

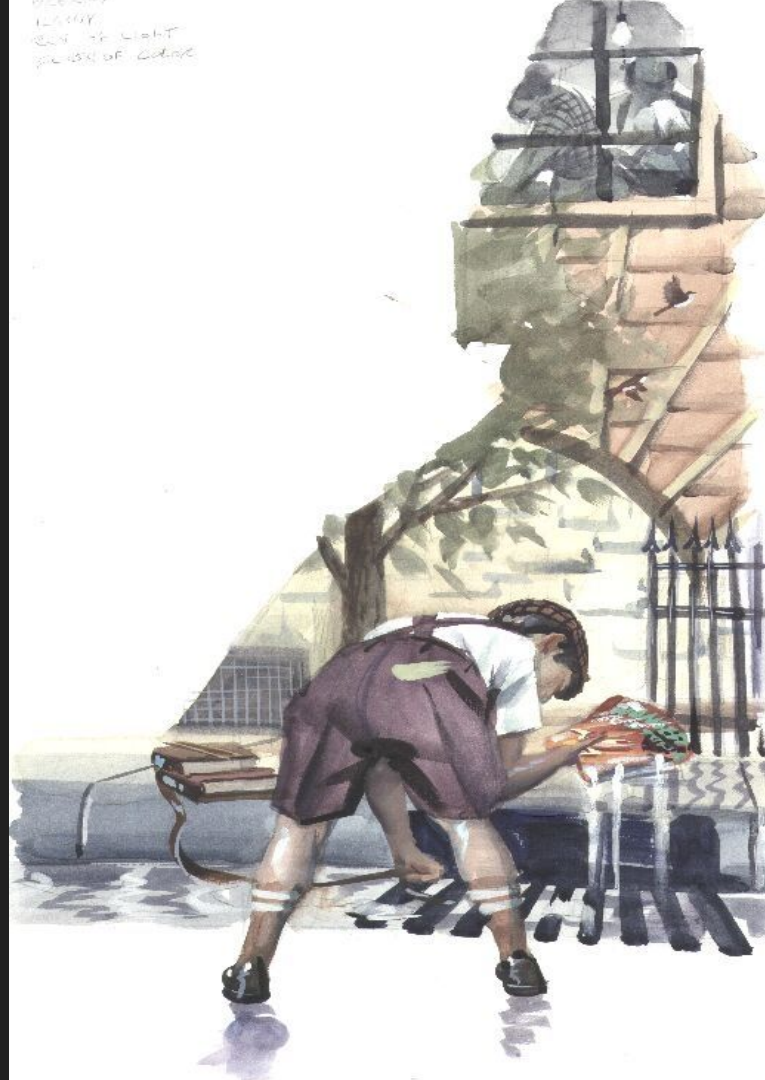
THE
SCIENCE FICTION
WORK OF
JACK KIRBY

Adam McGovern with Randolph Hoppe
Winter Con
3 December 2016
Queens, NYC

From the Gutter...

Jack Kirby famously had the course of his career set when a discarded science-fiction pulp — *Wonder Stories* — floated past him in a tenement gutter. This opened up both his future, and a lot of the world's.

Painting by Steve Rude
Streetwise (Alternate), TwoMorrows Publishing, 2000

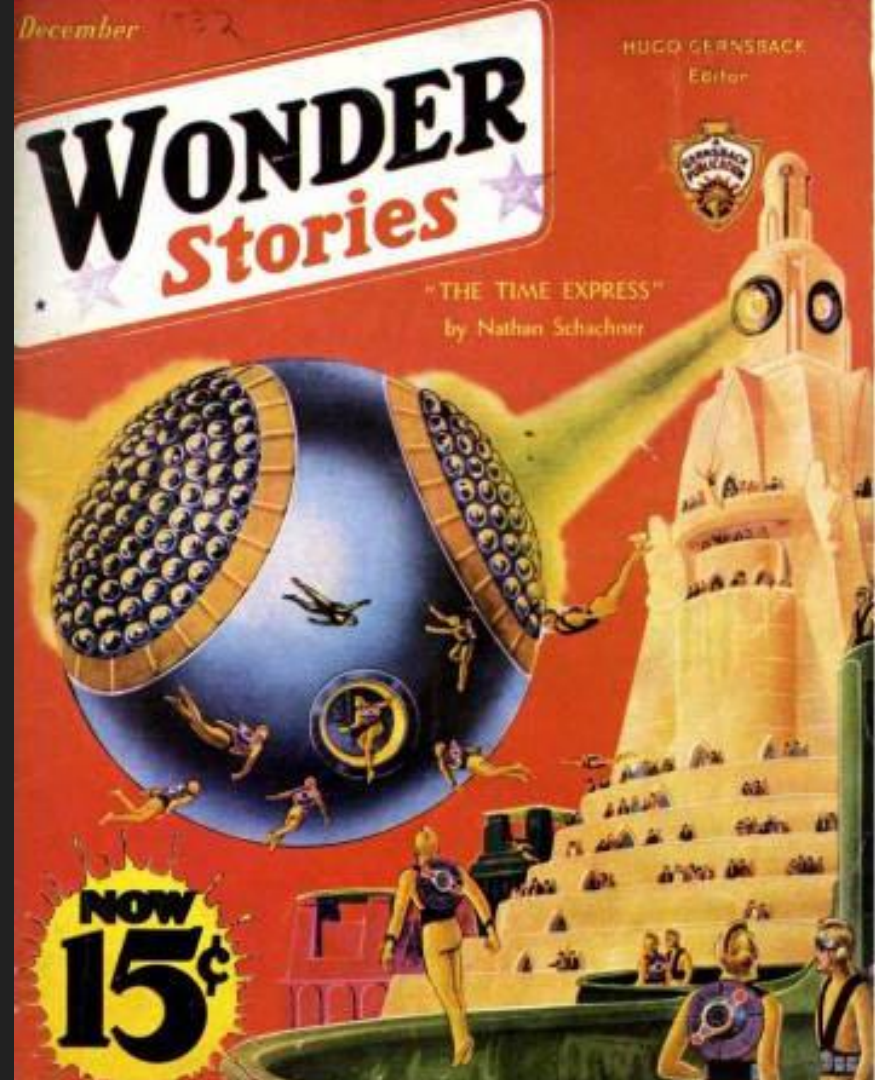


Painting by Steve Rude
Streetwise, TwoMorrows Publishing, 2000



...to the Cosmos!

Painting by Frank Paul
Wonder Stories, December 1932



Decades later, Kirby would speak of sensing the cosmos inside of him — for those of us who needed introducing, he would portray it for us in realms of the Marvel and DC universes that became signature territories in both those companies' mythos.



Detail from "Super War!"
by Kirby, Colletta, Costanza, Serpe(?)
Forever People 2, DC Comics, May 1971.

Spread from "...And One
Shall Save Him!"
by Kirby, Lee, Sinnott,
Rosen, Goldberg(?)
Fantastic Four 62,
Marvel Comics, May 1967.



But even in the 1930s, he was reading as much science as science-fiction — as early as the underground hidden-society adventure *Blue Bolt* he and partner Joe Simon were imagining alternate dimensions, when physical space-travel was still a dawning fantasy for many.

Page 5 from "Blue Bolt"
by Kirby, Simon, Avison, Gabriele, Ferguson, ?
Blue Bolt 5, Novelty Press, October 1940



Science was the source of many of Kirby's most iconic heroes' powers — perhaps most famously Captain America, accepting a super-serum that was like a magic potion for an era where the gods couldn't necessarily be relied on. This “rational magic” would stay with Kirby's creations for the rest of his career.



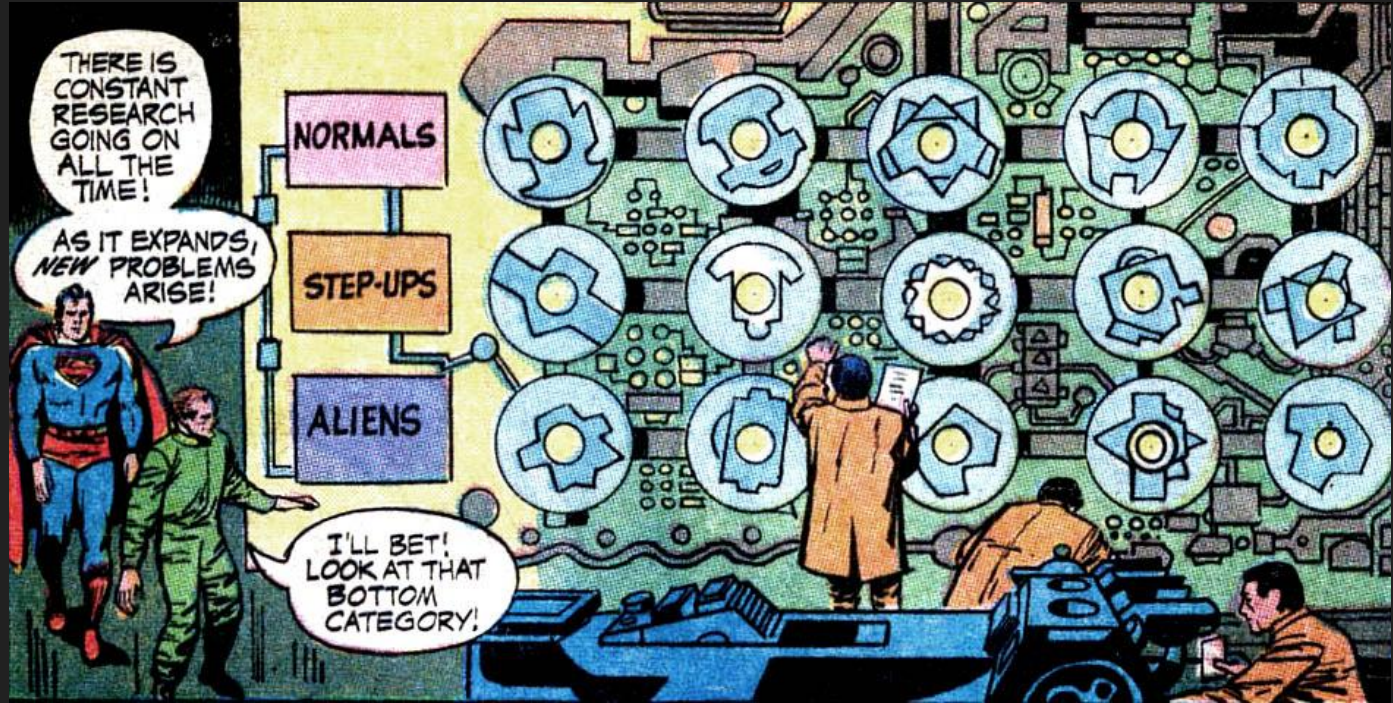
Detail from “Case No. 1 - Meet Captain America”
by Kirby, Simon, Liederman, ?
Captain America Comics 1, Timely Comics, March 1941

So too would the idea of being transformed by formulas rather than faith. The Inhumans, bred to be warriors for the galactic Kree Empire but resisting in a Himalayan stronghold instead, were genetically enhanced by a chemical vapor called the Terrigen Mists.

