

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Jack Kirby

Elisa Leonelli · Thursday, August 28th, 2025

The retrospective *Jack Kirby: Heroes and Humanity* opened at Skirball May 1, 2025, and will be on view until March 1, 2026.

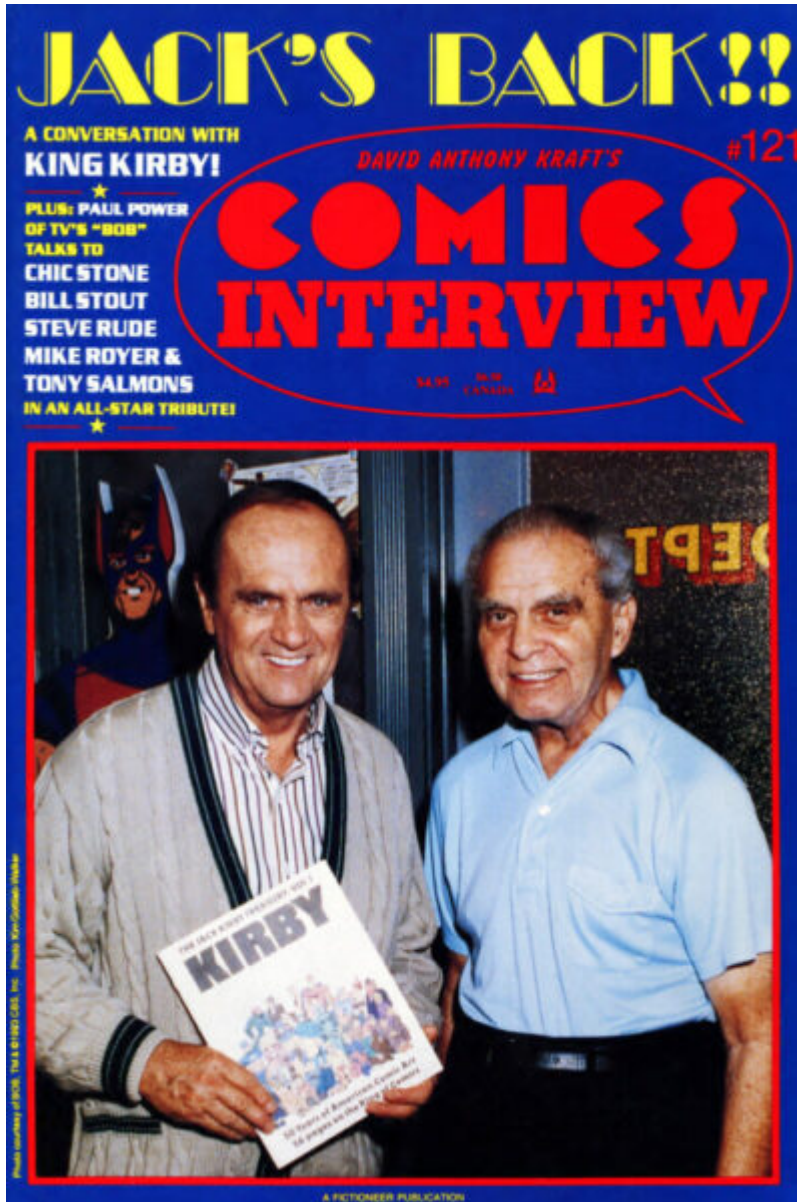


Kirby is the comic book artist who created superheroes like Captain America, the Fantastic Four, Black Panther, Thor, Iron Man, the Incredible Hulk and countless others.



Jack Kirby, Claudio Piccinini (c) Elisa Leonelli 1991

I had met [Jack Kirby](#) in the summer of 1991 when I accompanied my young Italian cousin to interview him at his home in Thousand Oaks. Claudio wore a [Silver Surfer](#) tee-shirt in honor of his mentor.

