to do. If we ignore these two pages, then it appears that in the original Mole Man story the characters did not have powers. So either the original Mole Man story featured different characters, or it took place before the origin story, not after it.

Clue 3: the Mole Man story was originally about underground atomic testing.

The Mole Man story begins with a 'radar scope': it is shown and named twice. This is clearly a seismometer, but somebody has renamed it "radar scope". The story was written soon after the 1958 Limited Test Ban Treaty moved all atomic testing underground. The key part of that treaty was the establishment

of a network of 170 control posts around the world, each equipped with seismometers. Through triangulating results they could pinpoint the source of any disturbance, such as an atomic test, anywhere in the world. This is how the monster was detected. So the monster is detected by atomic testing equipment.

Next, see how the monster attacks atomic power plants: the Mole Man's enemy is atomic power. And see how the team visits "monster isle", where they see a three headed King Giddorah monster. (This was years before King Giddorah in the movies: an example of Kirby seeing the future.) And see how giant monsters burst from underground. All of this suggests Godzilla, a creature who mutated due to atomic tests. Godzilla was really a metaphor for atomic testing.

Next, see how the Mole Man becomes the Mole Man. First we see him on a remote Arctic island. In 1959, Amchitka Island (one of the Aleutian Islands off Alaska) was considered for underground atomic testing. The Mole Man then falls down underground. He then experiences a blast that makes him almost blind: how else do we explain the last frame of page 22? That experience apparently makes him hate atomic power, so his monsters attack atomic plants.

Next, see how Reed and Johnny wear radiation suits after seeing the valley of diamonds. Why would diamonds give off dangerous radiation? Were they diamonds originally? A close look at the art shows that the diamonds are crudely drawn, whereas Kirby's other art is all of a high quality. And then there is the question of where the atomic power plants went: why would Kirby's story forget the atomic power plants? Kirby was an expert storyteller. He did not just forget major plot points. So it is possible that the diamonds were drawn over what was originally atomic waste, or the wreckage of atomic power plants.

Finally, the story ends with a classic mushroom cloud, the iconic image of an atomic explosion. Why would the Mole Man blow up his own island? That makes no sense. But if he had all the fuel and waste from atomic power plants, suddenly the explosion makes sense. This makes a more exciting story, because the team has no powers, and they are in more urgent danger: when Sue bursts in at the end it is because she realises the atomic material is about to explode! No wonder they run!

So it seems that the story was originally about atomic power. Kirby may have confirmed this in a later interview:

“That's how the Fantastic Four began, with an atomic explosion and its effect on the characters.”⁶

Kirby recalled correctly: the FF began with the Mole Man story, which ended with an atomic explosion. After this, they found they had strange powers. Occam's razor suggests they did not need any other reason for powers. After all, a few months later, an atomic explosion on its own was enough to create The Hulk. However, just as this story was finished, Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to enter space. That was an enormous shock to American pride. It caused great interest in the space race. At that point, a new story has the FF enter space and gain their powers from cosmic radiation instead of atomic radiation.

On a tangent, and how could they be the first people in space if Gagarin was already first? Because Gagarin only reached 330 km at its highest point of his orbit. The Van Allen radiation belts begin at 1000 km. So the team would be the first to explore outer space rather than merely orbit close to Earth.

Clue 4: Sue was originally a teenage girl.

Ignore pages 20-21, and focus on the strange curves on Sue. Her panels make more sense if she was originally skinnier and more angular in proportion: like a skinny woman or teenage girl. I mentioned page 18, panel 1 before, where the leg looks badly edited: Kirby was a better artist than that. Or, on page 17 panel 2, Reed is looking down as if talking to a young person. The change is most obvious if you look at page 8, panel 6 (the last panel before the origin flashback). Compare the version in issue #1 with the reprint in annual #1. In the original, Sue is much shorter than Johnny, and Reed is probably in his forties. But in the reprint Reed is much younger, and Sue is grown up.

Susan looks like Kirby's oldest daughter, Susan at that time, but with blonde hair. Susan Kirby was aged 16 at the time. She later recalled:

“I was in his [Dad's] office a lot, because he had a vast library of books, because he was into everything. And I used to go down

⁶ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

there and read, so I used to read his books, and stuff, and one day I was upstairs, and Mom told me to go downstairs because Dad was creating some new superheroes. So I went downstairs, and he said, 'I want you to see this.' He said, 'I named the female superhero after you, her name was Sue,' Sue Storm he was talking about, it was the Fantastic Four.

Q. Do you remember what year that was?

A. Oh, gosh, I was a teenager, that was all I remember, maybe 15 or 16, so 1961, '62.

Q. And when you went downstairs did you discuss with your father what he was doing?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you say to him? What did he say to you?

*A. I said it looked great. There were three characters on the board, three of the four. And I asked about who they were, and he told me who each one was. And I said, 'It looked great, they look great'."*⁷

Her brother Neal suggested that "Storm" came from her personality:

*"When recounting the creation of the Fantastic Four, for instance, he laughingly confessed that Sue Storm was named for my sister, Susan, and the 'Storm' could be considered a bit of personality commentary."*⁸

Reed and Sue appear to be the same ages as Jack and Sue at the time. In the only early cover to be inked by Kirby (FF #7) Reed looks like a self-portrait of Kirby.

Kirby said that he planned the Fantastic Four as a kids' gang (Kirby kid gangs typically have an adult mentor: see Boy Commandos, Newsboy Legion, X-men, etc.):

⁷ Deposition of Susan Kirby, October 25, 2010. Ohdannyboy.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/marvel-worldwide-inc-et-al-v-kirby-et_11.html

⁸web.archive.org/web/20120413015754/http://herocomplex.latimes.com:80/2012/04/09/growing-up-kirby-the-marvel-memories-of-jack-kirby-son/#/0

"Comics run in cycles. I knew that with interest fading in monsters and westerns, it might be the right time for a kid gang of super-heroes, this go-round the Fantastic Four".⁹

The editor wanted Sue older, so Kirby ended up creating the X-Men as the kids' gang instead. But the quote shows that originally Kirby thought of the Fantastic Four as young, with an adult mentor.

Finally, look at the flashback in FF #11, where Reed recalls showing the space rocket to Sue and Johnny. It looks like a parent and teenage children. Of course, by issue #11, Reed was officially closer in age to Sue. Although the story says he fought in World War II, after graduating from college! The image seems to be Kirby remembering how he imagined issue #1 at the time. It was probably the splash page for the rocket flight: Kirby always created splash pages for major new sections, but the rocket flight splash page was lost from the printed version.

Clue 5: Ben was not in the Mole Man story

If we ignore the two suspect pages (20-21), Ben does not fit in this story. Kirby was a master of layout: he knew how to position people. But Ben is generally squashed into the edges of panels, most obviously in the last frame. Kirby had to work with very low page counts, so would not add a character unless he had a good reason. Kirby's other monster stories generally have one hero, and perhaps one friend. That makes the story more exciting: everything depends on the hero! It makes no sense for Ben to be there. Indeed, the space flight story begins when we meet Ben, and he has to be persuaded to join the team. So if the Mole Man story was first (because they have no powers), then Ben was not there originally.

The only place where we have a good quality picture of Ben, on page 17 panel 2, Reed's face is looking down as if talking to a child. Which implies that the child was erased, Ben was drawn into the space, and Sue (the child) was redrawn, squashed into the corner.

Clue 6: Johnny was probably not there either

⁹ The VillageVoice, December 8, 1987 p.32.

The arguments against Ben also work against Johnny. There is nothing in the story that needs more than two people. The Mole Man story works best if there are just two people: only two people fall down the hole, they are separated in the darkness, Reed has to fight the Mole Man alone, then Sue runs in and says she found the atomic fuel that is about to explode. Also, the art throughout is far less squashed if there are just two people.

Susan Kirby only saw three people (she did not say which three). And when Kirby later recalled how he created the FF, he spoke mostly about Ben: Ben's conflict was the heart of the origin story. Kirby once spoke about Sue, and sometimes talked about Reed. But he only mentioned Johnny once, almost as an afterthought:

"And of course, the Human Torch, which was created by Carl Burgos, was thrown in for good measure, to help the entertainment value."¹⁰

The spaceship story works better with just Reed, Sue and Ben. Kirby knew all about these capsules, having just written Sky Masters, with its emphasis on real world space hardware. These capsules only ever housed three people. The fourth seat in the picture is very awkwardly added and does not fit the layout of the panel. After the crash, the panels look squashed with four people. Page 12, the central conflict, does not need Johnny at all.

Another odd part is where Reed learns that he can stretch, in the last three panels of page 12. In the first panel, only Ben's arms are seen, which is a very strange artistic choice for Kirby to make. Even stranger, Reed decides to wrap himself around Ben. This would take some thought, as non-stretchy people do not do that. There is plenty of evidence (including quotes from Kirby and others) that Kirby drew his art instinctively, channeling his experience of fighting, feeling like he was actually there. His action scenes are always just what you would do in those circumstances. So a detail like that wrapping yourself in circles around a much stronger person is wrong.

Another un-Kirby element is how Sue is entirely passive when Ben wants her. At the start of the story, she confronted Ben, so why is she now suddenly weak and letting Reed fight her battles? And why does Ben look so ashamed

¹⁰ From the Leonard Pitts interview kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2012/08/06/19867-kirby-interview/

when we next see him? The whole sequence makes more sense if Sue again criticises him.

And how did they get home?

And if Johnny was not there originally, what was on page 13 panels 1-3 where he flies around for no reason?

Later flashbacks (FF #2 page 6, Strange Tales #101 p.3, FF #11 p.20) provide an answer. Kirby worked from home, and was too busy to read the finished story, so flashbacks reflect what he remembered of the story before any edits. Those flashbacks show that Reed learned he could stretch when he waved at a passing plane.¹¹ That was a natural thing to do: much more natural than coiling yourself around an angry friend. Waving at the passing plane also explains how they got home. So it looks like the ending, where we now see Reed fighting Ben and Johnny flying, might originally have had Sue confronting Ben about his anger, and Reed reaching for the plane.

Conclusion

We can now attempt to reconstruct the original version of Fantastic Four #1:

1. Kirby wrote a Mole Man story starring a scientist and his daughter Susan. This was probably intended for Amazing Adventures #6, the title that ended the month before the Fantastic Four began. The Mole Man story was inspired by the real world move to underground nuclear testing. This naturally suggested a mix of Godzilla and Journey to the Centre of the Earth.
2. When the story was finished, the Russians put the first man into space. Kirby then got permission to turn this story into its own comic. To help sales, he added The Human Torch.

¹¹ The flashback in FF #3 p.15 was different, and seems to be based on the finished comic. But the issue #11 flashback is back to showing Reed stretching. Either Kirby forgot the edited version, or he was making a statement about his dislike of edits after the changes with issue #9.

3. In the next story, they recruited Ben Grimm to pilot their rocket to investigate the newly discovered radiation belts.¹² They then gained strange powers.
4. After seeing the finished work, the editor asked Kirby to put the superpowers at the start of the book. He also asked Kirby for a romance between Reed and Sue. And finally, he asked to remove the (controversial) implied criticism of underground nuclear tests.¹³

Dr Who

The original team had an old inventor, his daughter Susan, and an all-American type, Ben. This was similar to the movie Godzilla.¹⁴ But even closer to the first series of Dr Who, called "The Unearthly Child".

In the early days, the team often went into space,¹⁵ and in issue #7, they obtained their own flying saucer. Kirby may have had big plans for this saucer, as we saw it again in #11, #78, and #92. However, the series slowed down and became less space oriented after issue #8 (see the notes to issue #9). Reed gradually built a subspace portal, finishing it in #51 (see the notes to issue #51), but if the series had maintained its original faster pace and stronger orientation toward space, then no doubt the portal would have had an even stronger presence and much earlier. Because the FF precursors, the Challengers, often found themselves teleporting or travelling in time and space. Kirby always loved his scientist characters to explore different dimensions: for example, in the same month as FF #1, Kirby wrote two different dimensional stories ("Dimension of Doom" and "Krogarr"). Kirby also loved his team gangs (e.g., the Boy Commandos) to visit different time periods.

¹² Reed was similar to James Van Allen: both began with nuclear radiation, and that led to an interest in cosmic rays.

¹³ A similar thing happened when Gojira became Godzilla: the nuclear testing theme was largely removed from the American version.

¹⁴ Godzilla focused on Dr. Serizawa (the scientist), Steve (for the American version) and Emiko (love interest).

¹⁵ in issues #1, #2, #6, #7, etc.

So Kirby's idea was for an older inventor who built a subspace portal and explored time and space, along with his daughter Susan and All-American Ben. That was essentially the premise of the first Doctor Who, even down to Susan's name. Dr Who's equivalent of the All-American male was Ian, a Scot, described as a "physically perfect, strong and courageous" man.¹⁶ (Dr Who also had a second adult companion, Barbara, but she was less important to the stories.) Kirby's hero even regenerates, sort of: Kirby routinely continued the same characters with different names and faces: see the later chapter on how the stories link together.

Dr Storm

The series would be about a scientist and his companions, starting with Susan, then adding Ben, and perhaps others, as we saw when the replacement kid-gang, the X-Men, added Jean Grey. So "Fantastic Three" is unlikely (and awkward to say). The adventures rely on technology provided by the scientist: so the leader might give his name to the team, much as the X-men are Xavier's Men. (Xavier originally had a much larger role, as we will see in a later chapter.) Mysterious scientist characters were usually called "doctor" something, hence "Dr Fate", "Dr Doom", "Dr Strange", etc. As the father or grandfather of Susan Storm, our hero's name would be Dr Storm. The series replaced "Amazing adventures" which featured many Fantastic Four-like stories, and the only continuing character was the scientist Dr Droom. This strengthens the argument for "Dr Storm". When the name changed to Fantastic Four, "Amazing Adventures" became "Amazing Fantasy" and then "Amazing Spider-Man" so "Amazing" was the preferred adjective. So the new title would most likely be "The Amazing Dr Storm".

The lost fourth Skrull

(Fantastic Four #2, January 1962)

¹⁶ According to Richard Molesworth in Doctor Who: Origins (2006).

Summary: Skrulls were not stupid. They were dangerous. And the most dangerous one escaped! Here is the evidence:

The stories joined up

The original Fantastic Four stories naturally join up. The Mole Man had monsters who changed their form due to radiation. The second story was about entering space, and changing form due to radiation. This would naturally attract the attention of nearby aliens, and they were also shape changers. So #1 and #2 join up. I will later argue that #2 links with #3. Issue #3 moves directly into #4. And #4 links with #6. #5 also links with #6. This linking up was to be expected, as the first ten issues were planned together:

"Kirby showed [his editor] his work and they spent the rest of a day working out the plotting for the first ten issues."¹⁷

A story of gods and demons

Kirby's science fiction was about gods and demons, and they reflect the real world. He called the space gods Kree, after the ancient kree-tee, legendary creators of our civilisation. "Kree-tee" was how the people of Crete said their name. Minoan Crete was where the Greeks got their culture and science. So the Kree-tee were the legendary gods who created western civilisation.

FF #1-65 was our journey into space to challenge the space gods. The space demons are Skrulls, probably from the word "skull", symbols of death. The Skrulls oppose our journey to the space gods. As soon as the FF enter space (in #1) they meet the Skrulls (in #2). They then fight the Skrull leader (in #3, see the later discussion). They find someone powerful enough to help them defend Earth, though he is initially an enemy (in #4). They then meet a demonic human (in #5).¹⁸ The demonic human almost wins (in #6), but is sent back into space, home of the Skrulls. In #7, we meet what could be a reprogrammed Kree sentry in a Skrull craft. These events lead to #8, then the

¹⁷ Quote from Ray Wyman, in "The Art of Jack Kirby" (1992). Wyman's book was apparently based on hours of taped interviews with Kirby.

¹⁸ Dr Doom was originally a master of black magic, so must have relied on demons. He did so from a scientific angle. The Skrulls were space demons, so they were a natural fit.

series was forced to change direction. But until then, the original stories suggest that gods (Kree) and demons (Skrulls) were the theme that united the Fantastic Four stories. Now let's examine the Skrulls' first appearance in #2.

What was lost in editing

The first thing we lost in editing was the Skrulls' intelligence. In the edited version, the Skrulls were stupid enough to believe that comic book clippings were photographs. The edited text said the images were from "Strange Tales" and "Journey into Mystery". But those images never appear in those comics. The images are movie stills from 'The She Creature' (1956), 'War of the Satellites' (1958), and 'Them' (1954). In 1961, movie stills could be purchased from kiosks such as 'Irving Klaw's Movie Star Photos'. An alien could easily confuse these with photographs of military secrets. The Skrull landing part was only supposed to discredit the FF. By going beyond that and discovering military secrets, the landing party deserved the medal.

The second thing lost in editing was realism. In the edited version, the Skrulls are punished by being turned into cows. As we will see, in the original they were not being punished, but protected, so their own leader could not find them and punish them.

In the edited version, the Skrulls seem unwilling to kill the FF, so discredit them instead. But the Mole Man story was originally about radiation mutating bodies. This was the common theme, and was the key alien technology in Challengers #3. So the problem was not the FF, but the risk that other humans would learn to shape change. Hence, the FF had to be discredited, not killed. Nobody would copy them if shape changing made you evil.

This story was based in reality: the disaster at the Texas Towers (January 1961), the New York blackout due to a faulty circuit breaker (June 1961), the theft of jewels from Doris Vidor, recent widow of movie director Charles Vidor (May 1961), and the unveiling of statues for the centenary of the civil war (1961), one of which had its head melted off by lightning (eight months earlier in Freeport, Illinois). The story originally made sense. How did Johnny know that the Skrulls would be at the rocket launch? Because in June 1961 (when this was written) America's top priority was to get a man to orbit the Earth. Otherwise it would lose the cold war and perhaps be wiped off the map. So all the world was watching to see if American humiliation would end. So

the obvious and simplest way to discredit the FF was to show them destroying the next rocket. And only the Torch would be most visible on TV. So Johnny's prediction was not some wild guess.

The fourth Skrull escaped

Page 16 shows all four Skrulls defeated. But page 23 shows just three Skrulls. This was highly unlikely to be a mistake. The story was about four Skrulls and four members of the FF: the number four was important. And the final three pages, the climax to the story, are the Skrulls' attempt to escape, and then the team looking very serious. This makes no sense, unless a Skrull actually did escape.

The published dialogue makes no sense: it says the fourth Skrull escaped back to his mother ship. Why would that take place off camera? And if he returned to his ship, they would know they had been tricked and could simply return, knowing that Earth's secret weapons were fake. And why didn't they escape before the police arrived? They were only tied up, and they were shape changers. And why didn't the remaining three Skrulls escape from their ropes? The answer was in their faces: they were scared.

Recall how, when Johnny tricked the Skrulls they came back to the fourth Skrull who was wearing a big "X" and shouted at them as if he was their leader. Kirby would be familiar with this dynamic because he served on the front lines in World War II. Wars have conscripts who don't always want to be there, and they are not always well-trained. Clearly, only one of the Skrulls was competent: he escaped. The rest of them were scared that he would come back and punish them. They had to hide! The text said the three Skrulls were hypnotised, but the art did not show hypnotism. Kirby always used 'show, don't tell'. They were being instructed, not hypnotised. And why did they join a herd of cows in some remote field, unless the purpose was to hide?

On page 22, the last panel was badly drawn. The muscles, hand, and head were wrong, and the art switched the point of view away from the house. The flow was also wrong: before that panel we saw the Torch about to enter the building, and after it, we saw a Skrull escape from the building. So we should have looked inside the house.

In the next panel (page 23 panel) the lettering shows that certain words were changed in the final edit. This is clear when zooming into a good scan of the

original comic. In the phrase 'there goes the third one' the words 'third one' were originally something else. This all supports the idea that one of the Skrulls escaped (in the original story).

We cannot be sure why the story was changed, but in over ninety-nine percent of cases the editor preferred stories with neat happy endings.¹⁹ But the original story did not have a happy ending: it ended with a cliffhanger: a deadly shape changer, possibly backed by vast alien fire-power, was on the loose!

The Fourth Skrull came back

(Fantastic Four #3, January 1962)

Issue #3 was like issue #32, where a miracle worker turns out to be a Skrull in disguise. Here are the clues:

Clue 1: The hypnotist's identity mattered

Hypnotism was a common cliché in comics. Hypnotism on its own was not interesting. Kirby wrote many hypnotism stories, but the interesting part was always the identity of the hypnotist:

- The same month as this story, "Save me from the Weed"²⁰ featured a hypnotist who was an alien plant.
- A few months earlier (the same month as Fantastic Four #1), "The Dimension of Doom" featured a hypnotist who was an alien.
- The month before, "What Lurks on Channel X" had shape changing aliens appear on TV to hypnotise people.

¹⁹ This number comes from Michael Vassallo, on the Marvel Method Facebook group. Vassallo spent years examining everything that that publisher ever produced.

²⁰ Strange Tales #94, March 1962

- A few months earlier, "Dr Droom" was a series about a hypnotist with a very interesting backstory, and the stories were generally about aliens.
- A couple of years earlier, Kirby wrote "Marco's Eyes",²¹ about a stage hypnotist who turned to crime. "The Fly" used comical situations to make serious points, just like in "Fighting American", but Marco is really about a serious topic: the need for approval. He sits as a lonely man hidden behind a giant billboard, where he watches the world go by. He is eventually defeated by his desperate need to be loved.

Kirby hypnotist stories are never about hypnotism itself. Those stories are always about the hypnotist as a person. And he is frequently a shape changing alien.

This Miracle Man looked and acted like the villain in "He Walked Through Walls".²² That villain could also guide a person's thoughts. And he was really a demon stand-in, like the Skrulls. Then almost three years after The Miracle Man, Kirby wrote Fantastic Four #32, about another man who could do miracles: this time he was called The Invincible Man. He turned out to be a Skrull in disguise.

So if Kirby's other stories are any guide, the hypnotist was probably somebody else in disguise, most likely a Skrull.

Clue 2: evidence of major changes

The few surviving pages show major changes to the art. Page 8 panel 6 was redrawn and 13 panel 4 has Johnny added. Page 7 panel 2 originally had Sue wearing a mask. And later pages have white paint on Ben's legs. Why? The answer is in his shirt. On pages 9-11, Ben's costume has a shirt, which he then tears off. So on 12-13 he is shirtless. Then on 14-16 he has a shirt again. Then on 18-22 he has no shirt again. The back of page 11 shows some discussion over Ben tearing off his shirt. The obvious explanation is that this was to allow the story to show Ben both with and without the shirt, thus saving time

²¹ "The Fly" #2, September 1959

²² Tales to Astonish #26. December 1961

on re-drawing. So it appears that Kirby delivered a story where Ben wore trunks as in the previous stories. Then, after the story was inked, the editor decided that he wanted Ben to wear a full body costume. To save time on edits, it was agreed that Ben would tear off the shirt on page 11, so the next few pages would not need the shirt drawn on.

All of this indicates major changes were made to the story, even after the pages were inked.

Clue 3: the Miracle Man's big reveal

On the original art, page 5, panel 6, some of Kirby's original dialogue was not erased properly. The name "Thing" was just about visible. In the edited version, this was only on panel 4. On the back of the pencilled page, we have a big arrow to indicate changes: panel 6 moves to panel 4. Why move a panel? There are instructions for the first three panels. It looked like they were not in the original, and so the page had to be rearranged to make them fit. Those three published panels are not like something Kirby would write: it was just a monologue where the villain said what he will do two pages later.

So the original top of page 5 was changed. We don't know what it was, but the previous page ended with the Miracle Man about to reveal something. So we can conclude that the Miracle Man had some great secret to reveal, but it was removed in editing.

Clue 4: the ending was changed

We don't have the original art for the last page, but we do have the back of another page, and it contains a sketch of the final sequence where the Torch escapes. This indicates some discussion over that sequence. Kirby always delivered a finished story, so this indicates a change, or at least a discussion of a possible change. The Torch disappears off the top of the final panels too soon, making a bad layout, as if the panels were moved upward. This was probably to make space for the text along the bottom. If the panels were moved up, then the original art had space for far more text than in the final version. Or it could be that a completely different ending was being replaced. All we know for sure was that edits were made to both the art and text. Also on the final page, Sue's face on panel 3 was badly drawn, not like Kirby at all. So it looked like the final page had important changes.

Clue 5: this should join with issue #2

The first ten issues were planned together. Issue #3 joins seamlessly with issue #4. The villains from #4 and #5 come back in #6, #9 and #10. Issue #2 flows naturally from #1: #1 has mankind enter space. In #2, the local aliens notice. #1 is about radiation in space causing mutations. Issue #2 reminds us, when Ben passed through the radiation belt, he found that he could change. So it is natural that beings who live in space can change shape. #7 (a planet blows up) then leads to #8 (a meteor lands on Earth). So we should expect #3 to join with #2, about the Skrulls.

Clue 6: the missing Skrull should appear in this issue

We saw that issue #2 ended with a cliffhanger: a dangerous shape changing Skrull was on the loose. So we should expect him to appear in this issue.

Clue 7: The Miracle Man had Skrull powers

All the Miracle Man's powers were Skrull powers. He could change shape into a cloud. He could change size, to make himself small, or very large. So he was a shape changer. He could also create explosions. The Skrull who pretended to be the Thing used hidden technology for that. The Skrulls' ability to hypnotise would become the climax of the next Skrull story (FF #18, page 20).

Clue 8: he talked and acted like a Skrull

The Miracle Man talks and acts like a Skrull. He does not talk and act like a human hypnotist. On page 5, the Miracle Man says, "*The human race is powerless before me*". As if he is not from the human race, and dislikes them. On page 8, he plans to conquer the world. This makes no sense for a hypnotist. But it was the Skrulls' ultimate goal. After stealing money and a nuclear tank, he could then call back the invasion fleet in triumph. On page 10, the police commissioner is clearly not happy with Reed. Again, recall that the Skrulls wanted to discredit the Fantastic Four. The attempt to make the team look evil had failed, so now he makes them look incompetent instead.

Conclusion

So all the evidence suggests that the Miracle Man was going to be the fourth Skrull. But that required a connection between stories. At the time the editor disliked connected stories, feeling that young readers and new readers would become confused. He would later relent, but at this point stories were mostly “done in one”. So redrawing the Skrull face on the last page, to make him look human all along, removed the element of a continuing story.

(skipping a few issues...)

For space reasons, this book only explores a few of Kirby’s lost stories. So we will often skip a few issues.

Lost dialogue

(Fantastic Four #6, September 1962)

Fantastic Four #6 appears to be dialogued by Kirby, with very little editing.²³ This is very unusual. Almost every other Fantastic Four issue was heavily edited. So issue #6 lets us see Kirby’s original dialogue. We can compare #6 with other issues, where Kirby’s dialogue is edited, and see what was lost or gained.

A tale of two speeches

Issue #6 contains a speech that is very similar to a speech in issue #4. So we can directly compare the two. The speech describes the destruction of Atlantis. Here is Namor’s speech from issue #4. This speech was edited as usual:

²³ See Mike Breen's article in Jack Kirby Collector 61; also tombrevoort.com/2019/12/22/lee-kirby-the-mystery-of-fantastic-four-6/, and discussions on the 'Marvel Method' group. [facebook.com/groups/1758159214462637/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1758159214462637/)

"DESTROYED!! It's all destroyed!!"

"That glow in the water -- it's RADIOACTIVITY!! NOW I know what happened!!"

"The HUMANS did it, unthinkingly, with their accursed atomic tests!"

"My people could not be harmed by radiation, but when their homes were destroyed, they must have gone ELSEWHERE! The oceans are vast, endless! How shall I ever FIND them?"

["Minutes later..."]

"But the humans will PAY for this! I SWEAR IT!"

Now, here is Dr Doom's speech from issue #6. Dr Doom reminded Namor of the same event, with the same conclusion. But this was Kirby's original writing, apparently with no editing:

"Imagine... your great and proud people... struggling for thousands of years, defeating all the terrors of the deep to build a civilisation superb and beautiful... yes, beautiful and glowing with life... until that last terrifying moment... when that monster of a bomb lodged in the midst of that beauty..."

"Gone! All that glorious history gone in one brief instant!.. Replaced by an ugly crater in the ocean floor.. littered with fused masonry and bitter memories that cry out... revenge! REVENGE!!!"

"Revenge upon the surface world which did this in its ignorance! Revenge upon humanity's defenders! Death to the Fantastic Four!"

See the difference. This is what we lost when Kirby's dialogue was edited:

- Synergy. Kirby's words perfectly matched the expression, because he drew as he wrote.
- Vocabulary. Kirby used a wider range of words.

- Subtlety. The edited text had more exclamation points and more words in HEAVY EMPHASIS.
- Impact. Kirby used simple concrete ideas, evoking strong simple emotions, and built them through repetition.
- Power. Kirby's argument developed to a higher and higher crescendo.
- Depth. Kirby described a society we can feel and care about.
- Readability. Kirby built ideas gently. But the edited text reversed direction: adding "unthinkingly" as if he wanted to defend his enemies' actions, and then the awkward exposition, *"my people could not be harmed by radiation, but..."*

Respect for women

In issue #6, Susan speaks to the bellboy and calls him "son", like an adult explaining something. That is, she has higher status than the boy. In other issues, we do not have Kirby dialogue, but we do have Kirby art. We often see Susan defeating men in battle. However, the dialogue (which was heavily edited) contradicts the art, and makes Susan submissive to male authority. For example, when Susan fought Doom at the end of #17, or when she fought the Super Skrull at the end of #18, or when she grabbed the mobster in #95. The art showed her defeating a man, but the dialogue made her show deference to her husband.

Realistic family interactions

In issue #6, when Johnny finds the photograph, Susan's dialogue perfectly fits her actions: this is a wonderful family moment. It reflects Kirby's years of writing romance stories. But moments like that are very rare or missing in the edited books.

More accurate science

Issue #6 features a 'passenger ICBM' (shown in the building diagram). This had just been patented by Friedrich G. von Saurma, who ran the V-1 rocket

project in WWII.²⁴ Five pages later we see a new super powerful magnet. This reflects the real world news about a new class of more powerful magnet that had just been discovered. By far the greatest interest in the “rare earth magnets” was in 1962, the date of this story.²⁵ Theorists knew that electromagnetism was an incredibly powerful fundamental force, so Kirby imagined what even more powerful magnets might do in the future.

Other issues have edited text, so they sometimes have scientific mistakes. For example, the seismograph in #1 was called a "radar scope", and molecules are confused with cells in #15.

Simpler text.

Issue #6 showed that Kirby sometimes uses very short phrases like "Hiram!" and "Oh My!" on page 11. Or the unforgettable "Go! GO! GO!!" on page 20. Edited text in other issues tends to be verbose.

In conclusion, issue #6 shows that the edited dialogue lost much of the original power.

The lost universe

(Fantastic Four #7, October 1962)

Kirby's original story was awe-inspiring. The published version was “silly”. An experienced reviewer sums it up:

"Of course, in the end, it's a very silly tale. The idea that a super-advanced civilisation needs the scientific know-how of an Earth-man to solve their problem — and the idea that Reed

²⁴ [nytimes.com/1960/11/12/archives/cargopassenger-space-vehicle-was-slowed-on-reentry-by-rotors-variety.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1960/11/12/archives/cargopassenger-space-vehicle-was-slowed-on-reentry-by-rotors-variety.html)

²⁵ According to the Google NGRAM viewer.

Richards can knock up a shrinking potion in a few hours — was ludicrous."²⁶

Other reviewers comment on how this looked more like a science fiction story, not a superhero story. Let us look at these claims: that needing an Earth-man, and having him quickly create a shrinking potion, was ludicrous, and that this story fits better in one of Kirby's other books.

"Silly" idea 1: Needing an earth man

Page 2, panel 2, says the FF are "the only four creatures in all the universe who might find a way to save us". This was hyperbole. Other examples in this story are *"The World's Greatest Comic Magazine"* (on the cover), *"the most astonishing adventure of all time!"* (page 1), *"the most incredible adventure of all time!"* (last page), and *"one of the most astonishing devices of all time!"* (page 20). Hyperbole was nearly always added by the editor: it was seldom in Kirby's original text. Then what was Kirby's explanation? Why did Kurrgo use Reed? Kirby shows us, in the art. We begin by seeing that Kurrgo can spy on the team from another world. So Kurrgo is surely aware of other aliens such as Skrulls, and no doubt others. But we are shown that Kurrgo was an unpleasant dictator, and in a very weak position. Any advanced planet would take advantage of this, and remove him. So he needs a scientist from a less advanced planet. Somebody who is not a threat.

But why Earth? The phrase "light years" is only in the text, and may be another example of added hyperbole. The art merely shows them passing through the asteroid belt, then arriving at Planet X. Kirby's previous planet X (in "Goom") locates the planet just past Jupiter. Given the size of Jupiter, Planet X could easily be an oversized moon of the giant. Jupiter's gravity makes it attract large meteors, such as Hale-Bopp, that smashed into Jupiter in 1995. So Earth was the closest non-advanced planet to Jupiter, and Reed is the best scientist on Earth. They need a specialist in space travel, a field where they know nothing. Reed was in Earth's space program and recently defeated the Skrulls, so he is their best hope.

²⁶ from "Steve did Comics": stevedoescomics.blogspot.com/2011/12/fantastic-four-7-kurrgo-and-planet-x.html

“Silly” idea 2: Reed’s shrinking potion

Planet X had a highly advanced civilisation, with highly advanced technology. There may have been a shrinking potion lying around already. Dictatorships are usually in economic decline. The scientists might all be in prison. They might not know how their own technology works: Kirby wrote several stories about societies in decline, using technology they did not understand. Kamandi, for example. Or the Earth of 4000 AD, visited by Kang. Or the beings in “Menace from Mars”, who seem far too brutish to understand their own technology. It appears that some of Kurrigo’s technology was stolen: issue #92, page 6 said this saucer was *“captured from the Skrulls”*. Evading the Skrulls in #93 hinges on the fact that this was one of their craft. The saucer was on Kirby’s mind for a while: it also appears in issue #78 page 6. So Kurrigo had a Skrull saucer: technology he did not invent and did not understand.

The lost universe

The shrinking potion fits well into Kirby’s other stories of the time: see the discussion of the original Ant-Man. And “Planet X” could easily be the same planet X as in “Goom” and “Groot”. There was no reason why three species could not coexist on one planet. We saw how Planet X may have stolen a Skrull ship and re-purposed a Kree Sentry. The Sentry robot would be another reason why they didn’t want to draw attention to themselves. Kirby’s story hints at an amazing, complex, joined up universe. But the published version was just silly.

The lost awakening

(Fantastic Four #8, November 1962)

In the original story, Alicia could see. She was not a helpless female, she drove the story: the story of her awakening. Here are the clues.

Clue 1: Alicia’s mental connection

Page 16, panel 3 has obviously been changed. In the published version, Johnny asks where the Puppet Master is. The art shows Alicia in the middle holding her head as if she has some special brain ability. Professor X uses the same pose in X-men #3 page 5, when remote-viewing to find their enemy. When Alicia does this, Reed is shown reacting in a thoughtful way: this means something. And there is plenty of space for text: Kirby intended more writing. But there is very little writing, as if the explanation is missing. Then in the next panel they find the Puppet Master. Clearly, Alicia has some kind of mental connection with the Puppet Master. But what?

The Puppet Master has a mental connection with the people he controlled. He also has a mental connection with his robots. Could Alicia be controlled? We never see a small Alicia puppet, and Kirby used “show, don't tell”, so this suggests that Alicia is a robot.

Clue 2: what do blank stares mean?

For how Kirby drew blindness, see Matt Brown in “Resort Romeo”.²⁷ A Kirby blind person does not have a blank stare: they look exactly like any other person. As long as they are in a familiar location, nobody can tell they are blind.

Then how do we explain Alicia and Ben staring blankly between pages 9 to 13? It cannot be blindness: Ben certainly was not blind. How do we explain the blank stare on the face of the man who almost jumped from the bridge? Or the blank stare of the prison governor? The answer is in the title of the story: they were prisoners of the Puppet Master. Blind people do not stare like that, but mind controlled people do.

Clue 3: Alicia uses her eyes

The Puppet Master wants to trick the Fantastic Four into thinking Alicia is Susan. Why? Just to get into their headquarters and cause havoc? Ben can do that on his own. So Alicia is to do something when there. But she does not know the layout of the building. For that, she needs eyes.

²⁷ Young Romance #85

On page 13, panels 3 and 4, Ben changes and the spell is broken: then Alicia also looks at him. From that point onward, Alicia uses her eyes like any sighted person. Compare her eyes to Susan's eyes: they look the same.

On page 21 Alicia looks out of the window. Why would a blind person look out of a window? The published text tries to explain this obvious problem by saying that she looked "with sightless eyes". But the picture is very small: obviously Kirby did not expect much added text. Therefore the small picture was intended to speak for itself: Alicia is looking out of the window.

On the last page, on panel 2, Alicia looks at the doll as she grabs it. Then on panel 4 she looks at the doll again as she reaches for it.

The lines around Alicia's arm (last page, panel 4) are unlikely to be by Kirby, because he seldom drew lines like that, and they contradict the story. The story at this point only works if reaching for the puppet took less than a second. In panel 4 they both reach for the puppet, and the Puppet Master is in a lunging pose. He then trips, and his momentum causes him to fly out of the window. That momentum implies that he was moving very fast. So there was no time for Alicia to wave her arm around between panels 3 and 5. She had to reach straight for the puppet. (There was also no time for her dialogue, but the editor was famous for adding lengthy redundant dialogue in the middle of a split second event.)

Why did she cover her eyes?

On the last page, on panel 7, Alicia covers her eyes, so she does not see the horrible sight. Why would a blind person need to cover her eyes? Again the edited text has to explain the problem away: Ben is made to say, "Don't cry Alicia". But Kirby did not draw crying that way. He always drew crying with a tear, or a tear being wiped away, or if the emotion was too much, the head bowed into the hands. Kirby never showed crying by just covering the eyes. See for example the cover to Young Romance #3, or Young Romance #80, "Personal Message to Ruth" page 2, or "Gingerbread House" page 5, or #81, "Bring The Kids" page 5, or #82, "Lost Little Lamb" page 1, or "Bundle From Heaven" page 1, or "Repeat Performance" page 3, or #83, or "The Serious type" pages 4-5, or #85, "My Cousin From Milwaukee" pages 2,3. The closest thing to Alicia's pose is the man on page 6 panel 1, but he is holding his head in despair, not compassion.

Young Romance #83 has an image closer to Alicia's pose: a girl looking who was shocked by something she saw. See "Much Ado About Love" page 4. The logic of the story requires us to see the Puppet Master on the street below. Good taste means we cannot see the smashed body, so we have to see reactions instead.

Kirby based this ending on his earlier story, "Voodoo on Tenth Avenue" (from "Black Magic" #4), and that ends with the hero looking out of the window, before the final frame with the broken doll. Why didn't we just see Alicia looking? Because we have established that Alicia was very sensitive to emotions: see pages 6,7,11,13, etc. This sensitivity is important, because the story appears to be about a robot learning compassion: see "The Twilight Zone" below.

Clue 4: blind people do not touch faces

Alicia didn't merely touch Ben's face, she fondled and embraced him. Look at page 13, panel 5: she has her head on his chest, with one hand on his cheek and another behind his neck. (Sometimes the hand behind his head was missed by the colourist: look carefully.) In Kirby's romance comics, this is what people do when they are in love. Lovers often touch faces. Blind people almost never touch faces to feel a person:

*"I have yet to meet a blind person who habitually touched faces; this act was not only socially sanctioned, but it usually provides little useful information."*²⁸

*"I have been blind for just about ten years, I know people who have been blind from birth and those who have lost their sight through injury and illness. I can say in all honesty that no blind person that I know feels someone's face, to be able to 'see' them."*²⁹

²⁸ "Blind in the City: Why We didn't Touch Faces, and What We Do Instead." disabilitywisdom.com/2017/12/01/blind-in-the-city-why-we-dont-touch-faces-and-what-we-do-instead/

²⁹ William Elliott, "Can blind people construct a visual of another person's face by touching it?" [quora.com/Can-blind-people-construct-a-visual-of-another-persons-face-by-touching-it](https://www.quora.com/Can-blind-people-construct-a-visual-of-another-persons-face-by-touching-it)

Some movies mistakenly show blind people touching faces. But ten times as many movies show lovers touching faces. So we should interpret the touching as love, not blindness. Alicia also touches Ben's face when they leave the Puppet Master. Why would she love him so quickly? That brings us to the next clue: Alicia the robot.

Clue 5: Alicia the robot in The Twilight Zone

The previous story had a scene inspired by *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. Issue #2 was clearly influenced by *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Issue #1 (*The Mole Man*) had a nod to *Godzilla*. Issue #5 had a homage to pirate movies. Kirby made no secret of his love of movies. But an even bigger influence was *The Twilight Zone*. *The Fantastic Four* has all the same themes: alienated characters, and hidden dangers. The *Fantastic Four* logo was even modelled on the *Twilight Zone* logo. One of the more memorable *Twilight Zone* stories was season 1, episode 7, "The Lonely". The story is about a man called Harry, whose life has been ruined due to no fault of his own. Just like Ben. (The actor even looks similar.) As a result, Harry was very lonely, like Ben. Harry was given a female robot called Alicia. Alicia was designed to bond with the first man she saw, and did this by touching his face. The scene where Alicia touches Harry's face and bonds with him is just like the scene where Alicia bonds with Ben. In interviews, the actress Jean Marsh, who played Alicia, emphasised that the point of her character was that Alicia adapted to be the woman that the hero wanted. By the end of the story, it was clear that Alicia the robot had feelings, just as Alicia does in Kirby's story, when she instinctively shields her eyes from the dead body.

The TV story ends with the Alicia robot lying smashed on the ground. Kirby combines this with his earlier "Voodoo on Tenth Avenue" story, and this time has the bad guy smashed on the ground, as the robot watches in shock. This has a similar emotional impact: Kirby's Alicia robot has killed her former master, and feels distraught. But Kirby wisely ensured that his Alicia was still around for future stories. "The Lonely" first aired in November 1959. Due to the series' popularity, the first series was rerun in the summer of 1961.³⁰ Kirby would have written this story around the following April.

³⁰ *"re-themed" episodes were prepared for airing in the summer of 1961 as summer repeats*"" en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Twilight_Zone_(1959_TV_series)

Lost depth

The Alicia robot was obviously bonded to the Puppet Master at first. To follow Ben, she had to bond with Ben. This turned out to be the Puppet Master's big mistake: Alicia, now bonded with Ben, turns against her previous master. This also adds passion to when Alicia turns against her former boss: she does not want anyone to be controlled in the way that she was. It also raises important questions about what makes a person human.

Some readers liked the change to Alicia being blind, because it made Ben think that only a blind person could love him. But that would emphasise Alicia as being less valuable than another human. The story would be more powerful if she was a robot: no human loves him, so he turns to a sex doll for comfort. Then, as he grows to see her as human, her robotic strength could cause even more emotional stress: she is strong like him, but also pretty. So people no longer see him as the strong one, but just as the ugly one.

The famous synopsis

This story was unusual, possibly unique, because the editor wrote a synopsis to issue #8 in 1963. This synopsis said that Alicia should be a blind girl. So it must have been written after Kirby delivered the story with Alicia the robot. Kirby wrote hundreds of stories in this period, but this is the only one (apart from Fantastic Four #1) where the edits are known to be in writing. This indicates that the changes were very important, and is more evidence for the major change of direction from the next issue.