Page 5 from
"The Origin Of The Incomparable Inhumans!"
by Kirby, Lee, Sinnott, Simek, Goldberg?
The Mighty Thor 146, Marvel Comics Group, Nov. 1966



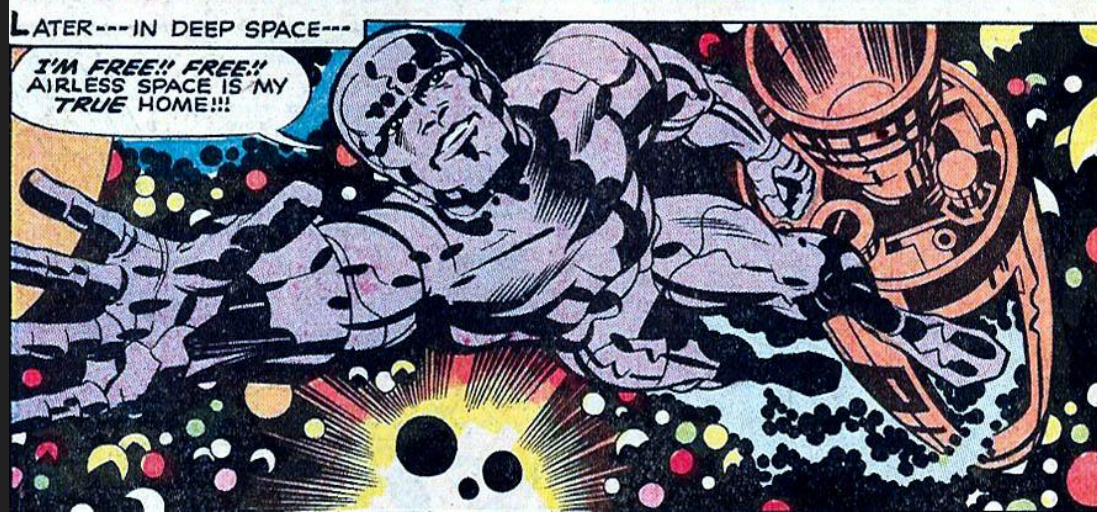
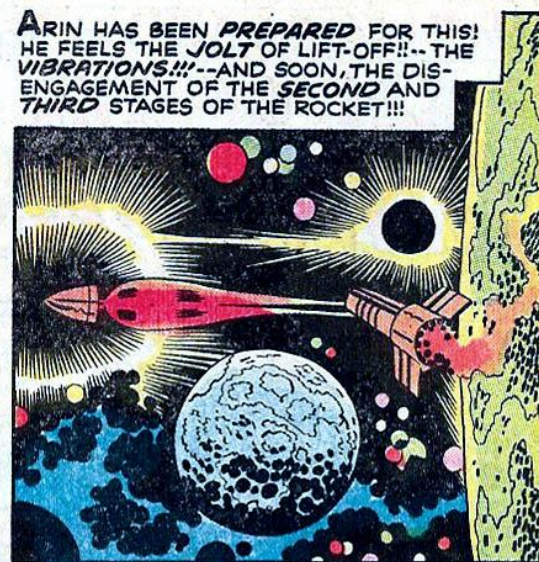
The “DNA Project” rearranged the codes of biology to create new variants of humanity that could survive different environments and solve problems in new ways.



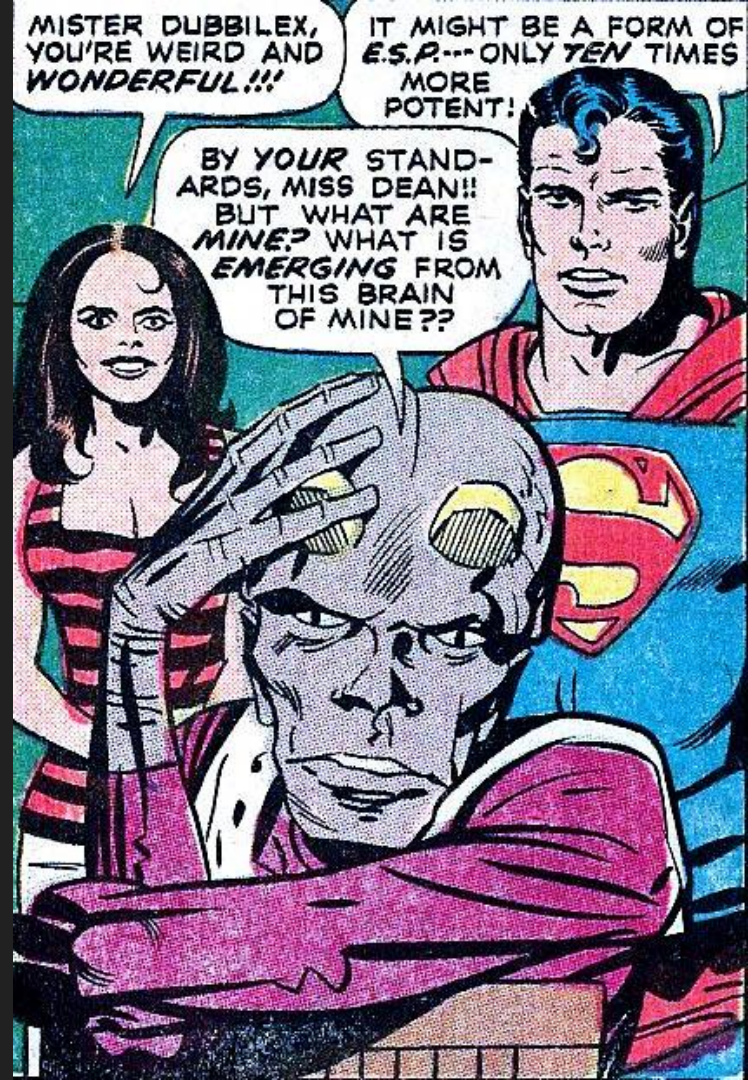
Detail from page 5 of “The Saga of the DNAliens”
by Kirby, Colletta, Costanza, Serpe?
Superman’s Pal, Jimmy Olsen 136, DC Comics, March 1971

The Inhumans were from Marvel Comics in the 1960s, and the “DNAliens” were from DC Comics in the '70s; in an era that called for expanded acceptance of the whole human family, Kirby was widening the definition even more inclusively.

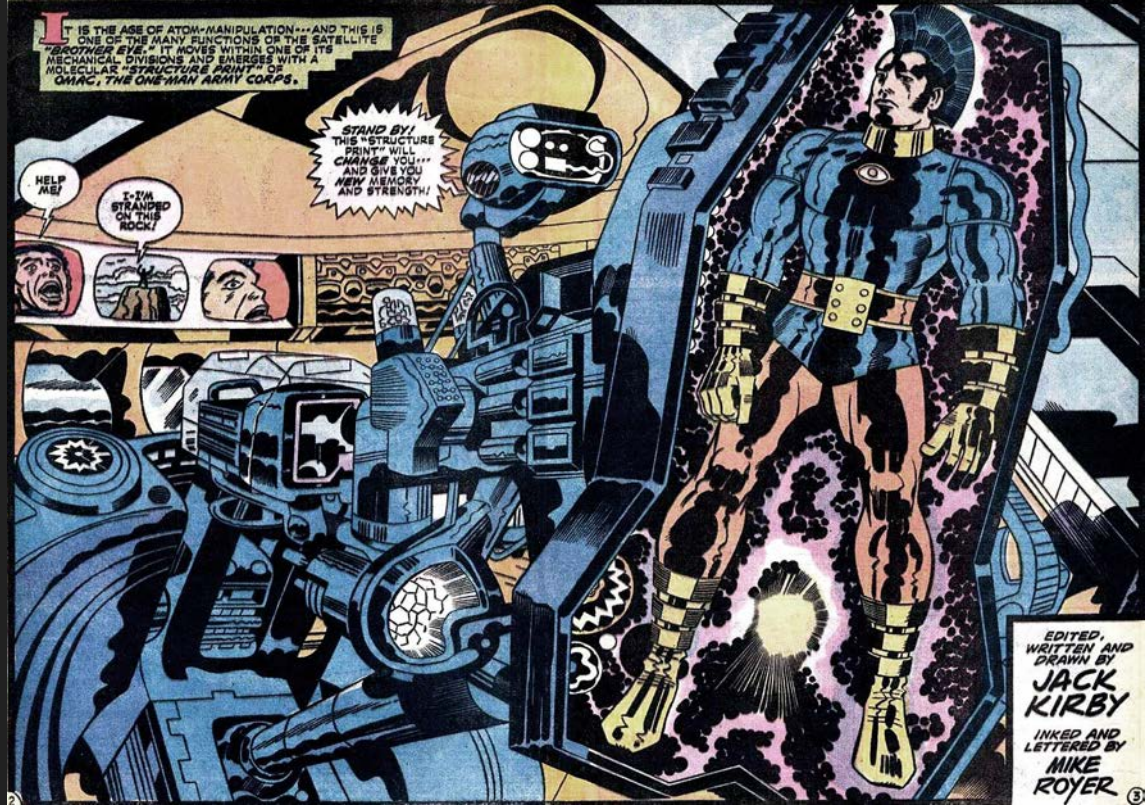
Detail from “Arin - The Armored Man!!!”
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen 146,
DC Comics, Feb. 1972



Detail from "Homo-Disastrous!"
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Superman's Pal, Jimmy Olsen 146, DC Comics, Feb. 1972



