

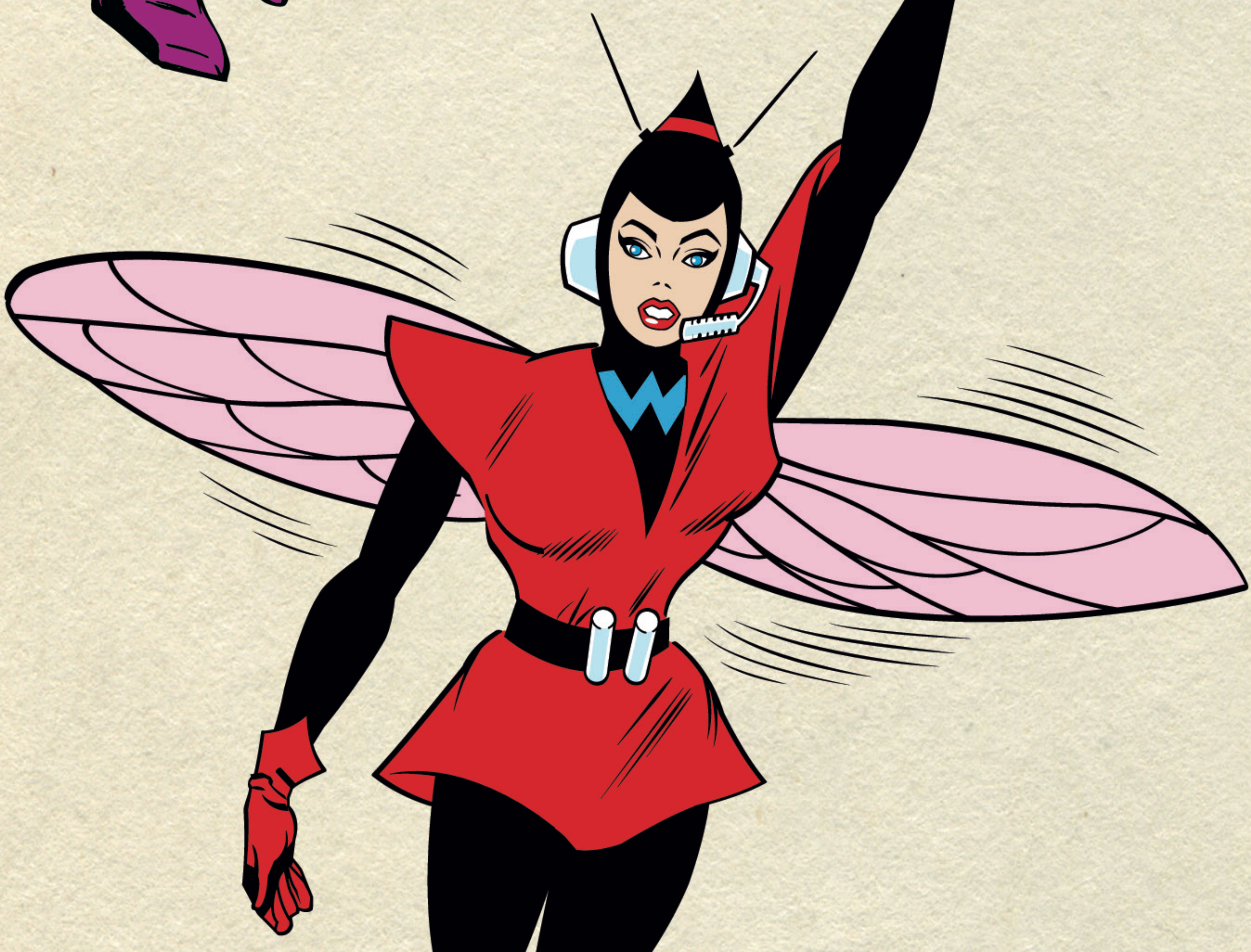
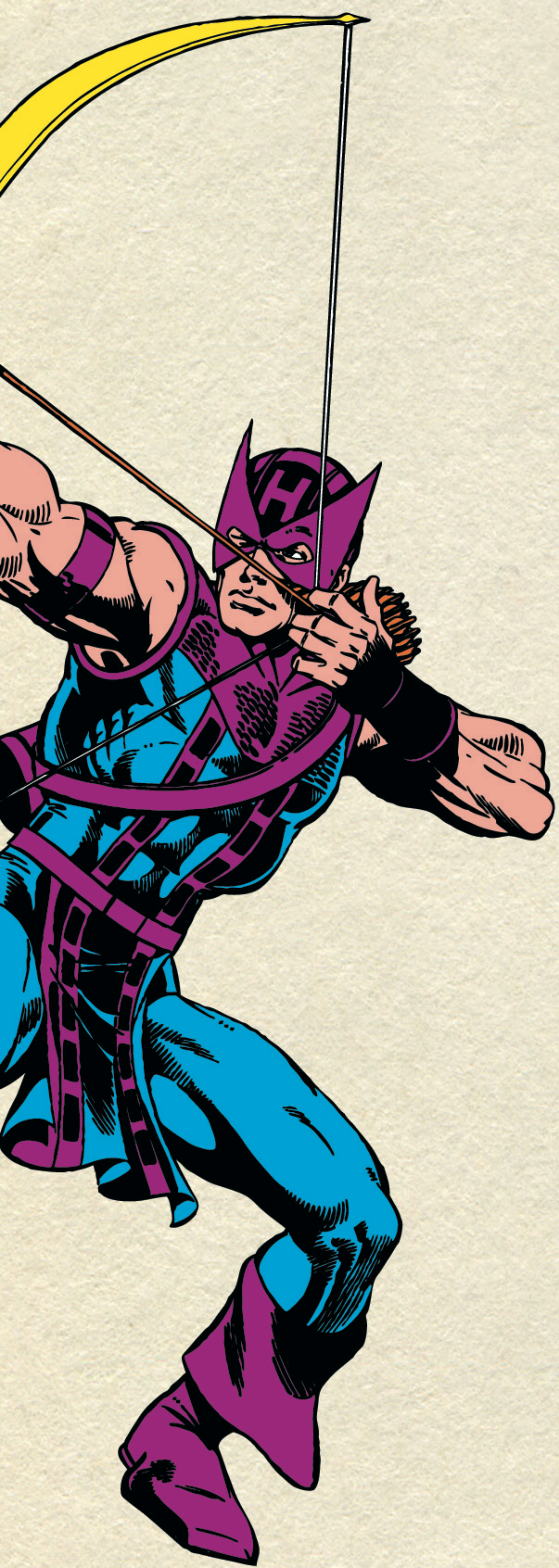