The origin of the Puppet Master

The Puppet Master is clearly not human: he looks like a puppet. Where did he come from? All we see of the Puppet Master is that he has radioactive clay. We also see that these issues tend to connect together. Issue #7 had robots and mind control devices. At the end their planet, probably based near Jupiter, was blown into pieces. Then in #8, the Puppet Master has radioactive clay from somewhere. Kirby often has radioactive meteors that can give artificial life or exotic power: see "The Thing on Sputnik 4", or Challengers #3, or Fantastic Four #13, #20, #35, #77, etc. Issue #35 is especially close to this: judging by the art, the radioactive meteor allows a model to come to life and be controlled. (The edited text seems to miss this obvious detail.) So all the

elements of the Puppet Master's story — the meteor, mind control and robots — are from the previous story.

The change in direction

(Fantastic Four #9, December 1962)

Everything changed with issue #9, almost certainly due to editorial demands.

Change 1: from hating publicity to loving it

The start of issue #3 showed that the team hated publicity. We saw this again at the start of #8. Yet the end of #9 shows them as movie stars, and loving it! Then in #11, we see they have fan clubs everywhere, and seem to encourage it. In #24 they court the media.

Change 2: from pariahs to popular

In issue #2, they were hunted by the law. In #3, the police commissioner was obviously not impressed. The cover to #7 showed them as public enemies. The cover to #9 also showed them hated by the public. Yet the very last image of #9 shows them as movie stars. #10 shows them mobbed by adoring fans. #11 shows their fan clubs. #12 has a military parade in their honour!

Change 3: From serious fighting to play fighting

When Ben fought the team in #2 they seriously worried that he could not be controlled. In #3 Johnny left the team. In #5 Ben left the team. In #8, when Ben walked out, his body language was serious: he hated the others. Sue could not persuade him to come back. But in #9, page 5, they all hug! And the last panel shows them united and loving it. In #11, they stroll down the street like friends and end with a birthday party together. The tone of the book has reversed: from serious fighting to warm and cuddly.

Change 4 from horror to light hearted fun

The early issues were full of monsters (#1,#2,#3,#4), deadly robots (#7,#8), and mind control (#3,#7,#8). The army pointed guns at the team (#2 and #3), there was a prison riot (#8), a creepy man with a sex robot (this is not stated, of course, but what else was Alicia for?) and the team was hated and also hated each other. Then issue #8 began with a man being forced to commit suicide! This was all very dark. But after the first few pages of issue #9 (in which the team are driven from their homes) the story suddenly becomes relatively light and fun. They still face dangers, but the dangers are never serious. In #9 they star in a movie. In #10, their most dangerous enemy becomes very amateurish, just visiting an office with a gun. In #11 they face a comedy character, in #12, they have fun chasing the Hulk, and so on.

Change 5: a drop in creativity

The early issues introduce major brand-new characters in almost every issue. From issue #9, the rate of new characters drops off severely. It does not take off again until after the wedding (from issue #44 onwards). Issues #44 to #67 are generally considered the high point of the series. But in between was a notable drop in quality.

Change 6: from cosmic to local

The early issues had exotic locations. Issue #1 had the frozen north, then a remote island, then underground, then outer space. (The opening eight pages set in New York were due to editorial changes.) Issue #2 took us back into space. Issue #3 took us into mental space — most of the events only take place in the mind — and the antagonist was an alien. Issue #4 took us to Atlantis. Issue #5 took us in a time machine. Issue #6 took us back into space. Issue #7 took us even further into space. Issue #8 had a dingy apartment (making it exotic in context) with a weird semi human man and a robot. But after this, and until the series picks up in #44, more of the stories take place in regular New York or the Baxter Building. Most of the exotic locations are places they had visited before (such as Atlantis or the Mole Man's kingdom).

Change 7: the editor began calling himself the writer

In the 1940s and 50s, Kirby's stories were usually signed "Simon and Kirby" because Joe Simon handled most of the business, and often helped with inking and lettering. So it just meant "business by Simon, comic by Kirby". When Simon left the comics business, Kirby often had his work signed "Kirby and Ayers" because Dick Ayers often inked Kirby's work. Having an inker halved the time it took Kirby to create a book. So the signature meant "comic by Kirby, inked by Ayers".

Beginning with *Fantastic Four* #1, the editor began to erase the "Kirby and Ayers" name and put his own name next to Kirby instead. Though sometimes he forgot to erase the original signatures, so we get both, such as in issue #8 page 14. With issue #9, the editor goes further: he begins to credit himself with writing the book, and credits Kirby only with drawing it.

It seems clear that the changes from #9 were the editor's request, because these were features common to the stories he signed for other writers.³¹ It was also clear that Kirby was still writing the series, because in the following two issues Kirby showed exactly what he thought of the changes.

Kirby's reaction: issue #10

In issue #10, Kirby shows his editor trying to think of a story: he has no ideas, so has to ask Kirby. Kirby then suggests a new villain who ends up being used in *Spider-Man*. The editor then says he wishes they could think of good villains like in previous issues (i.e., before he called himself the writer). Then one of those villains enters. The rest of the story is about pretending to be someone you are not, and ends up with the villain shrunk down to nothing. Curiously, the villain (Dr Doom) is shown as losing his hair, whereas in other stories he has a full head of hair.³² Kirby's editor at the time was losing his hair.

Kirby's reaction: issue #11

³¹ Michael Vassallo has examined this topic in depth

³² Compare the mirror scene with the similar scene in annual #2

If issue #10 was too subtle, Kirby made his frustrations clearer in issue #11. That issue's villain looked and acted like the editor and was called "the Impossible Man".

*"[H]e was the kind of kid that liked to fool around — open and close doors on you. Yeah. In fact, once I told Joe to throw him out of the room. ... he was a pest. ... He liked to irk people, and it was one thing I couldn't take. INTERVIEWER: Hasn't changed a bit, huh? KIRBY: He hasn't changed a bit."*³³

He ends up sitting on the hero's shoulders like a parasite. The only way to make him leave is to ignore him. At some point, the editor may have suspected that the Impossible Man was him, because he refused to let anyone bring the character back. He only relented for #176, years after he left the comics business, when his longtime assistant begged him. The official reason for the ban was that readers supposedly hated the character.³⁴ But the relevant letters pages are mostly extremely positive. True, one reader in #14 called the Impossible Man "*a ridiculous character*", and one reader in #15 said the character was "*too offbeat*". But that was just the usual mix. One reader in #13 said Dr Doom "*was an AWFUL villain; nothing special about him at all.*" And another reader in the same issue said, "*the Puppet Master story was a real dud except for the introduction of Alicia*". Yet both Doom and the Puppet Master returned many times. All the other readers were very positive about the Impossible Man. A letter in #14 said, "*issue 11 was the greatest!!!*" and said of the Impossible Man, "*I nearly died laughing*". Another called the issue "*one of the best yet*" and called The Impossible Man "*a great yarn*". Another said, "*The Impossible Man was Great*". Another said the magazine was "*unequalled, matchless, first class*" and "*The Impossible Man met all expectations and more*". But the editor hated him.

(Skipping more issues...)

This book is only an introduction to lost Kirby stories, so I will only look at a few selected issues.

For Fantastic Four #21, see the chapter on Nick Fury.

³³ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

³⁴ See "Marvel Visionaries: Roy Thomas"

The real origin of Dr Doom

(Fantastic Four annual #2, story 1, 1963)

Summary: read the art to Doom's origin story, and ignore the words. There is no hint of a mother anywhere.

The art shows that the story is about an alchemist who creates a very dangerous child. Evidently that child is supposed to protect or avenge his people.

In the story Doom is very troubled, very driven by some inner demon, and he has strange powers. He is very lonely, frustrated and angry. The imagery of the castle, the driving rain, the almost dead trees, the darkness, the shadows, etc, are familiar from many horror movies. But what does it all mean?

When Victor learns of his origin, he holds up two items: a winged demon, and some kind of flask (with a horn indicating it was evil). And outside the tent there are always horses. We now have all the clues we need.

Some years ago, my friend James put the clues together. I posted his conclusion on my website. I then received an email from somebody who had Kirby's original notes. They confirmed that James was exactly right. So rather than spend pages slowly examining the clues, let's cut to the chase. Let's look at Kirby's original notes.

Kirby's original notes

The owner of Kirby's original notes asked not to be identified. But their credentials are impeccable. The providence of this material is beyond doubt. The notes include several newspaper clippings, most notably from Otto Rippert's movie "Homunculus", and "Butterfly: The Golem". They also contain sketches of what appears to be Doom's father, and the name "Prof. Ortmann". So "Victor Von Doom" is not the family name, it literally means "the victor, who came from Doom".

The Homunculus

In the notes, the movie “Homunculus” has its original Hungarian name “Homunkulus halála”. This movie was released in parts between 1916 and 1917, the year of Kirby’s birth. It tells of a scientist who creates an artificial man in a laboratory. The creature is named Richard Ortmann.

Ortmann wants to feel emotions, but he cannot. He inspires the people of the Bavarian Alps to rebel against their oppressors. Like Dr Doom he becomes a saviour figure for his people. But his inability to feel emotion turns him into a cynical engine of death.

A homunculus, literally a “little person”, is a tiny human created without female help. According to the famous text “The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz” the purpose of alchemy was not to create gold, but to create a homunculus. The famous alchemist Paracelsus (1493–1541) described how to do it: instead of planting male seed inside woman to grow a normal baby, the seed should be placed in a horse’s womb and fed on human blood. It supposedly forms into a very tiny child, who then grows normally.

All of those elements are in Kirby’s story. Prof. Ortmann was some kind of alchemist. When Victor discovered his origin he found a demonic flask, as well as a figure of Astaroth (see the Golem, below), and horses were always prominent in the camp.

It has been suggested that Johann Konrad Dippel (1673-1734) also created homunculi. He lived in the real Castle Frankenstein and allegedly experimented on soul transference between dead bodies. He was an obvious inspiration for the novel Frankenstein. A famous story (probably untrue) is that Dippel’s chemical experiments led to an explosion that destroyed a tower of the castle. Kirby knew these old stories from “Frankenstein country”, because he learned them from his mother:

“She was a wonderful storyteller, she had come from ‘Frankenstein country’ and knew all these horror stories, and they used to make my hair stand on end;”³⁵

³⁵ Interview with Nessim Vaturi, Jack Kirby Collector #12

Soul transference was going to be a major part of Dr Doom's life.³⁶ Perhaps the explosion that scarred his face was an attempted soul transference, as it began with an Astaroth dish (page 9, panel 3). Or perhaps, like the tragic homunculus in the movie, Victor just wanted to fix himself, to give himself the ability to feel emotion.

The Golem

"Butterfly: The Golem" probably refers to Paul Wegener's third and most famous Golem movie, from 1920. In Wegener's previous movies the Golem already existed, and this movie told its origin. Its full title was "The Golem: How He Came Into The World". "Golem" literally means "chrysalis", and refers to a living thing about to emerge from an apparently dead cocoon. So it would be natural to refer to the origin story as "Butterfly: The Golem". Kirby famously returned to the cocoon theme with "Him",³⁷ a character he referred to in margin notes as just "The Cocoon Man".

The Golem is a famous story from Jewish folklore, perhaps the most famous of all, outside of the Bible. It tells of persecuted Jews who created a statue of a strong person out of clay. The clay person came to life and protected them. Kirby had recently told several different Golem stories, including the charming "The Scarecrow Walks",³⁸ and "I Created the Colossus",³⁹ both in February 1961, and then the month after, "Vandoom, The Man who made a Creature".⁴⁰ "Van" is just the Dutch variant of "von", meaning "from". Victor Von Doom came the year after.

The Golem was about medieval Prague, where the emperor wanted to kill all the Jews. In the movie version, Rabbi Low creates a man out of clay, and forces the demon Astaroth to make it come alive and protect the people.

³⁶ See Fantastic Four #10. The alien soul transference section was probably going to be longer before Kirby had to lighten the tone, causing him to make space for a commentary about his editor.

³⁷ Fantastic Four #67

³⁸ Strange Tales #81

³⁹ Tales of Suspense #14

⁴⁰ Tales to Astonish #17

Astaroth is traditionally shown as winged and horned, like the statue that Victor Von Doom discovered in the trunk. In the movie, the golem can only be stopped by removing an amulet from his chest. Kirby returned to that theme with Iron Man: the protector of the weak,⁴¹ who need batteries to power his heart.

The tragic Doom

The original Dr Doom was a tragic figure. He was unable to feel emotion, so tried to replace love with cold brutal power. Kirby said he based the character on somebody he knew, but he would never say who. Greg Theakston spoke to Kirby many times, and concluded:

“Clearly, Jack was patterning this villain on some of the businessmen he’d known and as Kirby had only worked in the Comics it must have been some publisher or editor he’d known. For years I quizzed Jack about who was really behind the mask and every time I asked, he replied, ‘I won’t say. He’s based on somebody I know but I won’t say who.’ Mystery laid on mystery. I interviewed Jack for almost twenty five years and he kept his word.”⁴²

Doom was cold inside. Sometimes, like the movie homunculus, he just wanted to make the world suffer. Other times he wanted to prove his worth by being the greatest in every way. Sometimes he tried to earn the love of his people. But he could never feel anything. And that is the tragic last page of the origin story: he would always be alone.

The lost theogony

(Fantastic Four #44, November 1965)

⁴¹ See the importance of the sick children in the original Dr Strange story, in Tales of Suspense #41

⁴² Greg Theakston, from “Jack Magic” volume 1

The Inhumans' story was much, much bigger than we think.

The climax to a 25-year story

In the published story, the Inhumans were just another set of villains. But in the original story, this was the climax to a 25 year search for the city of the gods. Tuk began his search for Attilan in Captain America #1. "Atlan" appears on the cover of Adventure Comics #100. In the 1950s, the search for the city of the gods moved toward space gods, as the Challengers asked, "What's Out There?" and began to focus on lost civilisations and aliens. In Fantastic Four #1 the team finally left Earth to find the gods.

This epic of finding the gods was delayed when the series changed direction with issue #9. Despite that change, we still had hints of the cosmic epic, most notably with issue #13. The cosmic epic got back on track with #44, when we first met the Inhumans (the lower gods), before entering the city of the gods. They will then call on God himself (see #48), which will lead the team to complete the subspace portal (effectively a Hell Gate, see #51) and then we finally meet the space gods, the Kree. For the lost origin of the Inhumans, and how they rebelled against the Kree, see the discussion of Thor #146.

The theogony

"Theogony" means "genealogy of the gods". A theogony was a story of how the gods began. And of how they control or represent history. The most famous Theogony was Hesiod's book of that name, telling the story of the Greek gods. To understand Kirby's theogony, we must see how Kirby saw Galactus and the Watchers.

*"Galactus was God, and I was looking for God. ... No one ever knew the extent of his powers or anything, and I think symbolically that's our relationship [with God]."*⁴³

The Watchers come from the book of Genesis, where we learn why God destroyed mankind in a flood: the "sons of God" married the daughters of men, and had giants as offspring.⁴⁴ "Sons of god" is sometimes translated as

⁴³ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

⁴⁴ Genesis 6:1-4

"angels" or "watchers". They were supposed to simply watch mankind, but instead they got involved. The result was the "giants" or "Nephilim" and "mighty men". In Kirby's retelling: the Watchers were supposed to just watch and record the universe. But Earth's Watcher could not resist helping his friend Reed Richards by giving him technology. This made Reed a mighty man, a man of renown.

The lost origin of Galactus

When Kirby moved to California in early 1969 he worked on a multi part Thor epic about the origins of Galactus and the Watcher. Kirby mailed in those issues just at the moment when his editor decided that multi part epics were too confusing for new readers. So the editor cut up the story and rewrote the text to make simpler stories instead. The Galactus origin lost numerous details, such as how his origin was linked to the Watchers.⁴⁵

We do not know exactly what Kirby intended, because the original manuscripts are lost or erased. But it would probably reflect the Bible version: Galactus was the original force (God), the Watchers came into being soon after (as angels) and then they became too interested in humans (or other species).

The lost genocide

(Fantastic Four #48, March 1966)

Maximus summoned Galactus. Here are the clues:

Clue 1

This issue begins with Maximus firing a gigantic gun. The first clue is that, in the published version, the gun does not work and the story just ends abruptly.

⁴⁵ See The Jack Kirby Collector (JKC) 52 and others. For the Watcher in his Galactus uniform, see JKC 13, or The Collected JKC vol.3

As one reviewer put it, “*Sadly, the ending of the Inhuman Saga is kind of abrupt and unsatisfying.*”⁴⁶ How can something so dramatic do nothing at all?

Clue 2

When the gun is fired, Galactus is not even in the same galaxy. He is near the Andromeda galaxy, the home of the Skrulls. This detail is probably from Kirby: there was no evidence that his editor knew the names of other galaxies. In issue #65, we will be reminded that Earth is a very unimportant backwater. Why would Galactus leave the centre of civilisation to come here?

Clue 3

Why is the Watcher unable to hide Earth from Galactus? We see that the Skrulls have technology to hide their entire empire, so Galactus can be fooled with technology. And we know that the Watcher is more advanced than the Skrulls. But somehow, Galactus zeroes in on us from another galaxy. How?

Clue 4: the antenna

The device that the text calls the 'atmo-gun' looks like some kind of broadcast antenna. It works through creating vibrations in the atmosphere: that's how broadcasting works.

Clue 5: “all human life on Earth has ended”

When Maximus fires the gun, he says it will lead to the Inhumans inheriting the Earth, because “*all human life on earth has been ended!*” Maybe he is telling the truth?

Clue 6: the Inhumans then hide

⁴⁶ User “gc8” at comicvine.gamespot.com/the-best-fantastic-four-story-arc-ever/4000-8428/user-reviews/2200-38101/

After firing the device that is designed to end all human life, Maximus hides his city behind a barrier that no physical force can penetrate. The city, inside its protective barrier, “sinks further and further into the ground”. Why?

Clue 7: the Surfer suddenly changes direction

After the gun is fired and the city hidden, we get our first look at the Silver Surfer (page 7, last two panels). We see him suddenly change direction. Next, he is shown circling around, with his arm in a different direction, as if working out the direction of something. Next he is shown moving in a very determined fashion, not letting anything get in his way.

The implication is clear. In the original version of the story, Maximus summoned Galactus from another galaxy, to kill all humans, while the Inhumans were safe inside their impenetrable “negative zone” barrier. That is, the barrier was made of subspace, and did not exist in our dimension. Hence, it could sink through the Earth. And hence, Galactus’ sensors would not detect it. After Galactus sucked Earth dry, Maximus could use highly advanced technology to rebuild the planet with no humans on it.

The lost genocide

Maximus, in Attilan, wanted to remove all humans so that only **his** species of human survived. This was similar to when we first learned of Attilan, in the story of Tuk. All other human species, such as the “hairy ones” and the Neanderthals, were dying off. Here was the same story again. Maximus was willing to destroy the planet in order to win. Hence, “Maximus the Mad”. Maximus and his elites would survive underground. Kirby returned to this theme in Kamandi.

The lost hero

(Fantastic Four #49-50, April-May 1966)

In the original story, Alicia defeated Galactus. Here are the clues.

The ant problem

In the published story, humans are like ants. The Watcher drives Galactus away. The humans merely follow his guidance, like ants following a trail of sugar. The Watcher gave the humans some credit for courage, but they did nothing more than an ant would do: an ant will continue fighting as long as it can. How could this show that humans were above the level of ants? We saw the same with the Silver Surfer. In the published story, Alicia said she wanted to live. Just as an ant would. Yet, somehow this impressed the Surfer. Why?

So the published story made no sense. But the original story was different.

How Alicia defeated Galactus

This is how Alicia defeated Galactus. Sadly, Kirby's story was badly mauled in editing, but some of his beautiful words can be deciphered on the surviving art:⁴⁷

"[missing words] basic energy [missing words]"

Alicia feels it. Surfer said this was waste. [missing line]

[Alicia] said "that sounds cruel — those things supply us with health, contentment, beauty"

[she pounds] her fists on him. She said 'you vandal'

he said 'you are the first creature to talk this way'

[Alicia said] 'Do we mean nothing?' 'Why don't you change me to energy. Will it please you ?!'

Surfer raised his hand hesitatingly, as if to destroy her. Then his hand gently brushes her cheek.

he said — 'are you — 'beauty'?"

Then confused, he draws away.

Alicia said 'you can feel emotions. — You just never used them.'

⁴⁷ See the original art (as much as survives) here: kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2012/06/19/a-failure-to-communicate-part-two/fantastic_four_49-011

In Kirby's original, Alicia showed that she valued beauty above life. This raised her above other creatures, who simply wanted food or power. Crucially, Alicia then challenged the Surfer to examine his beliefs: did he really believe what he said? Did beauty really count for nothing? She challenged the Surfer to be consistent. She showed her superior logic. No ant could do that.

The Surfer then took the same argument to Galactus: *'Why don't you change me to energy. Will it please you?!'* Galactus could not kill his only friend, and was therefore defeated by Alicia's argument, and by her courage.

In the original story, the Surfer was a creation of Galactus, not some person Galactus found. Kirby wanted the Surfer to be a blank slate, to discover everything new, so the story could reveal the most profound truths. The surfer was like Alicia: a created being, a robot, who learned love. In #49 the lower creation (Alicia) defeated a higher creation (the Surfer) who then defeated his creator (Galactus) through love.

The published version undermined Alicia's role in the story. Her motivation changed from a love of **beauty**. It became a love of **property**: *"this world was ours! Ours!"* Alicia's challenge to kill her — the key moment in the story — was completely removed from the published version. In the published version, instead of using love, she insults the Surfer: *"Are you as blind as I??"* The word 'hesitantly' was removed, and replaced with 'automatically', removing the Surfer's inner turmoil. The decision was reduced from a slow four panels to a quick single panel. The hand brushing her cheek was not mentioned, and his arm was hidden by a speech bubble. The power of the sequence was diluted through numerous text boxes and speech balloons. When the Surfer did change his mind, it became all about *him*, not about *her*. Kirby wanted the Surfer to say, *"are you beauty?"* But the edited version said, *"At last I know beauty"*. Alicia was also changed, so her words are all about herself: *"I knew it! I felt it from the first!"* So the published version became *"me, me, me"* whereas Kirby's original story was about reaching a person by caring about *them*.

In short, the heart of the story was ripped out: how the weakest being of all can defeat the strongest being of all, through love and courage and reason. The original story also solved the Nullifier problem. Galactus was defeated the moment that he lost his only friend. The nullifier just gave him an excuse to leave without appearing weak.

The lost science

(Fantastic Four #51, June 1966)

Kirby's science did not just happen. Like real science, we can trace its evolution, step by step.

In the published story, the subspace portal appears out of nowhere. Reed decides he needs one, so just invents it in a few weeks. This destroys the story. Because if Reed can invent things so quickly, surely he can invent a way to rescue the guy at the end. And why doesn't he cure cancer while he's at it? But a closer look shows that the subspace portal was developed over many years:

Fantastic Four #1 began with a seismograph, and a rocket capable of reaching the Van Allen belts. That is, with 1961 technology.

In issue #2, Reed obtained an alien craft capable of reaching orbit. He also had Skrull suits and a confiscated anti-gravity pack. These were apparently the basis of the Fantasti-car and unstable molecule suits.

In #5, the team confiscated Doom's time machine. But Doom was a magician, not just a scientist. The so-called time travel could be explained by actors and prior suggestions, until they drank something and fell asleep. It was only after the (drugged?) wine that they experienced the storm and shipwreck. This shows that Kirby's science actually made sense, even when it seemed crazy.

In #6, the amazing journey depends on a tiny canister. Occam's razor says it was far more likely to contain some kind of hallucinogenic gas. Kirby let us decide what his stories meant, But he knew that impossible stories always began with some kind of drink or canister.

In #7, the team had a captured Skrull ship (see #92-93) with faster than light abilities. That is, it warped space-time. The subspace portal would depend on this ability. Also in the story, Reed had access to the best equipped laboratory on planet X. In particular, we know he had shrinking technology.

In #10, Doom apparently obtained a genuine shrinking device, and left it behind. Like a faster than light travel engine, such a device probably warped space.

In #12, the military had "*Project 34, the anti-grav missile*". Anti gravity can be traced to the Skrull anti-grav pack. It was apparently stolen by the Wizard, for Strange Tales #102. The Wizard was now in jail, so the authorities controlled that technology. Access to military funding meant anti gravity technology would be duplicated as far as possible.

In #13, Reed spent some time in the Watcher's laboratory.

In FF annual #1, Reed had a device to remove oxygen from seawater.⁴⁸ This may have combined the shrinking ray with the broadcast abilities of the "roving eye" from #14. The more advanced technology Reed had, the easier it was to create the sub-space portal.

In #16, with the help of Henry Pym, shrinking technology could now allow access to another dimension. While there, Reed could no doubt increase his collection of exotic technology.

In #18, Reed discovered a power ray that opened some kind of wormhole between Earth and the Skrull home-world. Studying that ray would let Reed see how a subspace portal might work.

In #23, Doom's "master plan" was teleportation. It was hard to see how much he actually achieved, and how much was still a clever illusion. But the dinosaur at the beginning, and his other tricks, suggest he may have made great progress since gaining access to Reed's technology in #17.

#24 had the first version of the thought helmet.

#27 had the second version of the thought helmet. It could detect brain impulses and project them as images.

In #29, The Watcher arranged for Reed's brain to temporarily expand. He then showed how gravity held star systems together, and then explained matter transmitters and power rays. This was everything Reed needed to create a working dimensional portal.

#31 had the third version of the thought helmet.

In #32 the power ray from #18 was used as subspace transit.

⁴⁸ The published version said it removes the water, but it was more likely inspired by the device in the movie *Godzilla*.

#34 had more insights into the technological arms race. Not only were Reed, Henry Pym, Doom, the Wizard, the US military and foreign powers interested in exotic technology, but so was Gideon.

In #36, the Wizard seemed to have perfected some aspect of the Skrull anti-grav pack that he stole. Reed now had three anti-grav disks to study. These would help him to understand localised gravity and, hence, wormholes for dimensional travel.

#37 had the first experimental journey in subspace. Note the thought helmet again, used to aid calculation.

In #38, we saw that Reed went to great efforts to study alien technology, especially Skrull power plants. The sub-space portal no doubt needed enormous energy.

#39 showed us the state of the art for Reed's knowledge: The flaming suit captured in #2, Doom's Thing robot from #23, and very limited dimensional shifting. (In comics, "vibrating" was code for shifting between dimensions.)

#40 showed the stimulator, which charged every particle of a body and required immense energy. The portal would work on similar principles. We also saw the state of Doom's technology.

#41 had version 4 of the thought helmet.

In #42 Reed gained access to all the Wizard's tech.

In FF annual #3, the Watcher gave Reed the freedom to quickly examine and use his subspace technology.

In FF #44-47, Reed began to gain access to vastly more advanced Inhuman technology.

In #48-50, Reed saw that completing this portal had to be his top priority.

And so we come to #51. Reed worked night and day until he finally built a working portal. This presumably required enormous computing power, to warp space and matter without killing the subject and everyone nearby: hence the need for the thought helmet and stimulator technology. In this issue we also saw another player in the arms race: the unnamed scientist seemed to have his own version of the Skrull stimulator from #40.

In conclusion, Reed could not simply invent technology when he needed it. Reed's technology had its own rich history, where ideas develop one experiment at a time, just as in the real world.

The Great American Novel

(Fantastic Four #52, July 1966)

Ahab was going to be the greatest villain of all.

A problem with showing T'Challa's face

Comics had a problem with showing black people in a positive light. Back in 1940, Kirby's Prince Otembi, a highly educated black African, became a white person in the next issue.⁴⁹ In FF #52, Kirby's original cover showed T'Challa dominating the page, with his black skin visible. Kirby was told to push the black character into the background and not show his face. Inside the book, when black skin was shown, it was coloured a pale grey. This was later parodied by the writer Alan Moore:

*"[W]e currently feature a person coloured a light and inoffensive grey as a minor supporting character in one of our books, with plans to make him completely black in a few years time, assuming we don't get any negative feedback from our regional retailers."*⁵⁰

The original anti-colonial message

While the first Black Panther story (FF #52) was a simple battle, the next story (FF #53) is an open attack on colonialism. It ends with a cliffhanger

⁴⁹ Kirby's "Wing Turner" in Mystery Men Comics #10-11

⁵⁰ Alan Moore, as "Affable Al" in his "Sweatshop Section", a parody of "Bullpen Bulletins". In "Mystery Incorporated", part of Moore's "1963" series.

about the coming showdown between the colonialist and the natives. Then the text said this:

"It's not unlikely that we shall meet the Black Panther and his arch foe Klaw once again. But til we do, don't miss the start of a brand new storyline next ish!"

In other words, "This story stops now." The editor must have hated it. Kirby could not leave the cliffhanger forever, so after two unrelated issues, he wrapped the Klaw story up very quickly. But not in Africa, and the Black Panther had the smallest possible appearance: just a single, small image of a black face on a television toward the end. This ending was so absurd that it could not have been Kirby's choice: the battle was ended by simply hitting Klaw with a lump of vibranium! T'Challa could have done that at any time. But it was enough to end the story, and neither the Black Panther nor Klaw was ever seen again in Kirby's Fantastic Four. They did not even appear as cameos in the special guest issue (#100) even though it contained minor characters like the Hate Monger and Dragon Man.

"For a lark" ?

In the published story, T'Challa said he created the mechanical jungle 'for a lark' (#53, page 10, panel 3). But the art, and the context, suggested the opposite: this was deadly serious. Ahab stole their vibranium mine. Ahab expected the natives to be primitive and utterly beaten. But T'Challa was secretly arming his people, buying the very best technology and preparing for the coming war. His high-tech base was disguised to look like a jungle. Ahab did not know T'Challa was there.

Kirby's notes confirm that the story was very serious. Nothing was just *"for a lark"*. In the original notes, T'Challa's father told Ahab *'to get the hell off the sacred mound!'* But that was edited to *'begone! This land was ours! So speaks T'Chaka, the chieftain!'* This not only softened the force of the words, but made the Wakandans seem quaint and cartoonish. In the original notes, T'Challa was described as *'the world's richest man'*, suggesting that there were no limits to this conflict. But the published version softened that to just *'one of the richest'*. In the original notes when T'Challa left for battle he said he *'fears'* for what will happen. But this was removed from the published version. Everything was softened. Why?

The real Wakanda

"Wakanda" comes from Edgar Rice Burroughs' 1915 book "The Man Eater". The story took place in a fictional region of African jungle controlled by Belgium, where the natives were in rebellion. This meant Wakanda must be based on Katanga, a region of the Congo known for its mineral wealth. The locals rebelled against horrific conditions imposed by their Belgian masters, where up to fifteen million people died, and natives who did not work hard enough had their hands cut off. Note how Ahab's hand was destroyed in his fight with T'Challa, driving him into a rage of vengeance. This was serious.

By 1960, most of the world's uranium came from a single mine in Katanga. In 1960 Katanga declared independence under Lumumba, who Malcolm X called *"the greatest black man who ever walked the African continent"*. Lumumba was assassinated in 1961 after being betrayed by one of his army chief of staff, who had ties to the Belgians and Americans. Western mine owners sent mercenaries to get the mine back. The mercenaries used *"robbery, rape, murder and beatings"*.⁵¹ For example, in one town in 1964 they arrived, used bazookas to blow the doors off shops, stole what they wanted, and then:

*"After the looting came the killing. The shooting lasted for three days. Three days of executions, of lynchings, or tortures, of screams and of terror"*⁵²

In 1963 the Katangan rebel fighters (the Katangan Gendarmes) escaped, but vowed to return. By 1968 they were known as the "Katangan Tigers."

In 1965 civil war brought the Congo back into the news. Also in 1965 scientists finally worked out the vibrational properties of uranium, Katanga's greatest export. Kirby followed the science magazines so would have noticed. And that was when Kirby wrote FF #52-53. Here is a summary of the parallels:

Wakanda

⁵¹ Piero Gleijeses, "Flee! The White Giants Are Coming!": The United States, the Mercenaries, and the Congo, 1964–65" p.79, online at web.archive.org/web/20180121002623/https://ohiostatepress.org/books/Complete%20PDFs/Hahn%20Empire/05.pdf

⁵² *ibid*

= Katanga

Vibranium

= vibrational uranium

Ahab

= a mercenary who looked like an old style colonialist

T'Chaka

= Lumumba. Kirby re-named him after Shaka, the famous Zulu warrior.

T'Challa

= Perhaps named after Tshombe, who replaced Lumumba. Challa referred to the bread eaten on the Sabbath and Jewish holy days, perhaps suggesting T'Challa's sacred duty. (Kirby was Jewish.)

T'Challa's people

= Katangan Tigers, wanting to return and avenge the death of Lumumba and regain the uranium mines.

Fires of vengeance

Kirby's T'Challa burned with the desire for vengeance. His costume was black on the outside, but red on the inside, like coals on a fire. Black leaders often compared their struggle to a fire: a fire in the hearts, leading to fire in the streets. And this language scared white people. Lumumba (i.e., T'Chaka) was killed after his famous "fire and blood" speech, where he said, "*We are proud of this struggle, of tears, of fire, of blood*". The following year, in 1962, Nelson Mandela gave a similar fiery speech: "*the freedom flames now burning in the country shall never be extinguished*." The year after, in 1963, Martin Luther King opened his "I Have a Dream" speech by referring to "*Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice*." King was growing tired of putting out those fires. "*I didn't want to be a fireman any more,*" he told SCLC staff. *He promised to stop trying to extinguish racial fires*

created by Jim Crow".⁵³ Also in 1963, James Baldwin published *"The Fire Next Time"* with a similar sentiment: the title comes from the song *"Mary didn't You Weep"*:

*"God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
No more water, the fire next time"*

In 1964, Malcolm X recalled how he grew tired of taking racism, and decided *"to pour on pure fire in return"*.⁵⁴ Civil right leader Roy Wilkins describes this whole period as putting coals on the fire:

*"I have spent my life stoking the fire and shovelling on the coal"*⁵⁵

That was the context for Kirby's version of Lumumba and the Katangan Tigers. Kirby wanted to use the imagery of smouldering fires of revenge, and call his character "The Coal Tiger". Coal was also the ancient Jewish symbol of being the chosen one.⁵⁶ But the name was vetoed, so Kirby ended up calling him the Black Panther instead. Kirby served under Patton in the war, and Patton had the first African-American tank battalion, called "The Black Panthers".⁵⁷

The Great American Novel

Kirby wanted to call his mercenary leader "Ahab", like the protagonist in *Moby Dick*, due to the mad desire for revenge over a missing limb. "Ahab" signalled the scale of the story. *Moby Dick* is a good candidate for The Great

⁵³ Peniel E. Joseph, *The Sword and the Shield: The Revolutionary Lives of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.*, footnote 54

⁵⁴ Quoted in *"Pure Fire: Self-defence as Activism in the Civil Rights Era"* by Christopher B. Strain

⁵⁵ From Roy Wilkins' autobiography, *"Standing Fast."*

⁵⁶ See Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 11: the great prophets were chosen in visions of burning coals, representing being purified by fire.

⁵⁷ The 761st, Also, the most likely month when Kirby wrote this story, November 1965, a group called "The Black Panthers" promoted black voting in Alabama. The name would become more famous due to a political party in California the following year

American Novel, and here Kirby took the same theme of obsessive revenge, and added America's most controversial themes: empire and race. Sadly, the magnificent name Ahab was also vetoed. Kirby ended up calling him Klaw because of his metal hand: the literary richness was lost.

Vibrational uranium

Ahab was not supposed to be "the master of sound." The art in #53 showed nothing about sound in particular. Characters never shield their ears. The appearance of these beasts was not accompanied by sound. Nobody would guess from the art that sound was involved. Ahab's machine, as seen in the art, was clearly a Tokamak. A tokamak was a device for holding plasma in space using gigantic magnets. The first tokamak results were published in 1965, just before Kirby wrote this story. Another breakthrough in 1965 was new research into the vibrational properties of uranium. That was a detailed understanding of how uranium atoms arrange themselves. This led to exciting possibilities for building new structures with uranium.

In the story, Ahab spent his life studying vibrational uranium (hence, "vibranium") and apparently uses the tokamak to twist plasma into useful new arrangements. The magnetic fields force uranium atoms into shapes, like gigantic animals. These uranium structures have enormous energy, but are highly unstable, so hitting them often causes them to explode. By the end of #43, Ahab was able to transfer his own mind into such an energy creature, thereby maintaining its shape indefinitely.

So Ahab was supposed to be the master of energy, not just sound. This fits his career: he wanted uranium, the greatest energy source. But it is likely that the editor did not understand the concept of a tokamak, just as he did not recognise a seismograph in FF #1 or the difference between cells and molecules in FF #15. So the published text says, "solidified sound", which is far less interesting.

What we lost

Kirby loved the Black Panther and had big storylines in mind:

"I remember asking him about The Black Panther. He said that was from some storyline he'd worked on for years ... he loved

*the idea of The Black Panther being a royal African with a 500-year history, and things like that."*⁵⁸

Ahab versus T'Challa was set up to be the Great American Conflict: white versus black. Settlers versus indigenous people. Progress versus tradition. This was powerful stuff! If #56 was any guide, then Kirby planned to have Ahab access the subspace portal: a natural fit for his energy powers. But instead, the published version had a villain with second rate power in a watered down conflict that was cancelled as quickly as possible.

The lost ending

(Fantastic Four #66, September 1967)

The Fantastic Four ended here. Mostly. The story of this issue was given in more detail by Mike Gartland.⁵⁹ This is just a summary, with additional evidence at the end.

Kirby intended this issue to have no villain. The story was about well-meaning scientists. They created a superior kind of human. This new human was so superior to us that we disgusted him. He could not stand to be with us, and he was right! Gartland argued that the new human was to be an objectivist. That was, he believed that the world should go to those who can use it the best. And since the new human could use it better than us, it was all over for the human race.

The published version was changed, so the scientists were evil. Kirby then had to change the second issue to fit the changed story. So instead of building this into a bigger story, the story just ended. Gartland argues that this may have been the last straw for Kirby. He was tired of having his best ideas destroyed by editing. So at that moment Kirby stopped giving his best ideas, and began seriously looking for a different publisher.

⁵⁸ John Romita on Jack Kirby, in "John Romita... and All That Jazz!" page 81

⁵⁹ Mike Gartland, "A Failure To Communicate ' Part Four: The Last Straw?" in The Jack Kirby Collector 24. kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2012/07/03/the-last-straw/

For more details, see Gartland's essay. For other stories that were suddenly stopped mid flow, see issues #8 and #53. For another Kirby objectivist story, see the commentary on Doctor Strange in Tales of Suspense #41, part of the Iron Man section of this book.

What we lost

The original story was powerful for two reasons. First because it showed that even good people can cause terrible harm, despite their good intentions. Second, because this is really happening. Today, the brightest and best scientists race to create artificial intelligence. Like the idealistic scientists in this story, some of us think we can control something smarter than ourselves. Others think a more intelligent being will naturally want to help us. Still others think there is no danger because the kind of intelligence we create will not be like a human brain: as if that would stop it from killing us. So many well-intentioned people!

Beyond that, we lost what could have been a multi-part epic. More importantly, it meant that Kirby stopped creating new characters or exploring big topics for three years. Though some of his ideas were just saved for New Gods.

More evidence that the story ends here

Even if we did not know the story was changed, we can see that the flow of major characters suddenly stopped with issue #66. Before this we have:

- #44-47 The Inhumans
- #48-50 Galactus
- #51 The Negative Zone
- #52 The Coal Tiger (Black Panther)
- #53 Ahab (Klaw)
- #54 Prester John (later proposed for a continuing series)
- #56 The Sentry

- (#55 is the only issue where the editor wrote the plot, and the only one to lack any original ideas.⁶⁰)
- #62-63 Blastaar
- #64 The Sentry
- #65 The Kree, Ronan, and the Supreme Intelligence
- #66-67 "Him"

Then the faucet was turned off. Nothing. It was over. The final enemy was called "Him". Because Kirby did not even provide a name.

At the same time that Kirby wrote #66 he also wrote annual #5, that announced Sue's pregnancy. So he was committed to creating Franklin Richards the following year. Kirby could not be half hearted, so for Franklin's birth he also created two major supporting characters: Annihilus and Agatha Harkness. But only because Franklin was pre-announced. Otherwise, the flow of new ideas stopped dead, until Kirby found a new publisher and created his magnum opus, New Gods.

The original longer story

The Cocoon being only appeared at the end, just as Ahab did. This suggests that Kirby intended this story as a build up to something much bigger. Luckily, we have some original pages. The caption to #66 page 3 referred to:

*"one of the strangest, most startling mysteries of the century:
The Science-Citadel of Point Parallel"*

But the published version changes that to:

*"one of the strangest, most startling mysteries of the century -- a
mystery which may soon concern us all"*

"Point parallel" was a phrase from Euclidean geometry referring to parallel lines in two dimensional (2D) space. Presumably this was linked to the use of

⁶⁰ This plot was created for an interview with the New York Herald Tribune. The interview shows that the editor had no idea what was going on in the story. E.g. thinking that the Surfer could be "off in space", forgetting the previous issue's cliffhanger, unaware that Ben regained his self esteem in #51, etc.

the four dimensional portal. When Kirby resumes this plot in Jimmy Olsen #133, he has a similar citadel of science, with similar DNA experiments and teleportation device, the "penetrator beam" (Jimmy Olsen #135, page 16). It was easy to see the citadel's dimensional technology as the kind used by Olan Tagorian in "The Man Who Tampered with Infinity" (Challengers #1) and by Anton Zammer in "The Isle of No Return" (Challengers #7). All of that ultimately traces to previous civilisations.⁶¹ This matters because #1-51 can be seen as a story of one long arms race to conquer subspace, the fourth dimension.⁶² Dimensional portals are finally perfected and ubiquitous in the New Gods Boom Tube.

After the story stopped

Once the story stopped (except for Kirby's commitment to bring in Franklin), the remaining issues tied up loose ends.

Issues #68-71 are about the team breaking up. Reed and Sue really want to be just an ordinary married couple. Johnny and Crystal are more interested in each other than in the team. And Ben just wants to leave. Issue #71 was called 'and so it ends' and the final panel has Reed and Sue announcing that they are leaving the team. At the start of #72, we see them leaving for a new life.

And that was the end of the Fantastic Four. Kirby, of course, still had to make a living, and he did a professional job creating entertaining stories until he left the publisher. But those stories are mostly based on plots from TV and movies, and do not progress his bigger themes, so they need not concern us here.

The Lost Adventure is still lost

("Fantastic Four: The Lost Adventure", April 2008)

⁶¹ See the review of Ant-Man for an overview of Kirby science and history.

⁶² See the review of #51 and Kirby's science for details.

Fantastic Four #108 was changed in editing. The original story was partly recovered and published as “The Lost Adventure”. But that story is still not the same as Kirby’s original version.

Change 1: the whole story

Kirby’s story begins with an archaeologist asking Reed to find the age of an ancient statue. This question begins the story:

“Why should the statue have been unearthed at this particular time?”

We don’t have all of Kirby’s margin notes, but presumably its discovery was linked to the discovery of “Mega power” — a kind of all purpose power that began in 4000 BC along with this statue.

The next page reveals that the statue is from 4000 BC. Kirby, who attended Hebrew school, knew that date well. 4000 BC is the traditional date for Adam and Eve. The story focuses on the unnamed professor and his brother, a kind of Cain and Abel story. In the Bible, Cain was the first murderer, and also the first technologist: the father of metalworkers and city builders.⁶³ “Cain” just means “coppersmith”. This recalls how discovery of copper around 4000 BC allowed weapons and technology as we know them, and was very important to Israel because they got their god from the Cainites.⁶⁴ Technology advanced rapidly from 4000 BC until we finally have all purpose “mega power”. Mega power is thus the climax of what began in 4000 BC. Kirby’s story said:

“The ancients pondered problems that still plague us today.”

