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Hand Of Fire: The Comics Art Of Jack Kirby (Great Comics Artists Series)



Synopsis

Jack Kirby (1917–1994) is one of the most influential and popular artists in comics history. With Stan Lee, he created the Fantastic Four and defined the drawing and narrative style of Marvel Comics from the 1960s to the present day. Kirby is credited with creating or cocreating a number of Marvel's mainstay properties, among them the X-Men, the Hulk, Thor, and the Silver Surfer. His earlier work with Joe Simon led to the creation of Captain America, the popular kid gang and romance comic genres, and one of the most successful comics studios of the 1940s and 1950s. Kirby's distinctive narrative drawing, use of bold abstraction, and creation of angst-ridden and morally flawed heroes mark him as one of the most influential mainstream creators in comics. In this book, Charles Hatfield examines the artistic legacy of one of America's true comic book giants. He analyzes the development of Kirby's cartooning technique, his use of dynamic composition, the recurring themes and moral ambiguities in his work, his eventual split from Lee, and his later work as a solo artist. Against the backdrop of Kirby's earlier work in various genres, *Hand of Fire* examines the peak of Kirby's career, when he introduced a new sense of scope and sublimity to comic book fantasy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The first critical exploration of the work of a great comics creator

Charles Hatfield, Northridge, California, is associate professor of English at California State University, Northridge. He is the author of *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Follow his blog at <http://handoffire.wordpress.com/>.

Unlike some other reviewers I'm opting to review the text of the book, not the selection of cover art. Inside there are numerous examples of Jack Kirby's work (including a center color section) chosen specifically to illustrate the points raised by the author. If you want Kirby artwork, there are plenty of options here on ; this is an analysis of his prodigious output, not a collection. Two small quibbles: Hatfield has not been well served by his editor(s). A surer hand would have guided him away from such sentence-stoppers as "conflictual." And references could have been simplified by standard numerical superscript instead of clogging the narrative with titles and page numbers. (Also, the book itself is printed on paper and will burn if placed in proximity of fire). The two great ideas Hatfield contributes to Kirby scholarship are, in my view, the concepts of "narrative drawing" and what he calls Kirby's "technological sublime." I can't imagine any new writing on Kirby's work that does not process and include the insights that Hatfield discusses here. Chapter 6, Kirby at Apogee is a deep exploration of two classic New Gods stories, "The Pact" and "Himon." This chapter alone is worth the price of the book, in my opinion. And you can believe me, because I'm not a fictitious shill for the author. I'm just a lonely, aging comic book fan who was bribed with candy and temporary tattoos (Thanks, Chuck!). If you want serious, challenging scholarship about one of the defining figures of comic art in the 20th Century, you will appreciate this book. It's deep. It's thought-provoking. It should be rapturously reviewed in a future issue of *The Comics Journal*, if there's any justice. I'd love to read Hatfield on Steve Ditko, if he should choose to direct his attention and intelligence that way. However, "Hand of Fire" is not, itself, fire-proof. (To be fair, this is a defect I've found in other books purchased from).

Jack Kirby was one of the greatest creators of American comic book super-hero mythology. Sadly, the period of his career from the 1970's onwards seemed to be littered with failed attempts by Kirby to expand on his mythology. Hatfield focuses mainly on this post '70s era Kirby and gives us some insight as to why Kirby, despite still being highly creative in both ideas and art - if not necessarily writing - was not able re-capture the past glory of his Marvel era years with Stan Lee. The opening chapter gives an outline of Kirby's career before we enter into an analysis of Kirby's art in the second chapter. The second chapter looks at Kirby as a story teller who told stories mainly through pictures rather than words. Hatfield examines Kirby's creativity through the frame work of Charles

Sanders Peirce's Semiotic Theory. It is odd to see the sometimes child-like boom, crash opera of Kirby comics combined with talk of Semiotics and philosophical issues such as whether a picture represents a real object, yet it enables an interesting look at the tension that existed in those later years of Kirby's career where many people seemed to have started to become alienated by the lack of realism in both his art and his story telling. Hatfield closes the chapter by emphasising how Kirby's art used intensified depictions of emotion and dynamic movement with stillness to create a pictorial narrative. The next chapter looks at Kirby's classic early work done at Marvel comics with Stan Lee. Here we enter into some familiar old territory regarding who really was the creative genius behind classics such as the Fantastic Four - Lee or Kirby? Hatfield argues that Lee's wry colloquialisms, used in his writing, contrasted nicely with Kirby's grand epic ideas and made the early Marvel comics a winner with the comic book buying audience. Added to this, Hatfield also notes that both Lee and Kirby used their experience with other comic book genres such as romance and sci-fi to give their superhero story lines more depth. For example, on one page the Fantastic Four could be battling god-like beings from out-of-space and five pages later they could be ruminating over problems with their relationships. The irony, Hatfield contends, was delightful for comic fans. Many of these ideas are elaborated on in the next chapter along with Hatfield's contention that the notion of continuity of story line between not only specific comic book titles but also between other comic titles created by Kirby with Marvel revolutionised the superhero comic. Hatfield further contends that Kirby was also before his time when he moved to DC and created his so-called "Fourth World" mythos as it was one of the first ideas to use a range of comic titles interwoven together to tell a grander over-all story - an idea that would become commonplace in later DC and Marvel comic productions. The next chapter discusses the most captivating aspect of Kirby's work - an aspect called the "Technological Sublime." Hatfield notes that past philosophers have identified the sublime with a sense of overwhelming awe and even danger. Kirby's elaborate and intricate depictions of wild and crazy technology capture this not only for the readers of the comics but also often for the characters depicted in the comics. Hatfield rounds out the book with a specific analysis of Kirby's story telling in his DC "Fourth World" publications and his final works at Marvel, the latter with an emphasise on Kirby's "Eternals" storylines (the Eternals were a personal favourite of mine). Hatfield is a great writer and at times comes close to doing the impossible - giving words adequate enough to describe the crazy and sublime pictorial story telling of Jack Kirby.

Jack "King" Kirby is Here! As a child, I read the Fantastic Four, The Hulk, Thor, Capt. America, X-men, The Avengers, later it was New Gods and Forever People... just to name a few. There was

something about these comics that developed a mania in me. I never stopped reading and re-reading them. My appreciation never waned. Here it is 40+ years later and I have, mainly, one man to thank: Jack Kirby. After reading this book, I have a deeper understanding of what creative processes were involved. I, like most people "into" comics, thought Stan Lee was responsible for creating the Marvel Universe. He was not. He was a "shaper" and an "interpreter" otherwise known as a scriptor. Rarely was he a creator. That was the most "eye-opening" information. Kirby was "the Genius" behind most of the comics I have come to appreciate and love. HAND OF FIRE sets the record straight.

make no mistake, this is academic discourse, but with a fan's understanding and sense of wonder. I have limited patience for academic writing but this was actually cool.

This is the best book I've read on Kirby and the best critical study of a comic book creator or super heroes, bar none. Like many comic fans, it took a while for me to warm up to Kirby and even now I read Kirby not for the story but for the experience of reading Kirby. I agree with the reviewers above, the chapter on the technological sublime and the close readings of the fourth world stories, "the Pact" and "Himon" are worth price alone. The entire book is fascinating and is an absolute delight to read. This is more than a fitting tribute it raises the bar on Kirby criticism. I can't recommend this highly enough. Hopefully, the (Great Comics Artists) tackles Ditko next.

fantastic read

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