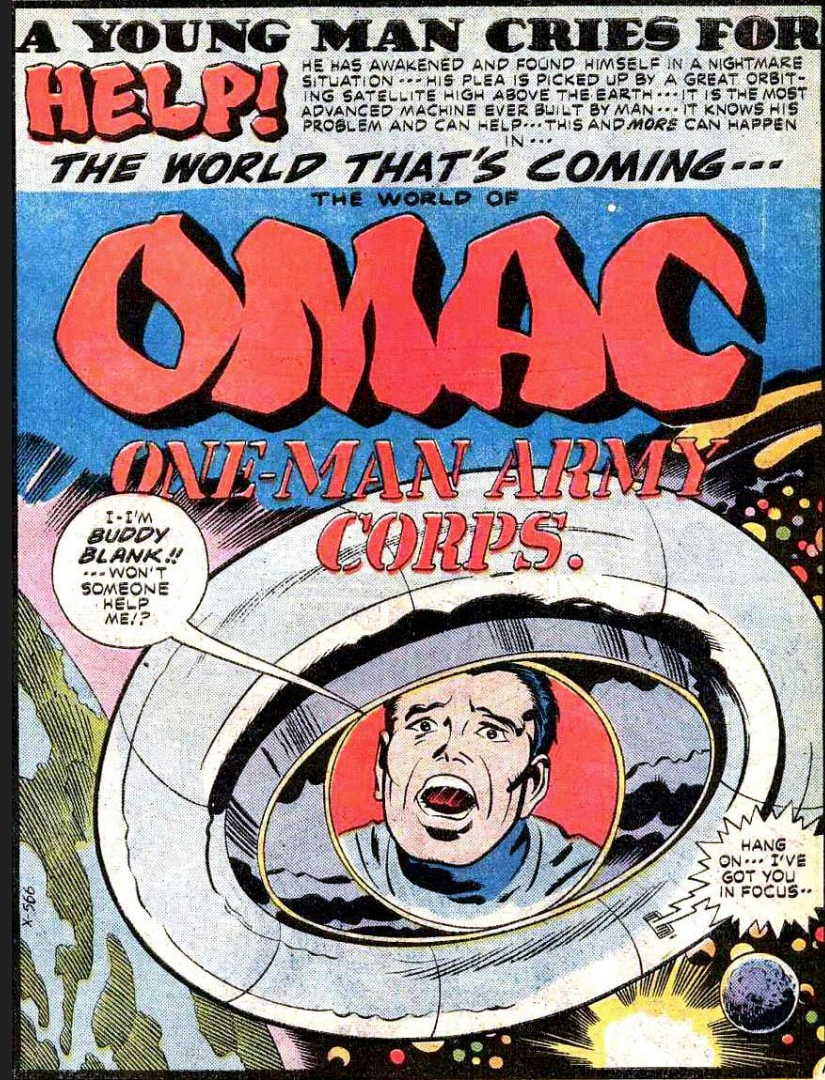
His later “super soldier,” OMAC, was symbiotic with science, being sent physical enhancements beamed from a sentient satellite named Brother Eye. Our current era, in which we accessorize our human form with earbuds and VR glasses and debate whether prosthetics give an athletic advantage, seems very close to Kirby’s predictions.



Detail from “Human Genius vs. Thinking Machine”
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
O.M.A.C. 8, DC Comics, Nov.-Dec. 1975

Brother Eye's look, part mystic camera-lens and part metallic Aztec calendar, was a signature case of Kirby connecting objects of worship and icons of mechanical wonder.

Detail from "Human Genius vs. Thinking Machine"
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
O.M.A.C. 8, DC Comics, Nov.-Dec. 1975



Kirby knew that we turn all that we feel defines us into myth, hence the technology-based deities of The Fourth World — the type of supernatural spirits who reassert themselves once we start revering modems rather than totems.

Metron mixed-media presentation by Kirby, 1969

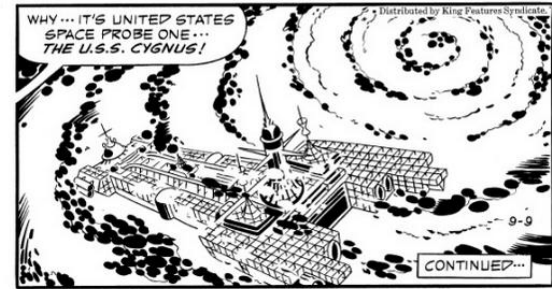
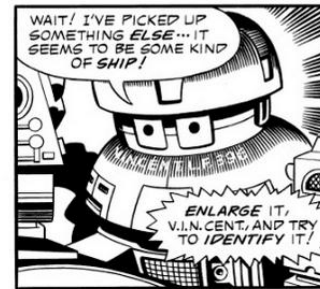


Kirby himself could escape to another world of greater legitimacy in the prized field of newspaper comic-strips; some of his greatest respect and financial security came from landing the *Sky Masters* gig in the 1950s...

Sky Masters of the Space Force 1 October 1958 strip
by Kirby, Wood, Wood, Wood, Letterese

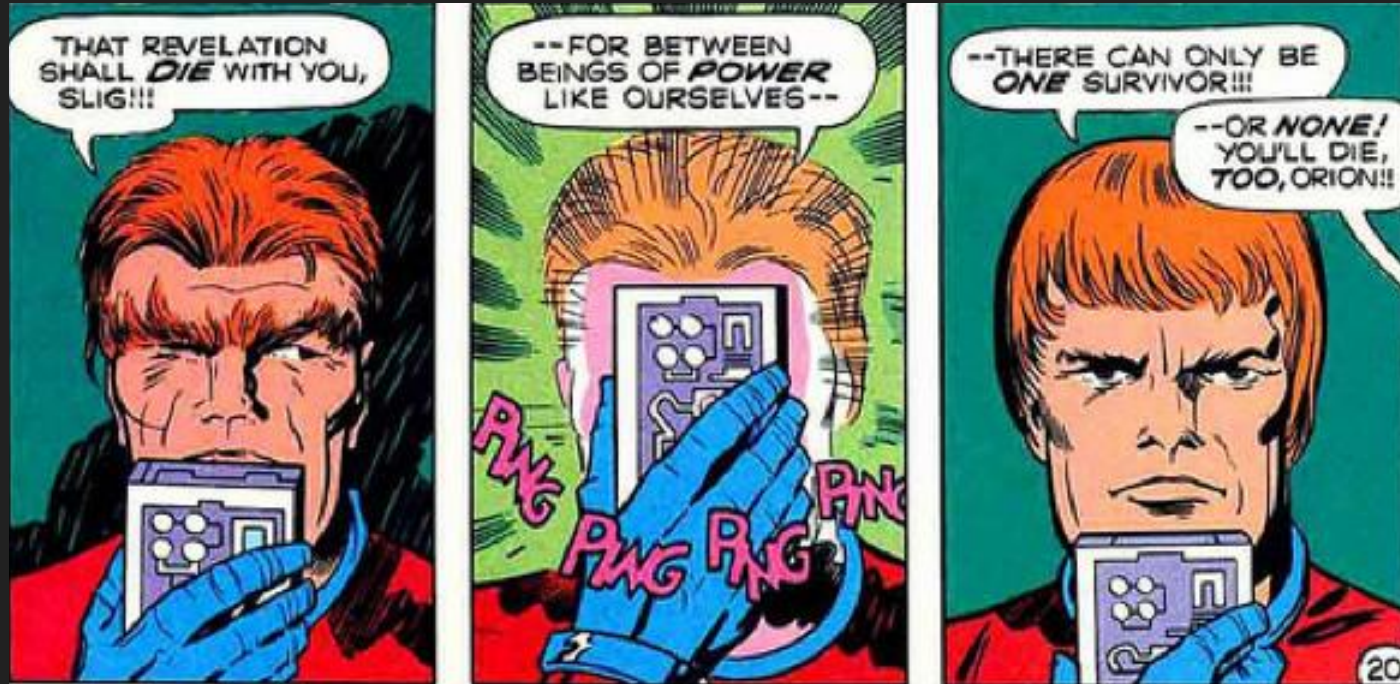


...and the Black Hole movie adaptation for Disney in the 1970s.



Black Hole 9 September 1979 strip
by Fallberg, Kirby, Royer

Kirby's anticipation of modern technology — the mystic, iPhone-like “mother box” to name just one — was prescient.



Detail from “Spawn”
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe(?)
The New Gods 5, DC Comics, October 1971

His own unprecedented brand of “Kirbytech” was like a merging of circuitry, hardware, circulatory systems and pre-Colombian carvings — the god that IS the machine.

“Dream Machine” painting by Kirby, 1975



“I tried to give technology the touch of legend”

— Jack Kirby, 1992

“Dream Machine” painting by Kirby, 1975



An anticipation of the singularity
that neither we now, nor he then,
it seems, really feared.

Page 1 from "Battle On A Very Busy Street"
by Kirby, Royer, Goldberg
Machine Man 4, Marvel Comics, July 1978

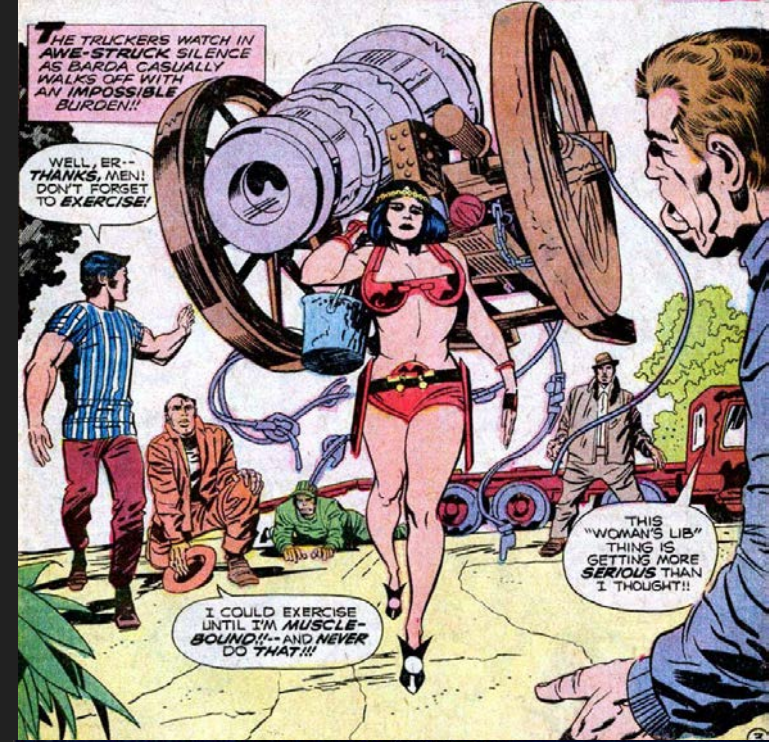


Every evolutionary stage in science-fiction was paralleled by Kirby's pop-cultural processing — including the giant-monster B-movies with which our Cold War anxieties about apocalypse and mutations took mountainous form.