Sue thinks we have progressed since then:

“That fierce face – thank goodness we’ve progressed today”

But then they learn of the modern Cain figure: we haven’t really changed that much.

⁶³ Genesis 4:17,22

⁶⁴ The Kenites (nomadic metalworkers, i.e., Cainites), based in Midian next door to Israel, were probably the first group to worship Yahweh. This is known as the “Kenite Hypothesis”. That is, Moses got his theology from the Midianites when he lived there and saw the burning bush.

The use of Janus also points us to 4,000 BC. Janus was the first technologist, the one who took us out of the stone age, according to Plutarch:

“For this Janus, in remote antiquity, whether he was a demi-god or a king, was a patron of civil and social order, and is said to have lifted human life out of its bestial and savage state. For this reason he is represented with two faces, implying that he brought men's lives out of one sort and condition into another.”⁶⁵

Kirby shows the modern Cain figure (the professor) with the same face as the ancient Cain figure (Janus)

“The Lost Adventure” completely changes Kirby’s epic story of civilisation and power. It becomes a story of just another modern adventure. And that is just the first change.

Change 2: no progress allowed

Kirby’s story was changed in three other ways.

First, Kirby showed the characters in civilian clothes. This is part of a theme in Kirby’s later Fantastic Four stories: the team wears normal clothes more and more. Reed and Sue try to retire in #72, and again in #88. Crystal takes over Sue’s role, and Johnny proposes marriage.⁶⁶ Franklin is growing older.⁶⁷ The Fantastic Four move forward and people grow and change, as they always have. But the published story puts them back into costumes: nothing is to ever move forward.

Second, every single Fantastic Four issue from #84 to #102 (when Kirby left) ends in a triptych. A “Kirby triptych” refers to three consecutive panels showing some action or change. Kirby embraced change. The published pencils show that #108 was also supposed to end in a triptych, moving the story forwards. But this was changed to a single panel where the characters

⁶⁵ Plutarch, Life of Numa, quoted here: thoughtco.com/ancient-roman-god-janus-112605

⁶⁶ Fantastic Four #88, last page, first panel

⁶⁷ See #108, splash page: he must be 18 months or older. Compare #94, splash page, where he was still a young baby.

just stand around as at the start. That is, there is zero progress from start to finish. Two comments indicate that yet another fight with Doctor Doom will roll around. That is, the published story shows a team where nothing will ever move forward.

Third, at the end of page 14, Kirby had Ben remind us that he was a pilot in World War II. Kirby was happy to remind us that time passes. But this was removed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the published “Lost Adventure” is about a world that never changes, a world that only cares about the present. But Kirby’s original story was about danger and change and history and progress. Kirby was about making a better world. This was changed to make a story about *not* changing the world, but protecting the world exactly as it is. A very different story.

The lost Ant-Man stories

The lost Ant-Man origin

(Tales to Astonish #27, January 1962)

A later chapter will show how Kirby's stories join together. This changes how we see the individual stories. Consider Ant-Man's origin, for example:

Burke, Carter and Fiske

Two months before Henry Pym's first adventure, Kirby wrote "Sserpo" for *Amazing Adventures* #6 (November 1961). It featured the scientist Thomas Burke who, in the 1860s, struggled to make a growth formula work. He thought he failed. His great grandson, Henry Burke, saw the amazing results. Kirby gave him a different surname, as this was officially a different story, but he looked the same and acted the same as Henry Pym.

The previous year,⁶⁸ and the year before that,⁶⁹ Kirby showed very similar liquids developed by Professor Carter and Wilbur Fiske. Meanwhile,⁷⁰ Howard Avery tried to make the serum work, but with disastrous side effects. What was this liquid?

Terrigen liquid

⁶⁸ "Krang" in "Tales to Astonish" #14, December 1960

⁶⁹ "A Giant walked the Earth", *Strange Tales* #70, August 1959

⁷⁰ "The Brute That Walked", *Journey Into Mystery* #65, February 1961

Kirby first used a shrinking liquid in Blue Bolt #4. The liquid was developed by an advanced underground civilisation with massive laboratories stretching as far as the eye can see. The liquid worked like this:

"The object of my serum was to condense the atoms of the human body!!! Practically condense them to any desired size — even to microscopic dimensions!"

The next issue implies that Dr Bertoff, experimented with the fourth dimension at the same time that he was developing the shrinking liquid.⁷¹ Kirby had a very good layman's grasp of science, and the only way to maintain biological processes at microscopic size would be to warp space. So shrinking probably involved some dimensional process. Further evidence is the shrinking stories in Fantastic Four and Jimmy Olsen, which are hard to explain in any other way.

Even with gigantic laboratories, fine tuned warping of space was extraordinary. The Green Sorceress obtained dimensional technology from a demon who used forbidden texts from a lost civilisation. In Blue Bolt #6, we saw that Bertoff secretly observed all she did, so he probably stole her ideas.

A growth liquid just like Fiske's and Carter's (and Bertoff's) was one of five liquids from an ancient civilisation.⁷² In the important story "The Invincible Challenger",⁷³ we saw a liquid that could not only make a body grow, as we saw with Fiske, but it could bestow other powers. The story explains that the liquid was routinely used by countless aliens. We saw a similar liquid used in vapour form by the ancient Inhumans. They call the vapour "terrigen mists". "Terrigen" is from the Latin "terrigena", from "terra" (planet Earth) and "genesis" (beginning). This meaning became clear in "The Eternals", where we learn that the space gods used this technology to mutate the first humans (and Eternals, deviants, etc.).

A history of terrigen technology

⁷¹ Bertoff had a ready made portal in issue #5, but it was untested.

⁷² Challengers of the Unknown, in Showcase #12

⁷³ Challengers of the Unknown #3, September 1958. This was the clearest parallel between the Challengers and the Fantastic Four, and is the first example scholars tend to use when showing that Kirby created both titles.

The "Challengers" stories showed how these ancient liquids came into the hands of regular humans.

The first Challengers story (Showcase #7) tells how Morelian studied ancient esoteric texts from an advanced lost civilisation. In Showcase #12: Amos Hunter learns of another (the same?) lost civilisation. He discovers five vials containing liquids. They appear to be a subset of the terrigen liquid. The first liquid makes a person grow, just like Fiske's liquid. The second liquid releases a fire creature from another dimension. The third liquid sends a message to the giant Kraken to come up from the deep. The fourth creates hollow duplicates of a person. The fifth liquid cancels all the others. In Challengers #2, Professor Hasomb continues his research into ancient technology. His is like the first of Morelian's technologies, creating giant creatures from just thought. In Challengers #3, "The Secret of the Sorcerer's Mirror" we learn that knowledge of these prehistoric civilisations survived into the Middle Ages.

In Challengers #5, "The Riddle of the Star Stone", professor Brandon discovers another artefact. This one uses a meteor: recall how aliens use meteors as convenient storage for their terrigen liquid. This meteor was carved to accept four jewels. Each one releases one of the terrigen abilities described in Challengers #3, such as flames, flight, and aquatic electrical abilities. When placed in the meteor, they provide general purpose ability. This must happen when a certain star is in a certain place, to transmit the abilities from space — presumably a safety feature so aliens can monitor for misuse. In Challengers #6, "The Sorceress of the Forbidden Valley", fumes from a liquid in an ancient lamp (i.e., like terrigen mists) provide general purpose powers. In Challengers #8, "The Man Who Stole the Future", we see a collection of three ancient artefacts. One sprays a terrigen-like liquid that causes people to temporarily de-age. Another gives telekinetic ability. Another has goggles that let a person see future science (presumably a portal through the fourth dimension to some kind of museum).

So we see how terrigen technology was given by the space gods, and led to ancient civilisations creating various tools. These were hunted for by medieval scholars, found by modern archaeologists, and stolen by criminals.

Scientists study terrigen liquid

In Challengers #7, "The Isle of No Return", we learn that professor Macon had an island where he researched a shrinking ray and several other miracle technologies. These were then stolen by Anton Zammer, who ended up in jail. In Challengers #1, Olan Tagorian had a similar underground lab with similar technologies. All these technologies rely heavily on the fourth dimension.

In Fantastic Four #66-67, the Enclave had a similar lab and similar technologies. Like the original Inhumans, they focused their science on advancing the human body. In Jimmy Olsen #135, we saw what looked like a later version of the Enclave, now called the DNA project.

In Silver Star we saw the final result of this experimenting with human power: it becomes part of our DNA. "Big Masai" for example has size changing power. Now that beneficial mutations are a normal part of some lineages, regular humans will soon be extinct.

What about radiation?

Terrigen liquid was one of two sources of mutation in Kirby's stories. The other source was radiation. Blue Bolt showed how they were connected. Blue Bolt #4 introduces the shrinking liquid. Blue Bolt #5 introduces dimensional technology. Blue Bolt #6 introduces mutation from radiation. After creating the dimensional portal, it seems to be used by Martin Hall ("Marto"): he materialises from thin air, without anyone knowing that he exists. Hall studied cosmic rays using highly advanced equipment.

"Then one day it happened... my giant attractors unlocked the unknown... I had underestimated the power of the rays! I could not control them!"

The rays focused on his body and mutated him in the same way as in Fantastic Four #29 (in the Watcher's home). It appears that the rays and the device were just two methods for delivering mutations. The liquid was a third method. The liquid, or device, or radiation, was simply a carrier for precisely targeted information to the atoms of the body. Today we store information on a disk or transmit it via radio waves. A liquid can reach a target more quickly than a solid can. Radio waves are useful for transmitting information over large distances.

Kirby's stories describe a kind of four dimensional internet that is not held back by the speed of light. For example, in Fantastic Four #65, the Supreme Intelligence speaks through dreams, and we see his four dimensional network represented as neuronal tendrils through time and space. In "Afraid to Dream" a cosmic distress signal is accidentally transmitted over the fourth dimension to the wrong person. And in Fantastic Four #75, Reed contacts Galactus through thought, knowing that Galactus will probably have that channel open as he searches for his herald.

Meanwhile, in the real world...

Why all these crazy comic theories? Because they dramatise how information can change us. In the real world, news, beliefs, and relationships are all information patterns that control our lives. In Kirby's stories, information patterns delivered by liquid or radiation do the same thing, but more quickly. Kirby points out that information changes us even when we don't want it to, and in sometimes unpredictable ways. This has implications for free will that are too complex to explore here.

The lost Black Widow origin

(Tales to Astonish #44, June 1963)

Summary: Kirby's Wasp was essentially the Black Widow, but one year earlier. That is, a beautiful and highly intelligent Russian spy who later gained stingers worn on her wrist. Kirby did not invent the sting, but calling her the Wasp made it an obvious idea.

Clue 1: a major character

Kirby left Ant-Man with Tales to Astonish #40: his role was to create new characters, then pass them on to others. But he was brought back for just one issue, #44, where he created the Wasp. This was almost certainly to help flagging sales: sales tended to fall when Kirby left a book. So the Wasp was intended as a character who could save a book. She was supposed to be important.

But the edited text makes Janet just a love interest for Henry. As soon as she arrived, she fell in love with him:

WASP: "Ant-Man... I think you're wonderful! I want you to know, in case this creature killed us, as it did my father, I-I'm falling in love with you!"

ANT-MAN: "No! You mustn't say that, Janet!" you're only a child!⁷⁴"

In later issues, the adoration continued. For example:

WASP: "Ejector seats! Dreamboat, you think of everything!"

⁷⁴ Tales to Astonish #44, pages 13-14

*ANT-MAN: "One of us has to, my little scatter-brain!"*⁷⁵

In the same issue (not by Kirby), Ant-Man could also control his wife's size. Apparently she was not allowed to control herself.

"I saved this as a surprise for you! As long as I'm wearing my cybernetic headpiece, I can mentally change YOUR height, also! See?"

I have never seen Kirby introduce a woman simply to fall in love with a man. In Kirby's romance stories each woman had personality and depth. That is true even in his superhero books. For example, Susan Storm kept Reed Richards guessing.⁷⁶ Jane Foster was stronger and smarter than Don Blake,⁷⁷ Crystal was stronger⁷⁸ and smarter⁷⁹ than Johnny Storm, and Jean Grey showed no romantic interest in the other X-Men: she was there to learn. So what did Kirby intend?

Clue 2: an exact duplicate of his wife

Kirby's story, judging by the art, goes like this: years ago, Henry Pym and his wife, Maria, were visiting her family in Eastern Europe – that was, behind the Iron Curtain at the height of the Cold War. Maria was kidnapped. Pym was told that she died, but we didn't see it happen. Henry returned to America, heartbroken. Years later (at the time of the story) Henry was an important scientist. A man knocked at his door. It was an elderly scientist Henry had never met before. He was accompanied by his "daughter", Janet, who looked exactly like Maria. The scientist then died, and Henry, feeling compassion, took Maria to live with him. She learned all his secrets. The obvious conclusion is that Janet was either Maria, a clone, or an actress, and the plan was to get Henry's secrets.

⁷⁵ Tales to Astonish #58. Thanks to "supermegamonkey" for pointing this out. supermegamonkey.net/chronocomic/entries/tales_to_astonish_58.shtml

⁷⁶ See Fantastic Four #14, page 5

⁷⁷ Especially in her first appearance, discussed later

⁷⁸ E.g. in Fantastic Four #68 p.8

⁷⁹ E.g. in Fantastic Four #62 pp.3-6 and #81 pp.13-14, where she is a better strategist than Reed. She saves the team again in #100 pp.1-2 and #101 p.14

Clue 3: the name

Why call Janet the Wasp? Why not a friendlier name, like the bee? Or a butterfly? Or ladybug? Or dragonfly? Or firefly? Wasps are best known for stinging. Kirby did not give her any kind of gun, so her sting must be of a different kind. But what?

In science fiction, a wasp generally means just one thing: a spy, or infiltrator. Because some wasps are famous for sneaking into the nest of another species. In 1957, Eric Frank Russell called his sci-fi novel “Wasp” because it was about a spy infiltrating another world without being detected. (In this case the alien world was Sirius, not Kosmos). In 1979, a parasitic wasp inspired a very famous sci-fi movie: Ron Cobb got the idea for the “Alien” xenomorph from a wasp that lays its eggs inside its victim.⁸⁰

This story also has parallels with the 1959 movie “The Wasp Woman”, which was re-edited for TV the year before this story.⁸¹ In the movie, a woman de-ages by twenty years, using a substance derived from wasps. This also turns her evil. This parallels Janet looking like a younger version of Henry’s wife, but possibly being a brainwashed spy from behind the iron curtain. In which case, seeing her father dead may have forced her to reconsider.

Clue 4: Kosmos

The elderly scientist, Vernon Van Dyne, wanted Henry’s help with what turned out to be dimensional travel. Recall that shrinking and dimensional travel are closely linked. Henry did not help. We then see an alien, Kosmos. “Kosmos” was spelled with a “K”, in the Russian way. Maria was from behind the Iron Curtain, so this suggests some previous connection.

Kosmos was not happy with Van Dyne for some reason. The only thing he failed at was bringing Henry Pym to help. So presumably that was part of the plot.

Clue 5: “go to the ants, thou sluggard”

⁸⁰ alienseries.wordpress.com/2012/10/18/the-insect-influence/

⁸¹ archive.org/details/jackhillexploita00wadd/page/n7/mode/2up?q=wasp

The story hinged on a quote from Proverbs chapter 6:

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, Provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?"⁸²

"Sluggard" was misquoted as "dullard" the first time. Which ruins the meaning: Maria was saying, "you are smart, you can do more with your life". But the edited version made no sense, as "dullard" means "stupid". Kirby's editor was not interested in his Jewish heritage⁸³, so presumably did not recognise the Bible reference. Neither did he see why "sluggard" was the key to Kirby's story.

This was a story about an American who needs to work harder, and also awake to the dangers from the Soviet block. Communists are winning the space race, and now contacting other dimensions! Communist spies are everywhere, even among your closest friends! Henry needs to wake up to the danger! "Arise out of thy sleep!"

Conclusion

Put all the clues together: an important character, likely a spy, about to infiltrate Henry's laboratory. This was part of a much larger scheme to defeat him. So it looked like Janet was planted as a highly trained beautiful Russian spy with a sting: basically The Black Widow, but a year earlier.

⁸² Proverbs 6:6-9, KJV

⁸³ See Riesman's "True Believer"

The lost Hulk stories

The published version of the Hulk was all over the place. Hero or villain? Smart or dumb? Free to act, or controlled by Rick Jones? Nothing was clear in the final edited version, so it's no surprise that the series was cancelled. So let's start by clarifying: how did Kirby see the Hulk?

What was the Hulk really about?

Kirby said two things about the Hulk that might appear contradictory. In 1969:

*"I created the Hulk, too, and saw him as a kind of handsome Frankenstein."*⁸⁴

And in 1989:

*"The Hulk I created when I saw a woman lift a car."*⁸⁵

When we look closer, it's the same, because it's about the emotions. Kirby thought in terms of emotions, not surface details:

BEN: "was that the way you'd approach characters? To have them personify an emotion or a feeling?"

*JACK: "Yes. Yes."*⁸⁶

The emotion was in the question in big letters on the cover of the book: "Was he man or monster?"

The Handsome Frankenstein

⁸⁴ From the Mark Hebert interview, reprinted in The Comics Journal Library 1

⁸⁵ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

⁸⁶ From the Ben Schwartz interview, jack Kirby Collector #23

Kirby first called the Hulk a "handsome Frankenstein". That was the emotion: the conflict between being a man and being a monster. In issue #1, we saw the handsome side. The very first time we saw the Hulk, on page 5 panel 6, Kirby drew him like Marlon Brando in a famous publicity photo from the 1953 movie *Julius Caesar*. The movie (i.e., Shakespeare's play) was all about whether Caesar was a man or a monster. Mark Antony said Caesar was a great man. But Caesar's close friend Brutus said he was a monster. Then in issue #2, we saw the monstrous side: the Hulk was rejected by humanity, and wanted revenge. This was obscured in the published version, but was very clear in the original. So in issue #2, Kirby drew the Hulk like Boris Karloff's Frankenstein monster, an innocent creature who was rejected and that made him want revenge.

The edited Hulk stories were very confusing, because the character had no clear direction. But the original stories were very clear. In issue #1, he was handsome, and he did good: his noble soul inspired the foreign Gargoyle to be good. But the Hulk's own people rejected him, and that hurt. So in issue #2, the Hulk became a monster who wanted revenge. In issue #3, Rick Jones, the peace protester, gained control of the monster, but this was a terrible burden to bear: Jones could never sleep, or the monster would kill everyone. And Jones knew that his own carelessness had created the Hulk and effectively killed Banner: Banner could not change back. In issue #4 Betty Ross solved the problem. She urged Jones to tell the truth. And Jones realised that yes, he could do it. He now controlled the Hulk, so he had no excuse. Unfortunately, all of these stories were dumbed down in editing, and the crucial issue #4 was changed so much that Kirby had to tear up five pages. So the published title became a confusing mess and did not sell. But the original story was magnificent: an exploration of men versus monsters, the conflict and potential that is inside us all.

The Hulk and atomic scientists, and Victor Frankenstein, and his monster, and Julius Caesar, all illustrate the same emotion: monstrous power. That was the point of the Frankenstein story: the book had the subtitle "The modern Prometheus", because it was the story of gaining extraordinary power and the great danger that brings: Prometheus ended up chained on a mountainside, where a great eagle pecked at his liver. Victor Frankenstein ended up losing his wife and everyone he loved, and was driven to despair and death. Caesar was assassinated. Atomic scientists created the doomsday bomb. This is what can happen when we unleash the power that is locked up inside us all.

Kirby on inner power

Kirby was fascinated by this capacity for gaining monstrous power. Here he describes that potential in 1970. Kirby was talking about "the mother box":

"I feel that man has the capacity to gain strength from the mystic, something outside himself ... I've done it. I once took a baby carriage — fortunately my kid wasn't in it — and I took this thing out of shape. It looked like it just couldn't be done, but it was just done, out of pure anger."⁸⁷

The emotion of monstrous power was very clear in the 1931 Frankenstein movie. The scientist generated life. He generated cruelty. The monster gained strength from the lightning. The iconic scene was when the monster was hit by lightning, and the scientist screamed, "It's alive! It's alive!" This was the same emotion behind the Hulk. Banner was hit by the explosion. He screamed. He kept screaming. Until the monster was born.

It was all about the emotion. The same emotion, the same idea. Kirby just mixed it with the atom bomb instead of electricity, and mixed in Jekyll and Hyde: it was the scientist himself who changed. But it was the same emotion: monstrous power from some mysterious source.

In 1984 Kirby described this same emotion of monstrous power. He again referred to bending steel, which he did when he bent that baby carriage. He again referred to electricity sparking a person to life, just as lightning started up Frankenstein's monster. This time he used Jekyll and Hyde as his example of monstrous power:

"I believe all these extremes are inside us. That's how the Hulk was born. ... it's innate in yourself to bend steel if you really want to, just like the Hulk did. ... Out of that, and out of the same line of thought, Stevenson came up with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."⁸⁸

In 1987, Kirby again described this monstrous power. He said how the Hulk personifies this emotion. He again referred to Jekyll and Hyde, and to bending steel. Now, he gave another example: a woman lifting a car.

⁸⁷ From the Train of Thought interview, Jack Kirby Collector #52

⁸⁸ From the Ray Zone interview, Jack Kirby Collector #45

*JACK: "I still feel there's a Hulk inside of all of us. I mean, a suddenly unreasoning, explosive personality. ... I once tore a tie rack right off the wall, see? Because I was just suddenly in an explosive burst of temper. I saw an article where a woman lifted the back of a Cadillac because her little kid was trapped under the tire. We can do feats of strength that would amaze us: Bend steel."*⁸⁹

Lifting a car was the iconic example of what doctors call "hysterical strength". The Wikipedia page on "Hysterical strength" lists many examples of lifting a car to save a life. Examples are given from 2006, 2009, 2009 (two examples), 2011, 2012 (two examples), 2013 (two examples), 2015, 2017, and 2019. The dates reflect the popularity of Wikipedia, which became the most popular reference source on the planet in 2005, and then readers would add an example of hysterical strength whenever they heard of it. This suggests that newspapers report an event like that every year or so. So Kirby would have the chance to see many examples between his childhood in the 1920s and 1962 when he created the Hulk.

The inner scream

The "handsome Frankenstein" and the woman lifting the car both represent the same emotion: monstrous power. In 1989 Kirby used the word "scream" to describe that emotion, even though the woman did not literally scream:

*"She looked from the rear window of the car [and saw the child...] looked like she was going to scream, and she looked very desperate. She didn't scream, but she ran over to the car and, very determined, she lifted up the entire rear of that car."*⁹⁰

Kirby made that scream integral to the Hulk's origin, on pages 4 and 5 of his first story:

1. Banner was looking out of the window (like the woman)
2. He saw a boy about to be killed (like the woman)
3. He had to act, and did not scream (like the woman)

⁸⁹ From the Ben Schwartz interview, Jack Kirby Collector #23

⁹⁰ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

4. He rescued the boy (like the woman)
5. But now Kirby cranked up the action: Banner was hit by the blast (like Frankenstein's monster being hit by lightning)
6. *Now* Banner screamed, just as the woman wanted to scream, just as Frankenstein screamed, "It's alive!" But Banner was not coherent: he reacted like the monster.
7. He kept screaming for hours.
8. He only stopped screaming when he was about to become the Hulk.

This is the emotion, the core of the character: the inner scream that unlocks extreme power. So Kirby's apparently contradictory stories – the handsome Frankenstein, or the woman lifting the car – were really the same emotion: the man or monster that is inside us all.

The lost Hulk origin

(Incredible Hulk #1, May 1962)

Summary: issue #1 asks two questions.

1. Are bomb makers heroes or monsters?
2. Are peace protesters heroes or naive children?

Is he a man or a monster?"

In the edited version, "is he man or monster" clearly referred to the Hulk: was he just a big strong man, or was he a scary monster? The subject of the question was especially clear from #4, when the Hulk was a hero and Jones and Banner became less important. However, in #2, the Hulk tried to kill all humans! And Kirby intended Jones to control the Hulk after issue #3 (see below). So the Hulk was unambiguously the monster. The cover showed Banner the man, and Hulk the monster. So that was Kirby's meaning: is Banner a heroic scientist, or a murderous monster for creating the Gamma bomb?

The neutron bomb

Hulk #1 would have been plotted around October 1961,⁹¹ the month when the biggest bomb ever made was tested.⁹² But the unusual radiation from the gamma bomb (gamma being a form of radiation) suggests the next generation of bombs then being developed: the “Enhanced Radiation Weapon” or “neutron bomb”.⁹³ The neutron bomb was designed to kill more humans and damage less property. Banner created a device specifically designed to murder people, while leaving their wealth untouched. Is that the work of a man? Or a monster? The Hulk personified the gamma bomb. Could the bomb really be controlled? Or would it kill all humans, as the Hulk tried to do in #2?

Banner was told that one mistake could "blow up half the continent". Banner then said, *"I don't make mistakes."* As he said that, he made a huge mistake, in trusting Igor and creating the Hulk.

*"These are times when we're all operating on the edge of holocaust, Apokolips, and everybody was living with the bomb. It's a Strangelove kind of time"*⁹⁴

Kirby understood what the bomb could do. And he knew that we can never eliminate the unexpected. There will always be some software fault, or some protester, or a hundred other things that can go wrong. And then it will be too late.

*"The Bomb has given us no way back. So we've got to stop there and say, 'We can't fight. There can't be any fighting between governments. There's gotta be compromises.'"*⁹⁵

Perhaps we can say Banner did the right thing. After all, he stopped the Gargoyle. We all see our enemies as Gargoyles, as inhuman monsters with no

⁹¹ As a very rough rule of thumb, Comics are written six months before the cover date, and on sale 2-3 months before the cover date.

⁹² The Tsar Bomba, detonated 30th October 1961

⁹³ Samuel Cohen came up with the idea in 1958. Google's NGRAM viewer showed it was discussed more and more after that date. It was finally tested underground in early 1962

⁹⁴ From the Train of Thought interview, Jack Kirby Collector #17

⁹⁵ From the Ben Schwartz interview, Jack Kirby Collector #23

compassion. And yet the Gargoyle was not destroyed by force, but by compassion.

Rick Jones, the anti war protester

Stories need conflict, so if the Hulk is about the bomb, then we need someone who is against the bomb.

When we first saw Rick Jones, he was playing the harmonica. That had a very specific meaning in November 1961, when the Hulk was written: Bob Dylan burst onto the scene in the New York Times on September 29th 1961, and his harmonica became an iconic instrument of folk music.

In the published version, Jones said he was on the test site because *“the kids bet me I wouldn’t have nerve enough to sneak past the guards.”* But why were “the kids” at the edge of a nuclear test site, hundreds of miles from anywhere?

One group of folk music fans had a very good reason to be hanging round test sites: they were “SANE” (The National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy). They formed in April 1957, and by 1960 had thousands of members, including Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando (remember him?). SANE staged protests including trespass: they tried to sail in the way of nuclear tests in 1958. In their early days they were dominated by relaxed middle class students like Jones.

A photo of Alan Lomax may have been the basis for one of Rick Jones’ early pictures.⁹⁶ Lomax was a famous folk music expert and protester. He was also a friend of Jerome Wiesner, an important figure at the atomic site Los Alamos. So everything fits.

The Hulk versus the human race

(Incredible Hulk #2, July 1962)

In Hulk #2, after being hunted in issue #1, the Hulk chose his side: he chose evil. On page 10, the Hulk said, with an evil look:

⁹⁶ Thanks to Mark Seifert for pointing this out. bleedingcool.com/2018/07/23/marvel-declassified-1-car-go-through-the-atomic-blast/

“With this flying dreadnought under me, I can wipe out all of mankind! Now the Hulk will be the hunter instead of the hunted!”

Issue #1 showed the Hulk as Marlon Brando’s Mark Antony, from Julius Caesar, a man who could be either good or evil. But issue #2 shows him as Boris Karloff’s Frankenstein monster. That was, the creature who killed everyone the scientist loved. This was serious stuff.

Evidence of changes

The cover:

Why are the Toad Men so small? They don’t look like any threat to the Hulk. The Hulk looks like the bad one. The cover implies that this is really a story about the Hulk as the bad guy, and the Toad Men are just secondary villains.

The whole story:

What did the Hulk do, exactly? He didn’t do villainous things, but neither did he do heroic things. In fact, throughout the story, there was no active hero making things happen. The humans merely reacted. Suspiciously, the two places where we would expect heroic acts — where the Toad Men were defeated, on pages 11 and 22-23 — look like they were changed the most.

Page 8, panel 2:

The explanation for the launch was that the craft will be safer in space, yet the opposite was true: nobody knew it was in this remote desert, but once it was visible in the sky it was quickly shot down. In every other Kirby story, when an alien craft landed it *stayed* landed, while aliens did their work on Earth.

Page 8, panel 3:

We are told the floating was due to being in free fall, yet we previously saw that it was due to the Toad Men’s anti-gravity guns.

Page 9, panel 2:

Sending Jones up to space, only to be sent right down again, made no sense. It wasted space. Why bring him up in the first place? Why not use him as

leverage, to force Banner to comply? And why send him off in such a gentle way? Wasn't he their enemy?

Page 9, panel 3:

These images (Jones sent down to Earth again) do not look like Kirby pencils.

Page 11:

After the Hulk decides to "wipe out all mankind", the pacing suddenly goes crazy. The previous pages progress at normal Kirby speed (except the weird jump into space): they follow a main character cinematically, not too slow or too fast. The following pages do as well. But page 11 suddenly jumps all over the place without warning: down to Earth (three different scenes), up into space, then down to Earth again, and suddenly it is all over.

Page 11, panel 2:

The military suddenly has space-capable hunter missiles that were never seen before. Until this point, all the military hardware was similar to real world technology, and introduced slowly. E.g. The Gamma bomb was like the recently created neutron bomb. Inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) were real, but to suddenly have not one, but a whole base full of them? Appearing deus ex machina? That was not like Kirby.

Page 11, panel 3:

When Jones ran, he achieved nothing, just like when he went up to space only to come straight down again. This was not like Kirby writing. Kirby used his limited space very efficiently. His people only did things for a purpose, and generally achieved what they intended, or at least led to a conflict.

Page 11, panels 3-5:

The three frames with Jones running and the missiles launching, look more like Ditko than Kirby. Ditko inked the whole story, following Kirby's distinctive style. But Jones does not look like a Kirby pose, and the layout of the missiles is more like Ditko's stylised fluid layout.

Page 11, panel 7:

The crashing spaceship is shown bouncing in a very unrealistic way. Kirby had experience of real munitions and real fighting. He might show a ship

skidding, like in Fantastic Four #1, but not bouncing. And the Toad men do not look like they noticed.

Page 23, panel 3:

This is an un-Kirby deus ex machina ending. Banner suddenly has a crazy gigantic gamma gun that nobody mentioned before.

Page 23, panel 4:

Why was the big gun called a "gamma gun", when it was clearly one of the Toad Men's anti-gravity guns, and did anti-gravity stuff?

The original story

Let us ignore all the dialogue (which might have been edited) and ignore the art that looked more Ditko than Kirby (such as Jones going back to Earth, or the missiles). We then see just the Kirby elements, and all the problems disappear:

- When Banner and Jones were captured, the Toad ship stayed on Earth, and Banner and Jones were helpless due to the anti-gravity rays.
- They were imprisoned just as nighttime fell, so Banner became the Hulk, escaped, and defeated the Toad Men.
- The Hulk, who we saw on page 1 was angry and evil, then saw the anti-gravity guns. The dialogue ("*I can wipe out all of mankind!*") was probably in the original: it fits the art, it fits the story, and it flows naturally from issue #1.
- Something happened on page 11 that was edited out. If we remove the possibly Ditko art and crazy pacing then we lose the whole page.
- Page 12 (definite Kirby art) shows the military pointing their guns at a hole in the spacecraft and Banner emerges.
- At the end of the story Banner turned the captured anti-gravity gun against the Toad fleet.

It seems clear that the missing pages must be the Hulk using the anti-gravity guns against the world, as he said he would. The army then responded and blasted the side of the ship. This let in sunlight, so the Hulk reverted to

Banner. The only person who could alert the military to the location of the Toad ship was Rick Jones. So Rick Jones was the hero in the missing page, just as Banner was the hero at the end, using Toad weapons against the incoming fleet.

The original story was superior in crucial ways. It had:

- A much clearer hero (Rick Jones)
- Greater peril (the Hulk was a villain as well)
- A more dramatic climax (the Hulk was about to wipe out mankind)
- A more interesting premise (nobody cares about the Toad Men, this was really about the Hulk)
- A more logical and satisfying ending (use the bad guys' weapons against them)
- More interesting enemies. Why do the Toad Men run as soon as soldiers appear? Toad Men have vastly superior hand weapons. They must have a moral objection to harming flesh. Why do they target Banner and Jones and only talk to them? The Toad Men were very similar to Kirby's Space Beasts from four months earlier.⁹⁷ Those toad men were larger, but otherwise very similar. They had powerful magnetic weapons and disintegrators, but could not, or would not, harm flesh and blood. The same month as this story, Kirby wrote "No Human can Beat Me",⁹⁸ where a man created a fake dangerous alien, with the goal of scaring humans into doing the right thing. Since the Hulk was the real villain of #2, and the Toad Men are only interested in scaring him, and they don't seem willing to actually hurt humans, it looks like the Toad Men might just want to scare our atomic expert, Banner, into not using atomic weapons.

Issue #3 now makes more sense. The army took the enormously expensive step of sending the Hulk to die in space. Why did they hate the Hulk when in #1, he saved America? Because in #2, he almost killed every human on Earth.

⁹⁷ Tales To Astonish #29

⁹⁸ Strange Tales #98, July 1962

Why the story was changed

Changes to Hulk #4, and a strong preference for feel good stories, show that the editor wanted the Hulk to be a hero. So the page where the Hulk attacked the world had to go. But then, how do we explain the hole in the side of the ship? The army did not know where the ship was hiding. So the ship had to go up into space, just so it could be shot down again.

The Hulk could fly

(Incredible Hulk #3, September 1962)

Summary: The Hulk, like the atom bomb in the new ICBMs, gained the power of flight. He did not just jump.

This is fairly well known among comic scholars, so this review will be brief. In Hulk #3, the Hulk gained the ability to fly. This was obvious from the art in this and later stories, where the Hulk often changed direction during flight. Sometimes he would even soar downwards, pick up a payload (e.g., Rick Jones) then fly upwards without touching the ground at any point. He also seemed able to control his speed.

Equally interesting is that Kirby continued to write stories with him flying, two or more years later, despite the dialogue being changed to say that the Hulk merely jumped.

The Hulk symbolised the dangers of nuclear bombs. So it was only natural that he would next gain the power of flight, like the ICBM or the “minuteman”. And Jones gained power over him. So Jones could now launch his weapon to anywhere in the world. Jones, the Alan Lomax stand-in, was given control of the Hulk, who represented nuclear weapons. Could even Lomax make the right choices?

The change to merely jumping might reflect the change to making the Hulk a hero. It was difficult to have a hero who was both angry and also over-powerful. What stories can you write? If he was calm, but over-powerful, like Superman, you could have stories where he holds back his power to avoid

hurting others. But that did not work with the angry Hulk. He would use full power all the time and always win. His power had to be limited in some way to make stories possible. But in Kirby's original, the Hulk was not supposed to be the hero. That was the whole point: the story was always about how Jones (or Banner) would try to control this dangerous weapon. Just as protesters or scientists must somehow control atomic bombs.

The lost ending

After the cosmic rays, we never saw the Hulk change to Banner. Story #2 is a flashback: remembering when Banner was human added to the pathos. A close look at the third to last panel of that flashback (the words “knows” and “can”) indicates that it was probably originally in the past tense (“knew” and “could”). The power of that story was in what Jones had lost.

The editor added a typical hyperbole to the end, saying that the Hulk was stronger than ever, so the danger was that he might escape. But the original story was the opposite. The Hulk was trapped. Banner was trapped. Jones was trapped. It was very powerful imagery and very powerful emotion. No wonder the college crowd loved it (see next story).

The torn up Hulk story

(Incredible Hulk #4, November 1962)

The original Hulk was like Steve Ditko's Spider-Man. It was about Rick Jones, an ordinary teenager, finding that he had great power and great responsibility.

Anime meets Spider-Man

Larry Lieber once heard Kirby arguing with Stan Lee. Lee had commissioned a story, but then refused to pay for it. Kirby tore the story up and left the office. Lieber retrieved the torn up pages from the trash. He took them home and taped them back together. There are five pages that we know about, pages

8,9,11,12 and 13 from a Hulk story. They can be found by searching on kirbymuseum.org. Do you have the pages in front of you? Good, then we may continue. The pages show Rick Jones being able to control the Hulk. Jones gained that ability in Hulk #3. In the published version of Hulk #4, Jones quickly lost that ability. This suggests that the lost pages were the original version of Hulk #4, but Lee did not like the idea of Jones controlling the Hulk.

The idea of a child controlling a monster was popular in Japanese anime. For example, “Tetsujin 28” (“Iron Man 28”), about a boy who controlled a giant robot, was so popular that it came to America as “Gigantor” in 1964. But in 1964 the idea was still new to Americans, and apparently Kirby’s editor didn’t like it. In the original Hulk #1-4, Jones was the hero. That is, his decisions drove the story forward. Jones created the Hulk by his decision to protest the bomb. Jones was the Hulk’s moral compass; Jones was brave. This was the story of Jones more than Banner. Jones, the teenage peace protester, had control of the Hulk, a weapon of mass destruction. The story was about Jones having great power and great responsibility.

This theme, of great power bringing great responsibility, is just one of the many ways that Rick Jones was like Peter Parker (Spider-Man). But Rick Jones did more, and Rick Jones did it first.

- Both Peter Parker and Rick Jones were teenagers consumed by guilt. (The Hulk only existed because of Jones.)
- Both were based at high school (e.g., the original Hulk 4) and gained power through a radiation accident. (The accident that gave Jones power over the Hulk was in issue #3)
- But when Peter Parker made a mistake, only Uncle Ben died. If Rick Jones made a mistake, every human on Earth could die.
- Both Jones and Parker got picked on. But Jones was picked on more: whenever he relaxed his control on the Hulk, the Hulk tossed him around and insulted him. And Thunderbolt Ross was more dangerous than J. Jonah Jameson.
- Both had to keep their power secret, or their closest friend would die. (The entire military wanted to kill the Hulk, and hence, Banner.)

- Neither could let people near them emotionally, in case those people got hurt. If Jones relaxed his control for an instant, the Hulk might kill his friends.
- Jones' story was all about worry. The iconic Hulk image shows the exhausted Jones sitting on the other side of the underground prison, not daring to sleep, while the Hulk pounds away on the door. In comparison, Peter Parker has no problems!

The published version changed all that. From the published issue 4 and onwards, Jones was no longer the star. He no longer controlled the Hulk, and the Hulk was no longer murderous. The published Hulk thus had no clear direction and was cancelled. A few months later Spider-Man launched, picked up the “tortured teenager” elements the Hulk dropped, and the rest is history.

A number of clues reveal the original story.

We have the original pages

The first clue is that Kirby was not stupid. He needed money to support his family, so he would not tear up pages that could be reused. So most of the original story will have made it into the published version with minor changes. Let's find those pages!

The published book has filler

The second clue is that several of the published pages are obviously filler. That is, they are not needed for the plot. They show the Hulk doing generic Hulk things just to fill up pages. Kirby never used fillers if he could avoid it: every page of a Kirby plot moves the plot forward. But these filler pages do not move the plot forward. The first example is the school bus and movie set sequence (page 6 panel 6 to page 8 panel 4). The added pages are problematic. The school bus sequence shows the Hulk as a hero, making his own decisions. But at this point, the Hulk was a villain who was under Jones' control. The movie set sequence is comic relief that is out of place and the art on page 7 panel 7 (“Food”) is not like the Hulk's normal face. The other filler sequence is rescuing the family from the burning building at the end. Again, this does not move the plot forward. And again the sequence is problematic: there is an unexplained jump between page 12 panels 5 and 6. A lot of text is squashed in

to explain why the Hulk is suddenly outside at a burning building. And then on page 14 panel 3 we are back inside again: the burning building sequence does nothing except fill a page.

It was better without the filler

The third clue is that when we remove these filler pages, the story improves. In the first example, Jones mentally calls the Hulk, then the Hulk approaches and rescues Jones. Try reading it without the filler pages: it works better. The filler pages also interrupt the heart of the story. Betty Ross just begged Rick Jones to stop hiding the Hulk. Jones realised that she was right. Jones had complete control of the Hulk, so the Hulk was no longer a danger. (He was not bothered by being captured, as the Hulk simply rescued him.) He then took the Hulk home to try to cure him. That was the heart of the story: how Jones was persuaded by Betty Ross.

The electrode

The next clue is the electrode in the Hulk's head on the splash page. We know from previous issues that the Hulk is heavily based on Frankenstein:

Issue #1 was a mix of Frankenstein (a destructive monster created by forbidden science), Dr Jekyll (the monster was also the scientist) and especially the Wolf Man (Banner was triggered by the full moon, had no memory of his rampage, and felt terrible about it).

Issue #2 went full Frankenstein: the face was based on Boris Karloff's iconic image, and the monster wanted revenge for how he was treated, as in the original novel.

Issue #3, chasing the hero, is classic Frankenstein. The sequence where Jones gains control is close to the 1931 movie, where the monster first gained life. It began with a lighting strike, then the monster entered the scene and seemed terrifying, then we have the same change from terror to a realisation that the monster can be controlled. We have the same stiff standing position; the same test, making him sit down, and the same secondary test, making him raise his arm (in the movie he was made to raise both arms by showing him the sunlight above). Then when he seemed to be under control he went on a rampage, and had to be imprisoned in a stone cell.

Now in issue #4 we see the most iconic Frankenstein imagery: the monster strapped to the couch, the gigantic laboratory equipment, the electrode to the head, the large lever, and so on. The most recent Frankenstein movie before this 1962 story was 1958's "The Revenge of Frankenstein". Just as in the Hulk story, the movie showed large electrodes in the monster's skull, not in his neck. It also featured a large rectangular device with curling metal tubes placed over the monster's upper body, just as on the Hulk splash page (though the Hulk's device was thicker and stronger). The monster's head was bandaged as a result of the electrode surgery, as in the torn up Hulk pages.

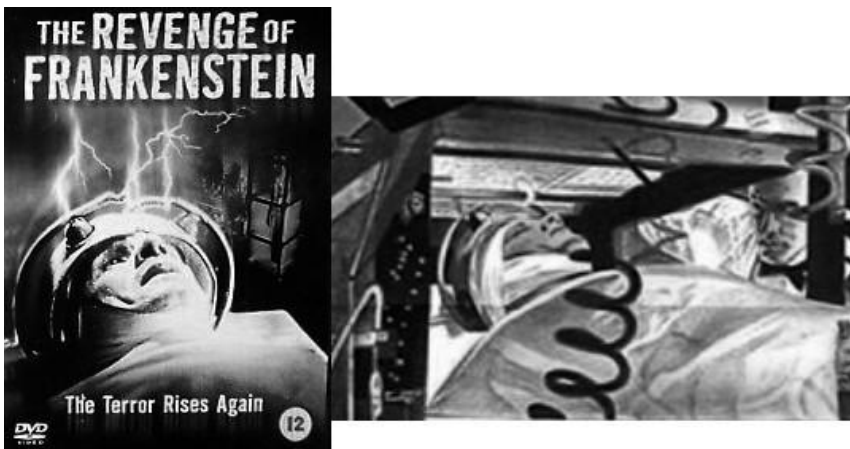


Image: Hammer Horror, fair use.