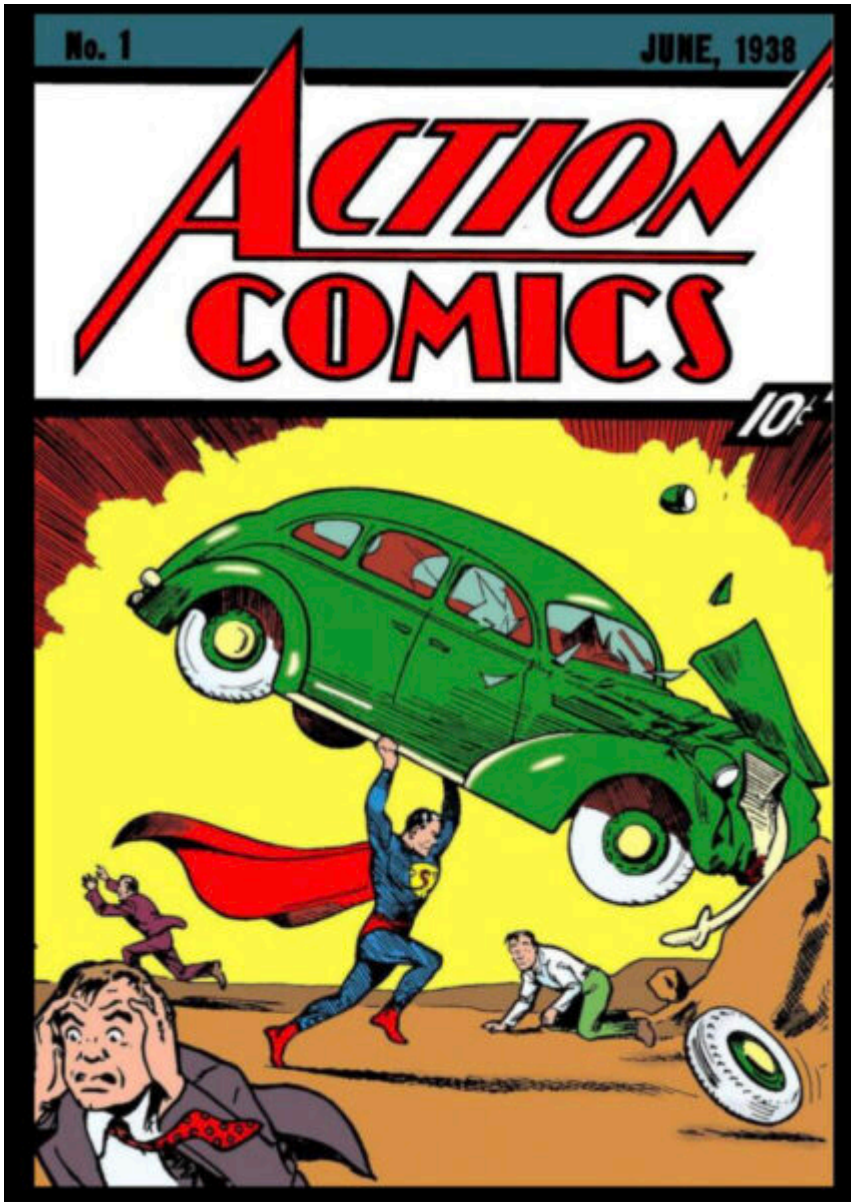


Here's an excerpt of what Kirby said about growing up in New York's Lower East Side: "I was a young man who didn't live in an environment of money, I couldn't afford passage on a boat or on a plane, so there was no way that I could travel to see for myself what the world was like. That is why I became an avid moviegoer, in order to see the rest of the world. Those movies became a part of my own personality and inspired me to create those superhero characters through fantasy." (Comics Interview #121)



Kirby Goes to War

Kirby and Joe Simon invented [Captain America](#), which debuted in December 1940, at a time when World War II was raging in Europe, but the U.S. was still neutral, in fact harbored many German sympathizers. But these two young Jewish immigrants knew better. That first cover shows Captain America punching Hitler in the face. Kirby was drafted on June 7, 1943 and joined the U.S. Army in France.