Page 1 from "I Created... Sporr!"
by Kirby, Ayers, Lee, Lieber, Simek, Goldberg
Tales Of Suspense 11, Marvel Comics, September 1960



Kirby welcomed the future as much as warned of it. Some of the earliest self-reliant warrior women in comics came from Kirby's mind, though the type is more common now (and female comic creators are just beginning to mend these characters' contradictions...)



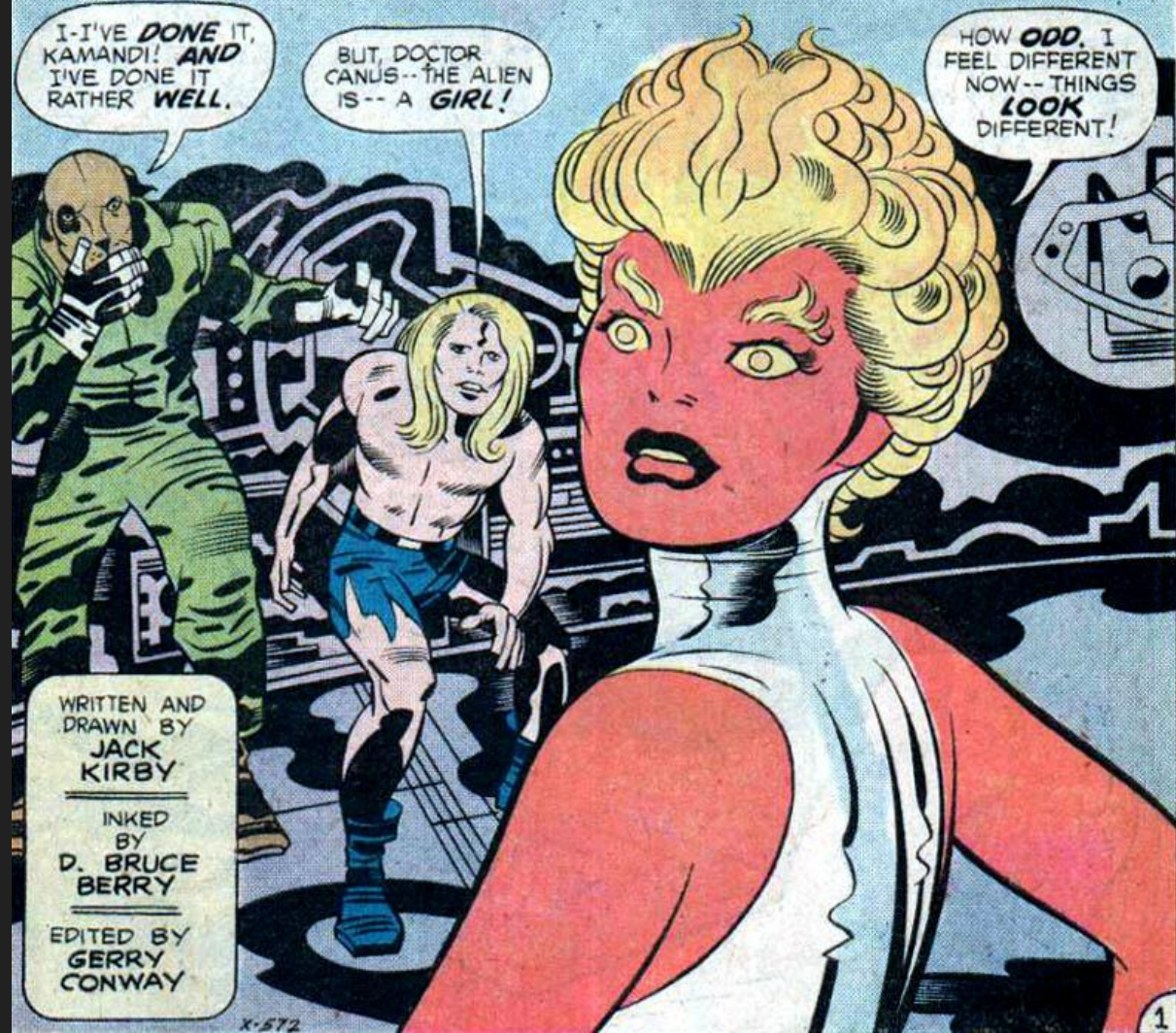
Details from "Murder Machine!"
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Mister Miracle 5, DC Comics, Nov.-Dec. 1971

And one of these characters, the extraterrestrial Pyra, was first an energy being who could morph identity, transcending gender altogether in a way that is very resonant with LGBTQ affirmation today.



Detail from "Pretty Pyra"
by Kirby, Berry, Serpe?

Kamandi 34, DC Comics, October 1975



WRITTEN AND
DRAWN BY
**JACK
KIRBY**

INKED
BY
**D. BRUCE
BERRY**

EDITED BY
**GERRY
CONWAY**

X-572

Detail from "Pretty Pyra"
by Kirby, Berry, Serpe?
Kamandi 34, DC Comics, October 1975

Kirby had always drawn on movies for inspiration, and foresaw the era of blockbusters wrought wondrously by computers that we enjoy today. His adaptation of Kubrick's *2001* remains a dazzling, controversial immersion in his loves of cinema and science-fiction.

Page 7 from "The New Seed!"
by Kirby, Royer, Roussos
2001: A Space Odyssey 7, Marvel Comics, June 1977



THERE ARE ALSO PLACES WHERE THE TECHNOLOGY REIGNS SUPREME! WORLD LINKED WITH WORLD BY MECHANISMS OF STAGGERING ACCOMPLISHMENTS!! THE NEW SEED LOOKS UPON CIVILIZATIONS THAT MARK THE STAR SYSTEMS WHICH SPAWNED THEM...

The love-affair was two-way — if not always spoken. Darth Vader is a more faithful adaptation of Doctor Doom than any literal ones that have ever made it to the screen...



Doctor Doom poster by Kirby
Marvelmania, 1970



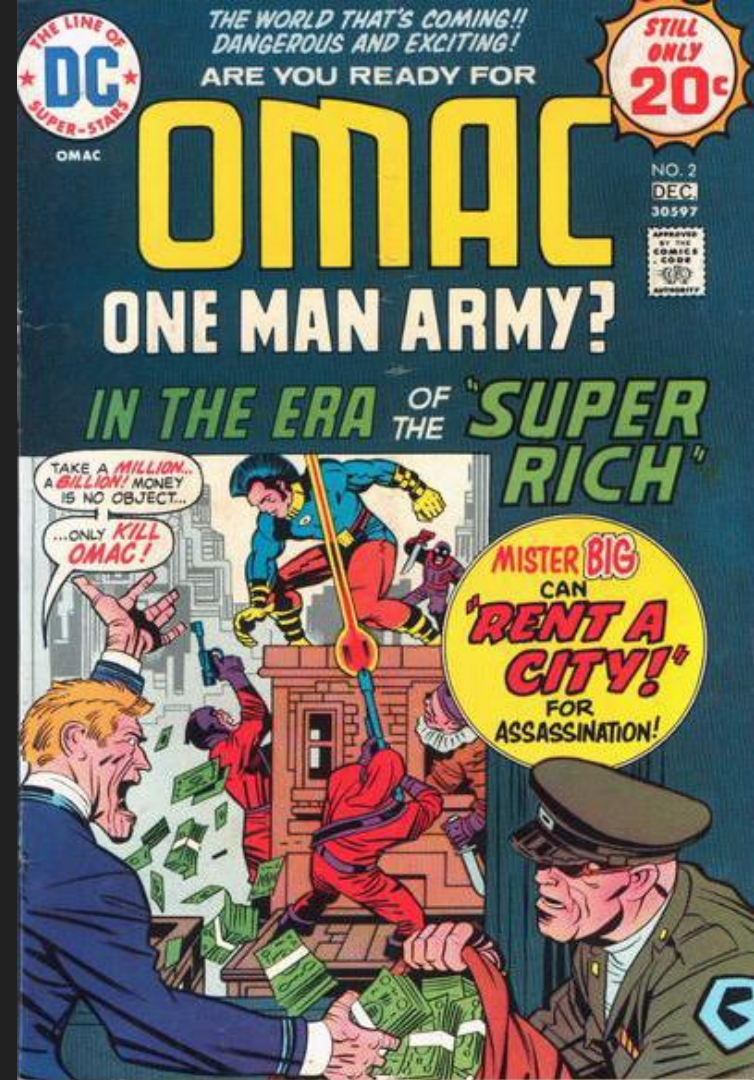
...and the mystic, technological mix of *Star Wars* in general — and especially its secret-father/son dynamic (Darth and Luke, Darkseid and Orion); even the phonetic and thematic similarities between Kirby's Source and Lucas' Force — is a clear descendant of Kirby's Fourth World (with liberal amounts of *Flash Gordon*, *Foundation* and *Dune*, among others, as well).



Darkseid/Vader comparison from
Russell Payne's 24 April 2014 blog article
"Was Star Wars based on Jack Kirby's Fourth World?"

Kirby could foresee both cultural landmarks and social phenomena — here, where a corrupt tycoon “rents a city” for one night to provide revelry for the elite (and kill the comic’s hero), we see a premonition of both *The Purge* movies, and the real-life ascent of a violence-inciting billionaire to the Presidency in 2016.

