

Chapter One

"Art is magical.

Writing is enchantment.

Storytelling with art and writing is super magical!"

It's June of 1967 and I'm seven years old, my family has just moved to Miami Beach and my entire life is about to find its direction. My parents go to a local drugstore with me in tow when I walk by the mysterious metal object that is filled with startling full color comics. The spinner rack exerts its magical powers on me as it has done to countless youth all across America. I'm trapped by its spell and it will never release me from its power.

You may be wondering how I could be so certain of that date of after all these years... It's because that was the day that I begged my parents to buy the one book that leaped out at and screamed for me to be one with it... Jack Kirby's Fantastic Four #63! I took that masterpiece home and absorbed it till it literally fell apart in my hands over the months!

I can't remember a time in my life that I wasn't drawing... But after that book I found a focus for my art... Dan Reed was going to draw comics! I was absolutely certain of it then and I've never changed my mind! I've added to that initial thought many times in many different ways but anyone who knew me growing up can tell you how certain I was about my future. It became my identity.

I was never into sports and was an outcast growing up, much preferring reading comics and creating my own than hanging out with other kids unless they were into the comics as well. Back in those days if you were into comics you were a freak... At least in the neighborhood I grew up in. By this time we had moved to the Greater Miami area and lived in a trailer on 119th street called "Myrick's Trailer Park". It was actually a nice little place where mostly elderly people lived. They had little fences and everyone kept up their little lots with flowers and bushes and such.

Unfortunately as time went by the area around the park became worse and worse. The decent people who could afford to moved away and were replaced by people who were not so nice. We couldn't afford to move and things got pretty rough for me. I'm not going to get into it and let you use your imagination. I will say it WAS NOT easy!

Anyway, despite my hostile surrounding environment, I spent as much time as possible reading and drawing comics. I also started getting into Edgar Rice Burroughs and found myself thinking of writing comics as well! Now the magic of the fantastic was increasing it's power over me.

As soon as I somehow managed to survive the dreaded "Last Day of School" of Elementary and was looking forward to what I hoped would be better days at Junior High

School, a major health disaster struck my life... Rheumatic Fever! It started as a sore throat and skin rash... I thought it was prickly heat from the Miami Summer. Then I found I was so weak I could hardly stand. Then my joints started to swell up with rheumatoid arthritis symptoms. The pain was unbearable when I moved any part of my body and it was almost as bad when I didn't. This all happened very quickly. My parents rushed me to Miami Jackson Memorial Hospital. None of us had the slightest clue what was going on, but I was sure I was going to die. We got there at night on a weekend... doesn't life always seem to throw this crap at you at the worst possible moments? We waited the obligatory five or six hours in the Emergency Room waiting area before they would even say boo to us. Then when signing in and finding out we were poor and would have problems paying for the services, it ended up being 3 AM before a Student Doctor got around to me.

After the briefest examination humanly possible she said it had been Strep Throat which quickly became Scarlet Fever, which just as quickly turned into Rheumatic Fever. She let us know there wasn't a lot to do about it and many kids got it and died, but in that day and age most just got really bad heart murmurs and could never run or ride a bike again. They could expect to have a heart valve replacement by 40 or so and live a very short life.

After this cheery news she gave me a shot of Penicillin and a hospital bed for the next couple of months.

Most of the other kids in the room with me had the same condition, only they had been in the hospital much longer than me and they all looked like they were on death's door. Oh joy! I saw what my future looked like.... and I wasn't impressed even a little bit!

Strict bed rest didn't help.... lets face it, sponge baths and bed pans are embarrassing.

Almost a week later the Student Doctor in training showed up again and told me that she was putting me on an aspirin regimen, letting me know that it was just to help with the pain in my joints a little. I figured I didn't rate real pain killers like the other kids got because we couldn't really afford them. She started me off with a few a day and said she would up the dosage every couple of days until I heard a ringing in my ears.

This went on for a few weeks. She finally stopped by again and told me she couldn't believe I wasn't hearing a ringing in my ears with the amount of aspirin in my system. I told her that I was sorry I couldn't hear any bells ringing, but the buzzing in my head had been driving me crazy for more than a week. She immediately lowered the dose.