The next clue to the original Hulk #4 is that the splash page shows evidence of major changes:

First, the page ends with a text box saying we will jump back in time: Kirby stories tend to move forwards, and they make sense even without any words, so this is usually evidence that a page has been taken out of its original context.⁹⁹

Second, we later return to the same event (page 10), but the electrode has gone. The new version just has gentle rays, so there is no need for a bandage. We cannot pretend that the electrodes are not important: along with the

⁹⁹ For a clear example of flashback editing to a splash page, see Fantastic Four #108, and also the less edited, but still fundamentally changed version, "The Lost Adventure".

monstrous appearance, they are the most iconic features of Frankenstein. And connecting the electrodes is the climax of creating (or curing) the monster: this is the moment when the scientist pulls the great lever, causing a surge of electricity through the monster's head, making him live. The whole purpose of this story is to make Banner live again, so the electrode is the whole point! And we cannot argue that Kirby just forgot the electrode: the machine and the handle both have highly unusual designs (examine them carefully), so Kirby must have referred back to the original page. So the decision to no longer show the electrode — and therefore no bandages — must be deliberate.

While on the topic of the electrode, recall that the Hulk had not changed back to Banner since the dose of cosmic rays in issue #3 story 1. So the rapid changing back to Banner and then back to the Hulk (pages 10-11) are unlikely to be in the original: it weakens the power of him changing back.

Another possible clue to the original Hulk #4 — not the strongest clue, but worth noting — is that the splash page was passive. Why should a new reader, who did not know the character, care about that splash page? Also, the title was squashed. Both the art and the title would work fine as a splash page for a later chapter, but they are an odd choice for the story opening.

Change to a high school setting

A major clue to the original story is that the lost pages suddenly moved the action from military test sites in the desert to a high school or college in a city. This made no sense, until we read what Kirby said later:

*"They were going to discontinue it [The Hulk] after the third issue because they had no faith in it. The Hulk was saved when a couple of guys came up from Columbia University with a list of 200 names saying that the Hulk was the Mascot of their dormitory. I said, 'For God's sake, don't stop the Hulk now! We've got the college crowd!' We'd never had the college crowd."*¹⁰⁰

No wonder Kirby wanted a story set in a high school or college: go to where the readers are!

¹⁰⁰

Comics Feature, May 1986, "A Talk With The King"

It all fits neatly

The final clue is that, when we subtract the weak pages, and add the five lost pages, everything fits together very neatly. So let's reconstruct the original Hulk #4.

Reconstructing the original Hulk #4

Original page 1 (splash page):

This was probably a page that Kirby ended up using as the splash page to Hulk #5 story 2 (General Fang). Notice the distinctive weapon. See how that page flows neatly onto page 2 of Hulk #4. The Hulk robot is leaping over the desert, and the army prepares to shoot it down. (Ignore the silly text about the Hulk needing exercise).

Page 2 – 6 (without the last two panels):

Unchanged (other than edited text). Betty wanted Rick Jones to stop holding back secrets. Jones realised she was right: he controlled the Hulk, so he could do something about it.

Pages 6 (last two panels) -7:

These are published as pages 8 (last two panels) and 9. Jones decides to use one of Banner's machines to give the Hulk a jolt of electricity through the brain, hoping to reboot Banner's brain inside.

Pages 8-9:

These are the torn up pages 8-9. Now that Jones is about to save Banner, we start to move to new kinds of story, set in the city.

Page 10 (chapter 2 splash page)

This page has Jones applying the electrodes. This page was published as chapter 1 page 1.

Pages 11-13:

These are the torn up pages, showing the Hulk after the electrodes, and Jones at high school or college. The mental link with Jones (from issue #3) causes the Hulk to wake too soon, which is probably why the Hulk never goes away.

Page 14:

This is the current page 14, but the first 2 panels would show the Hulk and Jones leaving the school.

The second story

The second story, “Gladiator from Outer Space”, now makes more sense. The torn up pages showed that the Hulk was in a regular hospital, with a doctor and also some kind of government official. That is, the government finally knew the full story, and hoped to be there when the Hulk turned back to Banner for good. So the Hulk was now common knowledge in the government, and the government knows that they can in principle control him. So it is natural that Russia should find out. They want to create an army of those controllable Hulks. They grabbed Jones, knowing that the Hulk had to obey him. But unknown to them, the Hulk was independent again and had some intelligence, so he defeated them. The story only made sense with the lost pages, where the government gained the knowledge that Jones controlled the Hulk.

The lost Spider-Man

Summary: Kirby's Spider-Man was going to use wilder ideas, as a way to cover more serious real world issues.

But first, let's be clear: the success of Spider-Man was due to Ditko, not Kirby. As Kirby recalled:

*"Spider-Man was given to Ditko who did a wonderful job on it, Ditko developed Spider-Man. Ditko's style sold Spider-Man. Ditko did the Spider-Man that's popular with everybody today. It's Ditko in Spider-Man that did it."*¹⁰¹

Jim Shooter saw Kirby's original design and character description:

*"RE: Kirby Spider-Man pages: I saw, and held in my hand, exactly one such page. It was a page of design drawings. ... There were notes in the margin that described the character ... I remember thinking, 'This isn't at all like Ditko's.'"*¹⁰²

Ditko knew that the first pages were drawn by Kirby, but Stan Lee never told Steve Ditko that Kirby also created the original design and character description:

*"Stan never told me who came up with the idea for Spider-Man or for the Spider-Man story that Kirby was pencilling"*¹⁰³

But Ditko did notice that Spider-Man was just like Kirby's character "The Fly". Ditko pointed this out to his editor, and suggested they make changes (in case the publisher of The Fly decided to sue.)¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ From the James Van Hise interview

¹⁰² jimshooter.com/2011/03/my-short-lived-inking-career.html/

¹⁰³ Steve Ditko, 2003, quoted in "Stuf Said" by John Morrow, page 26

¹⁰⁴ See Ditko's essay "An Insider's Part of Comics History" in Robin Snyder's The Comics (Vol. 1) #5 (May 1990), and the collection of Ditko essays called "The Avenging Mind"

Apart from the character description and first five pages, Kirby probably created plots for the first three Spider-man stories. We know this because the first issues were split into chapters, and only Kirby did that. Also, the first stories feature favourite Kirby topics like the space race. The origin story is similar to Kirby's origins for the Rawhide Kid (a teenager's revenge for the death of Uncle Ben) and Private Strong (his carelessness almost kills somebody). There are numerous other similarities with previous Kirby characters, such as Chip Hardy or the scrawny bookworm in *"I Dared to Battle the Crawling Creature"*.¹⁰⁵

Why didn't Kirby do it all? He already wrote and drew thirteen different stories that month.¹⁰⁶ Kirby was a force of nature, but even he could not create fourteen stories every month! So the Spider-Man book was given to Steve Ditko.

*"I created all those books, but I couldn't do them all. We decided to give the book to Steve Ditko who was the right man for the job. He did a wonderful job on that."*¹⁰⁷

The similarity to the Fly was striking: The Fly began with the spider imagery,¹⁰⁸ he crawled on walls, had a kind of spider-sense,¹⁰⁹ extra strength,

¹⁰⁵ Tales to Astonish #22, August 1961. For more Kirby connections, see Stan Taylor's article at kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2014/12/30/spider-man-the-case-for-kirby/

¹⁰⁶ In August 1962, the month of Amazing Fantasy 15, Kirby also wrote and drew "Thor the Mighty & the Stone Men From Saturn", "A Regular Gal", "I Love You too Much", "His Lips on Mine", "The Trail of Apache Joe", "The Little Man laughs Last", "The Fallen Hero", "Mister Morgan's Monster", "The Day before Doomsday", "The Man in the Beehive", "Sazzik, the Sorcerer", "A Monster at my Window", and "The Strange Fate of the Statue Maker", published in "Journey into Mystery", "Love Romances", "Rawhide Kid", "Strange Tales", "Tales of Suspense" and "Tales to Astonish".

¹⁰⁷ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

¹⁰⁸ The cover to The Fly #1 showed the hero on a giant spider's web facing a human spider. The spider villain climbs a silken cord and uses web-like nets. The origin began when Tommy Troy saw a spider-web, but in The Fly he focused on the trapped flies.

¹⁰⁹ The Fly's special sense was the ability to see danger in any direction and then react very quickly

was an orphan with money worries, and in Kirby's initial five-page outline, he had a web gun¹¹⁰ (the Fly had a buzz gun) and gained his power from an ancient civilisation. The new Spider-Man obtained his power from radiation, like Kirby's Fantastic Four. Or specifically, from an irradiated spider, like in Kirby's story "When the Spider Strikes!".¹¹¹

Kirby traced the idea further back than The Fly, to Jack Oleck's "Silver Spider" in 1953. Oleck was hired by Simon and Kirby, and Kirby developed this idea to become "The Fly", but keeping the same hero, Tommy Troy.

The original message

The Fly (the original Spider-Man) was a warning about our real future. The story began with an ancient civilisation with advanced science. Science became so advanced that to us, it was magic. But "power hungry despots" also had access to the technology. There was a great disaster. The civilisation fell. That could happen again! So the original Spider-man was one of Kirby's warnings that our civilisation can end if we become too greedy.

Kirby's Fly was often about the real world. Issue #1's main story was president Batista of Cuba stripping his country of its assets. Issue #2 continued with a satire on the dangers of consumerism (hypnotic billboards).

Kirby's Fly would not be a soul searching introvert like Ditko's character. Kirby's characters were usually too busy helping others to worry about their own problems. And they faced such enormous problems that they didn't have the luxury to be shy. So when Tommy Troy wanted a girlfriend, he just asked a girl out. Kirby learned from experience that when life was hard you had to be fast and determined, or you died.

The Fly often had a comical surface layer, such as a monstrously comic spider character (The Fly #1) or leprechauns on giant robots (The Fly #2). This allowed more serious topics, like Batista and advertising. In contrast, Ditko's Spider-man avoided such heavy topics.

¹¹⁰ Ditko, "An Insider's Part of Comics History".

¹¹¹ Journey into Mystery #73, October 1961.

The lost Thor stories

The lost Ragnarok epic

Summary: Kirby's Thor was the story of "The Death of God": the decline of traditional religions in the West.

"The Death of God"

Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche used the phrase "the death of God" to argue that old gods were no longer relevant to the modern world. This idea gained popularity in the 1960s. It was a great cultural turning point. Today, many people prefer the new gods of science and choice to the old tribal gods. This reminded Kirby of the old Norse legends. The Norse foresaw a time when Odin, Thor, and other gods, would die in a great battle. The battle was called Ragnarok. Then the world would begin again with new gods.

When we ignore Thor stories that are not by Kirby, and also ignore stories that are not as he intended, then the remaining stories fit together neatly. They tell the story of the road to Ragnarok: the death of the old gods.

How the Thor stories fit together

Here is a brief overview of Kirby's Ragnarok epic:

Issue #83: We are introduced to Thor and his purpose in the legends: to defeat the jotnar (stone aliens) and therefore prevent the end of his world (at Ragnarok).

#84: Thor must practice. He is not yet ready to defeat Surtur, the greatest warlord of all, who will lead the jotnar to destroy the Earth. So Thor must

practice on small scale human dictators. This is how warriors become strong: they start with small battles and work up.

#85: Next, Thor sees the path he must avoid: Loki's example, using power for selfish or trivial ends.

#86: Thor learns mankind's future if we do not change course: atomic war. A global Ragnarok. Zarko looked back at our time and saw it was characterised by atomic war, and he seeks to repeat our mistakes in the future.

#87: Armageddon depends on the Cold War, so Thor tries to fight the Cold War. But that is not a job for a god. He again shows that he is not worthy. If he were worthy, then he could rise above politics like a god, and see the real cause of things.

#88: Loki torments Thor, showing that Thor is still not worthy of Asgard. Because by focusing on an individual (Jane) instead of the group (the world), Thor becomes vulnerable.

(**#89** was Kirby showing his frustration with changes made to his stories, so this issue can be ignored. **#90-92** were not Kirby)

#93: Earth moves a step close to atomic war, through hellish atomic experiments.

(**#94-96** were not Kirby)

#97: The first "Tales of Asgard": a fire giant was unleashed on Earth. So Ragnarok is coming!

(**#94-96** were not Kirby)

#101-102: Again we see the great atomic war, but Thor cannot save us (in **#101**) because he has not embraced his destiny! So he is still not worthy.

#103: Asgardians come to Earth (not just Thor and Loki). So the barrier between the realms is breaking down. This is another sign that Ragnarok is approaching.

#104: Giants walk the Earth! The giant jotnar were the iconic enemies of the gods. Also, Loki releases Surtur, who melts the ice caps. A foretaste of Ragnarok!

(**#105-106:** not Kirby's choice.)

#107: A human-stone man hybrid. Stone men are jotnar, the enemies of the gods. So a human-stone hybrid shows that the forces of chaos are growing.

(#108-109: not Kirby's choice.)

#110: Thor finally enters Asgard! He embraces his godly role, and fights his way into his true home.

(#111-112: not Kirby's choice.)

#113: Thor is a god at last! He leads a magnificent Asgardian ship! But he still saddens Odin by wanting to visit Jane.

#114: Now fully powered, he finally faces a foe of equal strength. Finally Thor is as he was meant to be!

#115: Now a full god, Thor takes vengeance on Loki.

#116-117: Thor proves his superiority to Loki.

#118: Thor could now fight cold war and jotnar simultaneously.

#119: "Tales of Asgard" ends with "Ragnarok was coming!"

#120-123: Thor battles the symbol of all jotnar, who was ready to absorb Asgard and then the Earth, bringing Ragnarok. Hence the title, "as the universe trembles!"

#124-130: Gods versus gods as Ragnarok approaches. Essentially, this is one continuous war until #157.

#126-128: "Tales of Asgard" is all about Ragnarok.

#131-132: Alien jotnar return, but far more powerful than before.

#133: Thor faces planet sized enemies! And still the war grows!

#134-136: Evolution: belief in the old gods begins to crumble.

#137-139: Trolls! And 'To Die Like A God'

#140-141: Humanism weakens gods.

#142: The ultimate jotnar: an enemy from space.

#143-144: 'This Battleground Earth!' The gods finally battle on Earth. "Tales of Asgard", paralleling the main story, is 'The Beginning of the End'.

#145-147: 'The End' — the Tales of Asgard title says it all.

#148-149: Finally, Thor falls.

#150-153: Thor is dead. He is reanimated, but what good is a god who can be defeated? The final battle continues toward its inevitable conclusion.

#154: Mangog awakes.

#155: "Now Ends The Universe!"

#156: The death of the gods

#157: It's over. "Behind him Ragnarok".

For commercial reasons Kirby had to pretend to continue the stories after this, because he needed to sell stories to feed his family, and did not yet have a new publisher lined up. So instead of the last pages of Ragnarok he forced on a deus ex machina ending as if everything was right again. He then tied up a few loose ends. We are given a review of his origin story, then we learn that yes, he was always Thor, and Dr Blake was just Thor without his powers or previous memories. We are then shown how Galactus and 'Him' fit into the story of the gods. The series then ends with a few generic battles, and finally a homage to Ragnarok: where giants and Surtur attack Asgard in #175-177.

New Gods #1: New Gods began with the aftermath of Ragnarok.

The lost Jotnar stories

(Journey into Mystery #83, August 1962)

The "stone men from Saturn" are jotnar, the Norse god's classic enemies. Stone Men appeared in several previous Kirby stories:

- "Back From the Dead"¹¹²: Four months before Thor. This was the first time the Stone Men were named. They were based on Easter Island and awaited the main alien invasion force.

¹¹² Tales of Suspense #28, April 1962

- "Thorr"¹¹³: A lone alien was left on Earth for millions of years, ready to call the other aliens to invade when the time was right. This alien looked like the Stone Men, but was a giant.
- "The Things on Easter Island"¹¹⁴: The Pacific Easter Island statues were revealed to be aliens left behind (for millions of years) to assist their race of aliens when they invade.
- "The Stone Sentinels of Giant Island"¹¹⁵: An island like Easter Island emerges from below the oceans. The stone men were '*sentinels, left here by creatures from another planet!*'
- "The Great Stone Face"¹¹⁶ combined all of these elements and more.

There are parallels between the stone sentinels and the Kree Sentinel.¹¹⁷ Each was left on an island in the Pacific, to await the return of the space gods. The space gods finally returned in "The Eternals". The stories also parallel 'old gods' stories such as Lovecraft's "Dagon". These all feature ancient gods who would one day return. In Dagon, the ancient beings who worship the old gods were large enough to fight whales:

*"one of the creatures was shewn in the act of killing a whale represented as but little larger than himself."*¹¹⁸

In "Stone Sentinels" a boat stumbled on an unknown island covered in marine vegetation, showing it had recently risen from the depths of the sea. Ancient writing described ancient gods, and a being (or beings) were shown fighting a whale. A giant was seen, the author barely escaped and the island sank again beneath the waves. In the Fantastic Four version, the sentinel caught and threw an airplane, and again the island sank into the ocean, as in Dagon.

The Easter Island myths

¹¹³ Tales To Astonish #16, February 1961

¹¹⁴ Tales To Astonish #5, September 1959

¹¹⁵ House of Mystery #85, 1959

¹¹⁶ Black Cat Mystic #59, 1957

¹¹⁷ Fantastic Four #64

¹¹⁸ Dagon by H. P. Lovecraft. hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/d.aspx

Easter Island statues became popular after the 1957 book "Aku-Aku" by Thor Heyerdahl. Heyerdahl was inspired by the ancient stone faces in Peru. Peru has stories of ancient gods leaving massive stone statues behind, then leaving and promising to one day return:

"When the Spaniards came to Peru, Heyerdahl asserted, the Incas told them that the colossal monuments that stood deserted about the landscape were erected by a race of white gods who had lived there before the Incas themselves became rulers. [They taught the Incas science] and were taller than the Incas. The Incas said that the 'white gods' had then left as suddenly as they had come and fled westward across the Pacific."¹¹⁹

Later, Kirby would talk about these returning Inca gods in "The Eternals". They would come to judge the whole world.

In reality, the statues represented dead ancestors who lived in heaven. The statues were placed at locations that might sometimes need help from heaven: freshwater springs and fertile soil. The statues looked to heaven to foresee any problems and get help from good gods. Most of the statues were toppled because apparently there was a famine or other problem. The locals decided the statues must be on the side of the bad gods! So the Easter Island statues looked out for space gods, and the statues might not be on our side.

The Norse myths

Kirby was always interested in Thor and the Norse legends. In Norse legend in Norway, oddly shaped rocks were thought to be giant trolls or 'jotnar'. The wild lands beyond civilisation were full of strange rocks: full of stone trolls:

"The jotnar, who borrow their name and many of their characteristics from the ancient Norse ice giants, are superhuman characters. They tower above your average man, supported by colossal stony limbs. Their features are rugged, like stone worn down by the weather"¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thor_Heyerdahl

¹²⁰ mythology.net/norse/norse-creatures/troll/

The singular of jotnar was a "jotun" and meant 'devourer'. They come from the place 'Utangard'¹²¹ meaning 'outside the enclosure'. Contrast this with 'Asgard', meaning "the enclosure of the gods" and 'Midgard' meaning "the middle enclosure", where people live. Translated into modern terms, Utangard was outer space. The legends say that the jotnar will one day arrive from Utangard (outer space) and destroy the gods at Ragnarok.

Similarities between Easter Island and Norse myths

So Peru, Easter Island and the Norse legend all reflect the same concept: evil stone beings from space. The Norse call them jotnar.

Thor's role in the legends was to protect us from these jotnar. To succeed, Thor had to be the strongest, the bravest, the most worthy of the gods. So he could wield the full power of the thunder and keep the jotnar at bay. And that was the story of the Thor comic: was Thor worthy? Could he protect us from the aliens when Ragnarok comes?

So the first Thor established the eternal battle: Thor versus jotun. That is, Thor versus beings from outside the enclosure, from outer space. As Ragnarok approaches. Thor will enter space to battle Ego, will battle the Super-Skrull (the strongest of the demonic Skrulls), and finally be defeated by Mangog, a composite being of billions of enemies from outer space. The next five years would tell the whole story.

'Thorr' was not a spelling mistake

The final panel of Thor's origin showed the ancient hammer, with the large inscription "*Whosoever holds this hammer, if he was worthy, shall have the power of Thorr*" spelled with two 'r's. The published comics assume this was a spelling mistake, and 'corrects' it in later reprintings. But the original had two 'rs' and was the old Norse word for thunder. The word "Thorr" just meant "thunder." Don Blake gained the power of thunder: that was, the power of "thorr". Later generations spelled Thor with one "r", but the hammer was ancient so it retained the old spelling. This explains why Tales To Astonish #16 featured a stone man called "Thorr". Stone men were very ancient, and

¹²¹ Also called "jotunheim" or "the world of the jotun"

claimed to be strong like thunder, so he called himself by the old descriptor “Thor”.

The lost Jane Foster stories

(Journey into Mystery #84, September 1962)

Jane Foster was originally Don Blake's equal. Her role was to help him, teach him, and occasionally save his life. But she was changed into a one dimensional love interest.

The romantic subplot is not in Kirby's art. The words say romance, but Blake's face never showed them as anything more than friends. Because Kirby knew the legends: Thor was already married to Sif. The edited dialogue did not say Thor was married to Sif, but Tales of Asgard in #102 showed a young Thor rescuing Sif and carrying her away on his horse.

Sometimes the art was changed to add romance. For example, in #113 Foster held Blake and Blake smiled. The surrounding pages and the body language show the smile was out of place. Kirby did not draw smiles like that (see #107 for example). It looks like somebody added a smile, and also edited the text, to create a romantic moment that was not there originally.

A doctor-nurse romance was a cliché. Kirby invented the romance comic, and never used clichés. Worse, it made Thor indecisive (will he marry Jane or won't he?) and Kirby never wrote indecisive heroes. The stories did not reach their greatest popularity until this romance was dropped. The romance only moved forward in issues that are not by Kirby. E.g. #90-92, where Don and Jane smile and bicker together as if flirting. Kirby returned in #93, and made sure that Thor / Blake never looked at Jane, he always faced the other way. In later issues, Jane was shown admiring Thor / Blake. But in the art, Thor / Blake never responded with affection.

Eventually Kirby had to give in to his editor. So in #107, Kirby let Blake have fun with Foster. Kirby used it as a way to show that Thor was still not godlike enough (see Odin's reaction), but Foster would soon fade out of the story: in #110 Thor would fight his way into Asgard, and then spend more of his time off-world.

The original Jane

What was Jane's original role? Consider her first appearance. First she was seen assisting Doctor Blake in his medical work. Next, she explained global politics to him. Next, she accompanied him on the ship because he was lame and needed help. At the end, she began to wonder about Blake's unusual behaviour. So she was a skilled nurse, *physically superior* (because Blake was crippled) and *intellectually superior* (explaining politics to him). It was common for the girl to be the smart one in Kirby stories. See June Robbins (Challengers), Palomino (Boys Ranch), Crystal (Fantastic Four), etc. So this was probably how Kirby intended Jane's role.

The lost Asgard stories

(Journey into Mystery #85, October 1962)

In the original stories, Thor was banished from Asgard. The early stories are about his fight to prove himself worthy, so he could return, and then fight with the gods at Ragnarok.

Thor was banished from Asgard

In stories not written by Kirby, Thor simply walked into Asgard. In issue #92. Then again in #94. And again in #95, and #96, and #98, and #99, and #100. But in the early Kirby stories, we never see Thor in Asgard. We see Thor speaking to his father in the same way that a human might pray to a god: always from Earth. In issue #89, the last of the early Kirby issues (before Kirby took a break) the art seems to show Thor being frustrated with being on Earth, and longing to be home among the gods. Then Kirby was away and suddenly Thor entered Asgard easily. Kirby returned with #101, and showed Thor attempting to enter Asgard, but being turned away, and reacting in anger. In #104 when Thor sees Odin, Odin must first come to Earth. In #110, Thor finally fought his way into Asgard! He tried again to enter across the rainbow bridge, and was again opposed by Heimdall, guardian of the bridge. He battled against a whole army of gods, eventually defeated them, entering Asgard for the first time. This marks the beginning of the epic Asgard-based Thor stories.

It should be obvious that in the original stories, Thor was banished from Asgard. Why else would he be on Earth in the first place? Issue #159 finally revealed that Thor was banished to Earth to teach him much needed humility.

The overarching Thor story mirrored and contrasted with the Fantastic Four. The Fantastic Four was about humans challenging the gods. Thor was about a god learning humility. The Fantastic Four was about humans having no limits. But the Norse gods live in the knowledge that eventually they will all die at Ragnarok. The Fantastic Four was modern science personified: civilisation expanding forever. The Thor story was the ancient world personified: we fit in an ecological niche. Long experience teaches that too much power leads to our downfall.

Kirby saw the future

(Journey into Mystery #86-87)

In this story, Thor tests his limits, both physically (the bomb) and emotionally: Loki torments Thor, showing why he is not worthy to be a god. By focusing on an individual (Jane) instead of the group (the world), Thor was unable to stop an atomic bomb from being dropped on American soil. Loki showed that by acting like a god instead of acting like a mortal, he could stop it.

The last page may show signs of changed art. The shading on the left edge of the second to last panel, and the bottom right corner of the final panel, suggest cutting and pasting. More importantly, the layout is weak: we would expect Thor to be larger, or to appear in both panels. Design wise, we would also expect the rainbow bridge to be in the foreground of the final panel. My guess is that Thor's inability to enter Asgard was much clearer in the original.

It was a story about Ragnarok for all life. Because the cobalt bomb was a real device. It was known as the "doomsday device" because it was intended to kill far more people than other bombs. (It was a regular atomic bomb coated in Cobalt 60 for extra radiation, and hence, extra pain and death.) This story had atomic weapons being taken somewhere where nobody could defend themselves. Then at the climax, we were just minutes away from nuclear war. Just like in the Cuban Missile crisis, October 1962. The story was cover dated

November 1962, meaning that Kirby wrote it about six months earlier. So this was an example of Kirby seeing the future.

#89 was not part of the main story

A number of clues indicate something was wrong with issue #89.

1. After this story, Kirby stopped writing Thor for a while.
2. The cover is generic. Covers were usually drawn last, to promote the finished story. But this looks like the kind of generic image Kirby used when originally pitching the first issue of a new title. As if Kirby handed it the story, said, “I’m done”, so the editor had to search for old art to use as the cover.
3. The cover text is generic, implying that either the editor did not know what was inside, or there was nothing good inside that he could point to.
4. The villain was unbelievably weak.
5. The plot was cartoonishly weak, beginning with Thor using a tailor's dummy to distract attention from himself, and later defeating enemies by blowing a tablecloth over their head.
6. Some of the art looked stiff and awkward (e.g., the Thor and Asgard picture, last page, panel 4), and some looked squashed. Either Kirby was rushing or disinterested, or somebody else changed it.
7. Jane dreams of love in a way that demeans her. And Jane dreaming of polishing Thor's hammer — was the subtle innuendo intended?
8. This was the only story that knew what was happening next. Usually the editor had no idea of the next story until Kirby delivered it.

It all reads like a parody of uninspired superhero stories of the 1950s: the kind of story Kirby's editor was pushing him to write. This was three months after the editor began to officially credit himself as the writer instead of Kirby. The previous two months, Kirby showed his frustration in Fantastic Four #10 and #11. It looks like Kirby chose to make a statement with Thor. For one issue he did exactly what the editor wanted, and the result was dreadful. Then for three issues Kirby did not write at all. Those stories still carry the editor's name as

writer, but the difference was like night and day. So readers could see who really did the writing.

Tales of Asgard!

(Journey into Mystery #97)

It appears that Kirby was tempted back to write Thor by letting him have a backup strip where he had more freedom. Kirby used this partly to show elements that were edited out of the main story. In the main, edited story in #97, a new character (a 'lava man') just appeared for no apparent reason. In the edited dialogue, Loki referred to previously bringing the lava man to the surface, then forgetting about him. This made no sense: why would such a random character even exist, and why wasn't he given any context? But Tales of Asgard made the main story clear. 'Tales' began with an overview of the beginning and end of Asgard. We learn that the fire demon Surtur will bring Ragnarok, the end of the gods. At the end of Ragnarok the whole planet Earth will burn. The first story now made sense. First we saw Loki's eyes looking evil, foreseeing the world burning. Then we saw the legs of this gigantic fire demon, with flames around his feet. This might not be Surtur himself: It might be the Norse jotun called Hraunbui (meaning 'dweller of the lava-plains'). But it was clearly a sign of things to come. Thanks to 'Tales', we can see the bigger picture: Ragnarok is coming and a giant fire jotun is already walking the Earth.

The story beneath the padding

(Journey into Mystery #101-102)

These two issues have many flashbacks, to bring readers up to speed after Kirby's absence. Also, many pages are spent in crossovers with other comics that served no purpose to the story. So they were almost certainly advertising demanded by the editor. So #101-102 are essentially one story padded out to two. It is possible that the "power reduced by half" storyline was Kirby's

comment on the process: Kirby's stories were weakened by the editorial changes.

The story continues where we left off with Zarrko and the cobalt bomb. Thor let himself tag along with the villain in the future, so we the readers had a guided tour of what a future without force could be like. Machines help us, decisions are made wisely, and people are free and happy. Zarrko wanted a world based on force, and of course, Thor stopped him. This story is about our choices for the future.

#105-106: not Kirby's choice

Cobra and Hyde were introduced in non-Kirby stories (#98-100). They were far too weak to fight Thor: when Kirby returned (#101) his first splash page showed knocking a chunk out of an iron lamppost just by rushing past it. As if to say, "The real Thor would defeat Cobra or Hyde in five seconds". Presumably the editor wanted the characters back. Kirby did a professional job, but this could not have been his choice. Cobra and Hyde will only appear one more time, in #110-111. Those are crossover issues, so again they would be required by the editor. But Kirby managed to use Cobra and Hyde for a good purpose on that last outing. He spent time on the real story (entering Asgard), and he showed that such weak enemies can only be a threat if a serious enemy (Loki) was behind them. #110-111 showed that Thor was tired of wasting his time on such games.

The lost Dracula story

(Journey into Mystery #107)

The edited dialogue made #107 look like crazy comic book science: creating a superpower potion by accident. But look at the art without the dialogue: spilling the chemical was caused by the scientist being distracted by the opening door. First, see the amount of dialogue crammed into the third frame of that page: the art was not designed for that much text. The text broke the flow, adding an unnecessary break ("after his superior has left"), then had to find a new reason for the accident, so said the scientist was (inexplicably) careless. The position of the body and hands showed this was supposed to be

a smooth, continuous flow, like a movie. Kirby had a very cinematic flow, but the dialogue broke it. The art only made sense if the scientist was well aware of what he was creating, but did not intend to use it on himself. So this is not a story about an accident: it is about arrogance, where a scientist is willing to create a very dangerous substance because he thinks it will be used on other people.

Before this reveal, we saw passengers of an airplane all turned into stone. That was an unforgettable scene that reminds us of the most famous story about arrogance: Dracula, and his entrance into England. In Dracula, a ship arrived and every crew member was dead. The only living thing was Dracula in dog form, who left the ship as soon as it reached land, just as stone man was the only one to leave the plane. The dialogue says the people will revert to normal after sixty minutes, but the art never shows that. (Thor only escaped because his enchantment forced him to become Blake.)

So Kirby retold the story of Dracula with a human-stone man hybrid. That is, a jotun vampire. Kirby made the Gargoyle look like the fire demon in #97: This was the third time Kirby showed Thor against his arch enemies, the jotnar.

Journey into Mystery #108-109, 111-112: not Kirby's choice

These are crossover issues, in order to promote other titles. There was no story reason for these issues, and they interrupt the Asgardian plot. So they were almost certainly an editorial decree forced on Kirby. He had to pay his bills, so could not refuse.

The lost writing quality

(Journey into Mystery #110,113)

This is the central moment of the Thor series. Thor was banished to Earth because he was not worthy to live with the other gods. But at the end of #110 he finally fights his way into Asgard. And at the start of #113 he lives in his natural glory, at the head of a great heavenly Viking ship.

Sadly, the editor did not understand what was going on. He began with a text box, saying, *“This doesn’t have much to do with the main part of the story, but you’ve got to admit that it makes a spectacular beginning!”* But if we ignore the text, and read only the art, we see that this opening was central to the main story. Because Thor finally wins his way into Asgard, only to throw away his prize and return to Jane Foster. There are signs that the art was changed. Not just the added smile mentioned earlier, but examine Odin’s silhouette on page 3, panel 3. The raised arms are superficially dramatic, but did not fit the shape of the body. They are out of character for Odin, making him seem frustrated and weak. Odin could easily force Thor to stay, but this is about sadness. Odin’s hands were almost certainly by his side. His son and heir has betrayed his birthright.

More lost writing quality

(Journey into Mystery #114)

This was a sublime, near perfect story. It was weakened by the editing. Consider the context, ignoring the stories Kirby did not want. In #107, Thor fought a jotun and won. In #110 he entered Asgard in triumph. In #113, Thor regained his glory. And now in #114 he faces an enemy with his own power, and more willingness to use it. And Thor’s only advantage is his newly discovered courage.

Recall how 'jotnar' literally means "devourers" and they are usually made of stone. The absorbing man absorbs or devours your power, and typically changes into rock, or diamond, or some other stone mineral. Thor's first great enemy, now he was fully a god, is a gigantic symbol of the jotnar, the great devourer, intent on devouring all Asgard, and then the Earth: Ragnarok!

Before Thor became worthy, he was a type of absorbing man: he obtained his power from outside, from Odin, through the cane. But now that he embodies that power, the power is from inside. A true god of thunder embodies thunder, he does not merely borrow it. Before this, Loki could defeat and shame Thor because Thor was not worthy (e.g., in #88) But now that Thor has proven himself, he would defeat Loki easily (in #117). The power of these stories was lost because the central battle, the battle to enter Asgard, was edited out.

The editor did not understand the story

The Tales of Asgard feature confirmed that the editor did not understand the story. It began:

"Special note: we interrupt our 'biographies-in-depth-series' of the life of Loki to present this special tale"

However, the tale did *not* interrupt the 'biographies-in-depth-series' of the life of Loki. This 'Golden Apples' story was based on The Apples of Idunna, but Kirby replaced the ice giant with Fenrir, son of Loki. (Loki was half ice giant, so this worked.) As Fenrir was the son of Loki, this was still part of the in-depth biography of Loki.

The lost multi-year epic

(Journey into Mystery, renamed Thor, #124-132)

Thanks to editing that turns this into a villain-of-the month story, we miss how Thor fits into Kirby's other stories.

Pluto, featured here, was the main enemy back in Kirby's stories about Mercury / Hurricane, the son of Thor. Back then he played a role very similar to that of Darkseid, while Mercury, the son of Thor foreshadowed Orion. Thor's generation is to end, and the next generation is to take over. Tales of Asgard #126-128 reinforced this: it is all about Ragnarok. Recall that 'jotnar' referred to any beings from outside of Earth or Asgard. So this includes other gods: as we approach Ragnarok even the Olympian gods fight the Asgardians. More and more enemies will pile on, relentlessly, until Asgard loses.

The lost space epic

(Thor #133-134)

The "Ego" story ends abruptly. What happened? A fan asked Mark Evanier, Kirby's assistant, if the editor forced Kirby to cancel his plans. Evanier replied:

"Yes, he did. [The editor] didn't like the story that was evolving and told him to change gears quickly."¹²²

What was Kirby planning? He already wrote a living planet story in 1958,¹²³ but this time he wanted to go much further. He recalled:

"I felt somewhere out in the universe, the universe turns liquid — became denser and turns liquid — and that in this liquid, there was a giant multiple virus"¹²⁴

That was his idea for Ego. In the interview, Kirby then discussed non-Euclidean geometry. Kirby returned to that idea in Captain Victory, with Quadrant X: a part of the universe that connects to non-Euclidean space. He already hinted at it by saying the Skrulls live in the "fifth quadrant of the Andromeda galaxy".¹²⁵ Three dimensional space can only have four quadrants, but if space is folded, as in a hypercube,¹²⁶ a fourth quadrant could lead to a fifth and higher, like in Heinlein's book, "He Built A Crooked House". Kirby used Euclid's phrase "the fifth quadrant"¹²⁷ by analogy with a rotating body that passes through more than 360 degrees. This kind of higher dimensional space fascinated Kirby, but his editor evidently disliked it.

The lost evolution story

(Thor #135-136)

By treating Thor as escapist fiction, we miss its real world significance. In the real world, evolution was the number one enemy of fundamentalist religions. Yet here in 1966 a mainstream comic embraced evolution openly, without worrying about losing readers. The old gods were weakening in the real world!

¹²² From the old Kirby-L newsgroup, saved by Patrick Ford

¹²³ "The Garden of Eden", in "Race For The Moon" #3, November 1958

¹²⁴ From the Mark Hebert interview

¹²⁵ E.g. in Fantastic Four #18 p.3 and elsewhere.

¹²⁶ See for example "And He Built a Crooked House" by Robert A. Heinlein.

¹²⁷ Euclid's Elements of Geometry: Trigonometry.

The 'Man-Beast' is also a reminder that, while we think we are advanced, we can very easily go backwards after Ragnarok. Kirby explored that topic in Kamandi.

This story also features Galactus. This was not a forced crossover for sales, because Galactus was not on the cover or splash page, and he fitted naturally into the long term story. Ragnarok was the potential end of the world, so it was natural to meet the eater of worlds.

The lost story of Sif

(Thor #137-139)

Thor is now shown with his real wife, Sif. The text could not say that Sif was his wife. Because the editor spent the past fifty issues trying to show Thor having a lengthy romance with Jane Foster. So the significance of this story was lost, due to editing.

The art was also changed. See for example Ulik's face in #137. It was clearly redrawn from pages 10 to the end.¹²⁸ Page 11 panel 1 is especially obvious. Kirby wanted us to *feel* this fight. We see the huge arms, the heavy knuckleduster, the flying hair, and just the glimpse of an eye. Kirby was a fighter. That was what it felt like to be facing a raging monster. But the editor wanted to show Ulik's face. This detracted from the power of the fight.

The lost human story

(Thor #140-141)

In the edited story, this was just another enemy. But think of this as modern mythology, and the context: the death of our old gods. "Replicus" was about how whatever a god could do, human technology could maybe do better. That was the world of the 1960s.

¹²⁸

Thanks to Richard Elson for pointing these out.

The lost jotun

(Thor #142)

Jotnar are often seen as rocks, and then change shape. And “jotun” means “out there”, far from the safety of the camp. So the Super-Skrull, the craggy shape changing alien, is a jotun. In the Eddas, the main source of Norse myths, Loki who banished, then assembled the giants (jotnar) and other enemies to fight against the gods at Ragnarok. Here Loki is banished, but enlists the Super Skrull. The edited text loses all of that significance.

The lost ending foreshadowed

(Thor #145-147)

Tales of Asgard #145 states plainly: this is “The End”. The main story is that Thor has lost his power and been abandoned on Earth. Odin is against him. There could only be one result.

This story was dated October 1967, the same as Fantastic Four #67, the final straw that led Kirby to hold back new ideas and take 'New Gods' to a different publisher. So this was the moment when Kirby decided to hold the rest of his epic back for a new publisher. None of this is obvious in the edited text.

The lost Inhumans story

(Thor #146)

Thor #146 begins a history of the Inhumans. In the edited version, the Kree approve of the Inhumans' ancient experiments. But the original pencils and margin notes tell the opposite story: this early version of the Terrigen Mists was extremely dangerous and could have killed large numbers. The Kree sentinel came to tell them to stop. When they refused, the gods condemned and abandoned them. That was why they were called "inhuman", because they

lusted for power at the expense of life. Kirby made a similar point with the Hulk: if we invent science that can kill millions of people, are we men, or monsters? Are we human or inhuman?

The lost zombie story

(Thor #150-153)

Thor is dead. So nothing can stop Ragnarok. In the edited version, Thor's return from the grave was treated as if he was back to normal. But think what his death meant: a god could be defeated. What good is a god who can be defeated? He could be defeated again. He is a dead god walking: a zombie god. He is discredited. Ulik the troll, and the Destroyer, just keep Thor busy until the big gun arrives to finish the job.

The lost warning

(Thor #154-155)

In the published story, Mangog was just a comic book character. But when we see how this all fits together, we see he is much more than that. Mangog represents the force that killed our gods in real life, *and now rules us*.

Hive minds and Magog

Mangog is a hive mind: the combined minds of billions of people. The name is based on the Biblical name 'Magog', a name that came to represent hordes of the most feared horseback invaders, such as Scythians, Huns and Mongols. Mangog looked like the Minotaur of Minoan Crete, reminding us of Tuk and his journey to Crete, the legendary origin place for Greek civilisation. Our ten thousand year story of the beginning and end of civilisation is almost complete.

Kirby was long interested in hive minds. He was one of the first to popularise the phrase.¹²⁹ He foreshadowed it in the Swarm in #124. Good hive minds appear in The Forever People and The Eternals. But Thor and Captain Victory warn that a hive mind can eventually enslave all mankind.

In the real world, religions and nations and corporations are hive minds. See Noah Harari's book 'Sapiens' for details. Human brains can only cope with fifty to one hundred other people. In order to combine larger numbers, we need an imaginary being: a god, national identity, or business. As long as each person follows their hive's rules, we can understand billions of people, not just a hundred or so. New hive minds, like nations and businesses (and even scientific consensus) have made the old hive minds (the old gods) seem irrelevant.

The downside of a hive mind is that it evolves for its own survival, not yours. You and I become just cogs in the wheel. Just nameless worker bees. We become expendable. We no longer matter as individuals. This is Kirby's great message: power is exciting, but it does not care about you. Power will crush you. So Mangog exists in the real world and is crushing the world.

The lost theology

(Thor #156)

Kirby called this "The Hammer and the Holocaust". He meant it.

As a believing Jew, Kirby would not use the word "holocaust" lightly. He wrote about Odin being asleep, and about gods that relied on the sword, not on science. Kirby knew exactly what he was doing.

In 1961, Gabriel Vahanian published his famous book 'The Death of God'. He argued that the old gods were no longer connecting with modern people. This was also Kirby's thesis. It was why Kirby created New Gods based on technology and modern values. The 'death of God' debate reached its peak in 1966, as Kirby created the Ragnarok storyline. Time Magazine of 8 April

¹²⁹ On the back cover of Captain Victory #3, 1982. The phrase was not new, but did not become common until years later.

1966 simply asked, 'Is God Dead?' Also in 1966, Rabbi Richard L Rubenstein published the famous book 'After Auschwitz'. He argued that Auschwitz destroyed the idea of a God who intervened. We needed a new conception of God, one who does not fight for us. Kirby reflected this in his story of a sleeping Odin. Surely almighty Odin could defeat the existential threat of Magog? Yet he slept!

The cover image is highly symbolic. The old gods ruled by the sword, and the sword now made them look small. We readers look down on the old gods from a higher position. If a modern religion used the sword like in old times, it would be crushed by the state, and discredited in the minds of its believers. To use the sword today meant the religion would die. And so, in Kirby's story, if the Odin-sword were unsheathed in modern times, Asgard must fall.

The lost ending

(Thor #157)

To most readers, this was just another Thor story (albeit a very good one). In fact, it was the last Thor story of the epic.

These two covers (#156-157) are surely the best Thor covers ever. This one shows Thor helpless in the great claw of Mangog the hive mind. The city of the gods burns.

God is asleep, his sword is exposed, and modern man can never believe again. Ragnarok happens.

So Kirby's magnificent epic, Thor, is complete. It tells the story of the death of old religions.