Cover
by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
O.M.A.C. 2, DC Comics, Nov.-Dec. 1974



DISAPPOINTED GUESTS
OF *MISTER BIG'S*
PRIVATE PARTY -- !
YOU GOT HERE
BEFORE WE DID---

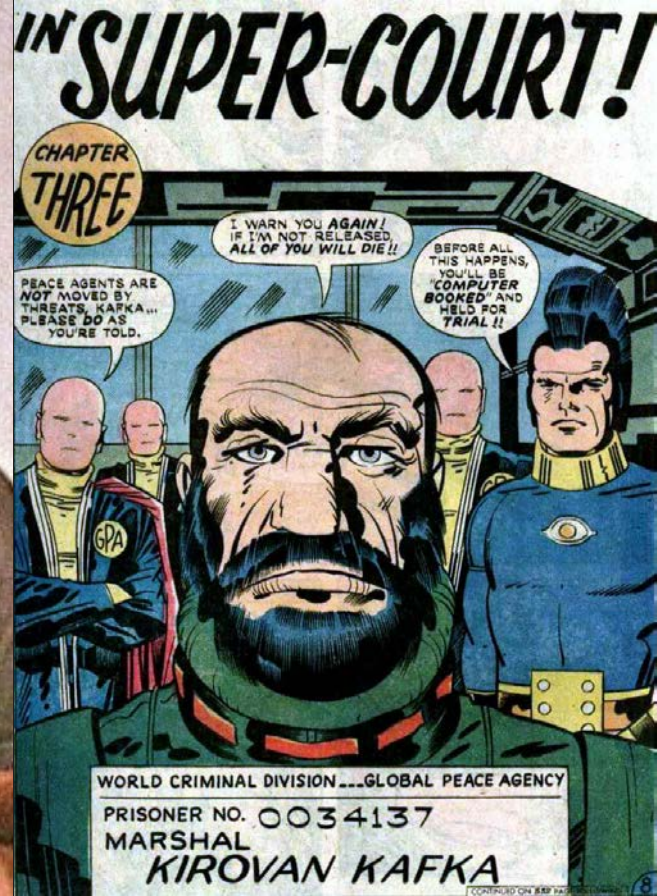
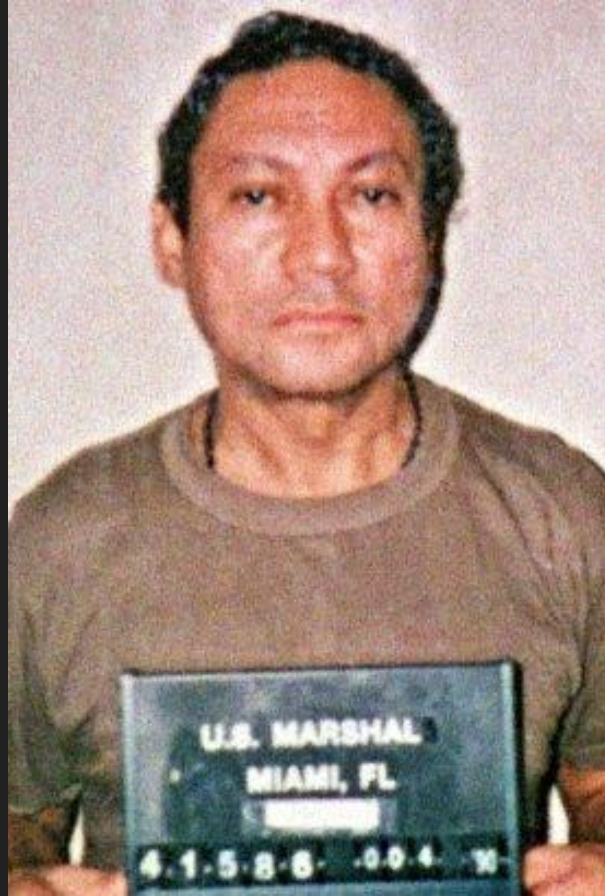
YES, BUT
I RAN INTO
--*DIFFICULTY!*

WE CAN *FIX*
THAT. HOP IN.
WE'LL TAKE YOU
INTO THE CITY!

Detail from "Blood-Brother Eye"
by Kirby, Berry, Royer, Serpe?
O.M.A.C. 2, DC Comics, Nov.-Dec. 1974



Science-fiction is not just about what wild ideas you can open your mind to, but the act (and accuracy) of prediction itself. Kirby foresaw the late-20th/early-21st century personalization of war...



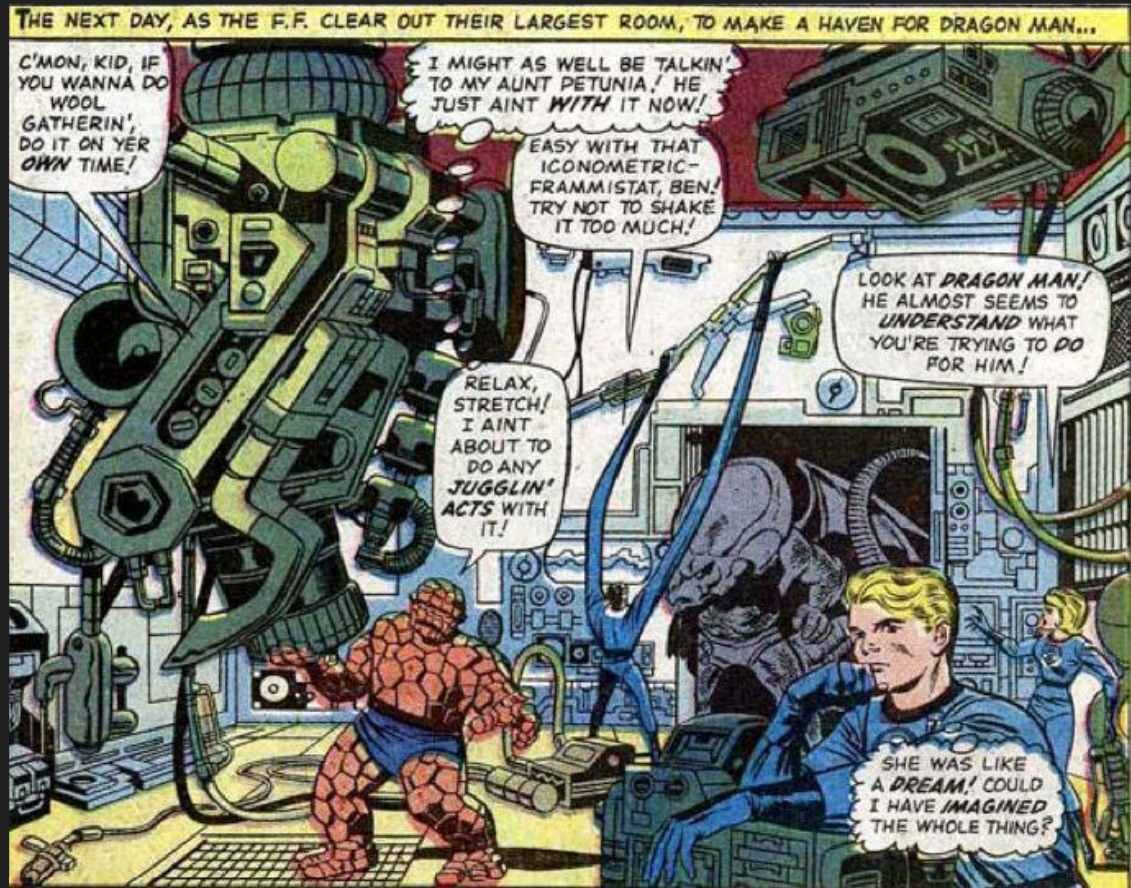
US Marshal's photo of Manuel Noriega
Detail from "The Busting Of A Conqueror!"
By Kirby, Berry, Serpe?
O.M.A.C. 4, DC Comics, Mar.-Apr. 1975



...and in his “spare time” made what could later have been masterworks of Photoshop in the low tech of pasted paper collage.

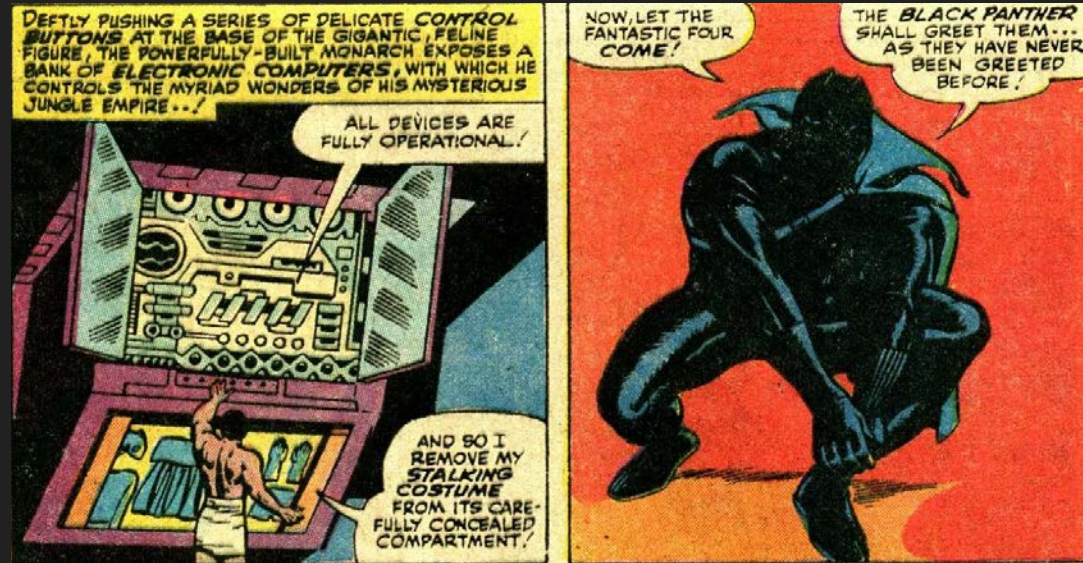
Collage by Kirby, 1969

William Gibson said that the future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed. Kirby, especially in his years with Stan Lee, was depicting an everyday of 25 years from now, with super-tech only in the hands of people like Reed Richards and Charles Xavier — a parallel to the wonders that NASA was bringing to our computing systems and breakfast tables.



Page 9 detail from "Among Us Hide... The Inhumans"
by Kirby, Lee, Sinnott, Simek, ?
Fantastic Four 45, Marvel Comics, December 1965

The future also wasn't evenly distributed across the Marvel Universe's Earth. In a prescient flip of stereotype, the origin-point of humanity, Africa, held the most advanced society on the planet; The Black Panther upheld ancient rituals while presiding over a technological wonderland.



Page 5 detail from "The Black Panther!"
by Kirby, Lee, Sinnott, Rosen, ?
Fantastic Four 52, Marvel Comics, July 1966

Kirby was foreseeing the era of Afrofuturism, and his concepts have been carried forth by scholars like John Jennings and Stacey Robinson with their ongoing visual remix project, Black Kirby, and the comics and other narratives it spins off.

Cover
by Black Kirby (John Jennings and Stacey Robinson,
with co-writer Damian Duffy)
Kid Code, Rosarium Publishing, December 2014



By Black Kirby (John Jennings and Stacey Robinson), 2012



I SAY THEE
VANGLOIOUS!