During the last week or so of my Summer stay in the hospital my mother had stopped coming in to see me. No one would let me know what happened to her. A week or so after I got back home.... still on strict bed rest (however, I was finally allowed to use the bathroom myself).... when my Mom showed up again. She refused to tell me where she had been, only saying that I would find out soon enough.

A week or so later my mother handed me a package... inside was a page signed by Stan Lee and Everyone at the Marvel Comics Bullpen, complete with a little rubber spider glued next to John Romita's signature.... all wishing me a speedy recovery! As though that wasn't enough, it also contained several 8 1/2 x 11 drawings by the likes of Herb Trimpe, Marie Severin, Alan Lee Weiss, Jim Starlin and a Shadow piece by Mike Kaluta!!! Wow! Was I stunned!!! Turns out my Mom took a Greyhound bus to New York City and visited the Marvel Comics offices and told them that her son was sick right now but that some day he would work for them and become a famous comic book creator! Stan Lee's secretary at the time, Mary Mac took pity on my plight and got that package together for me.

Holy Smokes! It did something amazing for me.... I never ended up like the other kids in the hospital. I had a heart murmur for sometime but it mysteriously vanished as did all the other symptoms. I was running and riding a bike in no time and got into Judo at 15. Of course many years after those terrible days Science found out that plain old aspirin is actually a super drug that is great for the heart.

But before all that I was at a comic book show at the local American Legion Hall when I found out that the legendary C.C. Beck lived in South Florida.... Boy did that change my life!

Chapter Two

"With One Magic Word!"

The South Florida comic scene was in full swing back in the early seventies. There were small shows at various locations at least once a month. The sites varied from one small venue to another. They were run by the likes of G.B. Love and James Van Hise, both of whom also published the ultimate fanzine of all time, "RBCC", The Rocket Blast Comic Collector!

I was very young and had a hard time getting to the shows that were even a relatively small distance from my home. There was a great deal of begging, pleading and whining. And of course money was a major issue for me at the time. Even when I got my way from time to time, I had very little money to spend. I would scour the neighborhood for coke bottles that I could return for the couple of cents it would bring. It really added up over the course of a month.

As luck would have it though, they started having regular shows every month just a couple of miles from my house at the local American Legion Hall. Finally, a regular Comic Con within walking and biking distance!

These shows were a dream come true for a kid like myself. They had everything a comic book/Sci-Fi/Horror fan could possibly want! Those were the days when Comic Cons were comic cons! Not Hollywood trade shows designed to promote the newest super hero movies. They had all the local dealers with their wares at tables, they had movies all day long from Forbidden Planet, Creature from the Black Lagoon, Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things, to Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman and many more! All on reel to reel projectors! They would always be playing The Lone Ranger and Star Trek all day long... and would always end the show with the Star Trek Bloopers reel.

These were heady times for those of us fans who were starved for this stuff, way, way before comic book stores, videos, DVD's, Cable, YouTube, the Internet and Net Flix were even a dream. The only computers you would ever see back then was on Star Trek or Colossus : The Forbin Project. Of course every Saturday Night you would get to see a late night horror movie hosted by the local version of Elvira or some other offshoot of the EC Crypt Keeper. Although these were wonderful, they could barely feed the need of devoted fans of the various genres.

I'd be in heaven at these shows and made a terrible nuisance of myself I'm sure. I would spend the entire day living and breathing this crazy fun fantasy world. I would dream of the day when people would be buying selling and trading comics that I had written and drawn! Of course nobody else shared my convictions and I was considered just another annoying fanboy with delusions of grandeur. "Sure you'll draw for Marvel and DC someday, Kid.... When pigs use phasers! Now get outta here, you're bothering the customers, Sonny", or something like that.

One day soon after my bout with rheumatic fever, I was at one of the local shows hovering near James Van Hise and G. B. Love when I overheard them mention that the legendary C. C. Beck lived somewhere in South Florida and that they wanted to get in touch with him for an interview for the upcoming issue of RBCC.

Did I hear that right? A real live comic book artist lived somewhere outside of New York City! Not only that, but in South Florida? Could this possibly be true? No way! I remember interrupting them, asking just where in South Florida? James gave me a his usual disdainful look of annoyance at my very existence and continued his conversation. Not to be put off on such world shaking news I continued to persist until he finally said I should just look in the white pages. Then they turned their backs on me walking away muttering something to the effect of "Like C.C.Beck would even consider seeing that kid! Ha!"