Loose ends

(Thor #158-177)

In the real world, Jack Kirby did not yet have a publisher for New Gods. So he still had to sell stories about Thor. The final pages, the dead bodies we see

at the start of New Gods, were postponed. Instead, Kirby tacked on a two page deus ex machina: Odin just wakes up and fixes everything.

Those last two pages should not fool anyone. They are completely out of place. But readers had grown to love the old gods, and they wanted to believe. This is another example of how Thor symbolises religion today.

After Mangog, Kirby just picked up loose ends until he left.

- #158: "the way it was" — reflects on the previous issue, then retells the origin story.
- #159 explains how Dr Blake is always just Thor, but banished due to being unworthy.
- #160-162 gives the origin of Galactus.
- #163-164 warn us of the coming nuclear wars.
- #165-167 bring back popular characters for indecisive fights: the Cocoon man, and Loki
- #168-169 have more about the origin of Galactus. **This was heavily edited** because the editor decided that stories should not continue beyond a single issue. So the lengthy story that Kirby mailed in from California had to be chopped up and rearranged and simplified at the publishers' offices in New York. In the original story (according to notes on the original art) the Watcher and Galactus were originally of the same race.
- #170-175 are more fillers: Thor fights some new enemy every month. But then Kirby knew he had a new publisher. So he once again tied everything up.
- In #176: Surtur showers fire on Asgard.
- #177 was "To End in Flames!" If readers wanted to believe that #177 was Ragnarok, they could. But the structure of the story showed that Ragnarok had already happened.

Kirby was never mean spirited, so even with #177 he tacked on another "deus ex machina" ending in order to help the next writer. And Kirby left to continue the real story, in New Gods.

The lost Iron Man stories

The lost Iron Man origin

(Tales of Suspense #39, March 1963)

Summary: Iron Man's origin was about needing other people. But editing reversed Kirby's message: it turned Iron Man into exactly the thing he opposed (in issue #41): a Randian loner.

Kirby outlined this story

We know that Kirby outlined this story, because:

1. It is clearly based on a Kirby story from four years earlier: Green Arrow in Adventure Comics #255 (December 1958).
2. It is based on real world technology. Kirby always based his technology on the real world. The amount of detail (below) suggests that Kirby provided a full outline, and not just a brief summary.

Other writers of the time simply did not care about real science. For example, some people link this story to "Metallo" from Action Comics #252. In that story, a doctor happens to find an injured man, and gives him an entirely robotic body. Not just that, but the body is unmeltable and indestructible and super strong. And it is powered by uranium that must be changed daily, even though uranium has a half life of at least 250,00 years, depending on the isotope. Science was not important to the story. That was normal for comics. But every detail in Iron Man is based on real world science, then Kirby imagined where science might be 30-50 years later.

"I always try to look 30 to 50 years ahead, I always have."¹³⁰

Here is Iron Man's real world technology from his origin story:

- Tony Stark's heart implant.
The first pacemaker — a circular device like Iron Man's one — was fitted in 1958. Metallo's square heart box was nothing like it. (The shrapnel near the heart in issue #39 was probably a new detail, to add some "ticking clock" drama. The original role of the chest armour was probably different: see issue #40, below.)
- An extremely powerful magnet.
A typical large electromagnet, such as in a hospital scanner, or a junkyard for lifting scrap metal, was 1.5 Tesla. But in 1961, advances in superconductivity enabled magnets of 20 Tesla. These were very fragile, until in 1962, niobium-titanium based electromagnets (achieving 10 Tesla) became practical. So in 1963, Kirby imagined what might be discovered next: a magnet that could tear open a reinforced door!
- Transistors.
1960 saw a big breakthrough — metal oxide semiconductors (MOS). When Kirby wrote this story (late 1962), transistors were progressing at a very rapid pace. This led to the big breakthrough in February 1963, just after Kirby wrote this story: "complementary MOS" (CMOS), which became the standard method for creating computer semiconductors. Kirby said transistors made everything more powerful, and it's true. Tiny circuitry makes existing technology far more efficient.
- Nickel titanium, or "nitinol".
Discovered in 1959. Nitinol was a flexible metal with "shape memory". In 1992, the "Stiquito" robot applied charges to nitinol legs in order to walk. Kirby imagined a more advanced version for Iron Man's armour: it can be collapsed like tinfoil, but when charged it

¹³⁰ Jack Kirby, on the Earth Watch Radio interview comicbookcollectorsclub.com/jack-kirby-and-stan-lee-radio-interview-earth-watch-wbai-1987/

becomes rigid, or changes shape like the later Stiquito muscles, but with far more force.

The quantum tunnelling transistor

Kirby's transistors somehow produce enormous energy. How could that work? Leo Esaki, an Asian scientist working in America, created the tunnel diode (the "Esaki diode") in 1957. This is a transistor that uses quantum tunnelling effects to switch power. Quantum tunnelling is a key part of nuclear fusion. In 1962, the year before this story, professor Brian Davidson predicted the Davidson Effect, where larger scale quantum tunnelling enables current to flow without applying energy. This proved the possibility of "Zero Point Energy", energy from a vacuum. Because quantum physics suggests that empty space is a seething mass of energy:

"Physicists John Wheeler and Richard Feynman calculated that there was enough such energy in the vacuum inside a single light bulb to boil all the world's oceans."¹³¹

Until 1963, Zero Point Energy was assumed to be just an imaginary idea. But in 1962, Physicist Louis de Broglie suggested that Zero Point Energy might be the physical basis of the quantum effects experienced by atoms. This led to a field of physics called "Stochastic Electro-Dynamics". Kirby was no physicist, of course, but he took an interest in science news. He wrote a story about the latest transistor being used as the key component in a dimensional tunnelling machine.¹³² If a quantum tunnelling transistor could unleash zero point energy, then that explains Iron Man's power!

Professor Yinsen, the "greatest physicist of all"

At the start of the Iron Man story, Tony Stark's super magnet had to be bolted to a steel table. It was not mobile, and may have needed a large external power supply. But then Stark visited South Vietnam and met Professor Yinsen, *"the greatest physicist of all!!!"* and is then able to make a portable

¹³¹ Mark Pilkington, "Zero point energy", The Guardian, 17 July 2003
theguardian.com/education/2003/jul/17/research.highereducation

¹³² "The Man Who Tampered With Infinity" in Challengers of the Unknown
#1

suit. The “greatest physicist” line could be an example of editorial hyperbole, but the editor would be more likely to write, “Greatest scientist”. Plus, Yinsen’s crucial role is implied by the art:

Page 2 (where the story begins) shows that Stark has a super magnet. This is the only technology we see him create before he meets Yinsen: just one thing, a super-magnet. Judging by the art alone, Stark is an expert at magnets. Kirby often used extreme magnetism in his stories, so this is probably important. This magnet is bolted to a heavy table, and is demonstrated inside a laboratory that is full of equipment. The demonstration is for a military man, and the military needs its weapons to be portable, so the fact that it is bolted down and needs a laboratory full of equipment suggests that the super magnet is not portable.

Pages 3-5 show Stark being injured and captured. On page 5 panel 6 we see him planning something, but the art does not show what it is. Since Stark is an expert at magnets, it probably involves small but powerful magnets or related technology. This story is very similar to the Green Arrow story, and he is held prisoner, so he is probably devising some weapons. But there is no hint of what the weapons are. The Green Arrow story has giant weapons on the theme of arrows, since Green Arrow uses arrows for everything. Presumably, Stark’s weapons would make use of miniaturised magnets.

Page 5, last panel, introduces Yinsen. Page 6, panel 1, shows Yinsen looking sad, and Stark looking interested. In panel 2, Stark shows Yinsen his plans, and Yinsen now looks very hopeful. Until this point, Stark looked unhappy. But now his mood starts to change. Page 6 panel 3 shows Stark and Yinsen working together. For the first time, Stark looks happy.

Clearly, the addition of Yinsen changed Stark’s outlook. Thanks to Yinsen, Stark can do something he could not have done before. Why else would Kirby add a character? The character has to matter to the story.

Next, we see Stark working with a chest plate. But what is Yinsen doing? He appears to have some kind of mechanical joint. That is, Yinsen is interested in mobility.

Page 6 panel 4 shows Yinsen, not Stark, putting together the armour. This is the first time the art suggests full body armour. In panel 5, Stark looks weak. In panel 6 it is Yinsen who places the armour on Stark.

So based on the art alone, Stark planned some kind of technology, and Yinsen made it mobile.

Earlier we saw that in the real world, Americans developed advanced transistors, but an Asian scientist developed quantum tunnelling transistors. So it was natural for Kirby to show Stark creating the basic technology, and then an Asian scientist added the special ingredient that took it to the next level.

Stark getting help from Yinsen was like Richard Feynman getting help from the famous Asian physicist Chien-Shiung Wu. Feynman (and fellow legend Murray Gell-Mann) proposed an important theory in 1958 that could not be confirmed until Chien-Shiung helped them in 1963. That was a few months after this story, but Chien-Shiung became famous in America just as this story was written. Here are more parallels between Chien-Shiung and Yinsen:

- Chien-Shiung was Asian, and recognised as the best in the world in the field of physics.
- Her work was crucial to atomic power, quantum entanglement (“action at a distance”) and electromagnetism.
- More famous physicists came to her for help,¹³³ just as Stark could not create his electromagnetic suit without Yinsen.
- She was in the news at exactly the time Kirby was probably writing this story.

I am not arguing that Kirby *consciously* modelled Yinsen after Chien-Shiung. But Kirby read very widely, and he chose a name and character that felt right. The name “Yinsen” could easily be inspired by “Chien-Shiung”: the sound is vaguely similar, but “Yinsen” is easier for westerners to read.

¹³³ aip.org/sites/default/files/history/teaching-guides/chien-shiung-wu/Chien-Shiung%20Wu_New%20Dictionary%20of%20Scientific%20Biography%20Excerpt.pdf



Image: Flickr Commons, via Wikimedia, public domain

Chien-Shiung Wu was “a pioneer and pivotal figure in the history of physics”,¹³⁴ a vital part of the Manhattan Project. She then worked on quantum entanglement, and was the first to prove that Einstein’s famous “action at a distance” theory was real. Wu later devised a critical experiment that led to her colleagues winning the 1962 Nobel Prize for Physics. (She could not win it herself because she was female.) Winners are generally announced at the start of October, two months before the prize ceremony in December. So Kirby would have heard her name just at the time he was laying out this story. *Tales of Suspense* 39 is cover dated March 1963, so would be on sale around December, so would normally be written around September.

¹³⁴nps.gov/people/dr-chien-shiung-wu-the-first-lady-of-physics.htm

But there are hints that this story was created at the last minute (see the original origin below), so the first week in October 1962 is a perfect fit.

Kirby may have wanted Yinsen to be female

A number of clues suggest that “Professor Yinsen” may have been female in Kirby’s original layouts. As they were just layouts. Kirby would just have written “Professor Yinsen” and roughly sketched her size and pose, but no facial details.

First, “Yin” is a girl’s name, from “yin and yang”, the eastern principle of male and male principles. Yinsen may have been the warlord’s consort. She contrasts with Stark’s “starkly” male principle: his interest in force (e.g., super magnets), the military, etc.

Second, Yinsen wears a wide sash that hangs down. That is common with female characters, to emphasise their curves, but Kirby’s Asian males tended to have thinner belts or no belt at all.¹³⁵

Third, Yinsen is short and slim. This is very unusual for a Kirby male figure. Kirby drew plenty of short characters, but they tended to be even shorter, and like himself: tough and stocky, or at least always in control of the situation.¹³⁶ But Yinsen enters the story by being thrown to the floor. So the height is probably not due to being a Kirby stand-in.

Is Yinsen short because “he” is Asian? In the Green Arrow story, the Asians are either the same height or only slightly shorter than the westerners.

Is Yinsen short because “he” is old? Kirby’s old people might stoop, but they do not tend to lose height.¹³⁷

Did Kirby even intend Yinsen to be old? The text does not say Yinsen is old, it only says people thought “he” was dead. As we would expect if some warlord

¹³⁵ See for example the cast of Yellow Claw.

¹³⁶ E.g. Oberon in Mr Miracle, Dr Chuda in the Lone Rider, Fenimore Flood (the Ant Extract), etc.

¹³⁷ E.g. the elderly chief in Fantastic Four #80, last panel. Or Dr Damian (Eternals #1, last panel: note that Icarus is probably very tall.)

attacked her town. Kirby again used the same trope, of scientists thought to be dead, in *Fantastic Four* #66. None of those scientists were particularly old.¹³⁸

If Yinsen is younger, that makes “his” death all the more tragic, which makes a stronger story.

Why are we even saying “he”? Don Heck drew a beard on the character, but Kirby seldom if ever drew beards like that. So that was Heck’s decision. Kirby just drew someone short and slim, called “Professor Yinsen”, a female sounding name.

After being thrown in, the next panel (page 6, panel 1) establishes Yinsen’s character as being sensitive to emotions. That is more often associated with females.

Another reason for suspecting a female scientist is that Stark needs help with transistors — that is, microcomputers. Kirby’s greatest ever computer scientist, four years before this, was a woman (June Robbins of the *Challengers*).

A female Yinsen makes a better story: there is more emotion when she is tossed at Stark’s feet, there is more emotion in the climax when she is killed, and she provides a dramatic contrast with the empty headed women at the start of the story.

Unfortunately, we saw with the Wasp, and Jane Foster, and Susan Storm, that the editor did not like strong female characters. So if Kirby intended a female Asian scientist in his rough outline, she would have been changed to be male. Kirby sketched her as small, so to make her male, she was given a beard and explained as old and shrunken. Even though Kirby did not write or draw like that.

Changes to the story

The art shows that Yinsen was just as important as Stark to the creation of the Iron Man armour. But the edited text makes it look like Stark had all the ideas and Yinsen merely helped. In the dialogue, Stark and not Yinsen suggests the suit. The dialogue has Stark say that he can design transistors “in any size to perform any function”, leaving Yinsen with nothing to contribute. The later

¹³⁸ *Fantastic Four* #66 page 4

movies make this even clearer: In the movies, Stark invents the arc reactor on his own, and Stark only says of Yinsen *"I need him"* in order to save Yinsen's life. Then a team of top scientists with the latest technology cannot duplicate Stark's work, leading to the famous line, *"Tony Stark was able to build this in a cave! With a box of scraps!"*

So Kirby's story was reversed by editing. Kirby wrote about how, no matter how smart we are, we need other people to do what we cannot do. But the edited comic, and the movies, said that one man can be so smart that he doesn't really need anybody. This is the belief that some people are just better than others, and are therefore born to rule. Kirby's stories always fight that belief. Kirby also fought that belief in real life, on the front lines in World War II.

The REAL lost origin

(Tales of Suspense #40, April 1963)

Summary: Tales of Suspense #40 has a different origin story, one that makes more sense. It was probably Kirby's intended origin story.

The clues

The published Iron man Origin (Tales of Suspense #39) has numerous problems. These problems all disappear if Kirby wrote issue #40 first, and intended it to be the origin story.

1. Why did the editor take such a risk with a new title? Kirby drew the second and third Iron Man stories, but he only outlined the first one. The editor left the details of the first story to a writer without Kirby's track record. Why take that risk? Normally Kirby launched a title for others to take over, not vice versa.
2. Why does the second Iron Man story (Tales of Suspense #40) gives a completely different and far more plausible origin story? (See below.)

3. Why does issue #40 make no reference to the first origin? Compare the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Ant Man, Thor, and Spider-Man: they all remind readers of their origin story in their second issue. Why does Iron Man seem completely unaware of his previous origin?
4. Why does the cover to #39 describe the events in #40? (Where Iron Man slowly puts on his armour for the first time.)
5. Why do we see the origin flashback in #41 instead, and it makes no reference to the accident or the cave? The flashback in #41, pages 4 and 5, has plenty of space to show Iron Man fighting gangsters, hijackers, industrial accidents and aliens, but no mention of anything from issue #39.
6. Why are #39 and #40 backwards? In every other story, the first story defines the character and the second one is a cold war story. For example in Thor's origin he fights the Jotnar, and then his second story is against some far eastern warlord. In Hulk's origin, he fights his friends, and the second story is about some Russian warlord. In Ant Man's origin he explores the microscopic world, then his second story is against the Russians. The Fantastic Four start fighting monsters, then the second story is a red scare metaphor. Spider-man starts with his personal problems, then his second story (Amazing Spider-Man #1) is about the space race. But Iron Man is backwards: His first story is against some unimportant communist warlord, while his second story establishes who he is, and the past versus the future. Why is it backwards?
7. Why was the origin story based on a Green Arrow story from just four years before? This, and Kirby merely outlining the story, suggests that he was in a hurry. But why not spend more time on an origin story, to make it work?
8. Why does the central premise stretch credibility? You can't create the world's most advanced machine, based on cutting edge microtechnology, in a cave, using second hand parts. In the Green Arrow story, he simply made explosive arrows: that is plausible. But making the latest microprocessors from rusty parts in a cave? Really? Kirby added Professor Yinsen, so that just about makes it plausible (maybe Yinsen was working on such things already), but that looks like papering over a gap.
9. Why does Tony Stark need an iron chest armour in #40 that covers his entire torso, like an iron lung? The text says it is because he needs

magnets to pull shrapnel away from his heart. But #39 begins by showing that Stark's main achievement is powerful magnets that are extremely tiny. We see them again near the end of #40. So Stark would need just the tiniest little device to assist his heart. Perhaps the gigantic plate is just an artistic decision, to draw attention to his heart? Then why is there nothing over the heart? Metallo had a heart problem, so he had a very obvious box over his heart. But Iron man has nothing, other than two electric sockets that are too low down and a search light that is too high up. Nothing about it suggests "heart", but the sockets and searchlight do vaguely resemble the connections and window on an iron lung.

10. There is nothing in the art in #39 to suggest the heart is damaged. Besides, how would they know? Did they have an X-ray machine in the cave? And how could they target the magnets without X-rays? But if the damage was to the lungs (a much larger target in the explosion), then the story makes sense: an iron lung, like the chest plate we see, would help.

These problems disappear if we focus on the iron lung and then forget that issue #39 exists. Let's consider #40 on its own:

Page 2 (the start of the story) shows how Stark owns a factory creating mobility aids for soldiers. These mobility aids are like part of Iron Man's armour. We then see a transistor. It is only natural that this genius would make more mobility aids, and when we put them together with the chest plate, then we have Iron Man.

Page 3 introduces the metal truss that Stark has to wear. There is no indication that his heart is the particular problem: if that was the case, then he would only need a heart implant, like in the movies. The circular design high on the chest is a searchlight (page 12) and is too high up for the heart. The inside view (#39, page 6) shows the back of a searchlight in that position, and has no indication of anything for the heart. So what was wrong with Stark? What would require his entire chest, not just his heart, to be enclosed in a metal casing? In 1962 this would be obvious. Kirby grew up in a period of polio epidemics, where tens of thousands of people, mostly children, contracted the infection that severely weakened their bodies. Lou Fine, Kirby's favourite

artist¹³⁹ and a close colleague in the early days, had a crippled leg from polio. Many others died from it. Other sufferers had to use an “iron lung” to breathe. Here is an iron lung from a polio outbreak near Kirby, just before this story: from Rhode Island in 1960.



Image: Center for Disease Control via Wikimedia, public domain

The case for Stark having polio or some similar childhood disease is strengthened in the following issue. Issue #41 page 5 shows Stark, the millionaire genius, with a glamorous date. But then he thinks about his weak chest. He then dumps his date, and instead of spending time with her, chooses to visit a hospital for sick children. He spends two full pages with the children, which is a lot of space for a thirteen-page story with so much to say. It appears that, in Kirby’s mind, Iron Man had an unusual empathy for the children’s hospital, and that empathy followed from thinking of his own weak chest.

Iron Man is about the power of technology. What better way to show the power of technology, than for a polio sufferer to create a portable iron lung to wear under his clothing, and then continue to develop it, so he is actually stronger than before?

¹³⁹ According to Joe Simon. [web.archive.org/web/ 20110519202642/http://www.comicartville.com/loufine.htm](http://web.archive.org/web/20110519202642/http://www.comicartville.com/loufine.htm)

Back to issue #40. After seeing Stark plug himself in, we have a sudden jarring change of pace. We suddenly cut to three panels of random adventures. But there is no flashback cloud, such as in #41 page 3. Then after three crazy panels we return to the normal pace (#40, page 7, panel 3). But we are suddenly in a circus! How did we get there? Why didn't the previous three panels show Stark at the circus and the moment of disaster that let the animals' escape?

The three random adventures not only don't fit in, but they are redundant. They merely show Iron Man in action, but we are about to see that anyway. They only exist to tell us that the circus is not Iron Man's first appearance. But the art suggests the opposite. Pages 4 and 5 reveal Iron Man at a slow pace, as if we are seeing him go into action for the first time. Page 5 panel 2 shows people surprised and scared, as if they have never seen him before. This surprises Stark, so he then paints his armour in non-military colours. This implies that Stark has never used the armour in public before.

On pages 4-6, Iron Man has very limited powers. He is a little stronger than a normal man: he can throw a leopard. But then, Tarzan could probably do the same. He can use jets to leap into the air, but not stay there. He can withstand animal bites. And he can electrify his suit. That is all. We do not see the gadgets he uses in issue #39: the suction plates, super magnet, finger saw, and torch gun. It looks like Stark trying out the first version of his armour, for the first time.

Regarding the three panels of random adventures, we have seen this technique before. In *Hulk* #4, pages of random adventures were added in the middle of a sequence. The random adventures added nothing to the story, and the sequence worked better without them, so they are a sign of editing. They are inserted into an existing story wherever they might fit and do the least damage. The only purpose of those added Iron Man panels is to contradict the rest of the story, and pretend that this is not Iron Man's first appearance.

The case against

The strongest argument against this being the original first story is also the strongest argument in favour of it: we do not see a sudden accident and the designing the armour in a cave. Instead we see a slow development, as we would in the real world. Let us look at each objection.

Objection 1: We do not see Stark being injured.

We also do not see Don Blake gain his limp, because that probably happened in childhood, as it happened to Lou Fine and many others. We do not see Peter Parker lose his parents, because again, that probably happened years before. When Kirby grew up, injuries, infections and the loss of parents were not unusual. That would not be much of a story. The story is how you rise above your long term problems.

That was a fundamental Kirby belief: no matter what your circumstances, somehow you can rise above it. This was a lifetime work for Stark. He was not some spoiled rich guy who had one accident and quickly fixed it because he was better than everybody else. Other than in #39, Kirby never shows the cave and quick armour. Instead he shows someone who must wear a metal truss, tires easily, and hides it, rather like Franklin D. Roosevelt hid his wheelchair. (Roosevelt was diagnosed with polio at the time, though it is now thought he caught something else.) Kirby's Stark is someone who grew up with challenges, but overcame them. This is more inspiring than a super genius who gets hurt but is up and working again within a week.

Objection 2: we do not see Stark create the Iron Man suit.

Actually, we do. We see him with a company that creates all kinds of advanced miniaturised technology. This company must have taken years to build. We specifically see super-skates that replace trucks. We see the chest plate, and we can infer that Stark helped design it. We also see a transistor that represents his ability to miniaturise other things. We then see the chest piece and some kind of advanced boots put together, and learn of compressed connecting armour. Together, they form a crude first version of the suit. In the next issue (#41) we see more technology, and the armour has more abilities. This is not a device created in a week: this is an ongoing project being improved over years.

This lifelong struggle to overcome nature is reflected in the main story, about the Neanderthal. The story is all about technology versus the past: mankind's long struggle. It is not the story of a privileged playboy with a minor setback, this is the story of civilisation.

Why the origin was changed

The two origins differ in one very obvious way: action.

The first origin (#40) has internal conflict. A disabled man who creates action-packed tools for soldiers, while he himself cannot even breathe without help. But for years he has worked on a suit to give him extra strength, and by the end he saves the world. This is about personal triumph. It is not about hitting people. There is no external conflict until page 5, when a big cat jumps at Iron Man. The real action does not begin until page 8. And even then, Iron Man never hits anybody, and we never see two humans fighting. This is about Tony Stark, and overcoming physical limits. It is not about person A hitting person B.

The second origin (#39) is the opposite. It is almost laughable for its visible conflict. It is as if the editor said, “I want action on every page!” So page 1 is a splash page showing Iron man tearing through an iron wall. Page 2 shows a reinforced door blown apart. Page 4 shows the bad guy defeating people by throwing them around using Judo. Page 5 shows Tony Stark being blown up. The only page that does not have some kind of physical conflict is page 6 where they put the suit together, and even that one is a life and death race against time.

So it appears likely that the original story was deemed as too intellectual, with not enough action. So Kirby quickly outlined a new origin story with action on every page.

Unfortunately, adding more action undermines the story of personal triumph. Stark’s injury becomes too temporary, and his triumph becomes too easy. Even worse, it becomes a story of a ridiculously over-able *Übermensch*. It becomes the opposite of Kirby’s original story about a disabled person. The original story was about how a weak person can become strong: it says anybody can be a superhero. But the new story is the opposite: the new Tony Stark is strong and healthy, and so ridiculously brilliant that even being blown up cannot slow him down — after a week he is even stronger. No real person could ever be as brilliant as the new Tony Stark, able to make a super suit, in a cave, in a single week.

In short, the first origin was anti-elitist: you may be disabled but you can still triumph. The second story was very elitist: some people are just ridiculously better than other people, and you better get used to it.

Kirby loved ordinary people: people with problems and weaknesses. He wanted to make a better world for everyone. The story of Tony Stark with

polio is an example of that. Polio was a horrible disease. There was no cure. But by working and experimenting for years, Stark was able to live with his disability, and then thrive. This is something we can all do, no matter our circumstances. This is how to make the world a better place! True, Kirby used futuristic technology, but it was just real technology plus what might be possible within thirty to fifty years. And it came true. Not in precisely that way, but we developed vaccines for polio, and better electric wheelchairs, and electronic systems of all kinds. So people like Stephen Hawking and Lenin Moreno could excel despite being disabled. So the old origin celebrates disabled people as able to triumph.

In contrast, the new origin story rejects disability. It features an impossibly brilliant man, a man in perfect health. And when he has an accident, he solves the problem within a week. That is an escapist power fantasy about an elite human. His disability does not slow him down and is effectively over in a week.

So, a story that accepts disability was rejected, in favour of a story that brushes off disability. The invisible shrapnel may as well not exist. One of Stark's super tiny magnets could sit in his shirt pocket and keep him healthy forever: he no longer needs the iron lung, that is only there as a relic of the original origin story.

In previous Kirby stories he did not make disability disappear. In a 1956 Kirby story, a blind man stays blind:¹⁴⁰ he does not get a radar sense to allow him to see. He just learns to get used to familiar settings, and nobody can tell he is blind until they get to know him. And in a 1950 Kirby story, a girl loses the use of her legs as a child, but she does not make a super suit: she stays in a manual wheelchair for the rest of her life.¹⁴¹ She works around it. In 1941 and 1957 Kirby wrote sci-fi stories when men lose the use of their legs, and they create motorised devices to carry them around. They do not get the use of their legs back.¹⁴² Kirby accepted disability: he showed that we can triumph despite disability. In the real world we cannot always make our problems go away, but we can work around them.

¹⁴⁰ "Resort Romeo" in *Young Romance* #85, 1956

¹⁴¹ "I Want Your Man", *Young Romance* #21, 1950

¹⁴² *Blue Bolt* #6, and *Gideon Challenger* from the *Chip Hardy* proposal

Sometimes Kirby's disabled people need a little help, like Don Blake needs Jane Foster to assist his work. In Captain Victory a woman from the eighth dimension is trapped by our third dimension.¹⁴³ She is completely helpless, and looks very ugly — we see a three-dimensional cross section of hideous internal organs. All she can do is rage and complain, like a bad-tempered quadriplegic. But Captain Victory can see her potential. He understands her mind, he falls in love with her. He helps her to escape back to her own dimension, from where she can help him in return. He never turns her into a three-dimensional woman, he accepts her difference and works with it, and everybody benefits.

The editor always wanted simple action, not inner triumphs. He wanted powerful, successful, handsome heroes, not people struggling with problems. Officially he claimed to like weaknesses: for example, he spoke of giving Spider-Man problems like acne.¹⁴⁴ But all those problems were superficial, and Spider-Man never did get that acne. Ditko's Spider-Man did have problems, but as soon as Ditko left, Spider-Man became very handsome and dated a gorgeous model.¹⁴⁵ In every case, the editor took a hero with serious problems and then reduced or removed the problems. The Fantastic Four were outcasts, they were changed into celebrities. The Hulk was an angry, tormented villain: he was changed into a hero. Thor was banished from his family in Asgard, but the editor let him enter Asgard at will. And we will later see that Kirby wanted the disabled Professor X to fight on the battlefield, but his editor wanted Xavier out of sight back at home while the non-disabled heroes did the fighting. It appears that the editor did not like heroes with serious problems: he wanted escapist power fantasies where any problems are either superficial or quickly solved.

¹⁴³ Captain Victory #8

¹⁴⁴ "I told him I wanted the character to be a very human guy, someone who makes mistakes, who worries, who gets acne, has trouble with his girlfriend, things like that." — comicbooger.wordpress.com/2020/03/21/ "stan-lee-v-steve-ditko-and-the-custody-over-spider-man-2/ "He'd have allergy attacks when fighting the villains, he'd be plagued by ingrown toenails, acne, hay fever, and anything else I could dream up." -Excelsior, p. 126, as quoted in Ditko's *Avenging Mind*, p.27

¹⁴⁵ Ditko's last issue is #38. Mary Jane's famous reveal, "Face it Tiger, you hit the jackpot" is in #46

So, Kirby wrote the new origin as required, full of action, and ditching any childhood disability. But he clearly did not like the new origin: he did not refer to it in any of his other Iron Man stories.

The lost Neanderthal story

Iron Man was about technology. So this story, as the title page states, is a showdown between the past and the present. It's really about the metaphor of walls: the walls that restrict us, and how we build them ourselves, and how we can overcome them. Stark overcame the walls of his iron lung. He overcame the walls in the way of technology. And now he faces political walls.

Tunnelling under the new wall that appeared overnight is obviously inspired by the Berlin Wall that suddenly appeared overnight in 1961. Worshipping a Neanderthal statue inside the wall reminds us that the Soviet fashion was for brutalist statues. But why does this story feature aliens? In monster movies of the 1950s, aliens were a metaphor for communists.

The story has both modern and ancient parallels. The people inside the walls are easily impressed by a strong leader. Modern man can still be dazzled by a strong leader who builds big walls (not speaking of anyone in particular...) We have always been like that, back to Gilgamesh standing on the walls of Uruk (circa 2500 BC), back to the Natufians building the first walled city at Jericho (circa 8000 BC), and no doubt back to the Neanderthals. As Kirby put it,

"We have a fetish for putting up walls"¹⁴⁶

Once again, Kirby's science is based on the real world:

- Tom Hancocks of Britain invented motorised roller skates for soldiers in 1944: they featured on Pathe news in 1962, the year before this story.
- Electronic jamming was common in the cold war.
- Flight using compressed nitrogen was real, one of several jet pack methods unveiled between 1958 and 1960.

¹⁴⁶ From the Zimmerman interview forbushman.blogspot.com/2013/03/kirby-takes-on-comics-1982.htm

- The shrinking ray did not work, because Iron Man was about modern engineering. Shrinking (e.g., in *The Fly* or *Ant-Man*) is only for stories that link the distant past or future.
- Neanderthals were real, and were indeed stronger and more muscular than us. Kirby exaggerates this for artistic reasons.
- The date is correct: Neanderthals were at their strongest around 80,000 BC. This was when *Homo Sapiens* stopped leaving Africa for a while, suggesting that perhaps the Neanderthals in Europe scared us off.

Once Kirby left Iron Man, this realism was abandoned. In the first non-Kirby story (*Tales of Suspense* #42) Iron Man could point his transistors at any object to make it super powerful. And that story has a disintegrator ray: an invention with no known basis in science. That story must have been problematic, as Kirby had to return for an issue, and brought back realism (see the lost Atlantis story, below). Then Kirby left for good, and realism left with him. Issue #44 turned Iron Man into a story about magic and time travel, where Iron Man could survive without electricity for as long as he needed. Issue #45 settled into soap opera and gimmick villain of the month.

Editing and later stories abandoned the real world, so readers no longer saw the point of the Neanderthal story.

The lost Tesla story

(Tales of Suspense #41, May 1963)

Kirby's first three stories for someone else always included (1) an origin, (2) what made the character special, and (3) an arch enemy. Iron Man's arch enemy was based on Nikola Tesla.

We know that Dr Strange was to be the arch enemy, because Dr Strange matched Iron Man in intelligence and inventions, and his Ayn Rand philosophy and use of mental science made him the perfect foil to Iron Man's egalitarianism and purely physical science. He was clearly overpowered for such a brief appearance, and escaped at the end, indicating that he was supposed to return. Kirby also gave him rich character traits that could be

endlessly mined in future stories: his similarity with Tesla, and the interesting dynamic with his daughter.

Unfortunately, editing turned the story into nonsense. For example, saying that Iron Man could be fully recharged using just flashlight batteries, and then letting the villain escape. Here are the clues that uncover the original story:

Clue 1: Why didn't Iron Man capture Dr Strange?

The final page says that Iron man could “take this island apart”. The art contradicts that: he just stands there while Dr Strange escapes. Why?

Clue 2: why did he need flashlight batteries?

The final page, panel four, says,

“(Gasp) the flashlight batteries revived him! Iron Man’s Getting to his feet! Now he’ll take this island apart...”

So a spark from the flashlight batteries returned his suit to full power? Kirby was not that scientifically illiterate. Besides, at this point, Iron Man did not need his suit. He already destroyed the machinery, including the forcefield. The fortress was already under constant bombardment from the American military. So Dr Strange would have to run away or be captured. And the art shows that Iron Man did not need his suit after this. He could stand up using his own muscles. He only needed the flashlight batteries to power the chest device that kept him alive.

Clue 3: why did destroying the machines hurt him?

Strange said anything strong enough to destroy the machines will kill Iron Man. But why? This panel had fewer words that we would expect. In every other panel, the word balloons were squashed: the editor was verbose. Yet here there was space to spare. So Kirby intended a longer explanation.

Clue 4: the mental connection

Iron Man found Dr Strange’s machines because “*my body was attuned to electrical energy*”. This reminds us that on page 8, Dr Strange used an

electrical machine to control Iron Man's mind. We can now apply Occam's razor: there is no need for two explanations when one will do. The mental connection led to the machines.

Put the clues together, and the mental connection on pages 8-10 means that Iron Man suffered damaging feedback when Dr Strange destroyed the machines. And the flashlight only restarted his heart, which was why he could not stop Dr Strange from running away.

So the original story made sense. So it is worth a closer look. We then see that Dr Strange was based on Nikola Tesla.

- The splash page shows Dr Strange surrounded by gigantic electrodes, like Nikola Tesla's famous photos.
- Tesla was Edison's arch rival, much as Dr Strange is said to be the only one who could rival Stark's genius.
- Strange's origin shows him struck by lightning in his mountain laboratory, like Nikola Tesla.¹⁴⁷
- Strange ends up with a gigantic electrical force field, something Tesla was working on.
- Strange apparently has giant death rays. Tesla's "death ray" was his most controversial invention.
- Today, Nikola Tesla is widely regarded as a hero, but in his lifetime people had mixed feelings. He inspired the fictional villain "Doctor Nikola", who in turn inspired Fu Manchu.¹⁴⁸
- Kirby had written for a Fu Manchu imitation called The Yellow Claw. The Strange — daughter relationship was clearly modelled on the Claw — daughter relationship.

¹⁴⁷ In reality, Tesla's "mountain laboratory" was a modest hill in a town, and lightning did not hit directly. But popular culture liked a good story. welchco.com/02/14/01/60/04/12/1310.HTM

¹⁴⁸ *If any one character might have influenced Rohmer's blending of a super-criminal and the 'yellow peril,' it would be Boothby's Dr. Nikola"*
philsp.com/SaxRohmer/Precursors.htm

- Strange surrounds himself with people from other lands, especially Russia and China. Tesla, an immigrant from Eastern Europe, had an Asian spiritual mentor.¹⁴⁹ In fictional versions of Tesla the Asian link was clearer: Dr Nikola wanted immortality from Tibet, and Fu Manchu and the Yellow Claw were both Chinese.
- Strange uses electricity to enhance his brain. Tesla experimented with electricity to enhance his brain: he even wrote a scientific paper on it.
- Tesla sold at least two devices for electrically stimulating the brain. He called electricity "the greatest doctor". So "Doctor Strange" was the perfect fictional name for Tesla.

Ayn Rand

Dr Strange appears to share Ayn Rand's philosophy, Objectivism. Objectivism taught that some people are just objectively better than others, and so they should rule. Dr Strange believed that he should rule because he was better than other people. Kirby disliked Objectivism. Three years after this, Kirby wrote a story critiquing Objectivism. The editor changed it, and that act was the last straw: Kirby began to look for a new publisher. See the review of Fantastic Four #66 for the details.

Rand explained Objectivism in her novel "The Fountainhead", the story of the fall and rise of architect Howard Roark. Rand's novel was in three parts: (1) Roark's great achievements, (2) his fall due to lesser men, and (3) his climb back to the top. Roark's lowest point came at the end of part two, when his greatest achievement, the Temple to the Human Spirit, was converted against his will into a hospital for disabled children. This opposed everything that Objectivism stood for: it helped the weak instead of celebrating the strong. The novel singled out a disabled child called Jackie:

¹⁴⁹ *"His concepts [after 1881] were greatly influenced by the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. ... Tesla began using the Sanskrit words Akasha, Prana, and the concept of a luminiferous ether to describe the source, existence and construction of matter."* teslasociety.com/tesla_and_swami.htm

*"a person called 'Jackie' of whose age or sex nobody could be certain. They marched into their new home, their eyes staring vacantly, the stare of death before which no world existed."*¹⁵⁰

"Jackie" was also Jack Kirby's childhood nickname. This was coincidence, of course, but it reminds us that Kirby could have been one of those fictional children. Kirby was twelve years old during the 1929 Wall Street Crash, the setting for the Fountainhead. Kirby grew up poor, and physically short, and he cared about the poor and the weak. So the first half of Kirby's story established Tony Stark as the opposite of Hoard Roark: Iron Man supports a hospital for sick children. In the second half of the story, Dr Strange only supports himself.

Astral projection

Dr Strange creates an electrical device that enables him to control another person's mind. This was big news at the time. In 1963, as part of the CIA "MK ULTRA" mind control experiments, Dr. Ewen Cameron used Electro Convulsive Therapy, along with drugs, in an attempt to control the mind of his test subject Linda MacDonald. Cameron used 76 times the maximum recommended electrical current.¹⁵¹ (She later sued.)

Kirby took this to the next stage: Dr Strange could transmit his own mind into someone else's mind. Kirby drew this mind control as a kind of astral projection: that is, Dr Strange appeared as a kind of ghost. The idea must have appealed to Kirby, as a few months later,¹⁵² Kirby had Iron Man use a similar astral projection device.

What kind of stories did Kirby intend for Dr Strange? We know that Strange liked electricity, and rays. And he was similar to Kirby's Yellow Claw (super scientist, wants to rule the world, based on Tesla, similar relationship with his daughter). And Kirby's super scientists typically use electrical means to reach other dimensions (see Dr Bertoff, or the origin of The Fly, or Captain 3D, or Olan Tagorian, Reed Richards, Captain Victory, etc.) So we might expect a story like Yellow Claw #4's "Living Shadows". The strange dimensional

¹⁵⁰ Ayn Rand, "The Fountainhead", part 2, chapter 15

¹⁵¹ wanttoknow.info/mindcontrol

¹⁵² Avengers #3, January 1964

“living shadows” look like something by Steve Ditko. Fans of Steve Ditko will see where this is leading.

The lost Atlantis story

(Tales of Suspense #43, July 1963)

The search for a new Iron Man writer clearly did not go well. Because Kirby had to step in for one more issue. Naturally we get original ideas of historic importance: Kirby expanded his Atlantis mythos, the archetypal warning of the end of civilisation. He also took the opportunity to warn us about using sunscreen.

As usual, Kirby's Iron Man science was based on reality. The story begins with a regular wind tunnel. In 1961 NASA produced an educational film, "The History of a Wind Tunnel", and Kirby's oldest children were at the right age to see it. The story ends with a warning about sun protection. In 1962, sun creams began to have “SPF” numbers, for “sun protection factor”. For the first time, most sunbathers were becoming aware that sunbathing might also harm the skin. So Kirby created a story where a people had been away from the sun for thousands of years. Kala, the beautiful ruler, wants to see the sunshine again. But her people have lost their natural protection, and just a few minutes lead to her skin feeling damaged. She realises that her place is really in her new world. For ten thousand years, her people imagined returning to the surface, but it was like returning to Eden: it could not be. This is a poignant story.

How the story was changed

Kala says they do not have power to reach the surface. But that makes no sense. They have enormously advanced technology, including disintegrator rays: they could just disintegrate the rock if they wished. A more likely reason is shown in the art: she admires Iron Man. She wants him on their winning side. It is also possible that they were forgetting how their technology worked, as the civilisation was so ancient.

Iron Man suddenly has miracle technology, not based on anything on Earth: a reverse energy device, a chemical ice wall device, atomic powered scissors that let him shoot upwards through rock, and so on. The text implies that this is just Iron Man's normal arsenal, and that he could make the whole thing overnight. It is far more likely that Stark anticipated likely problems, and spent the night adapting Kala's advanced technology to make only what he thought he would need.

Baxu says he hates taking orders from a woman. Yet, Iron Man feels that he can tell the two of them to marry. As if Kala's feelings don't matter. And as if it is fine for the queen to marry a man who hates taking orders from women. Sexism was one of the clearest signs of changes in Kirby stories of the 1960s. (Kirby's art often showed strong women, and the edited dialogue often changed them to be weak: see the Wasp, Jane Foster, etc.) Judging from the art in those two scenes, it is more likely that Baxu simply opposes the invasion, so is slightly sympathetic with Stark. And at the end, Iron Man is probably telling them that he respects them, and they will all find a way to be happy.

The scene where Kala weeps, resting her head on Iron Man, is moving. The damage to her skin is nothing compared to the damage she would cause to innocent people on the surface. She had to face reality and give up her dream. But again, this is a subtle idea: the villains are sympathetic and must give up their childhood dreams. The published version changes her into a one dimensional villain, where her solution is to be made to marry a man!

In conclusion, the original Kala story made more sense, and had more depth. It also added a new detail to Kirby's story of Atlantis, as told in Captain 3D, the Eternals, and elsewhere. Here we learn that some Atlanteans escaped, and that life moves on. Just as in the real world, some people escaped the floods at the end of the last ice age, and we still have Atlanteans: I discuss this in my other book, "Jack Kirby's History of the Future". So, this was a historic and moving Kirby story, ruined by editing.

The lost X-Men stories

Summary: the original X-Men was about the war between humans and mutants. Xavier was the greatest fighter, and Cyclops was only introduced to replace Xavier in issue #1's battle.

Outcasts, not celebrities

The published X-Men were popular with the authorities,¹⁵³ and had their own fan clubs.¹⁵⁴ The stories came a year after the new editor enforced that rule.¹⁵⁵ But without that rule, Kirby's X-Men would have been outcasts. We can see this from:

- His previous mutant teams in "Concentrate on Chaos"¹⁵⁶ and "Today I Am A"¹⁵⁷
- His later mutants in "Silver Star": it is always the same story.
- Xavier is clearly based on the "Baldy" stories by Henry Kuttner, collected as the book "Mutant" in 1953. Kuttner described "baldies", bald headed mutant telepaths, and the inevitable war between good and bad baldies, and between baldies and normal people. This became the pattern for all later writers on mutants.¹⁵⁸ Kirby often used ideas and phrases from Kuttner.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Issue #1, last page, second to last panel

¹⁵⁴ See issue #2 pages 2-4

¹⁵⁵ See the reviews of Fantastic Four #8-10 for details

¹⁵⁶ Yellow Claw #2, December 1956

¹⁵⁷ Black Cat Mystic #59, September 1957

¹⁵⁸ See "Spaceman's Realm" in The New York Times Book Review, December 20, 1953, p.17

¹⁵⁹ For example, references to the "blow up", the harm caused by metaphorical walls, the special helmet to enhance telepathic abilities, and even the name Modoc (Modok).