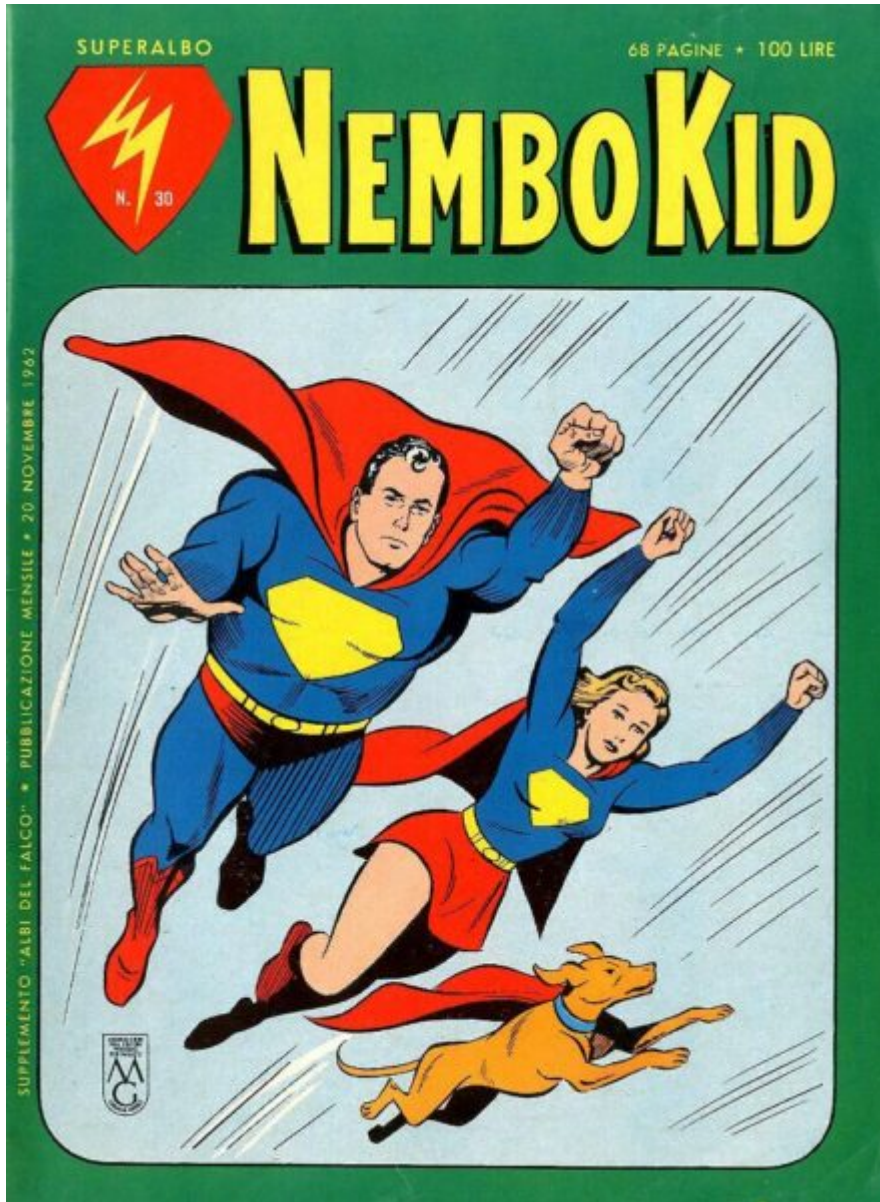


It was the success of [Superman](#), created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, two Jewish men from Cleveland, and first featured in a 1938 Action Comics, that had generated new interest in superheroes standing for “Truth, Justice and the American Way.”