So the seeds of destiny were sown by a disbelieving world. I was used to everyone thinking I was full of crap and there was no way a nobody like me would ever be able to reach the ranks of the gods on Mount Marvel. Never bothered me in the least. I never once doubted myself. These nonbelievers had no idea how hard I was working on my art and storytelling skills every single day of my life. This was no idle half baked delusional fantasy. I had bought several books on anatomy and perspective and was busy studying them while working on how to draw everything from every angle. I had thousands of pages of comic book compositions at home and I was just getting started. Of course I was just a kid with rainbows in his head and pie in the sky dreams to everyone else but I knew where I was going and just how much hard work it would take to get there.

I started asking around and it seemed that everyone at the convention knew about C.C. Beck but me. I left early that day for once, and rushed home to yank out the White Pages. And lo and behold.... there it was... C.C. Beck's address and phone number!

I asked my dad where that address was and it was pretty far away... certainly a lot further than the local comic book show. He told me in no uncertain terms that there way no way in hell he was driving me to Miami Gardens and that if I wanted to waste my time bothering that poor man I would have to find a way to do it on my own.

Dad was not a fan of my crazy idea that I was going to New York City one day and work for a big time outfit like Marvel. He was a self employed house painter and thought that I should stop daydreaming and think about finding a way of making a living in this tough old world. My dad was a realist and didn't want me to end up starving and destitute. In his world view I would be lucky if the Military would take me.

I understood my father's way of thinking and completely appreciated that he meant the best for me. However, he just had no way of understanding that this was my destiny and nothing and nobody was going to get in the way of it, no matter how good their intentions were.

So I was on my own again. Nothing new there. What to do? Mom suggested I look up the bus routes. Great idea! Rats! Nothing would take me directly to Miami Gardens. I would have to take one bus to the end of the line (an hour and a half), and then transfer to another bus to almost the end of its line (another hour or so) and then walk for about 45 minutes. Nothing to it! Now I had a plan and was all set to go! Next week I would set off on this incredible life changing journey!

My mother told me to be sure to call ahead to find out if it was alright with him for me to visit.

That was never going to happen. All I could think of was James Van Hise snickering "Like C.C.Beck would even consider seeing that kid! Ha!" . What if Mr. Beck politely but firmly told me to buzz off? All my plans would be ruined! I couldn't take the chance! I wouldn't call. I would just go and show up on his door step. What choice would he have but to let me in? And once I was in I would show him my art and he would love it and.... wait! Before I got carried away any further I had to get my portfolio in order for him!

I had gotten so excited about seeing my first real life comic book artist that I suddenly realized that I knew next to nothing about Captain Marvel. I was a Jack Kirby, John Romita, Steve Ditko, Gene Colan type of guy. The Original Captain Marvel was way before my time. I had seen his recent run on DC's Shazam but hadn't bought any copies due to my limited funds. Other than that, I had only seen covers of that old character at the shows. I was never allowed to even open one up because they were so expensive. Another fine pickle for me to chew over.

I had to wait a month for the next show so I could do drawings of Captain Marvel himself. After all I couldn't very well go over to this legends house and show him my drawings of Captain America and have him frown at me and say "Wrong Captain, sonny! You can show yourself out now!"

After long grueling weeks of endless anxiety I finally went to the local convention and found someone with a really beaten up copy of a Captain Marvel book that let me open it up and look through it. I was startled to say the least. It was so... **cartoony**. So unlike Marvel and DC. So unlike everything I knew about comics. I didn't know what to think. I started asking around about Mr. Beck and began finding out that he was very opinionated about Jack Kirby's work among others. In a negative way. This just kept getting stranger for me.

I wasn't going to let a little thing like that interfere with my plans. I just wouldn't mention my absolute, total blind devotion to Jack's art, that's all. Simple. Everything was back on track. No problems at all. I would be seeing Mr. Beck next weekend!

I penciled and inked a Captain Marvel piece of art on an oversized art board and added it to my portfolio and Saturday finally came. My mom wished me luck, still under the impression that I had called and made an appointment. I didn't exactly lie to her, so much as avoided the truth, if you know what I mean.

Two bus rides, a long walk and a couple of hours later I arrived at C.C. Becks house and knocked on the door. I was proud and nervous at the same time as I waited for him to answer. And waited. And waited.