- Issue #2 begins to make this explicit, with “homo superior”, “destined to replace the human race”
- The name X-Men implies ex-men: no longer human, but the next step on. True, the edited dialogue (page 8) said X-men meant “ex-tra power” but that is a non-sequitur, and the edited text was generally confused. For example, the next page confused “telekinesis” with “teleportation”.
- History shows that more powerful humans always replace less powerful ones. All serious writers on mutants know this. See for example Steve Ditko’s “The Man With the Atomic Brain”, which could act as a sequel to “Today I Am A”.¹⁶⁰
- The outcast tendency was also in the Fantastic Four (before issue #9’s forced change of direction).
- Kirby’s last act before he left the team was to bring back the theme of being outcasts. His last few issues were about the Sentinels and fear of mutants.

The editor did not like that dark direction. So the series lost its purpose, and did not sell well. Kirby’s outcast idea was not embraced until after the editor left. The X-Men then became the publisher’s biggest hit.

The original Xavier

(X-Men #1, September 1963)

Summary: Cyclops may have been created as a result of “ableism”: the desire to push disabled people into the background. That is, Kirby was told that Xavier had to stay home and could not be in the battle. So Kirby had to do something with all that art showing a leader blasting people with his brain. So he created Cyclops with his eye blasts.

Ableism

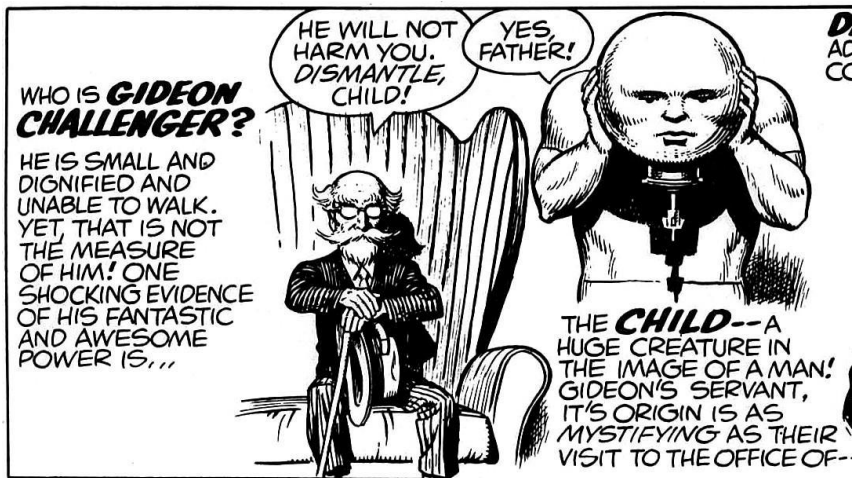
¹⁶⁰ Journey into Mystery #52, May 1959

“Ablism” is discrimination against disabled people. In the case of the X-Men, it appears that the series was green-lit on condition that a disabled person (professor Xavier) should not be allowed in the battle. Kirby wanted to give him a motorised wheelchair, and let him fight in the battle using his mind. Indeed, Kirby wanted Xavier to be the strongest member of the team due to his mental powers. But that was vetoed. Xavier had to be left at home, hidden away during the fighting. Here is the evidence.

Kirby's previous mutants

Kirby's previous mentally powered mutants could either teleport or levitate.¹⁶¹ When Kirby returned to mutants with “Silver Star”, they could all teleport. Why is Xavier the odd one out?

Kirby's mentally powered mutants typically had weak bodies and some kind of motorised wheelchair. Marto¹⁶² had one. MODOK had one. The Misfit¹⁶³ had one. Five years before Xavier, Kirby created “Gideon Challenger”, a super scientist who was not a mutant (as far as we know), but he lost the use of his legs.¹⁶⁴ So he designed a robot to carry him around.



¹⁶¹ In “Today I Am A” and “Concentrate on Chaos”

¹⁶² “Blue Bolt” #6, 1940

¹⁶³ Kamandi #9-10

¹⁶⁴ In Chip Hardy, a story proposal from 1958.

Image: detail from the Chip Hardy proposal, fair use.

A motorised wheelchair never slowed the mutant down, so he could always be on the battlefield if he wished. Yet in the published version of X-Men #1, Xavier has just a regular unmotorised wheelchair, so he could not be present at the battle. That was not like Kirby at all. And it made no sense: Xavier built a robotic danger room, so surely he could create a motorised wheelchair. In fact, he built a high tech chair in issue #9, so he could explore caves on his own.

Of course, in the real world, Jack knew that wheelchairs are not like that. Jack spent time in a wheelchair at the end of the war, when his legs almost had to be amputated for frostbite. And he had wheelchair bound characters like Joanne Ainsworth¹⁶⁵ who simply had to live with it. But Joanne had money, so she could do plenty of things that did not require the use of her legs. Superheroes are like people with money: they can find ways to do what they need to, even if they cannot use their legs.

There are many other clues that Kirby intended Xavier to be mobile:

Clue 1: the changing wheelchair

It is clear from the art on pages 1 and 2 that Xavier could not walk, even in the first pencils. So this was not a later change. However, the wheelchair does seem to be a late change. Xavier starts in a reclining armchair, not a wheelchair. It was a bulky chair, of the kind recently made popular by the inventor Daniel F. Caldemeyer in 1959.

Pages 1 to 8 were a continuous sequence with no significant gap, *so Xavier never changed his chair*. It is the same armchair as before, but on page 8 it suddenly has a badly drawn wheel. Why? The armchair again has wheels on page 16, panel 4, but the layout is squashed. Compare this to the other chair images, where nothing looked squashed.

Compare the wheelchair in issue #2: issue #2 has a normal wheelchair, but issue #1 is clearly an armchair that later had wheels added. So it appears that when Kirby initially drew issue #1, Xavier did not use a regular unpowered wheelchair. Kirby presumably intended him to use some other solution when

¹⁶⁵ "I Want Your Man", Young Romance #21

he needed to move: such as teleporting, or being carried, or a robotic chair as we see in issue #9.

Clue 2: Xavier was in the car

On page 17, panel 4, the dialogue indicates that Xavier travelled to the first adventure with the others, in a “specially-built Rolls-Royce.” But the next panel (page 17, panel 5) shows the journey continuing in an airplane. There is nothing in the art to suggest that they left Xavier at the airport. Why would they leave Xavier at the airport? Either leave him at home or take him with you.

In issue #2, Xavier travels with the team to be at the scene of the adventure. But in issue #1 the published version shows him going only part of the way. Why?

Clue 3: soldiers looking down

On page 18, panel 1, when the soldiers surround Cyclops, they **look down**. This may not be obvious on some copies, but examine a good scan of the pencils if you can find one online. The soldiers are not looking at Cyclops’ face, they are looking further down, as if looking at somebody who is seated.

Clue 4: a panel with a hole in the middle

Page 18 panel 7 has a very small Cyclops off to the side. The middle of the panel has nothing but some badly drawn magnetism lines that do not always reach the floor, due to awkward spacing. In every other case, the lines of magnetism extend the full length of whatever they did. In real life, lines of magnetism show a continuous line from the north to the south pole of a magnet. But this panel has badly drawn lines, with more lines at the top than the bottom. This would not be a problem if there was originally someone drawn in the middle of the panel.

What was in that space? Xavier speaks, so he is the obvious candidate. Cyclops has to awkwardly explain that Xavier is not actually present. But if he was not present, and communicating by thought for the first time, we would expect a disembodied head as on pages 11 and 23.

This raises the question, why isn't Xavier there? His power over minds would be useful, and who knows what other powers or technology he might have. Surely he can afford a motorised wheelchair? Why must Xavier stay at home? The answer appears to be Doom Patrol.

Here are more clues that link Xavier's wheelchair to the wheelchair bound leader in the comic "Doom Patrol":

Doom Patrol clue 1:

Three months before the X-Men was published, Arnold Drake created Doom Patrol, a superhero team led by a man in a wheelchair. Kirby's editor would have known about it before it was published:

"...I've become more and more convinced that [Kirby's editor] knowingly stole The X-Men from The Doom Patrol. Over the years I learned that an awful lot of writers and artists were working surreptitiously between [the two publishers].¹⁶⁶ Therefore from when I first brought the idea into [DC editor] Murray Boltinoff's office, it would've been easy for someone to walk over and hear that [I was] working on a story about a bunch of reluctant superheroes who are led by a man in a wheelchair. So over the years I began to feel that [Kirby's editor] had more lead time than I realized. He may well have had four, five or even six months. "¹⁶⁷

Drake overstates his case, except in the case of the wheelchair, which deserves an answer. Kirby's X-Men are not "reluctant heroes" in any way, and as noted, Kirby mutants pre-date Doom patrol. As for a band of kids with a leader, Kirby had done that numerous times, and planned to do it again in 1961 with the Fantastic Four: he originally intended the Fantastic Four to be "a kid gang of super-heroes".¹⁶⁸ This is confirmed by contemporary evidence: we saw that Kirby originally wanted the Fantastic Four to be younger, with

¹⁶⁶ They often used different names. Gene Colan called himself Adam Austin, Gil Kane called himself Scott Edward, Jerry Siegel called himself Joe Carter, and so on.

¹⁶⁷ Arnold Drake, quoted by Mark Evanier, [webcitation.org/ 5lXJY5e28?url=http://povonline.com/iaq/IAQ05.htm](http://webcitation.org/5lXJY5e28?url=http://povonline.com/iaq/IAQ05.htm)

¹⁶⁸ "Village Voice" magazine December 8, 1987 p.32

Susan being just sixteen. But his editor wanted Susan to be older. So when it came time to do the X-Men, the desire to do a kid gang of superheroes was still there. That idea did not come from outside, from Doom Patrol or anywhere else.

But the wheelchair is a problem. As we saw, that was not Kirby's plan.

Doom Patrol clue 2: the dates

The Doom Patrol link is hard to deny when we consider the timeline of Marvel superheroes who had their own books:

- Nov 1961: Fantastic Four
- May 1962: Hulk
- March 1963: Spider-Man
- Sep 1963: Avengers **and** X-Men
- Feb 1964: Strange Tales becomes all superhero
- April 1964: Daredevil
- May 1964: Journey into Mystery and Tales of Suspense become all superhero.
- July 1964: Tales to Astonish becomes all Superhero.

In every case except one, the publisher waited several months between each launch. When dates were close, it was because the superhero had already been tested as a small part of another book. (In the case of Daredevil, that was a very successful character from another publisher, but the trademark lapsed, so the publisher rushed to get his own version in print before anybody else.¹⁶⁹)

The big exception was September 1963: two team books in a single month. And the X-Men were completely untested. Why the rush? DC, the biggest comics publisher, just released two new superhero team books: Metal Men (dated May) and Doom Patrol (dated June). These were the first new titles since the Flash and Atom almost a year earlier, and the first team books since

¹⁶⁹ See Will Murray in *Alter Ego* #118 (July 2013), or #163 (March 2020) p.57

Challengers (by Kirby) and Justice League. This was a big deal, so Kirby's publisher had to react quickly.

So it looks like Kirby intended Xavier to have a weak body, but he would still be mobile, and still able to fight using his mind. But Kirby's editor wanted a wheelchair-bound leader, in order to copy Doom Patrol. So Kirby gave Xavier crippled legs. But what does this have to do with Cyclops? Let's take a closer look at Scott Summers in the first issue of X-Men.

Cyclops clue 1: the four person team

Kirby's first big success was Captain America. It stood out largely due to choreography: Kirby often spoke about how his fights worked: everything flowed from panel to panel, as if you were really in that fight. Other comics looked stiff and awkward in comparison. It is obvious from looking at Kirby's fighting scenes that anything more than four people in a panel does not work: the extra people just stand around or are in the background. Usually he would get around that by having one person as an outsider: the adult leader of a four person kid gang like Newsboy Legion or Boy Commandos, or the flying Human Torch in the original Young Allies.¹⁷⁰ Or sometimes a fifth character was larger than others (e.g. Giant Man in the Avengers), so that they could be doing something else when the four regular people were in action. When a team has more people (e.g. the Howling Commandos) you only see four or fewer at a time, except in line-up scenes (in crowds, or charging in a dramatic line up, etc.) Wherever choreographed fighting mattered, four was a natural limit. But the X-men have *five* characters plus the mentor on the sidelines. On its own this is not enough proof that one was added. But it *is* the first clue.

Cyclops clue 2: he's either all or nothing

Cyclops either does nothing, or acts like Xavier. Why?

In X-Men #1 page 1, Cyclops is awkwardly squashed onto the edge. This is just a bad layout, a very strange choice for the dramatic first appearance of the team. (The cover, though seen first, was usually drawn last.) Then on pages 2-5, Cyclops is a fifth wheel. He just observes from the sidelines. Once he

¹⁷⁰ Whitewash Jones was probably not in Kirby's original plan: see the later chapter on how Kirby stories join up.



controls a machine in the background, something anybody could do. On most pages where he appears, he is like that: awkwardly squashed into the back, or doing nothing, or is simply absent (e.g., page 16, panels 1-2). When he isn't squashed in, there are only three people, and he could very easily be Angel with minor pencil changes (e.g., page 6 panel 2, page 9 panel 2, page 16 panel 6). Note that Angel and Cyclops have essentially the same personality: the mature one. There is no reason for Cyclops to be in the team on half the pages. Yet in the other pages he is suddenly front and centre: leading the team, with the most dramatic power, and keeping them in line.

Cyclops clue 3: he does what Xavier should do

When Cyclops finally acts, he does what Xavier should do: when Beast and Iceman horse around on page 5, Cyclops puts them in their place (page 6), showing that he is the most powerful. Then later on the battlefield he liaises

with the army and tells the other X-Men what to do. Isn't that Xavier's job? So all the time that Cyclops is in the story, he either does not fit, or he suddenly busts out and does what Xavier should do. So why is he there at all?

Cyclops clue 4: he has Xavier's power

Kirby's mutant brains can usually perform brain blasts. Here for example is Dr Chuda from 1940:171

Kirby has even more dramatic brain blasts in other books.¹⁷² So why does Xavier not have his brain blast power? And why does Cyclops have it (or something similar) instead? And why is it, when Cyclops is about to use the power for the first time (page 6 panel 4) we have the extreme close up that is usually reserved for Xavier?¹⁷³ In short, why does Cyclops use Xavier's power?

Cyclops clue 5: Xavier should be at the barrier

In the published version, Xavier does nothing to help breach the barrier. Why doesn't he at least reach out with his mind to attack Magneto's mind? Why does the leader not lead? By not using Xavier at all, the threat is shown as less dangerous. The team is not even bothering to use its full power.

Kirby at this point had the master of comic book writing. He would not undermine a story by giving it such a weak climax if he could avoid it.

Cyclops clue 6: Cyclops serves no purpose at the barrier

Cyclops attacking the barrier makes no sense. Cyclops has force blasts: simple force, nothing else. Maybe we could argue some heat as well, but the army has already tried shells and explosions. Kirby had served in the army. He knew perfectly well the power of an explosive shell. Nothing Cyclops had done to this point is even a tiny bit as powerful.

¹⁷¹ Lightnin' and the Lone Rider, Famous Funnies #75, p. 43

¹⁷² E.g. The cover to Black Panther #2, and pp. 4 and 12, and #3 p. 14. Or the cover to Silver Star #6, or the spectacular mind powers in "Concentrate on Chaos" (Yellow Claw #2).

¹⁷³ On page 8, panel 5, or X-Men #3 p. 24, #4 pp. 7, 9, 21, etc.

A mental attack, on the other hand, is more than the army could do. And if Jean Grey is any guide, there may be some connection between mental power and Magneto's power.

Cyclops clue 7: Cyclops' body positions at the barrier

On page 18 panel 7, how do we explain Cyclops' pose? He is leaning against the barrier rather than standing apart, his normal pose when firing at something. He is not even looking at the barrier! So this was probably not Cyclops originally. But why redraw Cyclops over somebody else if Cyclops was already in the scene? This suggests that Cyclops was not there originally: the two people in that panel were originally Jean and Xavier. This argument becomes stronger in every panel.

The next panel (page 18 panel 8) shows Cyclops crouching down, hunched over, to attack the barrier. Why? We see the same hunched over position on page 6 panel 7. Crouching a little for dramatic effect is understandable, but why so much? And why is the layout (on page 18 panel 8) so bad? Why is Cyclops over on the right, with his leg cut off by the panel border? There is plenty of space in the middle of the panel. But if we imagine a wheelchair in each scene then it suddenly works.

The next panel (page 19 panel 1) shows Cyclops' whole head generating an attack, and not just his eyes. That makes no sense for eye beams. But it makes perfect sense for a mutant brain.

The next panel with Cyclops (page 19 panel 4) shows Cyclops being carried: he cannot walk. If he was simply exhausted then he would be no use in the battle, so why bring him? Carrying only makes sense if he is not completely exhausted, but simply cannot use his legs. That is, if he was originally Xavier.

The climax with Jean and Xavier

The story flows better if the climax to the story on pages 18-19 features Jean.

The story begins with the boys being trained, then Jean joining the group, so we should expect the climax to require Jean's power. Jean's powers are drawn the same as Magneto's powers, so that greatly strengthens the argument. On the original cover, Jean used her power against Magneto. Those lines were erased in the final version, but are still visible on some foreign editions and

this earlier version was used for the Masterworks edition. So Jean should attack Magneto's barrier in the climax.

On page 18 panel 6 we see Jean enter the battle. We next see her when Magneto is defeated: on page 19 panel 4, Jean is next to the wavy lines that show the remains of Magneto's barrier. What happened in between?

Page 18 panel 7 obviously has somebody erased. So we know this sequence was changed, and there were probably two people here (one in the middle, now erased). We also know that Jean should be in this sequence, for the reasons given above. And Xavier should breach the barrier with his brain blasts. Given Cyclops' pose, that was probably Jean in the original. Xavier would then be in the middle of the scene: Jean has given it all she has, and now Xavier will finish the job.

X-Men #1 summary

In summary, X-Men #1 is full of changes (such as to the cover), mysteries (such as the Doom Patrol link), nonsensical decisions (such as Xavier not having a motorised chair), strange layout decisions (usually involving Cyclops), and poor plotting decisions (like building up Jean Grey then not using her). Most of these problems revolve around a character who is utterly redundant to the story: Cyclops. When we imagine the story without Cyclops, suddenly it all makes sense. And the only reason for adding Cyclops was if Kirby was told that he could not have a disabled character on the field of battle.

Adding Cyclops creates a weaker story, poorer art, and makes Xavier into a weaker character. This change, plus turning the characters into light-hearted celebrities, undermines the original story about the end of the human race.

On the plus side, Cyclops has an interesting inner conflict. Cyclops is simultaneously shy yet confident; redundant yet powerful. And by scaling back Xavier's power, later writers are left to focus on Kirby's other theme: alienation. Inner conflict plus alienation makes popular comics: just look at Spider-Man. So forcing these changes may have helped the X-Men in the long run, though at the expense of reinforcing ableism and hurting the disabled.

Other changes

Sexism

Kirby's X-Men was also changed by adding sexism. For example:

In X-Men #1, the cover originally showed Jean Grey using her power to imprison Magneto. That is, she was the most powerful member of the team. But the final version erased the lines coming from Jean, so she just stood there being useless.¹⁷⁴

In X-Men #2 (pages 2, 3, 12), Jean Grey tested the limits of her strength. She can lift an enormous, heavy ball before showing any strain. But the dialogue said she would faint if she carried anything heavier than herself. Thanks to Kate Willaert's blog "Kirby Without Words" for pointing this out.

In X-Men #3 (pages 21-22), Jean Grey saved everybody. But the dialogue gave credit to Professor X.

In X-Men #10 (pages 14, 16), Jean Grey protected a panicking Warren, making him stand behind her for protection. But the dialogue changes that to her panicking, and Warren telling *her* to hide behind *him*. She then defeated a large dinosaur, but the dialogue said she merely "upset him for a moment".

"Kirby Without Words" has many other examples of this: Kirby's original stories were full of strong women, but they were routinely changed to make the women weak.

The origin of Professor X

Kirby created issues #1-10, then was only credited with "layouts" between issues #11 and #17. This was normal practice when giving a title to someone else: Kirby would ease them in by providing layouts. The margin notes on surviving artwork, plus other evidence,¹⁷⁵ all show that "layouts" meant that Kirby wrote the story.

¹⁷⁴ The original cover is visible on some foreign language editions.

¹⁷⁵ See Michael Hill's "According to Kirby"

Issues 12-13 were a two parter, giving the origin of Professor X, and introducing his brother, Cain Marko (The Juggernaut). The origin flashback built to a climax over many pages. The last two panels showed the brothers together in a cave. Marko then gained his powers and this caused the cave to collapse around Xavier. This must surely be when Xavier lost the use of his legs. It was a Cain and Abel story, in this case Cain and Xavier. In such a story, Cain had to hurt his brother in some way, and crushing Xavier in the rock slide was the climax. Kirby used a similar story later in *Fantastic Four* #108 (“The Lost Adventure”): that was another Cain and Abel story, where the bad brother ensured that the good brother lost the use of his legs.

Unfortunately, two issues earlier (issue #9 page #4), the editor casually gave a different reason for Xavier losing the use of his legs. But there was nothing in the art to say that. The text just meant that when Kirby came to tell the story of Cain and Xavier, he had to leave out the climax.¹⁷⁶

Silly names

Perhaps the most damaging part of copying *Doom Patrol* is copying the name of *Doom Patrol*’s villains, “The Brotherhood of Evil”. Magneto’s mutants became “The Brotherhood of Evil Mutants”. The name worked for *Doom Patrol* because of the personalities involved. But it made the X-Men look silly. Kirby always had serious names for his villain teams, like the “The Deathless Monsters”,¹⁷⁷ “The Unholy Legion”¹⁷⁸ or “The Hollow Men”.¹⁷⁹ The X-Men, the story of the end of the human race, ended up looking like just a joke.

¹⁷⁶ For more details, see “Kirby Without Words” kirbywithoutwords.tumblr.com/page/2 and “A Failure to Communicate”

¹⁷⁷ Captain America #2

¹⁷⁸ Captain America #4

¹⁷⁹ All Winners #1

The lost Dr Strange origin

(Strange Tales #110, July 1963)

Summary: Ditko probably saw Kirby's Dr Strange in July 1963 and was told to use the character. He then created his own version of Dr Strange in the same month. Ditko did the same three things to Kirby's Strange that he did to Kirby's Spider-Man and Hulk:

1. He took a character who seems evil (he fought Iron Man) but shows that he is actually good.
2. He reduced the reliance on technology
3. He made the story about self control

Let's begin, as we did with Spider-Man, by making one thing clear: Dr Strange's success was due to Steve Ditko. If anyone deserves money and fame and credit for Dr Strange, it is Ditko. Ditko added the parts that made Dr Strange different from Dr Nikola or The Yellow Claw. What follows is merely the link with Kirby.

Ditko's account

This is how Steve Ditko created his Dr Strange:

*"On my own, I brought in to [my editor] a five-page, pencilled story with a page/panel script of my idea of a new, different kind of character for variety in Marvel Comics. My character wound up being named Dr. Strange because he would appear in Strange Tales."*¹⁸⁰

Now consider the timeline:

¹⁸⁰ Steve Ditko, in "The Avenging Mind" (2008), quoted here: unitedfanzineorganization.weebly.com/ditkofaq.html#006

June 1961: Kirby created “Dr Droom”, a story that paralleled Ditko's Dr. Strange in several ways.¹⁸¹ Ditko inked the story, so he knew all about it.

May 1963: Kirby created Dr Strange as Iron Man's main villain. Dr Strange's power was astral travel.

June 1963: Robert Bernstein's first solo Iron Man issue had Iron Man fighting some random communist. The issue must have been deemed a failure because the following month Kirby was brought back.

July 1963: Kirby got the title back on track, then left again.

August-October 1963: Bernstein wrote three more Iron Man issues then left the company. Artist Don Heck would have helped with the plot, Marvel Method.¹⁸²

November 1963: Ditko took over writing and drawing Iron Man (with his editor then adding the final dialogue).

January 1964: Ditko's last Iron Man issue.

September 1964:¹⁸³ Ditko was asked to take over Iron Man again, but he declined. Ditko said he did not like the idea that Iron Man had a weak heart.¹⁸⁴ He ended up bringing back The Hulk instead.

So by the July 1963 issue, the Iron Man title was in trouble, and the editor wanted Ditko on the job if possible. So it is very likely that Ditko was offered Iron Man in either May or July 1963. Which means he would have seen Kirby's Dr Strange. Dr Strange, you will recall, was supposed to be a big deal: Iron Man's long term major foe. Even though the character was ruined in editing, the editor presumably thought this changes were for the best, so he

¹⁸¹ Amazing Adventures #1. A western doctor went to Tibet, to meet the Ancient One. The doctor passed mystical tests, gained powers, and took over from the Ancient One. This story was almost certainly changed: the strange oriental face at the end shows evidence of being changed, but that's a story for another day.

¹⁸² The “Marvel Method” had the artist largely plot the story. See for example Don Heck's margin notes on Avengers #22.

¹⁸³ These are cover dates. September's Tales of Suspense #59 was essentially a teaser for Ditko starting the Hulk in the following issue.

¹⁸⁴ Steve Ditko, “And Lo, There Was a Hulk”, part of his “Four Page” series of essays.

would still consider Dr Strange to be an important character, one that Ditko should strongly consider if he took on the title.

After considering Kirby's Iron Man and Dr Strange, Ditko presented his own version of Dr Strange instead. Ditko's version had the same name, costume, powers (astral travel) and Randian personality,¹⁸⁵ but he differed in three important ways:

1. Ditko made the apparent villain into a hero, He is the master of "black magic" — that is, dark, evil magic. But Ditko said to look closer.
2. Ditko reduced the reliance on technology: Kirby's Dr Strange needed an electronic box for astral travel. But Ditko's Dr Strange could do it with just his mind.
3. Ditko made the story about self control: the inner conflict was just as important as the outer conflict.

This is just what Ditko did with Kirby's Spider-Man.

1. Ditko's Spider-Man is seen as a villain by half the town. Kirby's Spider-Man outline probably already had the Parker-Jameson conflict, just as Tommy Troy opposed his selfish guardian Mr Marsh, but Ditko made this conflict far more serious.
2. Kirby created a character with a magic ring and a web gun. Ditko removed the technology as far as possible: the tiny web shooters are barely visible.
3. Ditko made the story about self control: about Peter learning to put duty before his own needs.

This is also what Ditko did to Kirby's Hulk.¹⁸⁶

1. Kirby's Hulk was a villain. Or at least, he enjoyed violence. Ditko made him pure hearted, but misunderstood.

¹⁸⁵ See the chapter on Iron Man and Kirby's Dr Strange

¹⁸⁶ Ditko discussed this at length in "And Lo, There Was a Hulk"

2. Kirby's Hulk changed form by using a gamma ray machine, and he fought global threats. Ditko stripped the story back to just the Hulk, his anger, and conflicts with individuals.
3. Ditko made the story about self control: Banner had to avoid becoming angry.

Ditko wanted to call his character "Mr Strange" instead.¹⁸⁷ He finally agreed to "Dr Strange," with the character appearing in *Strange Tales*.

Ditko's Strange and Kirby's Strange have the same name, costume, values (Randian self interest) and power (astral travel). But what about their supposed differences? Let us look at the new character's heroism, mysticism, dimensional travel. origin, and move away from electrical devices.

Heroism

Ditko's Strange was a hero, but he used to be very selfish when he was a surgeon. And he still used "black magic", which was usually associated with evil. So Ditko took Kirby's villain, and simply asked, would the villain see himself as a villain? Perhaps he was misunderstood? If he really had such abilities, would he not be respected? And if he could astral travel and enter another person's mind as Kirby showed, where would that lead? What would Dr Strange do next?

Mysticism

Kirby's Dr Strange used science. But in Kirby stories, advanced science is indistinguishable from magic. For example, Gideon Challenger, the scientist in *Chip Hardy*, was known as "The Sorcerer".¹⁸⁸ The *Challengers of the Unknown* had scientists like Morelian and Kregon who acted like sorcerers. And the *Fantastic Four* had Dr Doom, who looked and acted like a sorcerer in his first appearance. The most advanced Kirby scientist of all, the Watcher, dressed in a toga and was just as likely to use gestures as to use machines. Dr Doom looked and acted like a mystic, but made clear that really it was just science. Even Ditko's Dr Strange used a mechanical aid – the metal eye.

¹⁸⁷ See the 1963 letter from editor Stan Lee to comics fan Jerry Bails kidr77.blogspot.com/2018/10/who-created-doctor-strange-stan-lee.html

¹⁸⁸ *Chip Hardy* was a story proposal from 1958. But no publisher took it up. This is the story I most wish he had completed.

Dimensional travel

Kirby's Dr Strange used astral travel, but did not travel between dimensions in his first story. However, dimensional travel would have followed in later stories. Because Kirby's super geniuses were always obsessed with dimensional travel: see Dr Bertoff, Olan Tagorian, the Yellow Claw, Reed Richards, Dr Doom, the Beehive, and so on.

Origin

The two origin stories fit together neatly: they are both stories of proud men being humbled. I doubt that Ditko intended to connect the two characters, he was merely inspired to create his own character. But they are so similar that the origins fit together seamlessly. Like this: Dr Strange began as a brilliant yet arrogant surgeon, then he damaged his hands. Ditko glossed over an undefined period of time between the accident and finally learning humility. What happened during that time? Would such an arrogant man immediately accept defeat? Or would he try to prove that he was still brilliant? Kirby's story began with Strange in a "mountain laboratory". In Tesla's mountain laboratory he explored medical uses for electricity, amongst other things. Ditko's Strange might embrace medical pseudoscience in an attempt to prove he was still the greatest doctor in the world. Perhaps he worked in a mountainside sanatorium, attracting wealthy people desperate for a fake cure. He would apply electric shocks to their brains. The victims' wealthy families would demand that the army rescue their loved ones from this deadly madman. That is where Kirby's account began. An electric shock affected Strange's own brain. At the end of Kirby's story, Strange wandered off, having failed, and this time he could not blame bad luck: it was his own fault. He was then ready to be truly humble, ready to learn from the Ancient One in Tibet. This is pure speculation, but this little thought experiment shows that the stories do not need to contradict each other.

From electronics to no electronics

Kirby's Strange used electronic devices, while Ditko's Strange did everything through the power of his mind. This was a natural progression. A similar move away from physics and toward mysticism happened with Guy Boothby's Dr Nikola, which like Strange was also based on Tesla. Like Ditko, Boothby was not a physics person. So Dr Nikola played down Tesla's physics

and played up everything else. Later, when Sax Rohmer used Nikola to create Fu Manchu, he went even further: even less physics, more mysticism.

We see this move from electronics to no electronics in Lovecraft's short stories "Nyarlathotep" and "From Beyond": stories of a nightmare world that could be reached using electronics. Then with practice, a user could do it just with his mind. Lovecraft said that the machine in "From Beyond" just stimulated the pineal gland in the brain. A man with an electrically enhanced mind, like Kirby's Dr Strange, could certainly learn to do the same. This is the smoking gun: proof that electronic access to dark mental worlds would naturally evolve into unassisted access, under any writer familiar with the tropes of the time.

Was Ditko aware of Lovecraft's nightmare worlds, and their move from electronics to pure mental power? According to the Google Ngram tool (for recording the popularity of words) "Nyarlathotep" had a spike in popularity just before Dr Strange. So it was natural that Ditko, who wrote horror and weird science, would make these connections.

Comics expert Will Murray pointed out that Nyarlathotep's touring shows sound just like Tesla's touring show. This reminds us that anyone who was familiar with Tesla as a prototype bad guy was likely also thinking of this esoteric stuff. It is the same literary world. The same tropes. Today it is fashionable to see Tesla science as the opposite of the supernatural, but that was not the case when Kirby and Ditko created Dr Strange.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Ditko changed Dr Strange, and the Hulk, and Spider-Man, so that today we only know the original characters as footnotes. So it is fair to say that Ditko created the characters as we know them, because of what he added. This is just as he argued in many of his essays: a creator is the one who creates the parts that matter, even if somebody else handed you the character.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ See for example the "Four Page Essay" series, or "The Avenging Mind." ditko.blogspot.com/p/ditko-essays.html

The lost Nick Fury

The lost CIA story

(Fantastic Four #21, December 1963)

This was a serious story. It raised serious questions about international politics. But it was edited to make it silly.

The Howling Commandos

Kirby created "Nick Fury and his Howling Commandos" based on first-hand experience of World War II.

"I was a combat infantryman. I was with Patton's 5th Division and whatever Sgt. Fury did, I did."¹⁹⁰

Military units often had nicknames, like "O'Ryan's Roughnecks," (27th Infantry), "The Screaming Eagles" (101st Airborne), or "Flaming Assholes" (40th Infantry, a name earned in the Korean War). The Howling Commandos were essentially grown up versions of Kirby's Boy Commandos. After the war, in Fantastic Four #21, Kirby gave Fury a job in the CIA. The story was edited to make it silly. Here are some examples:

The cover barks, "Sgt Fury, more exciting than ever!" This was classic editorial hyperbole (see Fantastic Four #7) and set readers up for disappointment. This was not "more exciting than ever". Sgt Fury was two fisted action, guns blazing. But this story was a political piece, where Colonel Fury spent much of the time wearing a suit and sitting down.

¹⁹⁰ From the Hour 25 Radio interview

The villain said: “none can resist my all powerful H-ray!” (page 5), but later “I did not give them a strong enough dose” (p.13), and the “all powerful” ray could be cancelled with a simple pill (p.18). Another villain referred to “The all powerful Fantastic Four” (p.21) even though they were defeated earlier.

The text stated what the readers could already see in the art. For example, when the art showed Hitler being unmasked, the edited text had no fewer than seven pieces of dialogue describing what the readers could plainly see. Such as:

“He looked just like his pictures! Adolph Hitler!” “The mad Fuehrer! [sic] The most evil human being the world has ever known!”

The editor (who wrote the final dialogue) could not even spell “fuehrer” (führer when the umlaut is available). He spelled it wrong twice on the same page.

The edited text was over the top. These are just from the final page: *“The masked master of Hate”, “The most evil human being the world has ever known!”*, *“Reed Richards’ words shall never be forgotten! Not while the stars and stripes still wave! Not while America endures!”* These phrases are so camp that they belong in a tongue-in-cheek pastiche such as the later Batman TV show. Readers saw the corny dialogue and called the story “goofy”¹⁹¹ and “too plain-faced and simplistic”¹⁹² But Kirby's original story was the opposite: serious and nuanced.

The real Hatemonger

Kirby based the Hatemonger on George Lincoln Rockwell, founder of the American Nazi party. Rockwell's headquarters in Arlington were known as "hate monger hill". Kirby wrote this story in the run-up to the civil rights march on Washington, where Rockwell predicted that ten thousand of his

¹⁹¹ cbr.com/five-goofiest-moments-in-fantastic-four-21-25/

¹⁹² Review by "otoboke" comicvine.gamespot.com/fantastic-four-21-the-hate-monger/4000-6826/user-reviews/

followers would be there to cause that unrest.¹⁹³ Three months after this story, in Sgt Fury #6, Kirby created the racist “George Stonewell”.

This was an era of fighting hate. This story was probably a reaction to events in the Dominican Republic. Uncle Sam had spent a large amount to get Juan Bosch elected as the new leader. In Kirby’s fictional version, Fury said, “*Uncle Sammy has been pouring BILLIONS into San Gusto to make it a show-place of democracy*”. Fury did not mention the reason: in the real world, Uncle Sam had decided to remove the previous ruler, Rafael Trujillo, “*by any means necessary*”.¹⁹⁴ Eventually they just left guns where his enemies would find them, and it worked. Later that year Juan Bosch would be replaced by a military dictatorship while the CIA did nothing, but when his supporters tried to bring him back, America sent 42,000 troops to oppose him and support the military dictatorship. Kirby showed the message from the local people: “Yankees Go home”. But Kirby, a proud American, let us see both sides. Trujillo by that time was a brutal dictator. And the real villain was not the CIA or Trujillo, it was hate itself.

In the story, hate rays bounced off the moon. The world’s first communications satellite, called Relay, was commissioned in 1961 and due to send its first message just as this story hit the shelves (late November 1963). The message was supposed to be from President Kennedy to the people of Japan. But Kennedy was assassinated just at that time. So the first satellite message was an announcement of that event: the message about hate, bounced off a satellite, that shook the world.

The technology

The technology might seem absurd: a hate ray, a clone, and a nuclear tunnelling machine. And the hate ray can even change the orbit of the moon! But like all Kirby technology, this was all based on reality then projected into what might be possible in the future.

The tunnelling device was the Russian Trebelev Mole. It was to use a nuclear engine to generate the heat to melt rocks. The editor however did not

¹⁹³wamu.org/story/13/09/06/

arlington_uneasy_relationship_with_nazi_party_founder/

¹⁹⁴warfarehistorynetwork.com/2016/12/22/the-assassination-of-rafael-trujillo/

understand how it worked, and wrongly said it used "the reverse thrust of a rocket engine". If that were true, it would simply travel backwards and not vaporise anything. But Kirby's art showed it working as the Russians intended (though a lot faster).

The hate ray appeared to be electromagnetic, so could represent radio or TV. In 1963 TV had just become a powerful force for influencing opinion. For example, in the Kennedy versus Nixon debates of 1960, radio listeners felt that Nixon won, because his arguments sounded better. But TV viewers felt that Kennedy won because he looked better on TV. So TV could stir up emotion, making people believe things they would otherwise not believe.

Bouncing rays off the moon could refer to two news items of the day. First, the Lunar Laser Ranging experiment of the previous year (1962). In 1963, NASA approved a set of experimental equipment to be left on the moon: the Apollo Lunar Surface Experiment Package (ALSEP). This included various instruments, including the Passive Seismic Experiment Package (PSEP) to record movements in the moon's crust.¹⁹⁵

As for tidal forces, 1963 saw new research on tidal forces within the moon,¹⁹⁶ and the link between lunar tides and geomagnetism¹⁹⁷ (e.g., how molten magnetic rock cools when pulled one way or the other). Kirby exaggerated the science for dramatic effect, but drew attention to real science.

In short, this was a classic Kirby story about serious topics in the real world. But editing made it silly.

The lost SHIELD origin

¹⁹⁵ nasa.gov/feature/50-years-ago-first-apollo-lunar-surface-experiment-package-accepted

¹⁹⁶ "An Analysis of the Lunar Tides" by J. C. Harrison, publication date 15 July 1963. This was a few weeks after the most likely date for writing Fantastic Four #21, but the idea was already in the air.

¹⁹⁷ E.g. papers by Wijk, Bergh, Schneider, Onwumechilli and others on the topic of "Lunar geomagnetic tides". See the footnotes to Geophysik III / Geophysics III: Teil II /, Part 2 (By J. Bartels) page 602, or search "lunar tides 1963"

(Strange Tales #135, August 1965)

This was a story about the real world. It was changed to make it the opposite.

The Man Called D.E.A.T.H.

Kirby proposed giving Fury his own regular book, "The Man Called D.E.A.T.H." The editor, who had no experience of war, wanted something gentler and more upbeat. So Kirby changed the name to "Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D." "The Man Called D.E.A.T.H." was about Fury facing death every day. Why did he face death? To save *the rest of us* from death. This was from Kirby's margin notes on his story:

"Nick once fought what he thought was a big war. ... Then came peace -- and the "bomb", and bigger, bigger bombs. -- and the bigger, secret war to keep the bombs from going off. In this war Nick was still fighting -- against silent but deadly enemies".

So this was about the risk of nuclear war. Kirby knew that we are always ten minutes away from Armageddon. Today, hypersonic missiles with smart software are too fast and clever to stop once they are launched. And they are too fast to let us think before reacting. Nuclear war could be caused in countless ways: by terrorists, instability, mistakes, bad leaders, bad systems, and on and on. Kirby represented the never ending threat as a hydra: cut off one threat (one head), and two more grow in its place.

A common theme in Kirby's SHIELD stories was increasing danger and complexity. It became harder and harder to tell the good guys from those who simply pretend to be good, or those who are really just blindly obedient, or literal machines. In this scenario, the victory of hydra was inevitable, except for one thing. The only hope for mankind, the only way to prevent a slide into chaos and Armageddon, was to find people like Fury. Fury could not be compromised by evil. Fury had a record of absolute honour under all circumstances. Fury only cared about other people, not himself.

"His honor was his record! His service was in the cause of all free mankind!"

What was changed

"The Man Called D.E.A.T.H." was deadly serious. Yes, it used tropes from James Bond and the Man From UNCLE, to help sales, but in service of a serious message: we are accelerating toward Armageddon. But "Agent of SHIELD" reversed that message, and instead presented the Man From UNCLE message: big brother (or in this case, uncle) is looking after you, so keep going in this direction, everything will be alright.

The lost Captain Marvel

(Captain Marvel #1, May 1968)

Kirby had the idea for the new Captain Marvel. It was to be grander and more profound than the finally published version.

*MARK EVANIER: "[Kirby] had the idea of a Kree Warrior gone rogue. They were going to use it in the Fantastic Four. It wound up being the basis for Marvel's 'Captain Marvel'."*¹⁹⁸

The origin of Captain Marvel can be seen in Fantastic Four #65. A Kree warrior (Ronan) was sent to Earth, and he disagreed with his commander. He grumbled about how his commander was out of touch, and he felt that Earth was a waste of time. There is the seed of rebellion. But Ronan was sent to punish some humans, so he did his job. Then he learned to respect the people of Earth. They were not the insignificant primitives that he expected: they defeated him! But as a result, they angered the space gods. We saw the result in The Eternals: the Space Gods came back in person to judge the world.

We saw a similar story with the Silver Surfer. The Surfer was sent to this insignificant planet to announce its destruction. But he learned to respect humans: he went native. The Surfer fought against his space god master. Given that good fiction is based on conflict, we would expect the same for Ronan, had Kirby continued: the Kree warrior would go rogue.

The published version of "Captain Marvel" changed that. Issue #1 (following from marvel Superheroes #13) was just a lengthy contrived fight between a Kree warrior and a Sentry. Issue #2 was the same warrior versus the Super Skrull. Without Kirby, Captain Marvel became just another "villain of the month" book. Worse, the Kree became just alien versions of humans, with the same soap opera concerns, not the majestic space gods that Kirby had been teasing for thirty years. So when Kirby returned to the theme he had to rename them The Celestials, and showed how it should be done.

¹⁹⁸ From The Annual Jack Kirby Tribute Panel, Comic-Con@Home 2020
youtube.com/watch?v=qI0z4tUHe_s

Kirby's idea, for a rogue Kree to fight on our side, fit perfectly between Thor and the New Gods. Thor was about the death of the old gods, in Ragnarok. New Gods was about the new gods of science and technology. But there was a gap. Where was the story of mankind defying the gods? That was the theme of American history in the 1960s: not just that the old gods were dying, but that large numbers of people were actively opposing them. But by the time Kirby was free to write such a story, the 1960s were over and the story was no longer as relevant. The new gods of technology had won. So we never got to see Kirby's epic of humans fighting gods.