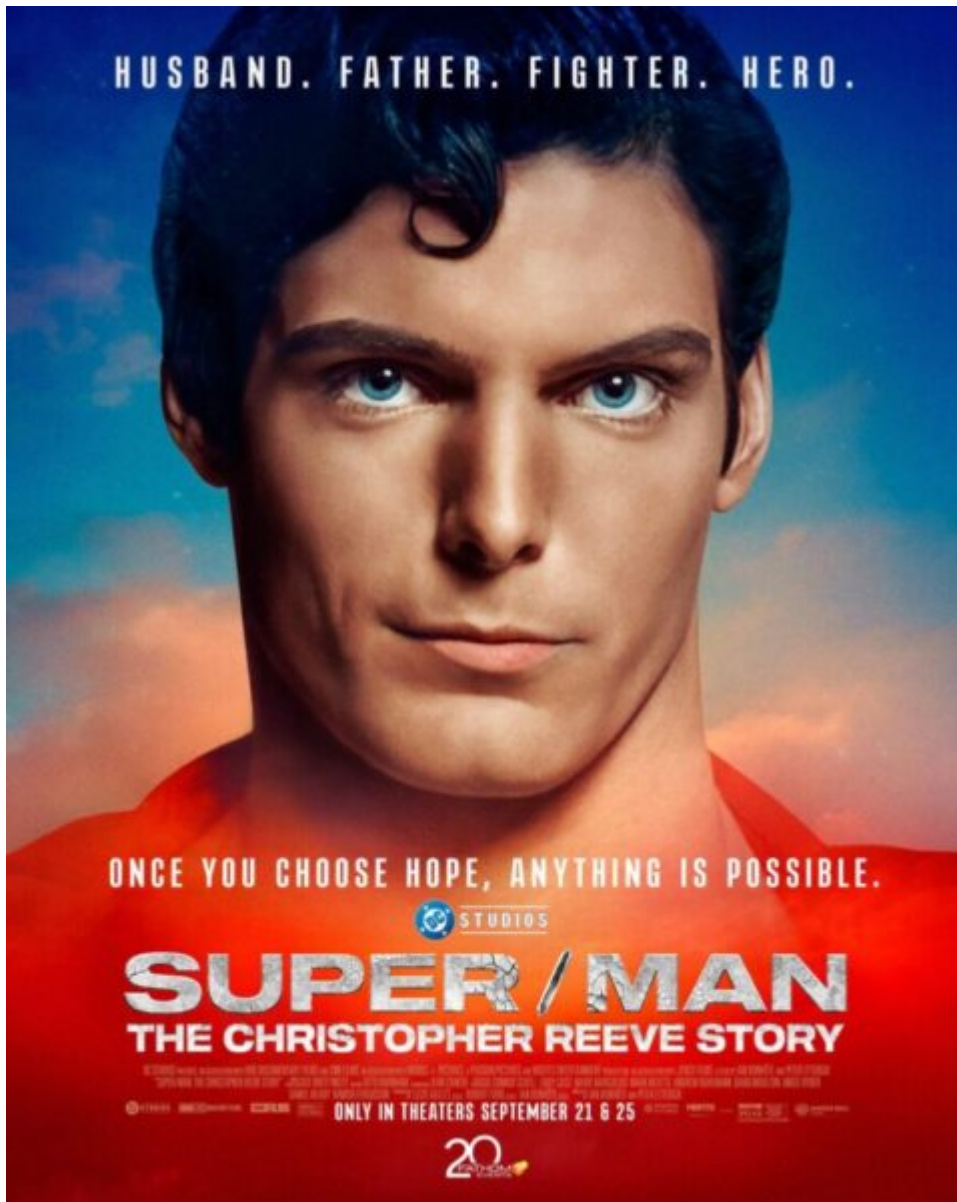


Jerry Siegel (c) Elisa Leonelli 1977

In 1977 I received an assignment from a magazine to photograph [Jerry Siegel](#) in his office. It was a dream come true, because Superman had been my favorite superhero as a child. In Italy he was called Nembo Kid (1954-1966).



And I liked this summer's *Superman* movie directed by James Gunn. It brought back memories of interviewing Christopher Reeve, so I watched the 2024 documentary about his life.