**MARVEL**  
**80**  
**YEARS**

# MARVEL

## MUSEUM

THE STORY OF THE COMICS





MARVEL MUSEUM

SECTION 2

# COSMIC RAYS!



*Atlas Comics  
Stan Lee  
Jack Kirby  
The Fantastic Four*

# ATLAS COMICS

In 1951 comics that had been published under Timely started using the name Atlas on the cover, and the company moved their offices to the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of the Empire State Building. Super hero comics had fallen out of fashion, and they stopped publishing super hero comics with *Captain America #75*, Cap, Namor and the Human Torch would appear a few times in the 1950s, but were not as popular as they had been in the previous decade.

Atlas Comics followed trends in TV and movies, so when Westerns and monster movies were popular Atlas created *Two-Gun Kid*, *Western Outlaws* and *Mystery Tales*. Soon humour comics were fashionable, so Atlas produced comics like *Millie the Model* (which would run until the 1970s) and *Patsy Walker* (who would later become Marvel's Hellcat). When readers wanted funny animal comics then *Dippy Duck*, *Marvin Mouse* and *The Monkey and the Bear* were produced. Horror comics like *Adventures into Terror* and *Strange Tales* were all especially popular with readers at the start of the 1950s.

In 1954 US senators publicly blamed comics for crime and juvenile delinquency, so publishers came together to create the Comics Code Authority, which limited what could be shown in comics, restricting which stories and situations could be used. Then, in the mid-1950s, distribution problems meant that Atlas went from producing between 40 to 60 books a month to producing eight. Around the same time Martin Goodman discovered a huge trove of unpublished but completed art, enough to keep Atlas going for months. Nearly all of the staff at Atlas Comics were laid off; there were no pencilers, letterers or inkers any more. Stan Lee was virtually the only person to keep his job.

Atlas did start creating comics again, but now the artists were all freelancers, paid by the page, rather than being regular, full-time staff members. Stan worried about keeping his best artists in work, but thankfully Jack Kirby, Bill Everett and a newcomer called Steve Ditko were keen to create comics. Titles like *Journey Into Mystery*, *Tales to Astonish* and *Tales of Suspense* told lurid stories of Martians, mummies and monsters. These stories were doing well, but at the start of the 1960s super hero comics started to come back into fashion, and everything changed...

## KEY TO PLATE

1: *Tales of Suspense* #1  
January 1959

This cover art by Don Heck shows the kind of exciting science fiction

stories that were popular in the late 1950s.



# STAN LEE

Stan Lee is a household name, famous for co-creating some of the most incredible and exciting characters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His boundless enthusiasm, warmth and creativity have inspired generations, giving countless readers a new way of looking at the world. But before Stan created these iconic stories, he was almost ready to give up comics entirely.

Stan Lee grew up as the son of immigrant parents in Manhattan. His father was a dress cutter, but found it hard to get work during the Great Depression. Stan always claimed that he learned a great lesson from his father's hardship and promised to work as hard as he could to make sure that he didn't suffer the same fate. When Stan was eight his younger brother Larry was born, and the two brothers shared a room for much of their childhood. Larry later followed Stan into comics, and wrote many stories for Marvel.