The lost New Gods ending

(The Road To Armagetto, and The Hunger Dogs)

Probably the most important lost story, the Holy Grail of Kirby stories, is "The Road to Armagetto". Thankfully this is not entirely lost, it has just never been published in its intended form. Hopefully it will be one day.

Armagetto (i.e., Armageddon) was the climax and whole point of Kirby's anti-power message.¹⁹⁹ This was the story where Orion decided to kill on a massive scale. It was supposed to lead into "Hunger Dogs", where Darkseid and Orion die. This story showed how, when we have a minority of beings with godlike power, they destroy each other, and everyone near them. It is possible that Kirby would have allowed some secondary characters to survive, but the main characters would die.

Why new Gods was cancelled

Kirby originally intended New Gods to develop over many years. But the publisher cancelled it after eleven issues. This was partly because of affidavit fraud. Affidavit fraud is where a seller signs an affidavit, saying he destroyed a certain number of unsold comics, and he receives a refund, but really he sold the comics on the black market. This was a special problem for Kirby's books because the New Gods was so new. Huge numbers were published, and when huge numbers disappeared, wholesalers could just say, "they didn't sell" without being proven wrong. Because publishers did not know what sales to expect. Comics historian and longtime dealer Robert Beerbohm has written extensively on the large scale of affidavit fraud: tens of thousands of copies of individual issues disappeared, to later be sold over many years by dealers' at comic conventions.

So *official* sales were low. But anecdotal evidence shows that *true* sales were huge. One fanzine reported:

¹⁹⁹ See my other book, "Jack Kirby's History of the Future"

*"the Cahuenga news-stand in Hollywood, sold 1000 copies of New' Gods #1 in 4 days, 500 copies of Forever People #1 in even less time"*²⁰⁰

Another reason for cancelling the series was that both publisher and readers expected simplistic stories. But Kirby gave them a dense literary epic instead.

Cancellation left many plot elements unresolved. So when the series was reprinted in 1984, Kirby wrote a 12th issue, called "On The Road To Armagetto", which was to lead to the final story, "Hunger Dogs".

What changed

In these two stories, the New Gods destroyed each other. But that created a problem for the publisher: they wanted to sell New Gods toys, and have a New Gods animated series, comics by other people, and other merchandise. So they did not want the characters to die. So they asked Kirby to write a different story instead. Kirby used 18 of the 23 pages of Armagetto, then created 43 new pages, plus two collage pages. This became the 63 page "Hunger Dogs". In that published story, the planets of New Genesis and Apokolips are both destroyed, but the main characters survive. After this, Kirby seems to have grown weary of writing for comics publishers. From that point until his death, he mostly just drew pictures to pay the bills. Toward the end, he outlined the Secret City stories for others to complete. Then he spent time with his family and worked on his garden.

A very small sized reprint of Armagetto was included at the end of the 2012 reprint book "Fourth World Omnibus Vol. 4". The crucial last page, where Orion goes on a killing frenzy, is online on various blogs and fan sites. Thanks to Hans Kosenkranius for the page details.

²⁰⁰ From "Newfangles" #45 (Jan 1971). Thanks to Art Cooper for the research.

The lost Atlas stories

(1st Issue Special, April 1975)

Atlas is only “lost” in the sense that Kirby was never able to complete his intended series. But we do have the first issue, including its Kirby-influenced essay, and two proposal pages that indicate future storylines.

Kirby’s Atlas, according to his accompanying essay, was going to combine the two Atlas figures of legend: the first king of Atlantis and the Titan who held up the sky. The Titan Atlas gave his name to Atlantia (Africa²⁰¹) and the Atlantic ocean. The Greeks may also have considered the king and the Titan to be the same person, because several Greek historians understood the Titans (and gods) to be mythologised versions of ancient human kings.²⁰² Either way, Atlas is the key figure at the end of the previous age of mankind and the start of this one: when the Titans lost to the gods. That suggests a date of just before 8000 BC, the founding of Jericho. I explore this period in more depth in my other book, “Jack Kirby’s History of the Future”. If you have questions about what follows, you know where to go!

The Atlas era, just before 8000 BC, is when archeology says the tribes of north Africa (what Herodotus called the Atlantes people, or people of Atlas) moved east toward the lands of the ancestors of the Greeks (the Pre-Pottery Neolithic). The Pre-Pottery Neolithic responded by creating the first fortified city, Jericho. The conflict between the North Africans (people of Atlas) and pre-pottery Neolithic (ancestors of the Greeks) matches Plato’s description of the battle between Atlantis (Africa) and the ancestors of the Athenians, when turned into Soon’s unfinished epic poem.

Kirby did not know the specifics: he died before some of these discoveries were made. But he knew enough about mythology and history to fill in the blanks. And obviously, Atlas is a composite figure: mythology combines many centuries of history into single people and single events. But everything

²⁰¹ See Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, chapter 35, “Ethiopia”. Ethiopia used to refer to all Africa from the Sahara down, and was previously called Atlantia.

²⁰² See Ovid, *Diodorus Siculus*, Hyginus, etc.

that Kirby wrote in *Atlas* turns out to be true at the larger scale. Here are some examples.

Kirby said (in his initial proposal) that *Atlas* fought the Skull Worshipers. The Skull Worshipers (that is, the culture that was obsessed with skulls) are known to archaeologists as the Pre-Pottery Neolithic: their remains are notable for their love of human skulls. The Pre-Pottery Neolithic created civilisation as we know it: they built the great temple at Gobekli Tepe, and they built the great wall and tower of Jericho in 8000 BC, thus beginning our present age of walls, inequality, and warfare. Kirby described them as living in underground tunnels, ready to swarm and destroy the old civilisation represented by *Atlas*. The neolithic site of Kalavassos-Ayios in Cyprus contains tunnels, and the Pre-Pottery Neolithic people in general used tunnels in irrigation, so this may be literally true. Or it could be symbolic: Kirby used the same imagery with the “The Last Enemy”, The Mole Man, the Insectons, and others who undermine civilisation. Tunnels are central to his novel *The Horde*, about the end of our present civilisation.

Kirby said that *Atlas* was also going to fight an army of zombies. Zombies are a good way to describe the first farmers around 8000 BC: they were physically weaker and unhealthier than previous generations, and being dependent on landowners, they were the first generation that could not think for themselves. For the story of the beginning of farming, and how early farming was much worse than hunting and gathering, see professor James Scott’s excellent book “Against The Grain”. Settled life also caused our brains to shrink: A Cro-Magnon brain for example was typically 1750 cc. Modern human brains are typically 1300 cc. It is easy to see why: hunting a field of wheat is much easier than hunting wild animals. But the farmers defeated the hunter gatherers thanks to overwhelming numbers. So a comparison with zombies, while unflattering, ticks all the boxes. Especially given the obsession with skulls: “braaaaains!”

Kirby said that *Atlas* gained his power from the crystal mountain. The Greeks saw the sky as a bowl supported by the mountains, containing crystals that we know as the stars. Diodorus Siculus said that bearing the heavens actually referred to *Atlas*’s great skill in astronomy: *Atlas* studied the heavens from his high mountain. Scholars now understand that so-called “Stone Age” peoples had a sophisticated understanding of the heavens, and positioned their temples and stone circles very precisely to track certain stars.

Kirby planned to spend the Atlas series exploring the peoples of previous lost civilisations. He tried the same thing with his proposed Prester John series: Prester John was supposed to travel the world, finding the last remnants of lost civilisations. But publishers and readers did not bite. So the closest we ever get to learning of Kirby's pre-8000 BC civilisation is hints in the Challengers, and Prester John in Fantastic Four #54, and the broad overview of history in The Eternals. Kamandi ended up exploring the same topic, except that Kamandi's lost civilisation is us!

In short, Kirby was setting up the story of our ten thousand year civilisation. But his readers didn't get it. They still don't. They are missing so much!

The very few online reviews of Atlas the Great mostly talk about the art, or about other superheroes called Atlas. Sometimes a review mentions the Old Testament, or the idea that superheroes were around a long time ago, but that's all. They don't pick up the references. As Grant Morrison said, they don't have Kirby's reading list.

Kirby's readers, in general, miss the best of his stories, because they don't read the classics. So they don't recognise what they are reading. Nor do they keep up with archaeology. They are not familiar with the origins of civilisation at Jericho. A few readers might remember Jericho from the Bible, but they certainly do not know the conflict raging within archaeology, about whether the invention of farming and cities made our lives better or worse. If modern readers have heard of lost civilisations they certainly don't think of the Pre-Pottery Neolithic. They have no feeling for what it must have felt like to be an early Farmer, facing hierarchies and back breaking work and low nutrient food for the first time in history. They have no feeling for the visceral experience of pack living: they have never fought on the streets like Kirby, like our ancestors fought since the beginning of time until recently. They had never fought in the front lines of a war. They do not feel the primeval conflict inside their souls, like Kirby felt it: the ancient conflict between life and death, between flesh and stone. They do not know about the skull worshippers, or why they matter. A few might have heard of Gobekli Tepe, but they don't make the connection with Atlas. Kirby's readers cannot see the richness and epic power of a story like Atlas. They just don't get it. As one reviewer put it, trying to explain Atlas The Mighty:

"I'm kind of struggling for something to say... this is the kind of issue that doesn't really lend itself to

analysis. It just sorta 'is'. Not great, not horrible... if it weren't for my strange fascination with 1st Issue Special, I would never have checked it out."²⁰³

Comic readers in general just don't get Kirby. They just look at the pictures and don't know what to say. All they see is yet another superhero with big muscles.

And so Atlas, like so many of Kirby's greatest stories, remains a lost Jack Kirby story. It sits there in plain sight, one of his greatest works, waiting to be discovered.

²⁰³ chrisisoninfiniteearth.com/2017/02/1st-issue-special-1-1975.html

Rejected titles

Kirby proposed a number of title that were never picked up by any publisher. Here are just a few:

1940s:

“Inky”: about a cartoonist trying to make it big.

1950s:

“Tiger 21”: a newspaper strip about space exploration;

“Night Fighter”: a superhero book;

“Kamandi and the Caves”: a strip with dinosaurs and aliens.

1960s:

“On the Green with Peter Parr”: a newspaper strip for golf fans;

“Kirby Deities”: a pantheon of gods featuring Honir and Sigurd;

“Captain Glory”: a proposed new version of Captain America.

1970s:

“Galaxy Green”: set on Earth, AD 3048, where there are only women;

“True Divorce Cases”: romance meets true crime;

A Bruce Lee comic: some pages ended up in 1993’s Phantom Force;

“Time Diver”: (very little is known about this);

“Raam, Man Mountain”: a Hulk from Tibetan mystics;

“The Golden Age of Prester John”: a medieval Indiana Jones;

“The Sinister Dr Phibes”: serial killer and master of disguise;

Kirby also wanted to do a Dracula book, according to his assistant Mark Evanier.

In the late 1970s Kirby helped to develop “Lord Of Light”, a proposed movie and theme park based on Hindu mythology. Barry Geller credits Kirby for many of the ideas. *“some of them are 70% me and some of them are 70% Jack.”* ²⁰⁴ Lord of Light ended up being used as cover by the CIA in rescuing hostages from Iran. Search for it online!

And of course, The Horde: Kirby’s greatest unfinished work. This novel about the future is now coming true. I discuss this more in my other book, “Jack Kirby’s History of the Future”.

²⁰⁴ blog.threadless.com/happy-100th-birthday-jack-kirby/

How the stories fit together

INTERVIEWER: “Your work over a number of years in fact has all been linked, isn’t it? It all links together, whatever you’re drawing, whoever the main characters are in the comic book.”

KIRBY: “Yeah, right. And you may be right about that.”²⁰⁵

In this chapter, I look at connections between Kirby’s stories. I will then discuss how these connections create a bigger, more interesting story that is often lost.

If some of these titles seem obscure, just turn to the bibliography for where they fit into Kirby’s career. Let’s start near the beginning.

Captain America joins to the Young Allies

Captain America comics #1 invited readers to join a club called the Sentinels of Liberty. The club was such a success that Kirby quickly created a kids gang called the Young Allies. The allies comprised Bucky, Toro (the Human Torch’s sidekick) and some regular kids. So Captain America and the Young Allies occupy the same universe.

The start of the Young Allies is credited to Kirby (in the Grand Comics Database, comics.org). That is, in the very first issue, the cover and the first page of each story are credited to Kirby. Then others inked it, and others did the remainder of the stories and of the series. This suggests that even at that early stage, Kirby was known as the ideas man: he would start books for others to continue. However, even those first pages were changed. For example, the published cover is not the cover advertised in Human Torch #5, and it includes a team of five boys, not six. According to Michael Vassallo, the authority on early Atlas comics, the final comic had “*Minimal to no*

²⁰⁵ From the Peter Hansen interview

Kirby".²⁰⁶ The only clearly Kirby art is the illustration alongside the very first appearance, a text feature in Captain America. That art showed much younger boys, and no Whitewash Jones (a shameful racial stereotype). So there is no need to point out all the other reasons why Kirby's idea was for a four person team, plus flying Toro (and no Whitewash Jones).

The Young Allies become the Newsboy Legion

When Kirby changed publishers, he just changed some names and minor details and carried on with the same stories. It is obvious that the Young Allies and Newsboy Legion were essentially the same team:

Knuckles became Scrapper.

Jeff. the educated one, became "Big Words."

Gang leader Bucky became gang leader Tommy.

Henry, the fat kid, became Gabby: no more fat shaming! But still round faced.

The superhero, The Human Torch, was replaced by The Guardian. Kirby did not create the Torch, and he preferred his superheroes to be more "hero" than "super".

There was no equivalent to Whitewash, which strengthens the case that he was not on Kirby's original team.

The Newsboy Legion joins to Jimmy Olsen

The Newsboy Legion appears years later, as adults, in Kirby's Jimmy Olsen stories (issue #133 and onward).

Jimmy Olsen joins to New Gods

Kirby's Jimmy Olsen, New Gods, Mister Miracle and Forever People often intertwine. They are collectively known as "The Fourth World".

²⁰⁶ Vassallo, replying in the Jack Kirby Dialogue group, 23 June 2021, referring to his work on the Masterworks reprints.

New Gods joins to Captain Victory

Captain Victory's origin story in issues #11-13 reveals that he is the son of Orion, and hence, grandson of Darkseid. Orion's name is not used, for legal reasons, but the imagery makes it clear: we see Orion's transport, allusions to Orion's evil father, the conflict between good and evil inside the Orion family, the Source, and more.

Thor joins to New Gods

Thor continues in New Gods, with just enough changes to keep the lawyers happy. The original theme of Kirby's Thor²⁰⁷ was the approach of Ragnarok, the death of the gods. New Gods then began with the death of the old Gods. The Ragnarok scenes and New Gods start are similar. One scene even shows Thor's helmet amid the rubble.

[Interviewer:] "Did Jack view New Gods as the logical extension of his Thor mythology?"

[Mark Evanier (Kirby's assistant):] "Yes. If you look over some of the later Tales of Asgard stories, you'll see references to young gods."208

Fantastic Four joins to Thor

The Fantastic Four introduces Galactus, the Inhumans, and the Cocoon being. Each of these are then developed in the pages of Thor.

Fantastic Four joins to Tuk

Tuk (set in 50,000 BC) was about the search for Attilan, the city of the gods. The name "Attilan" comes from "Atlas", the one who supported the heavens. So it is a good name for the city that was closest to, and supports, the gods' heavenly cities. We finally enter this city in the Fantastic Four.

²⁰⁷ See the original Thor stories

²⁰⁸ Kirby Tribute Panel in Jack Kirby Collector #6

Boy Commandos joins to Captain America

Soon after Kirby stopped writing Captain America in 1941 he had the Boy Commandos battle “Agent Axis”.²⁰⁹ In the 1960s, when Captain America recalled his wartime enemies, he included Agent Axis, who looked the same.²¹⁰

New Gods joins to Eternals

In New Gods #9, on page 11 and twice on page 17, the wise “Prime One” refers to the New Gods as “The Eternals”. The Eternals have names based on the Greek gods (Zuras is Zeus, Olympia is Olympus, etc.), so these are equivalent to the Greek gods who appear in Kirby’s Thor. While Ragnarok destroyed Asgard, it is likely that some of the Greek gods survived. To see why, let us recall Kirby’s three classes of gods.

1. Gods like Thor. These are gods of war. They inspire us to fight.

“You take a crummy Viking, remove the glamour, and what the heck was he? Some poor guy in bear skins, who never took a bath. He had a beard with lice in it and he says: “Look at me, I’m a really cruddy object.” ... And then he begins to idealize the version of all the bravery that goes into the fight. Maybe he begins to see himself as Thor and his captain as Odin. Then he sees what he’s fighting for.”²¹¹

2. Gods like Thoth, favourite of the alchemists. They inspire us to think.
“[I]f you don’t know that Metron is basically the same principle as Mercury or Hermes or Thoth, then you’re lost; it’s hard to approach the New Gods without knowing all that stuff, and without knowing exactly which, y’know, Voudou god corresponds to which New God. Because they all do fit; Kirby created a perfect pantheon”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Boy Commandos #1

²¹⁰ Tales of Suspense #82

²¹¹ Jack Kirby, “Comics & Crypt” interview, [kirbymuseum.org /blogs/effect/2013/06/28/kirby-and-infantino/](http://kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2013/06/28/kirby-and-infantino/)

²¹² Grant Morrison, Jack Kirby Collector #49, p.68

3. Gods like Arishem. The oldest gods of nature. They are very distant, operate on enormous timescales, and all they require from us is respect.

For the last six thousand years or so (ever since the copper age allowed better weapons), gods of war were ascendant. Since the 1960s these old gods have fallen out of fashion among the young and educated. It was inevitable that gods of war would end in war. Ragnarok came, killed the old gods of war, and now we want gods of science again. (Of course we still have war, but now it is scientific. No more clubs and swords, now robot drones instead.)

Mercury finally became Metron, the modern god we call science. Thor and the gods of war died at Ragnarok, but Metron and the gods of science did not.

Where do the Celestials fit into this? The Greek gods (the Eternals) look up to the Celestials, who are millions of years old and created humans and gods. If the Eternals are any guide, all the Celestials require is respect. The Celestials have no commandments, and they often leave us alone for thousands of years. They might take fifty years just to make a decision, But it is vital that we respect them. For all these reasons, it appears that the Celestials represent nature itself. Nature does not care what we do, except that if we fight against nature then we die. It's as simple as that.

Where do the Titans fit into this? Kirby only wrote one story about Titans: Atlas the Mighty. The Titans seem to refer to the humans who created the gods: that is, the humans who created civilisation, and civilisation then gives rise to whatever gods we value (war, science, etc.) If all this seems confusing, perhaps a timeline will help. This is very rough, of course.

2 million BC: Arishem, etc. The name "Arishem" means "lion of renown" in the sense of reputation and respect.²¹³ If you respect nature, nature respects you.

- 8000 BC: Atlas, etc. (Titan humans), the first walled city (Jericho), and the birth of the gods of science: the religion of human progress.

²¹³ abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Ari.html, abarim-publications.com/Meaning/Shem.html

- 4000 BC: Anu, Yahweh²¹⁴ etc. (war gods), the first hierarchical city (Uruk), and the beginning of rapid conquest.
- AD 1970: Age of Aquarius, etc. War gods are out of fashion, science gods are back.
- AD 2100: Science is out of fashion, nature gods are back. See my other book, “Jack Kirby’s History of the Future”

As an example of “new” gods surviving Ragnarok, Darkseid was likely the son of Loki.

[Interviewer:] “Heggra was Darkseid's mother. Who was his father?”

[Steve Sherman, Kirby's assistant:] “My best guess would be Loki, since that's the direction Jack would have headed. But, who knows. It could have been anything.”²¹⁵

The exact dates are vague, since gods are essentially timeless. They are symbols. So it is possible that Captain Victory, the son of Orion, is really thousands of years old. Hence Lieutenant Alaria asked him,

“How old are you? A thousand -- ten thousand years of age? You're one of the gods! Aren't you!”²¹⁶

In short, the New Gods, and Captain Victory, are a continuation of Eternals (the Greek gods). So they deserve their title “Eternals”. It all connects.

Mercury joins to New Gods

Kirby began his superhero career with “Mercury in the 21st Century”, who became “Hurricane, son of Thor”. Mercury in legend is also known as Hermes or Thoth, the messenger, the one who likes information. That is, Metron. Even at the start, Kirby saw this young god, the “son of Thor” as the next generation after Thor. We see the same dynamic, old gods having fun as they

²¹⁴ Based on the Kenite hypothesis (Cain = Kenites, and their god was YHWH): dating to the start of the copper age

²¹⁵ Kirby Tribute Panel in Jack Kirby Collector #6

²¹⁶ Captain Victory #12, page 8

wait to replace the old gods, in Tales of Asgard. Kirby had the old and new gods right from the start. Mercury fought Pluto, who acted like Darkseid: controlling the major criminal gangs as part of. Larger plan to control everyone. Kirby told essentially the same the same story in Mercury and New Gods.

Solo art pieces join up

Bruce Zick tells how he paid Kirby to create the quintessential Kirby image: *“fantastic architecture and incredible machinery mixed with colossal statues”*.²¹⁷ But when Kirby delivered the final image it was not what Zick expected: Kirby had drawn a god, climbing a mountain, toward a distant city, fighting every inch of the way. Seeing Zick’s confusion, Kirby explained his creation. Zick recalls:

*“This was the progenitor race of beings that birthed not only Captain Victory, but a fledgling society of new gods. And then it connected to Orion of the Fourth World Mythology.”*²¹⁸

Kirby had drawn the moment that united the New Gods and Captain Victory stories, a moment never before revealed.

Stories that naturally fit into the same world

All Kirby stories are fictionalised accounts of the real world. For example, romances feature the kind of people you meet every day. War stories are based on Kirby’s experience of war. So we are expected to think of them as taking place in the same world: our world. So they are all connected.

We might say, “But those connections don’t matter!” But they do. Because Kirby was building up a bigger and bigger story of how the world works in all its many facets. He was creating a world of ideas to illuminate the world we live in. No matter what part of reality we inhabit, we can find some Kirby story to help make sense of the world

²¹⁷ Bruce Zick, “The Big Moment”, Jack Kirby Collector #5, p.11

²¹⁸ Zick, as above

Stories set in our history

Some Kirby stories are set in history. For example, when the Boy Commandos visited ancient Rome,²¹⁹ or when Kirby told the story of Nostradamus. Put them together and they sample every part of history, from the age of dinosaurs (“Devil Dinosaur”) through the origin of mankind (“The Eternals”), through the rise of technology (“2001”) to the present day.

Even the fictional histories reflect real history. For example, *Fantastic Four* #19 tells of gaps in Egyptian history, and about a Pharaoh who said he was from the future, with amazing technological abilities. This simply dramatises the real world. In the real world there are gaps in our knowledge. And to the Egyptians, their Pharaoh had amazing powers: he represented the sky god Horus, and could protect the entire nation and ensure its success. Modern man no longer has faith in Horus. So the closest analogy would be a person with a spaceship who arrived with advanced knowledge. Kirby showed us how it felt to be an ancient Egyptian.

Stories set in our future

Kirby’s future stories all fit together. He began making dated predictions in 1940, and so far they have all come true. For details, see the companion volume to this book, “Jack Kirby’s History of The Future”.

Many natural connections

Some stories are obviously the same story with superficial changes. For example, “Mercury in the Twentieth Century” appeared in the “Red Raven” comic. But only one issue was ever published. So Kirby carried on the story as “Hurricane, son of Thor” in *Captain America*. As for *Captain America* himself, he was just Blue Bolt, without the elements that Kirby did not care for. Joe Simon created Blue Bolt as an escapist fantasy set underground. Kirby gradually changed the book until Blue Bolt lived in New York and fought gangsters with his sidekick Bucky. Then the next month, he launched *Captain America*, who was essentially the same character, but without the escapism.

²¹⁹ “Roman Holiday”, *Boy Commandos* #15, May 1946

Jimmy Olsen joins to the Fantastic Four

Beginning with Fantastic Four #67, with the Beehive project, Kirby began holding back his best ideas. As soon as Kirby started releasing his ideas again, he continued with something just like the Beehive project, in Jimmy Olsen #133. If we ignore the issues when Kirby was holding back ideas, then Jimmy Olsen #133 is just the next issue of the Fantastic Four after #71.

Issue #71 ends with Reed and Sue leaving to focus on their family. He was also developing a romance between Johnny and Crystal, and now that Ben has overcome his depression in #51, he was overdue to settle down with Alicia. So Kirby wanted to move on and focus on the next generation, just as he wanted to follow the next generation of young gods in Thor. So Jimmy Olsen #133 features a new generation of heroes flying something that looks suspiciously like The Fantasti-car. It is as if the journey of the Fantasti-car that begins in Fantastic Four #81 page 11 fades into the journey in the Whiz Wagon in Jimmy Olsen #133 page 7. Kirby even drops a hint:

“A Fantastic Happening takes place above the slum district”

Kamandi joins to OMAC

The letters page to Kamandi #27 suggests a link between OMAC and Kamandi. Steve Sherman, Kirby's old assistant, noted that:

“Since Jack read the letters page before it was sent in, I'm pretty sure he approved it. I think that he still wanted to ‘novelize’ the stories. At some point, he would've tied it together and used that as a springboard for other characters.”²²⁰

Other readers²²¹ noticed similarities between OMAC and the start of Kamandi: When OMAC begins, Buddy Blank, works in a robotics company, by the underground factory called "Section D". The name is important: it is

²²⁰ Writing in the “Jack Kirby Dialogue” Facebook group.

²²¹ See the Collected Jack Kirby Collector Vol. 4, p.109

prominently shown, or stated, three times.²²² The robots are intended to be used as walking bombs, to assassinate world leaders. OMAC is concerned that the robots can be used to trigger nuclear war. The series ends with the world's sea levels changing due to advanced technology. Kirby wrote OMAC at the same time as he was writing Kamandi, so the following coincidences are unlikely to be accidental. Kamandi recalls how his unnamed grandfather saw that an unspecified "natural disaster" was going to happen. So grandfather retreated to an underground facility that he called "Command D". If OMAC was going to create a command structure when nuclear war began, the high tech underground "Section D" would be very convenient. The name "Kamandi" comes from "Command D". When Kamandi emerged, civilisation was wiped out and coastal areas were flooded, as implied by OMAC.

Starman Zero joins to Tiger 21, Kamandi, the Eternals, etc.²²³

In the 1940s, Kirby planned a science fiction newspaper strip called Starman Zero. It featured a spaceman whose body was enhanced, so he could survive long journeys in space. Starman Zero then explored other worlds, and had various adventures. No publisher bought the story, so in the early 1950s, Kirby reworked it as "Tiger 21". It now featured a moon base called "Command D" and a vehicle called "Tiger 21". The hero would pilot "Tiger 21" to various adventures in space. Kirby proposed this as a TV series, but the TV company didn't bite.

Later in the 1950s, Kirby proposed another newspaper strip, "Kamandi of the caves". Kirby set this series in prehistoric times, and involved alien visitors, foreshadowing the alien Kree who visited prehistoric humans. Again nobody bit. Kirby then used the names "Kamandi" and "Command D", and the idea of mixing primitive man and modern technology, as well as his earlier story "The Last Enemy", and created Kamandi.

Around the same time as Kamandi, Kirby proposed a TV series called "Lightning Lady" about the queen bee of a colony of alien insects. Once

²²² OMAC #1, pages 12,13,19

²²³ see "The Unfilmed Ideas Of Jack Kirby" by Steve Sherman, JKC #11, twomorrrows.com/kirby/articles/11unfilmed.html

more, nobody commissioned the series. So Kirby added the son of Orion, and Lightning Lady became "Captain Victory". The "Tiger 21" ship then became Captain Victory's dreadnought, "Tiger". Everything connects!

Challengers of the Unknown joins to Fantastic Four

The closer we look, the more links we see between Kirby stories. Let's take a detailed example: links between the Challengers of the Unknown and the Fantastic Four (FF). As we saw in an earlier chapter, Kirby originally intended the FF to be something like Dr Who²²⁴ (before Dr Who existed). But the editor wanted changes. So Kirby made it more like the Challengers. Here are some similarities between the Challengers and the FF:

- The same concept: a team of four adventurers who explored the unknown.
- The same powers: in the Challengers, Rocky gets all the powers together. In the FF they each get just one.
- The same origin: the Challengers' origin is in two parts, a plane crash to form the team, and a rocket to give Rocky superpowers. The FF combines both.
- The same costumes: compare Challengers #8 (the last Kirby issue), especially story 1 page 5, with FF #1, especially pages 17-18.
- The same continuity: FF #1 contains a number of problems that disappear when we see the story as a continuation of the Challengers. For example, why is Ben unable to change? Because this is his second dose of radiation. Why did Reed take along two untrained people? Because they are Challengers, the people most qualified for the task.
- The same in-fighting: When Rocky gains his powers, he wants to fight the others. In the FF, this conflict is extended due to a love triangle: a close look shows that every fight is due to Ben feeling angry that he cannot attract Sue. This kind of conflict is common in Kirby's romance comics.

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See the original Fantastic Four

- The same themes: mind control, robots, etc.
- The same monsters: in their first stories, each team flies to a remote island to battle a giant monster. In both titles, a giant red monster disappears when they no longer believe in it (see FF #3). And so on.
- The same locations: outer space, underground, under the oceans, etc. Sometimes scenes are almost identical, such as entering a city by falling through low gravity.²²⁵
- The same leader: The nickname "Ace" means the same as "Mr Fantastic". Ace's goal is to enter space, back when the space program meant the high altitude part of the air force. He succeeds in FF #1. If we want to explain the ageing and then de-ageing in FF #1-13 (because Kirby originally wanted a parent-child dynamic) we can just call it a reaction to the youth serum in Challengers #8.
- The same rocky hero: a fighter called "Rocky" and a fighter covered in rocks. When the FF briefly breaks up in #15, Ben returns to being a wrestler like Rocky.
- The same acrobat: "Red" is the youngest, like Johnny. When the team briefly breaks up in #15, Johnny returns to being a circus acrobat. (The dialogue that said this was new to him, but that was not implied by the art.)
- The same computer genius: June is a computer programmer, as is Sue: in FF #5 she knows how to sabotage a computer with her hands tied behind her back.
- The same ocean expert: Haley's role is taken by Namor. Haley never looks happy in team activities: he prefers to be underwater, exploring the oceans. So it is natural that he would leave the team. It is fun to imagine him behind the scenes when Johnny "accidentally" discovers Namor in FF #4, pages 8 and 9. Several panels on those pages have a character who looks like Haley.

- The same headquarters, inside. Compare the Challengers living space²²⁶ with early FF living space.²²⁷ They are the same, right down to the squared window panes, bookshelves, and large globe of the world. The only difference is that the TV grew larger, reflecting the huge growth in screen size at the time: a 1950 Philo TV set was typically 12.5 inches. But in 1959 between the Challengers and the FF, the Admiral 23 inch set became available.²²⁸
- The same enemy: a sorcerer in a hooded cloak, with a castle in America, who possesses incredible inventions, uses a rocket powered helicopter, is associated with Merlin, and his goal is to obtain magical jewels that make him either invincible or immortal.²²⁹
- The same introduction: compare the in-comics advertisement for the Challengers with the splash page for FF #1: it's the same design of the four characters in yellow circles.

Kirby pointed out the connection:

*KIRBY: "Even before I created the FF, I created the Challengers, which --" INTERVIEWER: "-- was the same thing." KIRBY: "And if you notice the uniforms, they're the same."*²³⁰

*INTERVIEWER: "Looking back on it, do you see the Challengers as a precursor to the Fantastic Four?" KIRBY: "Yes, there were always precursors to the Fantastic Four."*²³¹

²²⁶ Showcase #7 p. 3, #11 p. 3, #12 last page, Challengers #7 story 2 p. 3, #8 story 1 p. 2

²²⁷ FF #1 p. 9, #3 pp. 6,16, #5 p. 3, #11 story 2 p. 6

²²⁸ blog.vava.com/the-evolution-of-tv-screen-sizes-past-and-future-the-largest-4k-tv/, vintage-adventures.com/vintage-television-radio-ads/2990-1959-admiral-television-ad-new-picture-size-model-year-1960.html

²²⁹ Compare Showcase #6 (first Challengers) with FF #5

²³⁰ From the 1969 Mark Hebert interview, reprinted in The Comics Journal Library 1

²³¹ From the 1989 Gary Groth interview, in The Comics Journal #134, online at tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

NEAL KIRBY: *"In discussions with my father The Fantastic Four basically was a derivative of the, from what he told me, basically he came up with the idea just as a derivative from the Challengers of the Unknown"*²³²

Are these connections real?

Kirby's stories link up naturally, simply because he did not plan his stories.

ROZ KIRBY: *He never wrote the story ahead of time, he wrote while he was drawing.*

JACK KIRBY: *In other words, I'd never planned a story.*²³³

So each story was simply *what Kirby was thinking about at the time*. Kirby's thoughts naturally connect, and therefore the stories naturally connect. Beyond this, Kirby encouraged readers to interpret the stories however they wish.

*"I put enough chinks into the story to allow the reader to interpret it his way,"*²³⁴

Kirby called his stories a conversation with the reader.

*"they're conversation. In other words, you're going to send back a response saying, 'Did you mean this when you drew this?' And then I find that interesting"*²³⁵

So Kirby was fine with readers finding connections, even when he did not consciously intend them. But many fans dislike the idea that Kirby's stories connect. They see continuity as restricting a writer's freedom. This is true with stories that involve multiple writers, or where the writer must return to the same events. But Kirby continually moved forward with his characters and ideas, so he never had reason to revisit old ideas, so those problems never arose.

²³² From his 2010 legal deposition

²³³ From the Groth interview.

²³⁴ From the Mondo 2000 interview

²³⁵ From the Peter Hansen interview

Here are four reasons to connect Kirby's stories:

1. Connections mend broken stories. Kirby's stories were often broken in editing, so he simply carried on the same theme in a different title. For example, the original FF ends on a cliffhanger, with the Kree about to invade.²³⁶ The Kree (in all but name) then arrive on Earth in "The Eternals". New Gods also ends with a cliffhanger, with the Bug about to invade. The Bug (in all but name) invades Earth in "Captain Victory" (as the Insectons). The Citadel of Science in "The Fantastic Four"²³⁷ continues as the DNA Project in "Jimmy Olsen". And so on and on. If we reject these connections, then we lose the endings of these major storylines.
2. Connections make bigger, unique stories. Without connections, The Eternals became just another repetitious space gods story, and the Insectons became just another repetitious monsters-in-tunnels story. But by connecting them we can more easily see how each idea builds on the one before.
3. Connections make Kirby stories easier to remember: the stories form a single coherent shape, not a thousand random pieces.
4. And finally, connections create lives. We can follow a person through her life. We get to know her friends, her family, her children, her hopes and dreams. Take Cherry Romaine for example.

Cherry Romaine

Cherry Romaine is the star of "Gun Moll" in "Justice Traps the Guilty" #2. She is a teenage orphan who becomes entangled in crime. She only appears in one story. She is a fictional character of course, but she personifies an emotion: the emotion of struggling.

²³⁶ Ever since #1, the Fantastic Four stories had been building up to meet the space gods. They finally met the Kree in #64. But they defeated two Kree representatives, in 64 and 65. We should therefore expect the Kree to come in person to see what happened since mankind arose, and judge the world. But Kirby began holding back his ideas after #67.

²³⁷ Kirby's preferred name for "the Beehive" in Fantastic Four #66

BEN: "was that the way you'd approach characters? To have them personify an emotion or a feeling?"

JACK: "Yes. Yes"²³⁸

Kirby gave characters the minimum necessary background or inner thoughts. His characters are essentially mythological: they are symbols for universal feelings or ideas. Sometimes Kirby does not even give a character a first name: they are just "Ace" or "Professor": their actions and choices are their identity. Cherry Romaine never gives her real name: Cherry is "not my real name". It simply represents her emotion: She is virginal like a cherry, and experiences bitterness, like the romaine lettuce, often used as the "bitter herb" at Passover. She is best seen as Kirby's "struggling woman" emotion.

Cherry can easily be the same person as Madelon Roberts,²³⁹ and June Robbins²⁴⁰ and Susan Storm, and Glenda Mark²⁴¹. They are all struggling women. But they are more than that: their details and dates all match up. They are essentially the same woman. Sue and June are both computer programmers. Cherry and Sue both have parents killed in car crashes. Cherry and Sue both have a shameful past, involving the police, that they don't like to talk about.²⁴² There is evidence that Johnny (Red) is Sue's son, not her brother: There is a large age difference, and in *Strange Tales* Sue acts more like his mother. Sue does not like talking about her past (in FF #11 and #32). In that era it was common for a child born out of wedlock to be presented as a girl's new baby brother. And Johnny was born at exactly the time when Cherry was most likely to have a child out of wedlock.²⁴³ It all fits.

²³⁸ From the Ben Schwartz interview, Jack Kirby Collector #23

²³⁹ "The Girl in the Grave", *Strange World of Your Dreams* #2

²⁴⁰ *Challengers of the Unknown*

²⁴¹ *From The Demon*

²⁴² In a rejected page from *Fantastic Four* #32, Sue angrily confronts her criminal father.

²⁴³ In FF #11, cover dated Feb 1963, the letters page says Johnny was "just 17" and will not give Sue's exact age. So Johnny was born at the start of 1946. So he was conceived just when Cherry was released from prison: she was a beautiful penniless girl in need of friendship and without anywhere to sleep, just as young men were coming back from the war and would promise anything to get a girl.

Kirby did not plan it that way of course. But he grew up in the gangster era, and came back from the war to start a family in 1945. So when he thought of “a struggling woman” he naturally thought of women he knew who grew up at the same time he did. So they all tended to be young before the war, to start families after the war, to try to make a better life in the late 1940s, and so on. The stories naturally end up visualising the same woman, of the same age, with the same background.

Did I just cheat, and choose Cherry, Madelon, June, Susan, and Glenda just because they were similar? Can we find other struggling women who do not fit the pattern? Let’s find out.

Cherry was a naive girl finding herself involved with crime. Kirby told the same kind of story several times. Do any of the other stories have a struggling woman like Cherry or Madelon? Let’s see.

The issue before “Gun Moll” is “I Was a Come-On Girl For Broken Bones, Inc.” Superficially, this might look like the same story. But Cherry is young, lonely, in a very bad situation, and is also a tough survivor. Kitty Cramer (“broken Bones”) is different. She has an easier life, and learns never to take dangerous risks. Kitty can never be as tough as Cherry, or as desperate as Madelon, or as driven as June, or as strong as Sue. Kitty does not fit into the Cherry — Madelon — June — Susan — Glenda pattern.

The issue after “Gun Moll” is “Buried Treasure Fraud”. Again it is superficially similar. Valerie Trent, like Kitty Cramer, accepts a job she knows might be illegal. Like Cherry, she is an orphan, and learns to be tough. But she is tough in a totally different way. Cherry is desperate, up against a wall. But Valerie is feisty, bursting with confidence. Valerie would never let Chip dominate her like he dominates Cherry. And Cherry would never change her mind as quickly as Valerie. Cherry, Kitty and Valerie are very different people, and of the three, Cherry has the greatest strength.

The next issue has “Queen of the Speedball Mob”, featuring Belle Munson. She is not hard like Cherry, or soft like Kittie, or feisty like Valerie. She is studious and dutiful. She takes over her brother’s crime operation purely out of family loyalty. It is an intellectual decision. She is driven by pride, not need or greed. She wants to get ahead at any cost, she wants to prove she is smarter than others. She is different from the others.

Two issues later there is another superficially similar story, "The Money Making Machine". Once again, an innocent girl becomes a criminal then goes to jail and reforms. And once again the girl has nothing like the others. Stella Brady is shallow and simply loves money.

Two issues later is another story of the same type: Jean Lanzi is the daughter of a mobster, in her thirties with great connections and confidence. And crime is merely a job to her.

And so it goes on. No matter what the story, no matter how similar it is to previous stories, all of Kirby's women are unique. So when we see two Kirby women with the same personality and background, and the dates match up, that is very unusual, and we should notice. Kirby's "troubled woman" character has a very specific age and background, even though her name ("not my real name") might change. She is not the hero with a thousand faces, she is the troubled woman with maybe five or ten faces, and we can trace her life from childhood to old age.

If we looked closer we would no doubt find other examples of Kirby's feisty, confident type, and trace Kitty Cramer through her life, across many different identities. Or we could find other examples of the studious and proud type, and trace Belle Munson across the decades. Or follow the shallow chancer Stela Brady through her life. Or career criminal Jean Lanzi. Or a hundred other Kirby characters.

In this example, I have chosen to trace Cherry, the troubled woman, because I grew up reading about Susan Storm. I watched Susan grow up, get married, and have a child. I shared her worries and joys. I wanted to know what happened next. With Kirby you can find out. If a character interests you, you can trace her life (or his life) from childhood to old age, and follow all her adventures and trials, her friends and lovers and children. Sometimes you can follow a family across multiple generations: like Loki, his son Darkseid, his son Orion, and his son Captain Victory. There are endless depths to Kirby's story that we have barely begun to explore.

How to recognise a Kirby story

Perhaps the largest category of “lost” Kirby stories is stories that are wrongly attributed to other people. Before 1971, Kirby’s work was often uncredited, or credited to other people. Or sometimes he was given a script, so the story is credited to that writer, but Kirby re-wrote it:

“I did the stories and I did the illustrations. Sometimes they would send us scripts. ... but I’d throw them out the window.”²⁴⁴

So how do we know what Kirby wrote? If a story has some connection with Kirby, no matter how slight, then we can apply ten different tests. If the story passes eight or more of these tests, then it’s probably by Kirby.

The best way to understand these tests is to see them in action. So this chapter contains two complete stories. The first story (Blue Bolt #1) has no input from Kirby. The second story (Blue Bolt #1) has the same characters and situations, and is credited to the same writer (Joe Simon), but experts agree that the art is by Kirby. So there is a Kirby connection. So let’s read the two stories, and see if there is any difference in style. Then we will apply the ten tests.

²⁴⁴ From the Hour 25 Radio interview [kirbymuseum.org/ blogs/effect/2012/06/27/19900413-interview/](http://kirbymuseum.org/blogs/effect/2012/06/27/19900413-interview/)

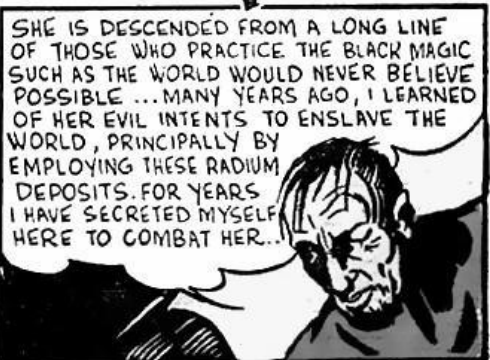
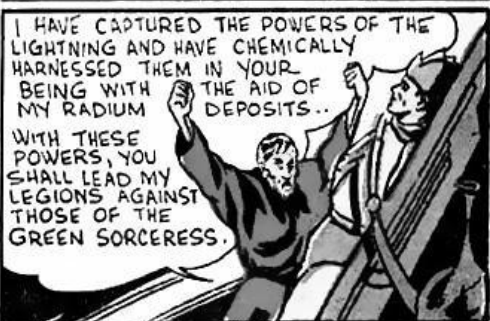
NOT BY KIRBY







DEEP DOWN INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE EARTH,
THE WEIRD PROCESSION WENDS ITS WAY...
THEY HALT AT THE ENTRANCE TO A FANTASTIC
LABORATORY...THE LIMP FORM IS LAID
ON AN OPERATING TABLE...BRILLIANT
RADIANT ROCKS GLEAM ALL ABOUT THE ROOM.