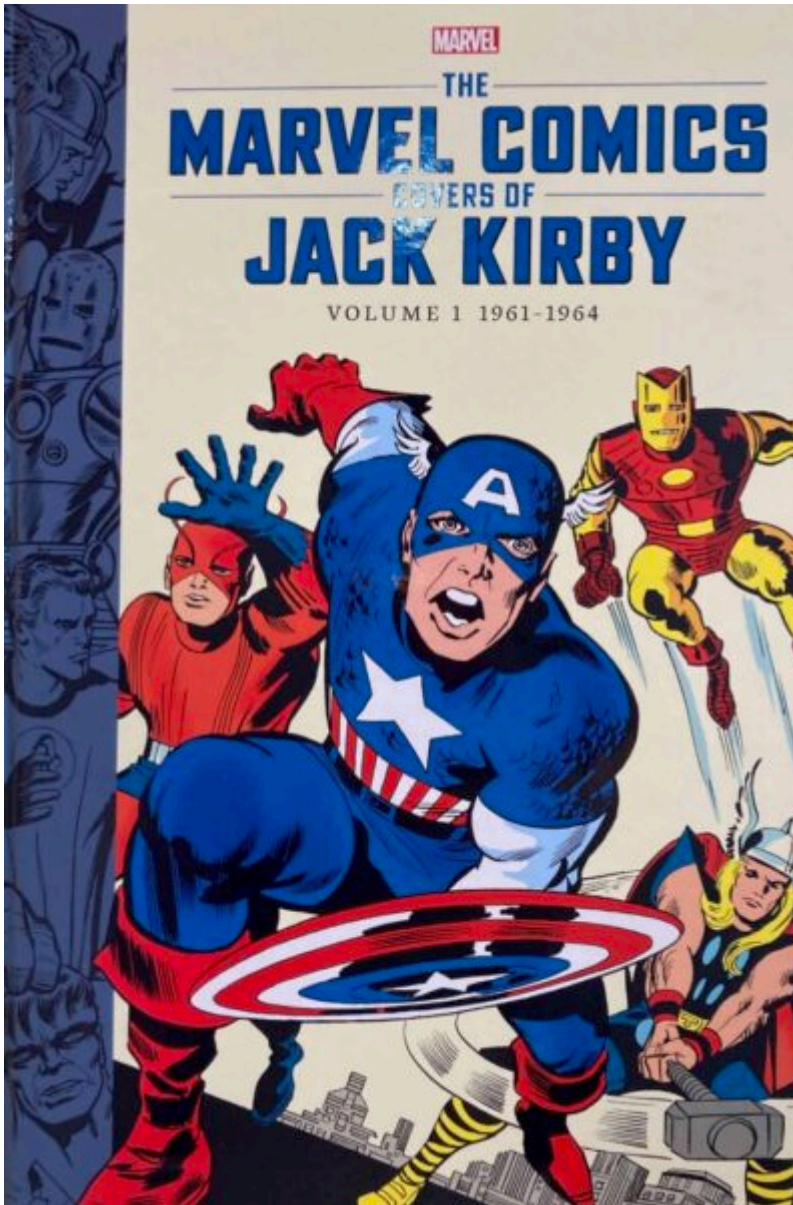


*Captain America* had stopped publication in 1950, but was reintroduced in November 1964, when Kirby and Stan Lee at Marvel Comics literally resurrected him after he had been frozen in ice since 1942, and he joined other Marvel superheroes like Thor and Iron Man.





I had learnt this storyline from the 2011 movie *Captain America: The First Avenger* starring Chris Evans (who had played the Human Torch in the *Fantastic Four* films, 2005-2007).



That 1964 *Avengers* cover was chosen for the book *Marvel Covers of Jack Kirby*.



Fantastic Four-First Steps (c) WB

The 2025 movie *The Fantastic Four: First Steps* revisits this very human family of superheroes: Mister Fantastic, Invisible Woman, Human Torch, Thing, created by Kirby with Stan Lee in 1961, and the giant super villain Galactus from 1966.