I HATH DECREED
"FOR WHOSEVER
DOETH SPIT WORTHILY
'PON THIS MIC
SHALL I POSSESS
GREAT POWER"

THOU HAST
FARED WELL
IN THY BATTLE
'GAINST
THE WACK MC!

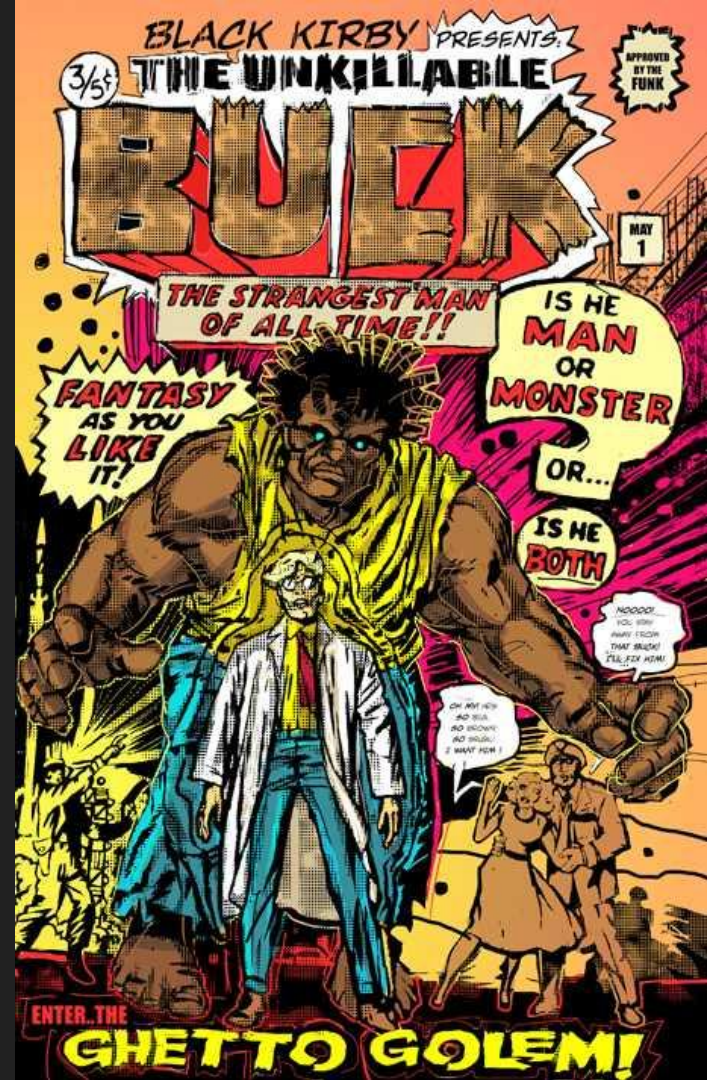
SO
KNOW YE
THIS,
MOST
NOBLE
SON...

THOU SHALT
POSSESS THE
COSMIC FUNK
POWER
OF THE...

**SOUL
SONIC
FORCE!!**

BLACK
KIRBY

By Black Kirby (John Jennings and Stacey Robinson), 2012



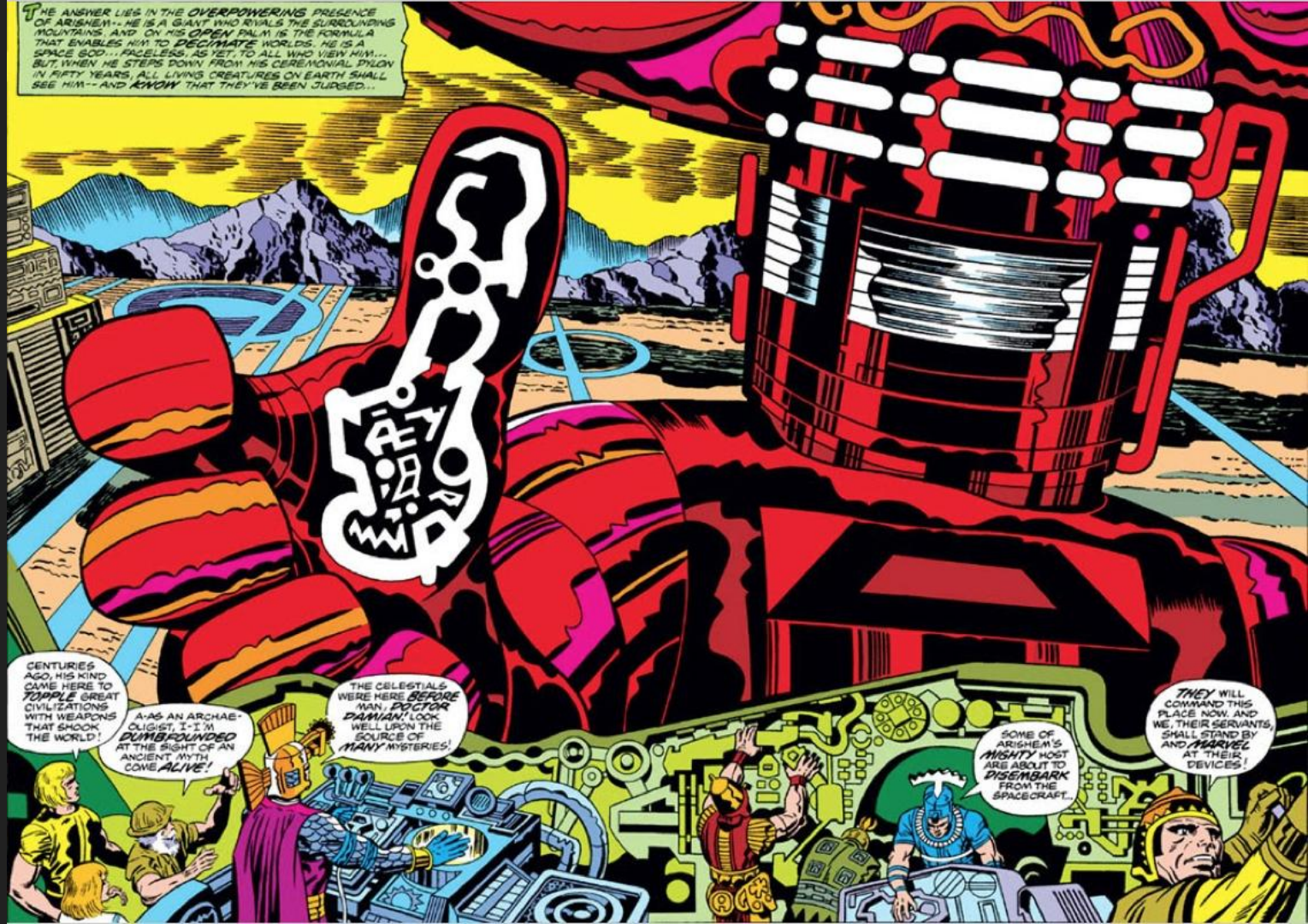
Kirby would return to the idea of a monolithic technology replacing our concept of benevolent gods time and again, from the world-devouring Galactus...

Page 15 from "When Calls Galactus"
by Kirby, Lee, Sinnott, Simek, ?
Fantastic Four 74, Marvel Comics, May 1968



...to the
planet-judging
Celestials.

Spread from "The Devil
In New York!"
by Kirby, Verpoorten,
Costanza, Wein
The Eternals 3,
Marvel Comics,
September 1976



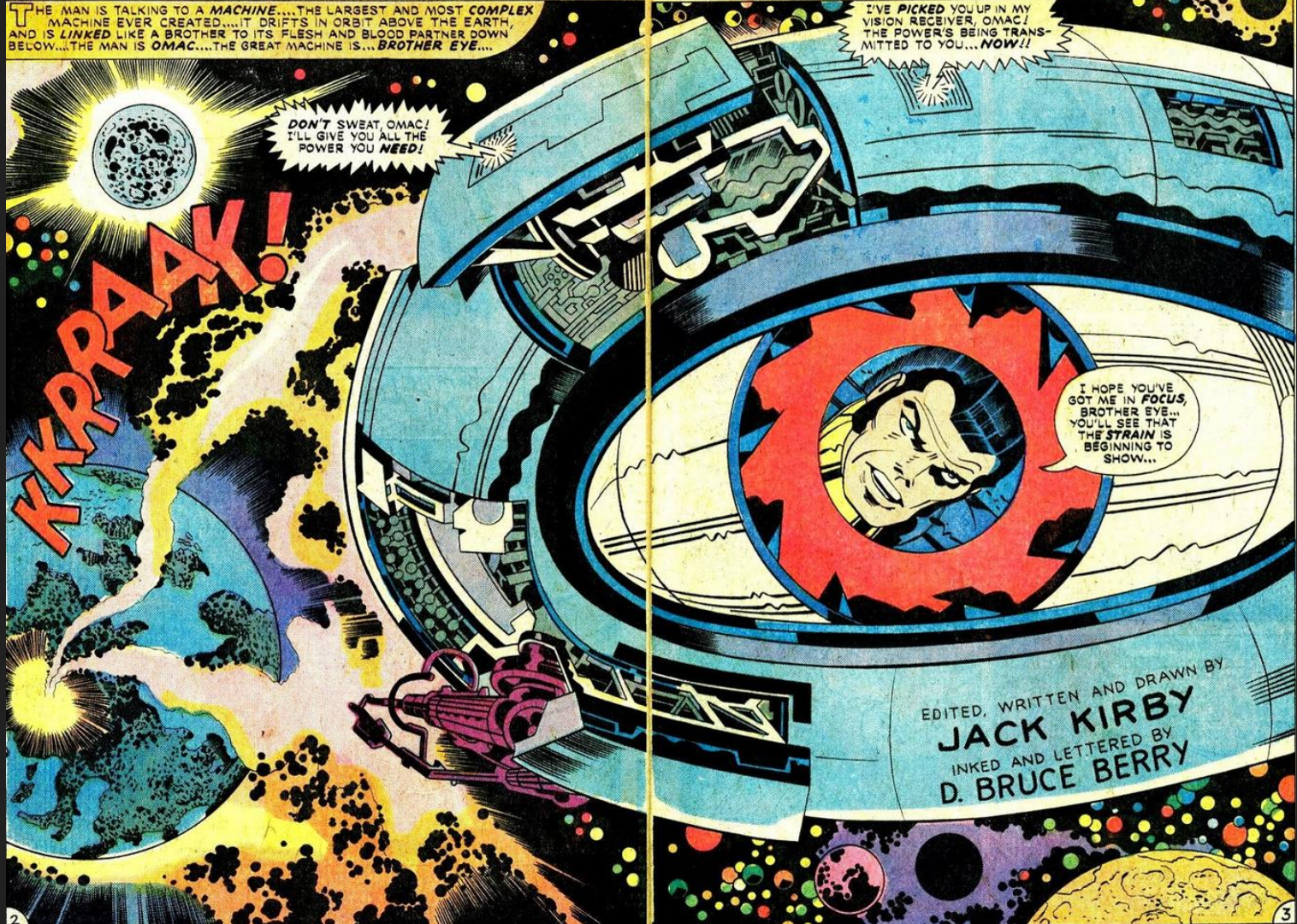
Late in life he
would revel in
space-opera
with *Captain
Victory*...