INFURIATED BY THE PROFESSOR'S LATEST THREAT, THE GREEN SORCERESS DETERMINES TO STRIKE FIRST.

WITH A SAVAGE ATTACK OF THE HEAT RAYS, SHE QUICKLY MOBILIZES HER QUEER LEGIONS FOR A KILLING THRUST...

I HAVE TRIFLED LONG ENOUGH WITH THE MAD SCIENTIST AND HIS MISSIONARY WAYS! MAN THE RAYS!

AS YOU COMMAND, HIGHNESS!

NOT BY KIRBY



AS THE POWERFUL HEAT RAYS BEAT UPON THE MOUNTAIN STRONGHOLD, EVERYTHING IN ITS WAY MELTS AND SHRIVELS...THE ENTIRE MOUNTAIN-SIDE SEEMS TO BE AFIRE...

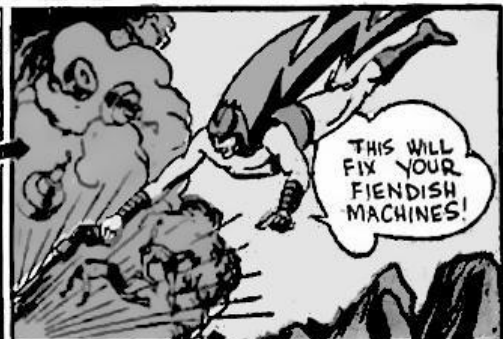
THE DEVIL! SHE MUST HAVE PERFECTED SOME NEW INFERNAL MACHINE! I CAN'T BREATHE!



SOON THE EFFECTS OF THE RAY REACH INTO THE DEPTHS OF THE LABORATORY...



BUT THE NEWLY ENDOWED POWERS OF LIGHTNING ARE NOT TO BE DENIED...WITH A MIGHTY LUNGE, BLUE BOLT HURLS HIMSELF AND THE SCIENTIST INTO SPACE, HIS LIGHTNING GUN BLAZING OPENINGS AHEAD



THIS WILL FIX YOUR FIENDISH MACHINES!

MY RAYS!! HE IS RUINING MY GREAT INVENTION! RELEASE THE BIRDS! THEY WILL STOP HIM!



SOON, THE GREEN SORCERESS FEELS THE AMAZING POWERS OF BLUE BOLT!

4

THEY ARE
VERY HUNGRY!

AT THE
STRANGE
COMMAND,
A GUARD
RUSHES TO
A HUGE
BIRD
CAGE...



AS THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN, THE SKY IS
DARKENED BY MONSTROUS WINGED CREATURES.
THEY SWOOP DOWN ON **BLUE BOLT**...



IN THE STRANGEST AERIAL BATTLE
ONE WOULD EVER EXPECT TO SEE, **BLUE BOLT**'S
LIGHTNING GUN DEALS OUT SEVERE PUNISHMENT
TO THE SAVAGE HORDE...



5

BUT THE
TREMENDOUS
ADVANTAGE IN
NUMBERS SOON
TAKES ITS TOLL
ON THE LIGHTNING
MAN...



AND HE IS FELLED BY TERRIBLE THRUSTS
FROM IRON TALONS...



THE MONSTERS SWOOP DOWN TO DEAL
THE DEATH BLOW... THEN---



BACK! BACK, I SAY!
NORZIMO COMMANDS
YOU!!

FEARLESSLY, THE SORCERESS RUSHES AT THE MONSTERS.
THEY HESITATE FOR A MOMENT AND THEN RETREAT..

NOT BY KIRBY

TAKE HIM
TO THE
CHAMBERS



AS THE BIRDS OBEY HER,
THE GREEN SORCERESS COMMANDS!



HE IS SO HANDSOME
BUT HE AWAKENS!
I MUST NOT LET
HIM FIND ME
LIKE THIS..



IS ROOM IN MY FORCES FOR A MAN
SUCH AS YOU... IF YOU WILL FIGHT
ON MY SIDE, I SHALL GRANT YOU
MANY FAVORS..

AND IF
I REFUSE?

BLUE BOLT'S GREAT VITALITY REVIVES HIM!



THEN, FOOL,
YOU SHALL BE
FED TO THE
DRAGONS!

I PREFER
TO TAKE
MY CHANCES
WITH THEM!



NOW, BLUE BOLT...YOU ARE
NOT SO BRAVE, ARE YOU?

LOVELY LITTLE
PLAYMATES YOU
HAVE, DUCHESS.



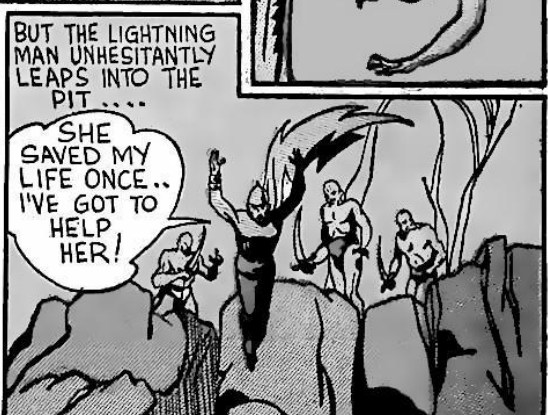
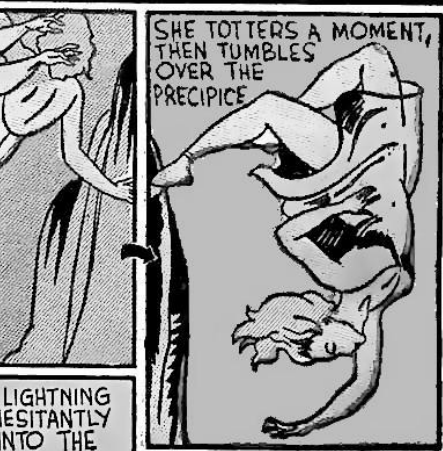
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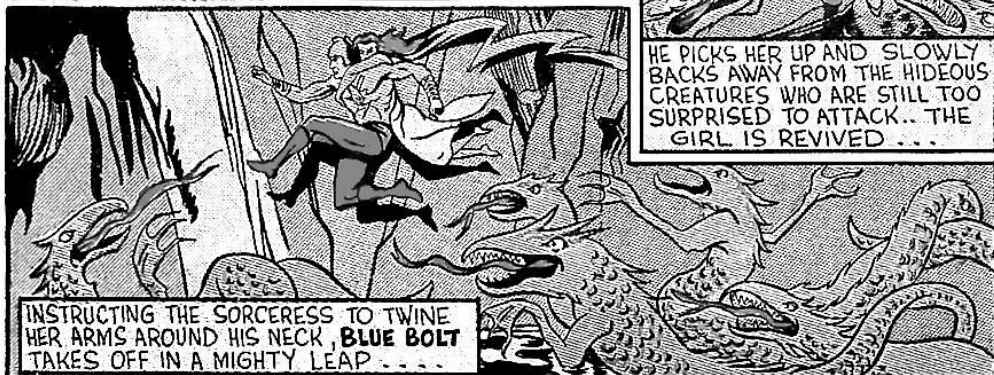


THROW
HIM
IN!

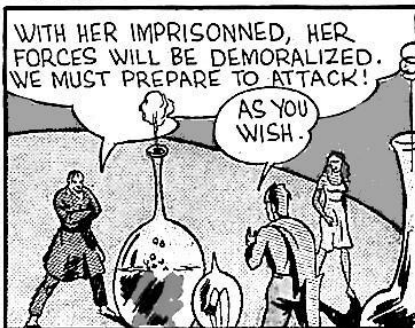
JUST A
MINUTE!

DESPERATELY, BLUE BOLT FIGHTS FOR TIME





HE KEEPS GOING PAST THE SORCESS' STRONGHOLD AND DELIVERS HER TO THE PROFESSOR, WHO IS BUSILY ENGAGED AT REPAIRING HIS LABORATORY.



TURNING TO SEIZE THE SORCESS, **BLUE BOLT** SEES ONLY A GREEN CLOUD WHERE SHE STOOD..



That was Blue Bolt #1, by Joe Simon. Kirby was not involved in any way.

Next we will look at Blue Bolt #2. This has the same characters and a very similar story set up. And it still says, “By Joe Simon”. But some art is distinctive Kirby art. So experts agree that Kirby began to work with Simon at that point. But did he write any of the story?

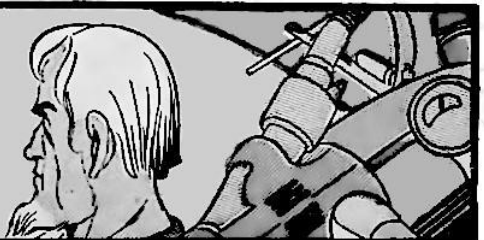
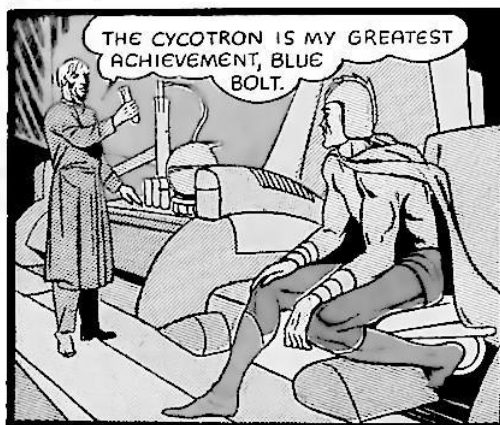
Read the story, compare it to the previous story, and see for yourself. Then we will look at the ten signs of a Jack Kirby story.

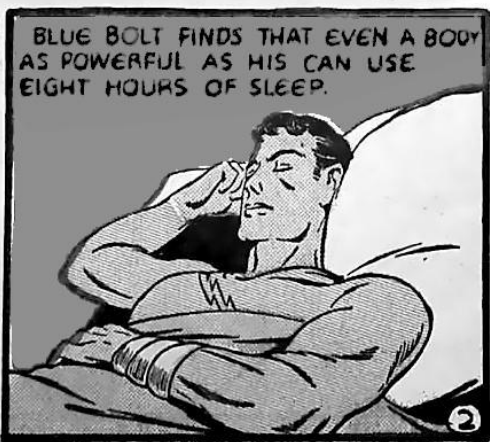
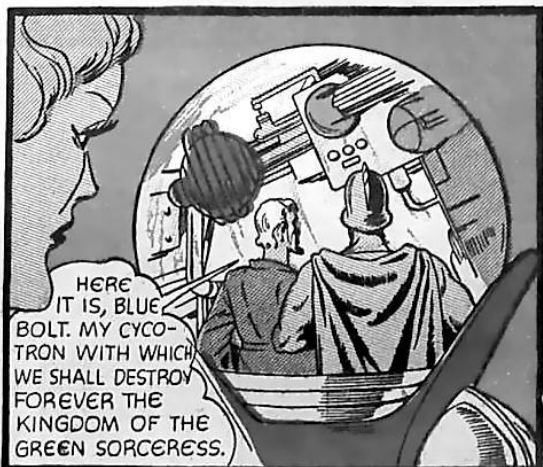
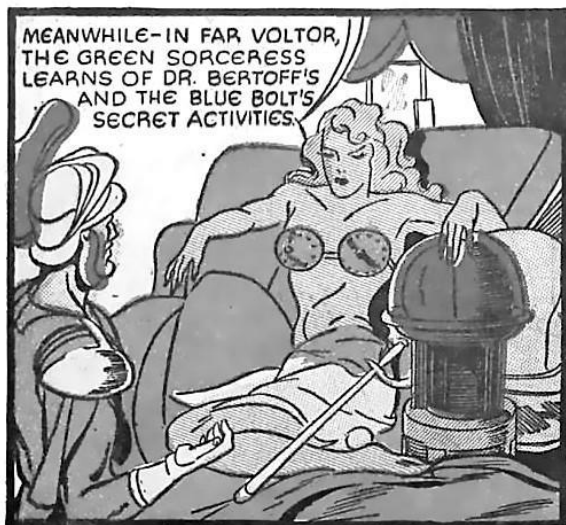
While reading, ask yourself: could the same man have written both stories? Could it be a joint story? Or is it so different that it has to be purely Jack Kirby?

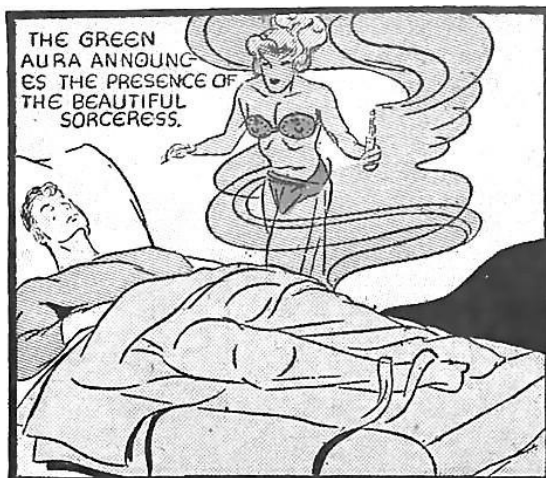
BLUE BOLT

THE LIGHTNING MAN

A YOUNG AMERICAN, STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, HAS BEEN HURLED INTO THE SUBTERRANEAN LAND OF DELTOS! DR. BERTOFF-SCIENTIST AND RULER OF DELTOS—REVIVING HIM WITH INJECTIONS OF RADIUM—HAS HARNESSSED THE POWERS OF LIGHTNING IN HIS BODY! SO WAS BORN THE BLUE BOLT!





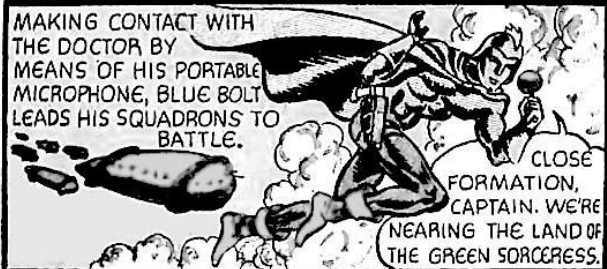




DR. BERTOFF ELEVATES HIS CYCOTRON, THE 2,000-TON ELECTRO-BEAM ATOM SMASHER, WITH WHICH HE INTENDS TO DESTROY THE LAND OF THE GREEN SORCERESS.

WHEN IT IS ALL SET UP ON THE MOUNTAIN PEAK, YOU WILL START YOUR EXPEDITIONARY INVASION. THE ATOMIC ENERGY ELEVATOR WILL RAISE IT EASILY.

MAKING CONTACT WITH THE DOCTOR BY MEANS OF HIS PORTABLE MICROPHONE, BLUE BOLT LEADS HIS SQUADRONS TO BATTLE.



CLOSE FORMATION, CAPTAIN. WE'RE NEARING THE LAND OF THE GREEN SORCERESS.



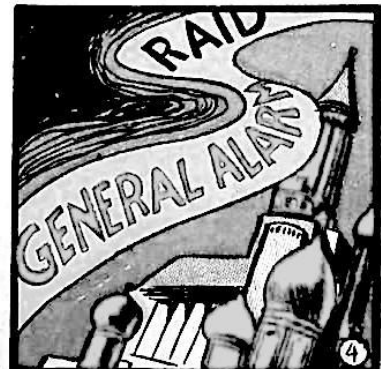
HA! THE FIGHTING IS BEGUN—NOW THE CYCOTRON.



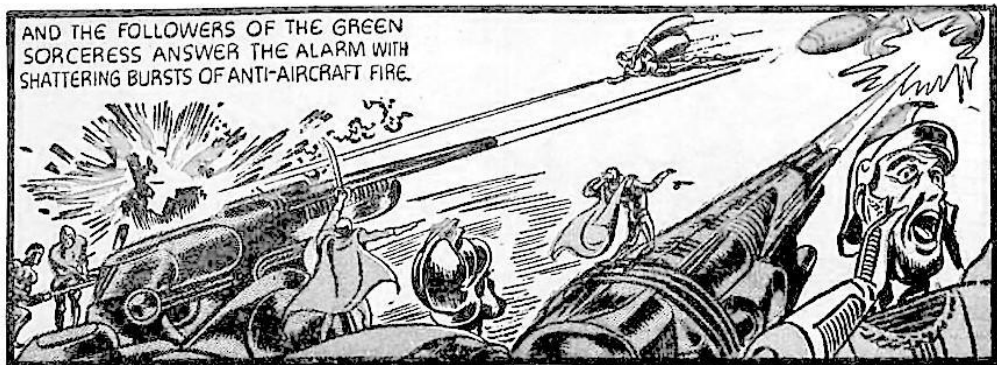
THERE GOES THE RAY—GOOD OLE DOC! JUST IN TIME. THE CYCOTRON GOES INTO ACTION.



WHILE IN THE CONTROL TOWER OF THE SORCERESS'S STRONGHOLD, FEVERISH HANDS SET THE SIGNAL TO ARM.



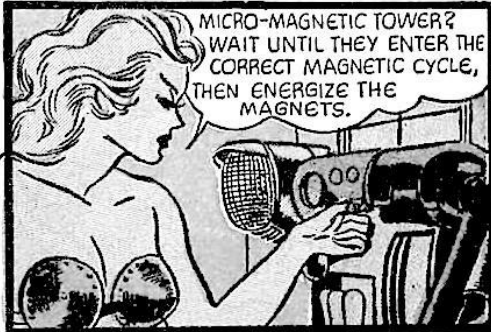
AND THE FOLLOWERS OF THE GREEN SORCERESS ANSWER THE ALARM WITH SHATTERING BURSTS OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE.



SO! THEY
ATTACK!
GOOD!
THEY PLAY
RIGHT INTO
MY HANDS!



MICRO-MAGNETIC TOWER?
WAIT UNTIL THEY ENTER THE
CORRECT MAGNETIC CYCLE,
THEN ENERGIZE THE
MAGNETS.



IN THE MICRO-MAGNETIC TOWER,
THE MAGNO MECHANICS SEE
THE ENTIRE BATTLE ON
THE TELEVISION SCREEN.



READY
TO PROPEL
THE MAG-
NET, SIR!

WONDER WHERE
DOC'S BEAM IS?
DOCTOR BERTOFF—
CALLING
DOCTOR
BERTOFF!

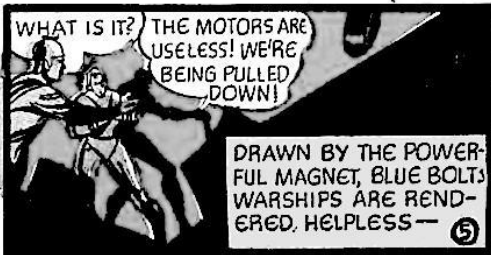


HAH! THEY ARE IN
THE MAGNETIC
CYCLE!
READY-FIRE!

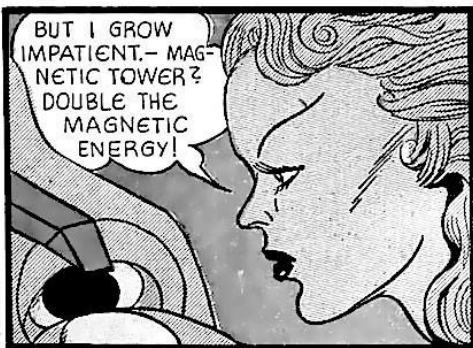
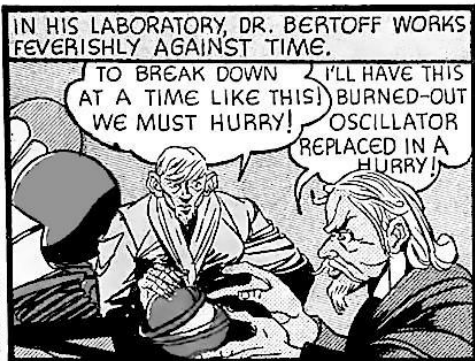
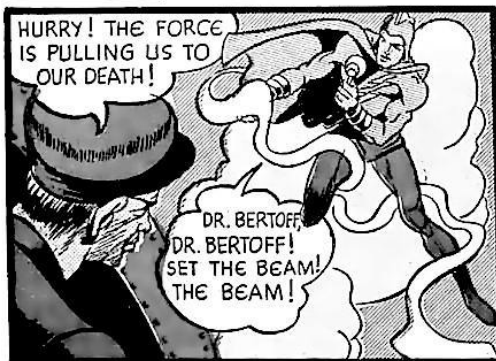
FIRE
IT IS,
SIR!



WHAT IS IT? THE MOTORS ARE
USELESS! WE'RE
BEING PULLED
DOWN!



DRAWN BY THE POWER-
FUL MAGNET, BLUE BOLTS
WARSHIPS ARE REND-
ERED, HELPLESS—





WEAKENED BY THE CYCOTRON, BLUE BOLT IS THE LAST TO BE DRAWN INTO THE GAPING CREVICE.



WELL, A RECEPTION COMMITTEE!



STOP! STOP OR I'LL SHOOT!

OH, NO! YOU HAVE ORDERS TO TAKE ME ALIVE! RIGHT?



I THOUGHT SO!

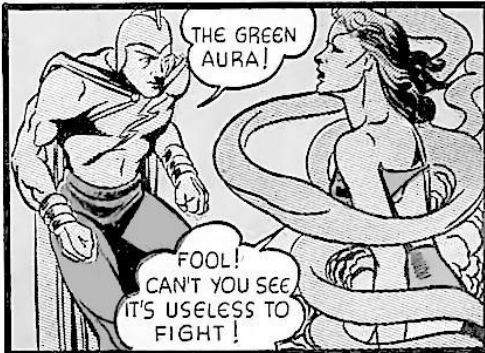


LIGHTNING DOES STRIKE TWICE!



THE GREEN AURA!

FOOL! CAN'T YOU SEE IT'S USELESS TO FIGHT!



YOU HAVE BUT ONE CHANCE, BLUE BOLT!

NO! I WILL NEVER DESERT DOCTOR BERTOFF!



YOU HAVE DECREED YOUR OWN DEATH! GUARDS!! TAKE HIM TO THE DUNGEON!



BLUE BOLT IS IMPRISONED IN THE DUNGEON OF DOOM. HE WAITS PATIENTLY FOR THE SOFTENING FOOTSTEPS OF THE GUARD.

HE'S GONE!
LUCKY THEY
DIDN'T FIND MY
LIGHTNING
GUN!

GOOD! THE
LOCK IS GIVING
WAY! NOW TO
FREE MY SOL-
DIERS!

HURRY! UNTIL
THE MEN—
SOMEONE
APPROACHES!

FIND YOUR
ARMS—THERE
MAY BE A
FIGHT!

RUN, MEN!
PICK THE
FASTEST
SHIPS!

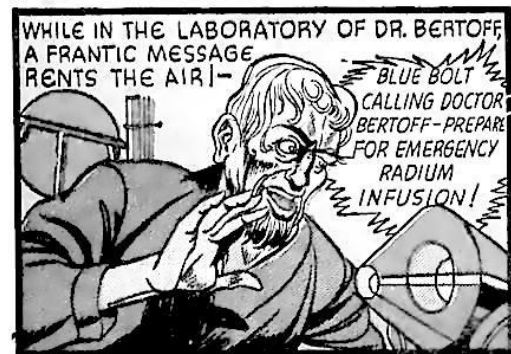
WHAT'S ALL
THE COMMOTION
HERE?—
WHAT TH—?

BLUE BOLT, WITH CLEAN, POWERFUL
BLOWS, HOLDS OFF THE ENEMY, WHILE
HIS MEN
SEEK THEIR
WEAPONS.

IN THE MIDST OF
THE BATTLE, GREEN-
ISH VAPOR APPEARS—
THE GREEN
AURA!

LOOK OUT! TOO LATE—I'VE
SHOT HER!

OUT OF THE AURA RISES
THE GREEN SORCERESS.



Here are the ten big differences between Blue Bolt #1 and #2. The best writers can duplicate some of these features. But only Kirby has them all.

Test 1: the art.

Blue Bolt #2 has Kirby art. That alone means it is 99 percent certain to be a Kirby story. The other tests just confirm it.

*"Nobody ever wrote a story for me. I created my own characters. I always did that. That was the whole point of comics for me."*²⁴⁵

A fellow writer recalled the time when Kirby worked with Joe Simon. Sometimes Simon provided an outline, but Kirby created the details and the ending. When other writers helped Kirby, they just turned his notes into finished dialogue.

*"Jack was the idea man. ... They were Jack's plots. I just supplied the dialogue."*²⁴⁶

It made no business sense to give Kirby a script. Not only did Kirby's ideas sell better, but he produced ideas constantly:

*"I really sweated out plots, unlike Jack Kirby. Jack just ignited and came out with ideas"*²⁴⁷

Kirby's method did not involve scripts. Instead, he visualised himself in a situation, and drew what would happen next:

*"I would frequently watch as Kirby would pass through the genius-mirror. A still, distant look would come over him ... It was kind of a fugue state..."*²⁴⁸

*"Kirby actually thought he WAS the characters ... he's crazy as a bedbug."*²⁴⁹

²⁴⁵ From the James Van Hise interview reprinted in the Jack Kirby Collector #25

²⁴⁶ Writer Kim Aamodt, interviewed by Jim Amash in Alter Ego #30

²⁴⁷ Writer Walter Geier, interviewed by Jim Amash in Alter Ego #30

²⁴⁸ Greg Theakston, in "Jack Magic" Volume 1

²⁴⁹ Joe Simon, quoted by Theakston in "Jack Magic" 1

Kirby could not possibly achieve that effect using a script. It just would not work:

*"I was totally immersed in the characters. I pencilled fast, I wrote fast. Nobody could have written it for me because they couldn't have understood the situation or what to do."*²⁵⁰

There is a small handful of cases where Kirby did follow another person's script, mostly toward the end of his career. He adapted the TV show "The Prisoner", and the movies "2001" and "The Black Hole" because he liked the ideas, and the work paid well. And he illustrated Joe Simon's Sandman script in the 1970s because he had a quota of pages to fill before he could escape his contract. But in almost every other case, Kirby art means Kirby writing. And as the ideas man, he also provided ideas for other people.²⁵¹ So when he is not drawing, but there are hints that he might have helped with ideas, we need other tests to identify his work.

Test 2: real science

Kirby used real science, and real history. Other writers? Not as much. For example, Blue Bolt #1 use "heat ray" guns, just like Flash Gordon. But heat rays are not scientific. Nikola Tesla explained why, and why particle beams are more realistic:

*"Rays are not applicable because they could not be produced in requisite quantities and diminish rapidly in intensity with distance. All the energy of New York City (approximately two million horsepower) transformed into rays and projected twenty miles, could not kill a human being, because, according to a well known law of physics, it would disperse to such an extent as to be ineffectual. My apparatus projects particles which may be relatively large or of microscopic dimensions, enabling us to convey to a small area at a great distance trillions of times more energy than was possible with rays of any kind."*²⁵²

²⁵⁰ From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

²⁵¹ See for example the original Spider-Man story.

²⁵² Nikola Tesla, "A Machine to End War", in Liberty Magazine, 1935

As soon as Kirby took over the story, on page 1, he showed Bertoff developing Tesla's particle weapon instead of heat rays. This “cycotron” is based on the real life cyclotron. A cyclotron is a device for accelerating particles. Here is a real world cyclotron from 1939:

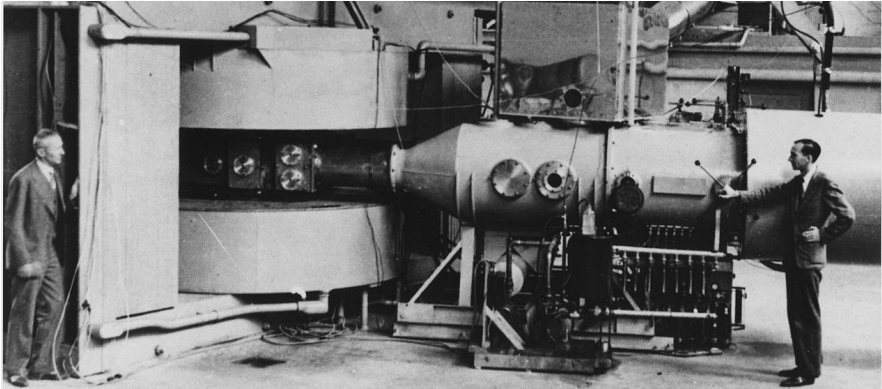


Image: cyclotron at Lawrence Radiation Lab, 1939. Public domain, via Wikipedia

Kirby's “cycotron” has a similar design: large circular chambers (for cycling the particles around) then a long barrel.



Kirby calls it an "atom smasher" and refers to "atomic energy". The story says that the cycotron needs an oscillator, and the enemy device relies on magnetism. A real cyclotron uses a magnetic field to change the direction of moving particles. The year 1939 (when this story was written) saw the first

useful magnetron oscillator, which went into service in 1940. Kirby's device also needs the addition of helium atoms. At the time, only German scientists were doing this, so it was either cutting edge science, or a very good guess.

On page 5 we have a "micromagnetic tower". It obviously contains micro magnets of some kind. It relies on the "correct magnetic cycle" — that is, it oscillates. The sorceress says that at the correct point in the cycle they "energise the magnets". A mechanic says he was then "ready to propel the magnet". Anyone with an interest in electromagnetism will understand. The tower no doubt accelerates charged material to the end, where the charge then changes direction. The rapid change in direction will induce an enormous magnetic field. That would play havoc with charged particles, such as used by Tesla's particle beam weapon. So the science works, at least in principle.

Another example of Kirby using real science is the crystal ball. The crystal ball in issue #1 is clearly inspired by the crystal ball used by the green witch in the Wizard of Oz. In issue #2, Kirby changes it into a "televisor", a kind of security camera. Kirby saw the future: today, governments and businesses use security cameras everywhere.

Test 3: Nothing contrived.

Kirby hated contrived stories. He found other people's scripts to be contrived, and he threw them out.

*"I conceive, they contrive"*²⁵³

Unfortunately, Blue Bolt #1 is contrived.

Blue Bolt is a mix of "Blue Beetle" (a strip that Jack Kirby had just revolutionised) and "Flash Gordon", the most popular character of the day, named after a flash of lightning. Blue Beetle plus Flash Gordon becomes "Blue Bolt, the lightning man". Flash Gordon's "Dr Zarkoff" becomes "Dr Bertoff". The stories are Flash Gordon's mix of medieval and futuristic: Dragons and futuristic science. Simon follows the Flash Gordon pattern: a handsome sportsman, a barely dressed woman, a one dimensional enemy ruler with one dimensional henchmen. They fire "heat guns", they fight giant birds, they rely on radium, and so on. To avoid being sued, Simon had to

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From the Groth interview, tcj.com/jack-kirby-interview/

make some changes. So he copied another popular movie serial of the time, "Phantom Empire", about a hero who finds himself in a super scientific underground world ruled by an evil queen. This enabled Simon to combine Flash Gordon's Ming, princess Aura and Dale Arden into a single character, the Green Sorceress. Her green skin, crystal ball, and travelling in a puff of green smoke are clearly modelled on the wicked witch from 1939's Wizard of Oz. To make it all look good, Simon copied some art from famous comic artists Hal Foster (Prince Valiant) and Alex Raymond (Flash Gordon).

This is not just unoriginal, it is highly contrived: that is, it would not work in the real world. Kirby had to use the same characters and situations, but he spent the first story changing Simon's ideas to make them less contrived:

On page 1, we forget Flash Gordon's heat guns, and start using a "cycotron" based on real science. On page 2, the enemy no longer uses the crystal ball to focus on the hero being handsome. Instead she focuses on the military hardware, like a real leader in a real war. On page 3, instead of the Wizard of Oz "green cloud where she stood", Kirby changes it to a "green aura", and in issue #5, he explains this as a side effect of shifting into the fourth dimension. On page 4, instead of Flash Gordon style monsters (who would be easily defeated with handguns), the war is fought with serious hardware, like in real wars. On page 5, instead of Flash Gordon's trademark half naked henchmen, Kirby has properly trained soldiers in armoured uniforms. Kirby did have a token half dressed enemy on page 8 for continuity with the previous issue, but such undress is not seen in future stories unless indoors. On page 6, instead of everything working perfectly, the key device breaks down, like in the real world. On page 7, instead of tossing Blue Bolt over a cliff, the Sorceress uses intelligent military strategy. On page 8, instead of unrealistically incompetent bad guys, Blue Bolt immediately sees that they must have a reason for not killing him. On page 9, instead of being unrealistically perfect, he accidentally shoots the wrong person. Like in a real war. On the last page, tired of this one dimensional villain, Kirby removes the black magic. Later stories will be based on real politics and real science.

A Kirby story is never contrived.

Test 4: characters act like real people

In Blue Bolt #1, characters do not act like real people. In issue #2, Kirby makes them more real.

In #1, the characters always produce some new power or new machine or new danger out of nowhere. In #2, Kirby shows the heroes carefully developing their weapon, and he shows all the steps to make it work.

In #1, the hero is defeated by trained giant birds. Even though the hero has a hand gun capable of destroying an enormous cannon. And how many giant birds did she have, for goodness' sake? In #2, the enemy plan makes more sense: a magnetic field to interfere with the charged particle beam (and also interfere with electronics on the enemy ships).

In #1, the enemy immediately falls in love with the hero because he's so handsome. Kirby cannot not just ignore this plot point, so uses it against her in #2 (as discussed later).

In #1, her lines are corny. Her first lines are *"The Fool!!! To think he can match his powers against the cunning of the Green Sorceress!"* and later, *"Then. Fool, you shall be fed to the dragons!"* Kirby cannot just ignore this characterisation, but in #2 he avoids the word "fool" and has her speak intelligently instead: she "calmly" refers to *"the futile efforts of these mortal men"* and refers to their actual failures: *"look at the clumsy mortals"*

Test 5: "show, don't tell"

Issue #1, pages 3 and 4 are confusing without the words. But with issue #2, we can see the entire story from the art alone.

Can we explain this clearer art by saying that Kirby is just a better artist, but might be using a Simon script? No, because sometimes Simon's words are impossible to illustrate clearly. Take issue #1 page 4 for example. The heat gun makes the laboratory too hot, and Blue Bolt creates a hole in the roof to escape. He then destroys the heat guns. This involves four changes of scene across a large distance. We have no previous idea of how these scenes fit together. The text refers to "the depths", so the heat must somehow reach from the top of the mountains to the bottom? And where is the laboratory in relation to the guns? We never saw these big heat guns before. We never saw Blue Bolt in action before. We never saw Bolt's small gun in action before. We had no clue until now that he could fly. Somehow we need to see his

entire journey from the laboratory, and also destroying the heat guns, in a single frame. This is impossible to illustrate clearly.

So Simon obviously did not think about the art when he wrote a story. In contrast, whoever wrote #2 understood the art perfectly. It flows smoothly, and the story could be told even without the words. So it cannot be a Simon script. This ability to show, not tell, is another sign of Kirby writing.

Test 6: Pacing

We have already discussed how issue #1 page 4 was almost impossible to draw. The following page is clearer, but has awkward jumps. We see the hero shooting a bird, and then we see him lying on the ground, bleeding. We do not see him being hurt, and we do not see him fall. The next page has the same problem. Blue Bolt is unconscious, being nursed, then in the next frame he is standing up, talking. The most important events are not shown. And big stuff, like the large gun and the giant birds, just appear *deus ex machina*.

Contrast this pacing with issue #2, where the cycotron is introduced properly on the first page, before it is used, and the whole story flows from that. This naturally leads to the Green Sorceress finding some way to oppose the cycotron. This leads to Blue Bolt being in jail. All of this flows naturally from the first page.

Test 7: Elitism

In issue #1, Blue Bolt is clearly elite, and everybody else, apart from the Green Sorceress, is far below him in status. Blue Bolt is strikingly handsome. He has amazing strength. He can fly, or at least make great leaps. And he wins single handedly. Whereas Bertoff is scruffy, puny, plain looking, with limp straggling hair. He sees himself as a failure: *"You, Blue Bolt, shall carry on where I have failed!"* Blue Bolt is superior to Bertoff in every way other than science, and even Bertoff's science has failed.

In issue #1, Bolt acts like elites deserve special privileges. When he captures the Green Sorceress, he asks Bertoff *"You'll not be too hard on her?"* because she saved his life for selfish reasons. This is the woman who wants *"to enslave the world"*. But she apparently only wants to enslave common people. And only tried to kill Bertoff, who was a loser anyway. So be nice to her.

Elitism is common in superhero books. And it is common in Joe Simon's other work. One of Simon's most famous creations is "Prez", about a teenage president. Another famous Simon creation is "The Green Team", about a group of millionaires. Another famous creation was "Brother Power the Geek", a mannequin who does not have to worry about food or shelter and could just wander around saying whatever he thinks.

Kirby's characters are different. Kirby's passion was that all men are created equal. All his stories show power inequality as a bad thing (that will be the focus of my next book, "Jack Kirby's History of The Future"). With Blue Bolt, Kirby has to use the character he is given, but he removes all traces of elitism.

In issue #2, Bertoff is handsome, in his own way. Bertoff is in charge, but treats Blue Bolt as an equal. Blue Bolt depends on ordinary soldiers and treats them with respect. There is no elitism in a Kirby story.

Test 8. Sexism

In Blue Bolt #1, The Green Goddess is glamorous and shows a lot of flesh. She acts like finding a handsome man is her highest priority. Kirby has to keep the character he is given, but in issue #2, her brain is her greatest feature. She is clever, able to walk around her enemy's quarters without being detected. She is educated, understanding the technology she uses. She is a fine leader, assessing her engineers and troops. She is just as capable as Blue Bolt or Bertoff. And in the end her black magic is removed, so Kirby can treat her like a normal intelligent human in future, not as some exotic fantasy.²⁵⁴ Lack of sexism is a hallmark of Kirby's writing.

Test 9. Escapism

Blue Bolt #1, like Flash Gordon, is pure escapism. The story is about leaving the normal world for a place where men are handsome and women are sexy, where you could shoot bad guys and fight dragons and problems are easily solved.

²⁵⁴ She claims to regain her power in #3, but this appears to be a political move to prevent her generals from rebelling.

Issue #2 changes that. From the more realistic science, to the need for other people, the story becomes more like the real world. In later issues, Kirby goes even further. Issue #7 features Hitler and Mussolini. By issue #9, Blue Bolt is based in New York, fighting gangsters. Kirby fought real world evils, he did not try to escape from them.

Test 10: it rewards study:

Issue #1 does not stand up to scrutiny. But with #2, the closer you look, the better it is. To illustrate, let's examine two apparent problems in #2, and see if they weaken or strengthen the story.

First, on page 9, the line *"Lucky they didn't find my lightning gun!"* This might look like bad writing: what kind of jailer does not search Blue Bolt for his famous weapon? But look closer. In #1, Simon establishes that the Green Goddess likes our hero. Kirby is stuck with that, so he uses it. On page 8 Blue Bolt knows he is being set up to be captured: *"You have orders to take me alive, right? I thought so."* He expects this. Why? Because on page 3, Bolt learns that the enemy has been in his bedchamber yet did not harm him. Bertoff then says, *"We must be on our guard"*. Bertoff is the science guy, so will naturally find a way to hide a weapon for when Bolt is captured.

Here is another apparent problem: on page 8, where does the "gaping crevice" come from? Also, it might be unclear who is shooting whom. But if we follow the story closely, it all makes sense. The blue side's cycotron and the green side's magnetic tower are both intended to be surprises. They both hide in crevices in the mountainous countryside. The pit is defensive, in front of the enemy city. Bolt's planes have to fly over it to reach the city, directly over the magnetic pulses that both deflect the particle beam and harm any electronics. It is a brilliant strategy, and reveals Kirby's genius. Once assailed, all Blue Bolt can do is tell Bertoff to shut down the cycotron, and all the Sorceress can do is enjoy her triumph. If we pay attention, then we see that a big, realistic story of military hardware and strategy is compressed into a very few pages.

In summary, Blue Bolt #1 and #2 reveal ten ways to identify a Jack Kirby story. If a story has some connection to Kirby, and it ticks most or all of these boxes, then it's a Kirby story. Regardless of what official credits might say.

Conclusion

In this book I reverse engineered around forty Kirby stories. The case of Dr Doom proves that this method works. I may have gone too far in some cases, but other cases I did not go far enough: you be the judge.

The field of Kirby studies is in its infancy: there is so much work still to be done. For example, the last theory I worked on concerned professor Xavier's wheelchair. Then just as I was about to publish the book, I happened to see an unpublished cover for the Young Allies back in 1941. That led me to explore the topic of how many characters were in each of Kirby's many teams, and which characters were added during editing. That made me look again at Cyclops, and pretty soon the whole X-Men chapter needed a rewrite. I could keep changing this book forever! But then it would never be published. This book has its faults, but there are so many lost Kirby stories, there is so much work to be done. We have to start somewhere.

Finally, a plug. This book began as an appendix for my other book, "Jack Kirby's History of the Future". You ain't seen nothin' yet!

Thanks for reading.

Kirby Bibliography

Some of Kirby's major works. Based on Ray Owens' list: marvelessentials.com/resources/kirby_chronology1.html

1937

Facts you never knew

1938

The Count of Monte Cristo

The Diary of Dr. Hayward

Wilton of the West

Lightnin' & The Lone Rider

1940

The Solar Legion

Blue Bolt

The Vision

The Black Owl

1941

Captain America

(includes Tuk, and Hurricane, son of Thor)

1942

Sandman

The Newsboy Legion

The Boy Commandos

1946

Stuntman

Boy Explorers

1947

Headline

Real Clue Crime

Justice Traps the Guilty

Black Cat

Young Romance

1949

Young Love

1950

Boys' Ranch

The Frog Prince (screenplay, actual date unknown)

1952

Strange World of Your Dreams

Young Brides

1953

Captain 3-D

1954

Fighting American

Bulls-Eye

In Love

Police Trap

Foxhole

1955

Western Tales

1956

Black Cat Mystic

Yellow Claw

1957

Challengers of the Unknown (begun in Showcase)

House of Secrets

Tales of the Unexpected

My Greatest Adventure

Alarming Tales

1958

Race for the Moon

House of Mystery

Gunsmoke Western

Sky Masters (newspaper strip about the space race)

1959

Tales to Astonish

Strange Tales

Journey into Mystery (later renamed Thor)

Tales of Suspense

Double Life of Private Strong (aka The Shield)

Two-Gun Kid

Adventures of the Fly

Battle

Love Romances

Kid Colt Outlaw

1960

Rawhide Kid

1961

Amazing Adventures

Classics Illustrated

Fantastic Four

1962

Teen-Age Romance

Incredible Hulk

1963

Amazing Spider-Man

Sergeant Fury

X-Men

Avengers

1970

Chamber of Darkness

Jimmy Olsen

1971

Forever People

New Gods

Mister Miracle

In the Days of the Mob

Spirit World

1972

The Demon

Kamandi

1974

Our Fighting Forces

OMAC

1975

Atlas the Great

1976

2001: A Space Odyssey

The Eternals

1977

Black Panther

1978

Devil Dinosaur

Machine Man

1979

The Horde (unpublished)

1981

Captain Victory

1983

Silver Star

1993

The Secret City

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Thanks to Michael Hill for "According to Jack Kirby".

lulu.com/en/us/shop/michael-hill/according-to-jack-kirby/paperback/product-v7dnyy.html

Michael shows how Kirby created his 1960s work, and everything is fully referenced. So at last we can move past claims of 1960s authorship, and focus on what matters: the stories.

Oh, and Michael also generously proof-read this book.

Thanks to Abraham Riesman for "True Believer". The first book to show a mainstream audience that Kirby was a writer, not just an artist.

Thanks to ComicBookPlus.com for hosting some of Kirby's best work, legally, and for free.

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