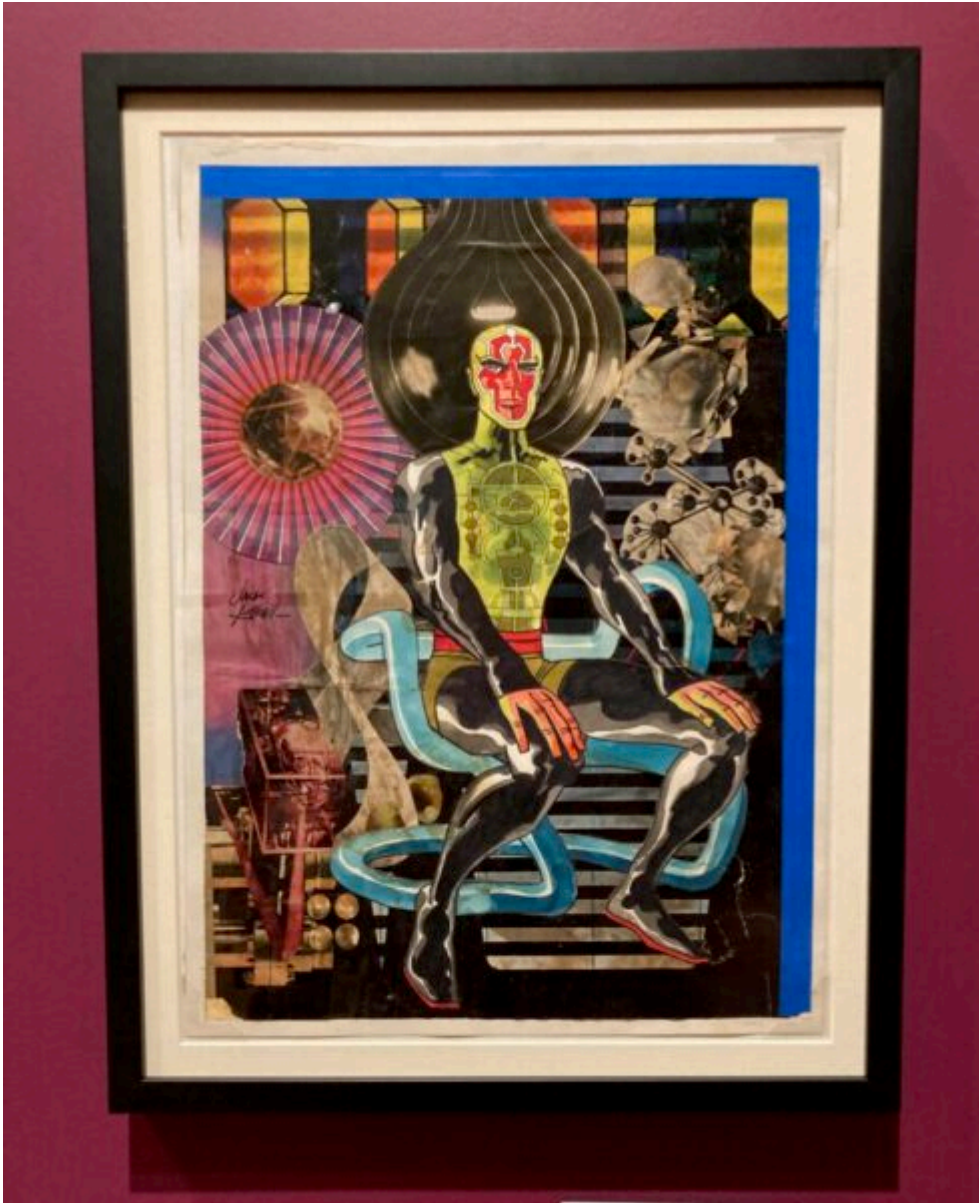


Kirby also created Black Panther and the world of Wakanda. See one of his original presentation drawings of King T'Challa.