Spread from
"Gangs Of Space"
by Kirby, Thibodeaux,
Luth, Jensen
*Captain Victory And The
Galactic Rangers* 13,
Pacific Comics,
January 1984

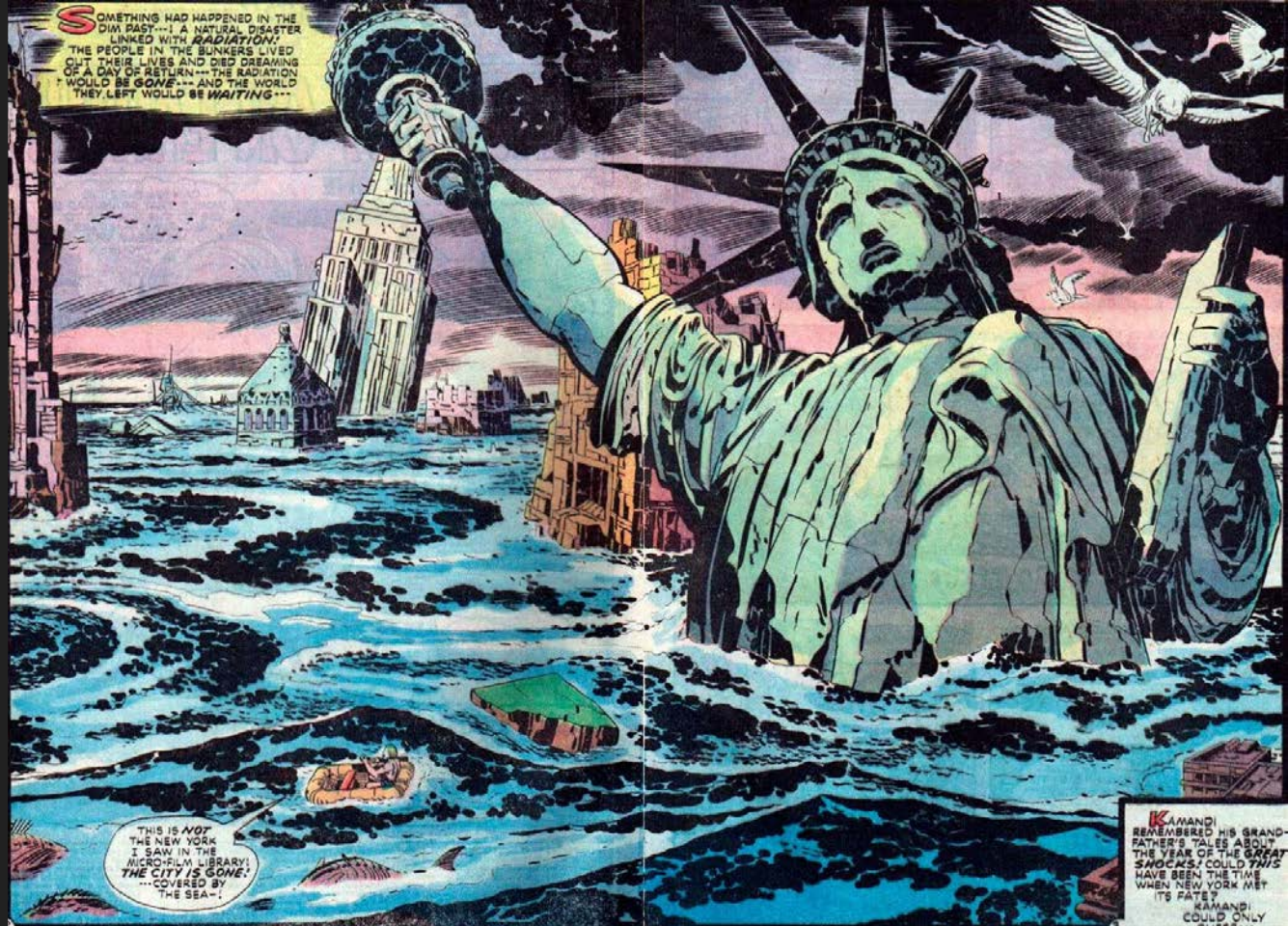


...and, a bit earlier, had brought the future to Earth in his dystopian cyber-soldier saga OMAC, *One-Man Army Corps*.

Spread from
"The Busting Of A
Conqueror!"
by Kirby, Berry, ?
OMAC 4, DC Comics,
January 1975



Kirby could envision the collapse of technology as well as its conquest — not rampant automation but nature run amok was the subject of his most commercially successful comic of the '70s, *Kamandi*, *The Last Boy on Earth*.



Spread by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Kamandi 1, DC Comics, Oct.-Nov. 1972

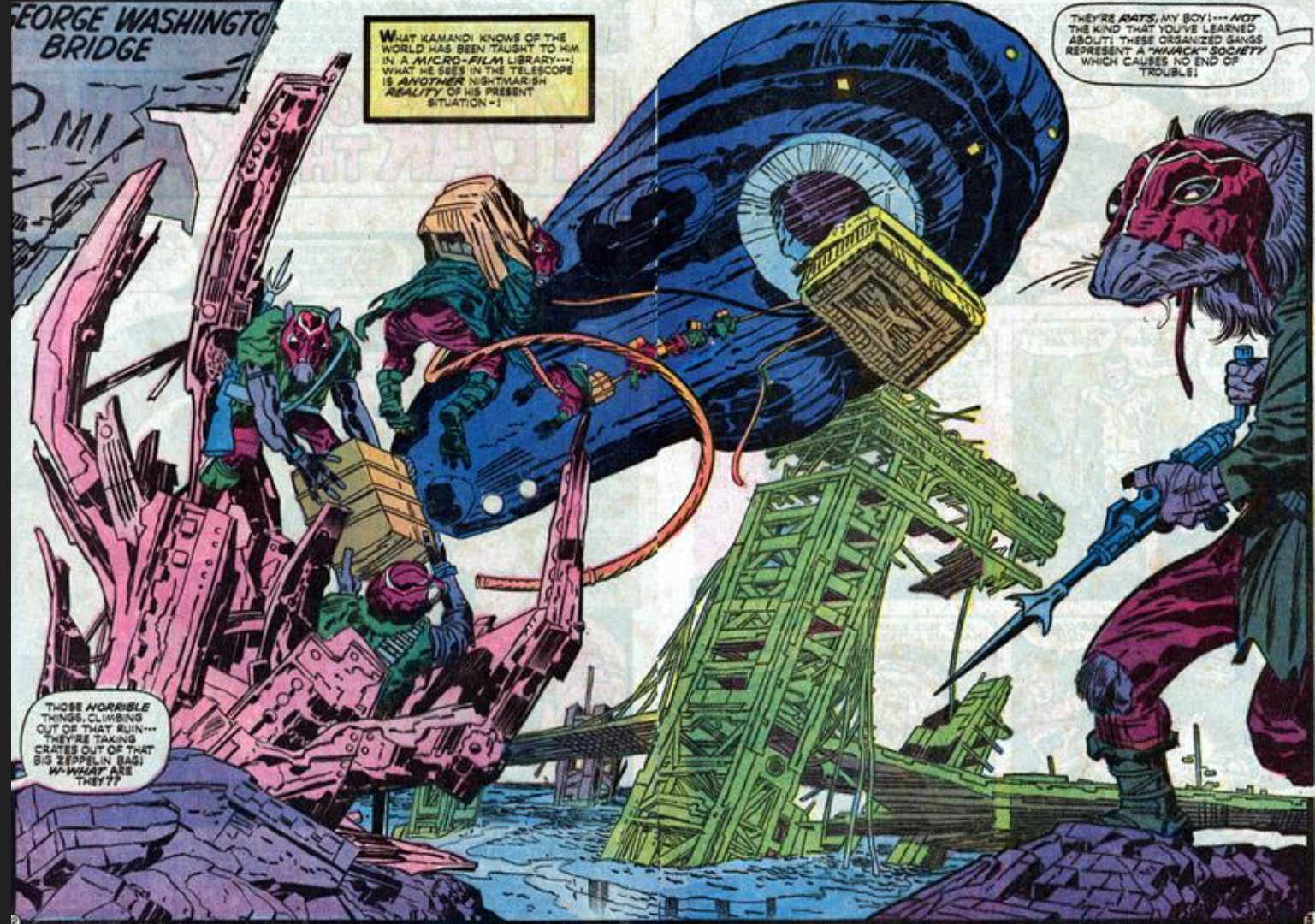
GEORGE WASHINGTON
BRIDGE

WHAT KAMANDI KNOWS OF THE
WORLD HAS BEEN TAUGHT TO HIM
IN A MICRO-FILM LIBRARY---
WHAT HE SEES IN THE TELESCOPE
IS ANOTHER NIGHTMARE-LIKE
REALITY OF HIS PRESENT
SITUATION--!

THEY'RE RATS, MY BOY!... NOT
THE KIND THAT YOU'VE LEARNED
ABOUT! THESE ORGANIZED GANGS
REPRESENT A "WACK" SOCIETY
WHICH CAUSES NO END OF
TROUBLE!

THOSE HORRIBLE
THINGS CLIMBING
OUT OF THAT RUIN---
THEY'RE TAKING
CRATES OUT OF THAT
BIG ZEPPELIN! BASH!
W-WHAT ARE
THEY??

Spread by
Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Kamandi 2, DC Comics,
Dec. 1972-Jan. 1973





[I]N WHAT WAS ONCE THE STATE OF NEVADA, THE WESTERN ROUND-UP STILL GOES ON... BUT THE SQUALLING SHRIeking HERD CONSISTS OF CORNERED HUMANS!... UNFORTUNATELY OUR YOUTHFUL HERO HAS FALLEN PREY TO THEIR CAPTORS---GORILLAS!!!