And waited. I figured he must be out shopping for groceries or something, so I sat on his door step and waited some more.... I mean, how long could it take to buy groceries after all? He'd be back in no time and welcome me with open arms!

And waited. Finally a few hours later a next door neighbor took pity on me, came out and she looked at my black portfolio bag and asked if I was waiting for Mr. Beck? I said I certainly was and was going to show him my artwork.

She told me I was going to have a long wait... he had just left with his family for a two week vacation.

Well.... Shazam!

Chapter Three

"Sorcerer's Apprentice!"

Well that was certainly humiliating! And on top of it I had to face up to the fib I told Mom and Dad about calling Mr. Beck in advance. There was no way to tap dance around it. I originally figured he would be there and I could just act like he had given me permission to see him.... but now.... there was simply no clever way to get out of this one. I had to fess up!

The hopeful excitement on Mom's face was quickly replaced by disappointment at my subterfuge. I didn't get punished, but the look of sadness my Mother had and the knowing look my Father gave me was chastisement enough believe me.

After a few days of the silent treatment all went back to what passed as normal in the Reed household again. Finally my Mom suggested that I call Mr. Beck in a few weeks and make an appointment... like I should have in the first place. Eating crow is tough.

So a couple of weeks later under my Mother's watchful eye, I called Mr. Beck and introduced myself asking if it was alright if I went over to see him and show him my artwork. He told me he already knew who I was... his neighbor told him all about me sitting on his door step for hours.

Would the suffering and torture never end? Good God it was humiliating!

He then told me he would be glad to see me sometime in the future.... but to be sure to call ahead next time. Sometime in the future? That sounded like a polite brush off! NO! It couldn't end like that... I had to do or say something or my opportunity would be lost forever! So I blurted out "How about next Saturday? Or if that's not good, how about the Saturday after that?" I knew I was pressing my luck but I had a terrible premonition that if I didn't get something solid right then, that he would keep coming up with excuses until I couldn't call anymore.

After a long pause he finally agreed to see me in two weeks. I didn't realize I was holding my breath until I let it out in a gasp. The deal was sealed! I thanked him over and over and told him I would call the day before to make sure he would be expecting me. Apologizing again for showing up like that and thanking him yet again, I finally hung up.

I simply could not believe I had pulled it off. Mom gave me a big hug and told me how proud she was of her son. Dad grunted something under his breath. Now all I had to do was somehow get through the next two weeks without dying from anxiety!

Somehow I survived the next two weeks and I found myself once again on Mr. Beck's door step.

A middle aged man opened the door. I knew this couldn't be C. C. Beck, he was far too young to have been doing Golden Age comics. I introduced myself and said I was there to see Mr. Beck. He told me that he knew who I was and that his father was expecting me. My reputation had proceeded me it seemed.

The Ranch Style house seemed nice but normal to me. Nothing shouted out that it was the home of a comic book personality. From where I was I could see a living room with all the normal things like a couch, chair, and TV. I don't know what I expected... Reed Richard's laboratory maybe?

Before my crazy imagination could continue along it's usual path a nice looking older woman came up to me and introduced herself as Mr. Beck's wife and asked me if I'd like some water. I said I sure would. This was South Florida and I had just had a long walk. She got me a nice cold glass of water and said that C. C. was just finishing something up and would be with me in a minute.

A moment later he arrived.

Before I go any further, you must understand that everything I'm describing is seen through the eyes of a thirteen year old comic book fanatic. This is all just how I saw the world back then. OK, back to the story.

He was exactly what I expected! He was a grey haired older gentleman with glasses and a very wise look about him. Something about him seemed to exude an aura of knowledge, wisdom and almost mystical awareness. In short, he conveyed the impression of being a Wizard! It was truly strange, but I immediately pictured him in the clothing of a Sorcerer like the one in the Disney film Fantasia.

Of course he had dressed in normal clothing and the image faded as quickly as it appeared.

I have no idea what he thought of me, but he seemed like a very nice person to me. I offered him my hand and let him know what a pleasure it was to meet him. We shook and he invited me into his studio.

Walking into his studio was like walking into a different world! Now this was more like it! Drawing boards, work tables, paint brushes, and strange contraptions where everywhere. Medieval weapons were scattered around as well as a large perfect replica of the starship Enterprise!