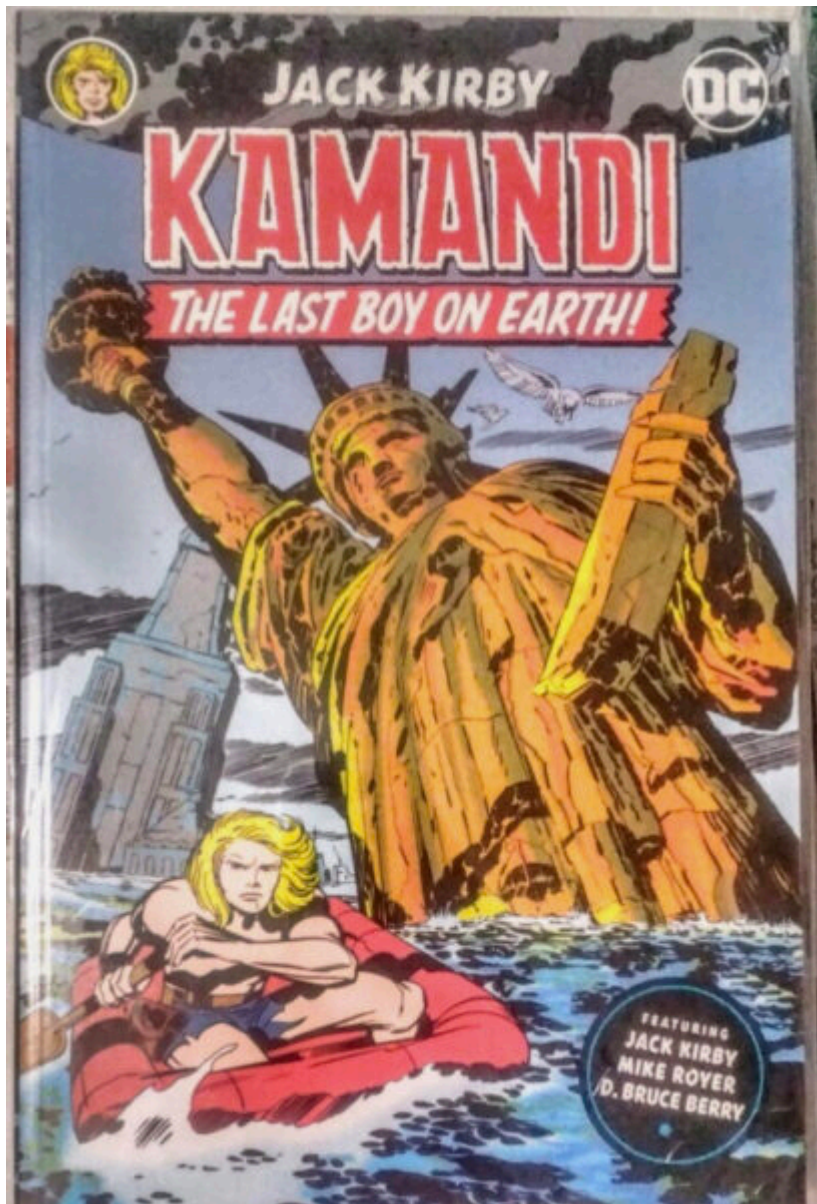
Black Panther by Jack Kirby 1965

By 1969 Kirby was upset about Stan Lee not giving him credit for his creative work, so he moved to California with his family and started designing for DC Comics in 1970.



Metron by Jack Kirby 1970

Here's a character design of supervillain Metron for the 1971 New Gods series.



Another series created by Kirby that I found intriguing is *Kamandi: The Last Boy on Earth*, that debuted October 1972.



In 1976 Kirby returned to Marvel and created other characters such as *The Eternals*. When a movie about these superheroes was released in 2021, I interviewed Salma Hayek who played Ajax, their leader, and wrote an article for *Best Movie, Italy*.



Captain America and The Fantastic Four remain to this day the most popular superheroes created by Jack Kirby. See these books for small children sold at Skirball’s gift shop.



Read “Superheroes of Summer” for reviews of the 2025 movies *Superman* and *Fantastic Four*.

Click on underlined words for more info.

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