SOT'CHA, LITTLE DOGIE!

GOOD ROPING, TRANKKA! WE SPOTTED HIM SKULKING AROUND CAMP! HE'S PROBABLY A LOVER! THEY NEVER TRAVEL WITH THE HERD!

LET ME GO! IF I GET MY HANDS FREE, I'LL BLAST YOU OUT OF THOSE ROCKS!

A BEAST OF BURDEN... AND HE'S GOT A GUN--!

BAM!

Spread by
Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Kamandi 3, DC Comics,
Feb. 1973

It expanded on the *Planet of the Apes* franchise by pitting one last, lone human against an often hostile world where every other species is dominant — though in typical fashion, Kirby (with Simon) had dreamed up a similar story before the source novel for *Planet of the Apes* was even published.

Detail from "The Last Enemy!"
By Kirby, Simon, ?

Alarming Tales 1, Harvey Comics, Sept. 1957



I AWOKE IN, OF ALL THINGS, A SOFT
AND COMFORTABLE BED. I'D HAVE FELT
QUITE CONTENT IF I DIDN'T SEE THE DOG,
THE FOX AND THE BEAR AT MY BEDSIDE...



Detail from "The Last Enemy!"

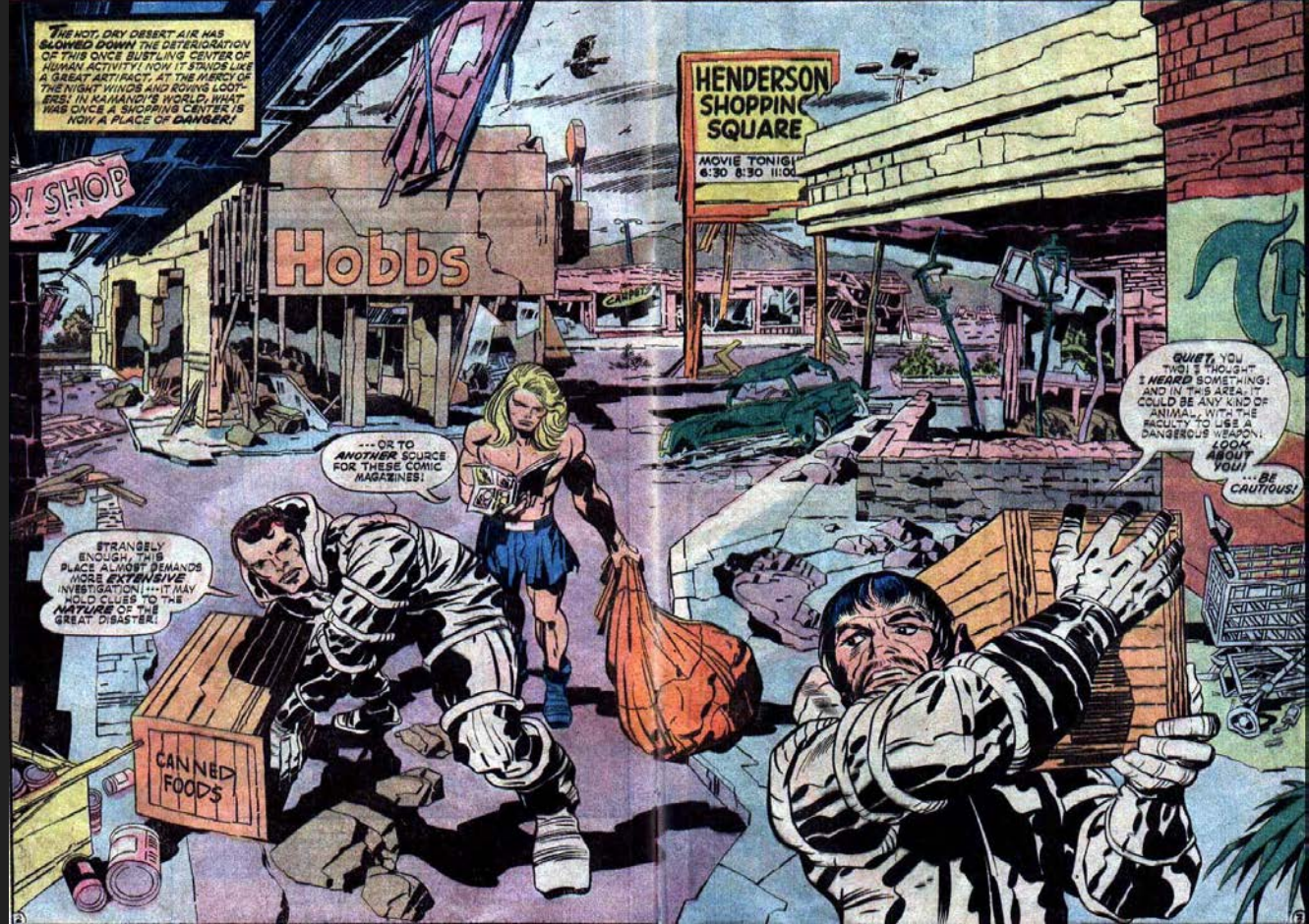
By Kirby, Simon, ?

Alarming Tales 1, Harvey Comics, Sept. 1957



Detail from "The Last Enemy!"
By Kirby, Simon, ?
Alarming Tales 1,
Harvey Comics, Sept. 1957

Science-fiction in the '70s more often took the form of things breaking down; it was a golden age of post-apocalyptic fiction, and Kirby was right in the middle of it.



Spread by Kirby, Royer, Serpe?
Kamandi 4, DC Comics, March 1973

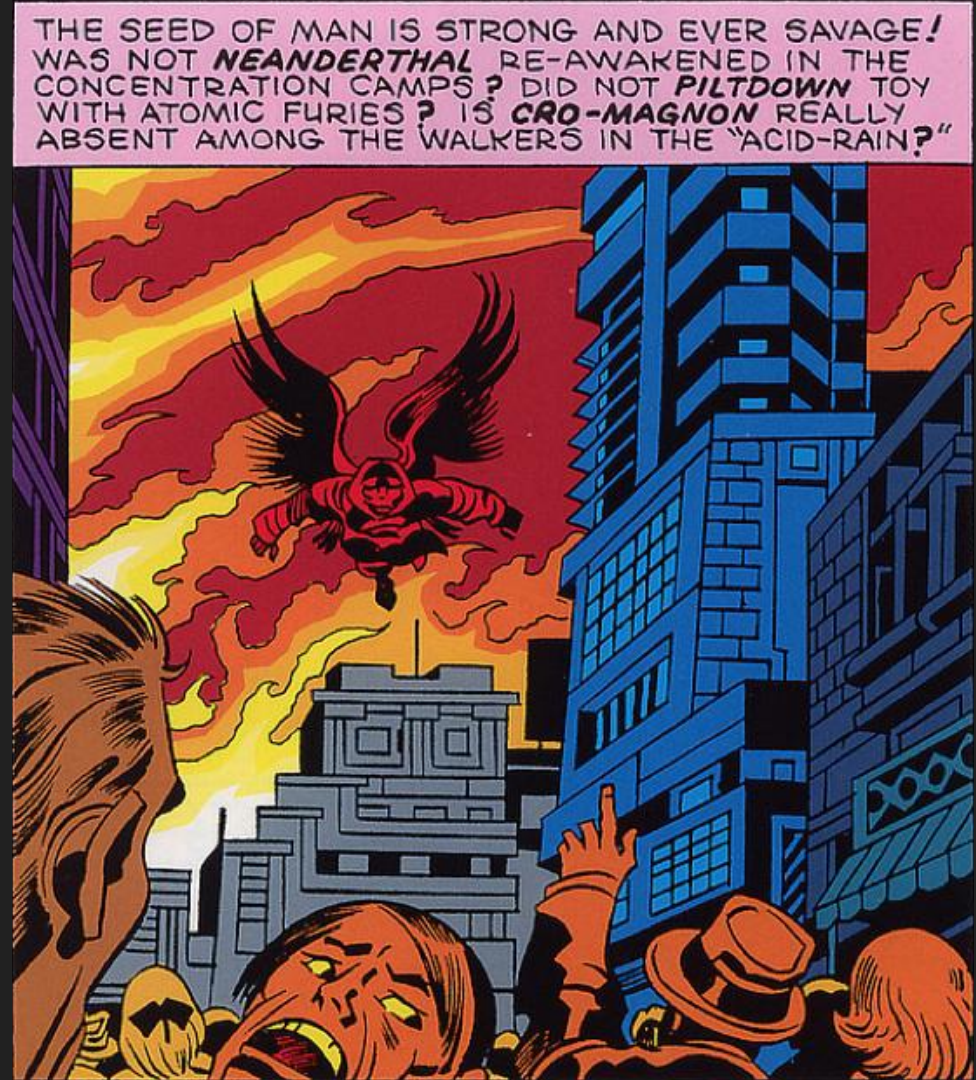
Kirby's last works still warned of the limits of technology and exulted in the leaps we could take with it — *Silver Star* depicted a next level of human evolution on the battlefield, but centered also on the shaky humanity of its protagonist.

Cover by Kirby, Thibodeaux, Alcala, Cohen
Silver Star 1, Pacific Comics, February 1983



Almost closing the book on his comics career, the series brought a modern-day Angel of Death into its story, threatening an end to our relative technological utopia.

Detail from page 18
by Kirby, Berry, Luth
Silver Star 6, Pacific Comics, January 1984



But long after the angel visited Kirby himself, the endless future he had mapped out was giving us paths to follow into eternal new days of creativity and culture.

Kirby's pencil art for page 14
Silver Star 6, Pacific Comics, January 1984



AS STERILITY STRIKES
THE LAST AREAS
BENEATH HIM --
-- THE ONRUSH OF DEATH
GAINS SPEED!!! HIS SENSES
REACH OUT TO SAVOR
THE TEeming LIFE OF
THE CITY LOOMING
IN HIS PATH !!!

“Whatever I do... I assure you it'll
electrocute you in the mind!”

— Jack Kirby, 1975



IT IS A **SAVAGE** AND
CONTINUOUS DISORIENTATION
WHICH SMASHES ALL MEMORY
AND IDENTIFICATION WITH
THE INDIVIDUAL SELF-- DAVE
BOWMAN **CANNOT** REMEM-
BER WHO HE IS - OR HOW HE
CAME TO BE... HE HAS
BECOME COMPLETELY
TRAUMATIZED...