Stan entered the army in 1942 and first served in the Signal Corps, but was later given the military designation of "playwright", which involved writing training manuals and educational material. Stan was still writing for Timely while in the army, and would send back comic scripts every week. After the war, Stan returned to Timely Comics and stayed in Manhattan, and in 1947 he met Joan Boocock, a British model. Stan would consistently recount that he fell in love with her immediately, and proposed to her after only two weeks of dating. The two were married, and in 1950 their daughter Joan Celia "J.C." Lee was born, all while Stan was working at Timely and later Atlas Comics.

By 1961 Stan Lee was disillusioned with comics and wanted to quit. He loved working with his artists and revered the work of Jack Kirby, but he wanted something more. Stan had always dreamed of writing "the Great American Novel", and one of the reasons that he hadn't used his real name in comics was that he didn't want his comics work associated with the highbrow book he intended to write one day. Stan's wife Joan suggested that he use the modern, realistic characters that he wanted to use in his books in his comics. Stan agreed and comics were changed forever.

Stan's amazing creativity and enthusiasm allowed him to form a whole new universe in just a few short years. Working with a team of incredible collaborators, he was able to co-create heartfelt stories that linked and played off each other in ways that wouldn't be possible in any other medium.



## KEY TO PLATE

1: *What If?* Vol. 1 #11  
October 1978

This lighthearted story is titled "What if the Fantastic Four Were the Original Marvel Bullpen?" and casts Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Flo Steinberg and Sol

Brodsky as the Fantastic Four.  
2: *The Amazing Spider-Man*  
Annual #1  
October 1964

Both Stan Lee and Steve Ditko

appear in the first *Amazing Spider-Man* annual in a comic about how Spider-Man stories are created.

# JACK KIRBY

If there is a signature look that defined Marvel comics in the 1960s, it comes from the pencil of Jack Kirby. While other artists made huge contributions to Marvel, there is only one creator who was given the nickname "King".

Jack Kirby was five years older than Stan Lee, and like Stan he was a New Yorker born to Jewish parents. Born Jacob Kurtzberg, he never took any formal art lessons, taking inspiration from any comic strips that he could find. He worked on newspaper comic strips, and after a brief stint in animation moved to monthly comics. Jacob Kurtzberg dabbled with a few pen names such as Curt Davis, Ted Grey and Lance Kirby before eventually arriving at Jack Kirby. Jack joined Timely Comics in 1940, where he created *Captain America* with Joe Simon, which became one of the decade's biggest hits.

Jack met Roz Goldstein in 1941. They married in 1942 but a year later Jack was drafted into the army. During World War II Jack served in the Infantry, and because of his art skills he was often sent as a scout behind enemy lines to draw maps and enemy positions. He used what he saw in the war in his comics, and that is perhaps part of the reason that his action scenes are so realistic, but also feel so dangerous.

After the war Jack worked for a number of different comic book companies, partnering with Joe Simon in many different genres. Jack worked on *Young Romance* for Prize Comics, a comic which promised "all true love stories" on the cover – this was the first romance

comic and is often credited with creating a whole new comics genre. He eventually returned to working for Timely (which was now Atlas Comics), working on supernatural and science fiction; his speciality was stories where giant monsters attacked helpless cities.

Jack's incredible work ethic and levels of productivity meant that he was a legend in the comics industry. He would work for 12 to 14 hours a day in his house in Long Island, producing four to five pages of exciting and dynamic comic artwork every day, while some artists struggled to complete one. Kirby's prolific page rate meant that he could pencil several comics every month, giving the early Marvel comics' line a style of its own.

Marvel wouldn't be Marvel without Jack Kirby. He created so much of the look, the feel and the emotion of early Marvel heroes that it is impossible to imagine the current age of super heroes without him. Kirby's heroes are natural and completely stylised at the same time – they are gods with human problems.

## KEY TO PLATE

### 1: *What If? Vol 1 #11*

October 1978

No image of Jack Kirby is complete without his signature ogre.

### 2: *The Avengers #4*

March 1964

In 1964 Jack Kirby returned to *Captain America*, when Steve Rogers was added to the Avengers' roster.

### 3: *The Avengers #1*

September 1963

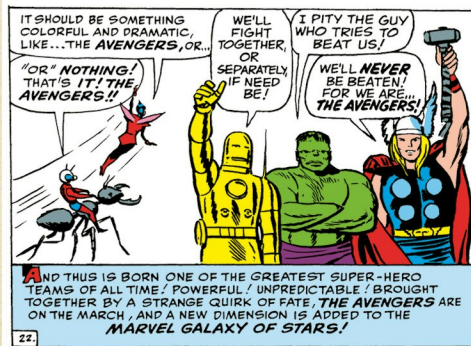
In his iconic panel, the Wasp gives the Avengers their name, bringing the team together.



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