Holy Moly! This was the real deal! Stepping over the threshold of his doorway was like entering another world! One where magic was not only possible, but created every day! I couldn't believe my eyes!

I was staring at the Enterprise model and asked where he bought it. He chuckled and told me he had built it. WHAT? He then flipped a switch and the lights all over the ship came

on. He took the top off of the saucer part and showed me the inside, how he had rigged the lighting. He explained that he had built it from light weight balsa wood. I was stunned... how could he have done that? It looked perfect! It could have been used as a prop in the show... amazing!

We then went over to a work bench where he had several ancient Medieval weapons. I asked if he would mind if I touched the ax? He said it was fine, and that I could even hold it. Cool. I picked it up and my hand shot into the air! C. C. Beck chuckled again in pleasure at this and explained that it too was made of light weight modeling balsa wood. He said he loved to do that to everyone who came to his studio, that people expected it to be really heavy so that when they picked up one of his weapons they always overestimated the weight and their arms would go flying into the air.

I examined the ax closely and it still seemed real to me. It was around this time that I began to suspect that my first impression of Mr. Beck was an accurate one... this man was indeed a Sorcerer of some kind!

Then Mr. Beck pulled out some oversized art of his own... full color reproductions of Golden Age covers he was doing for a client. Stunning to say the least. They were some of the most beautiful things I had ever seen.

He then led me to a corner of his studio where there was this big wooden contraption with a chair in front of it. It had an opening where a tilted glass sat, not unlike a drawing board. He flipped another switch and it lit up. He put a golden age comic in a slot on the side and it showed up on the glass top, only larger. He adjusted the focus on a lens and put a large sheet of tracing paper on top of the glass explaining that he had designed and built this projector so he could reproduce the covers faithfully.

Excuse me? He figured out the optics and design of a projector and hand built it? You have got to be kidding me! Who was this guy? Certainly far more than just a comic book artist.... it was fast becoming obvious that I had stumbled into a realm closer to Leonardo da Vinci.

We both sat down on stools as he explained some of his working methods, and before long he asked to see my artwork. The focus shifted to me. This was the moment of truth! All this trauma and angst was all building up to this juncture... would he like my work or think I was wasting my time and really just deluding myself to think I could someday be good enough to make a living drawing comics.

I started by showing him the oversized Captain Marvel. He seemed really seemed to like it! He continued looking at my work and making various comments about them showing a lot of promise, and pointing out various flaws in my art. All the while making positive remarks about how they could be improved if I had the right training and direction.

It almost seemed to me that he was hinting that he could be the one to give that guidance. Could I be hearing him right or was I just hearing what I wanted to hear? Only one way

to find out. I started suggesting that maybe he could help me out. That if I could come back from time to time, he could continue to offer me suggestions... and that I would not be any bother to him.... and it would really be an honor for me if he would.... and....

He laughed at my overt enthusiasm, and said that he was quite busy, but perhaps he might just find a little time to occasionally see me and give me a few pointers. Not too often mind you, and that I had to keep showing that I was actually taking his advice and showing improvement. He didn't want to be wasting his time.

I assured him I would and would it be OK with him if I came back in a couple of weeks? He told me that a month was more like it. And to remember I had to show that I was working hard on the comments he had made on my work today. I absolutely guaranteed him I would.

We left it at that and I thanking him over and over and on my way out, I thanked his wife for the water and promising not to be a pest. All the while being a pest. I finally managed to walk out of the house with my oversized portfolio with whatever grace and dignity I could muster.

As soon as I was out of sight of the house I started jumping up and down! I had done it!!! C. C. Beck had promised to take me under his wing and guide my future! I knew that my life would never be same again!

Chapter Four

"A Meeting With The King!"

Chapter Five

"Come Fly With Me!"

Chapter Six

"Bullseye!"

Chapter Seven

"Climbing Mount Marvel!"

Chapter Eight

"College And The Subatomic World!"

Chapter Nine

"Transformed!"

Chapter Ten

"Hi Ho, Hi Ho, It's Back to Marvel We Go!"

Chapter Eleven

"Independence!"

Chapter Twelve

"It All Started With A Big Bang!"

Chapter Thirteen

"The Dimensioneer!"