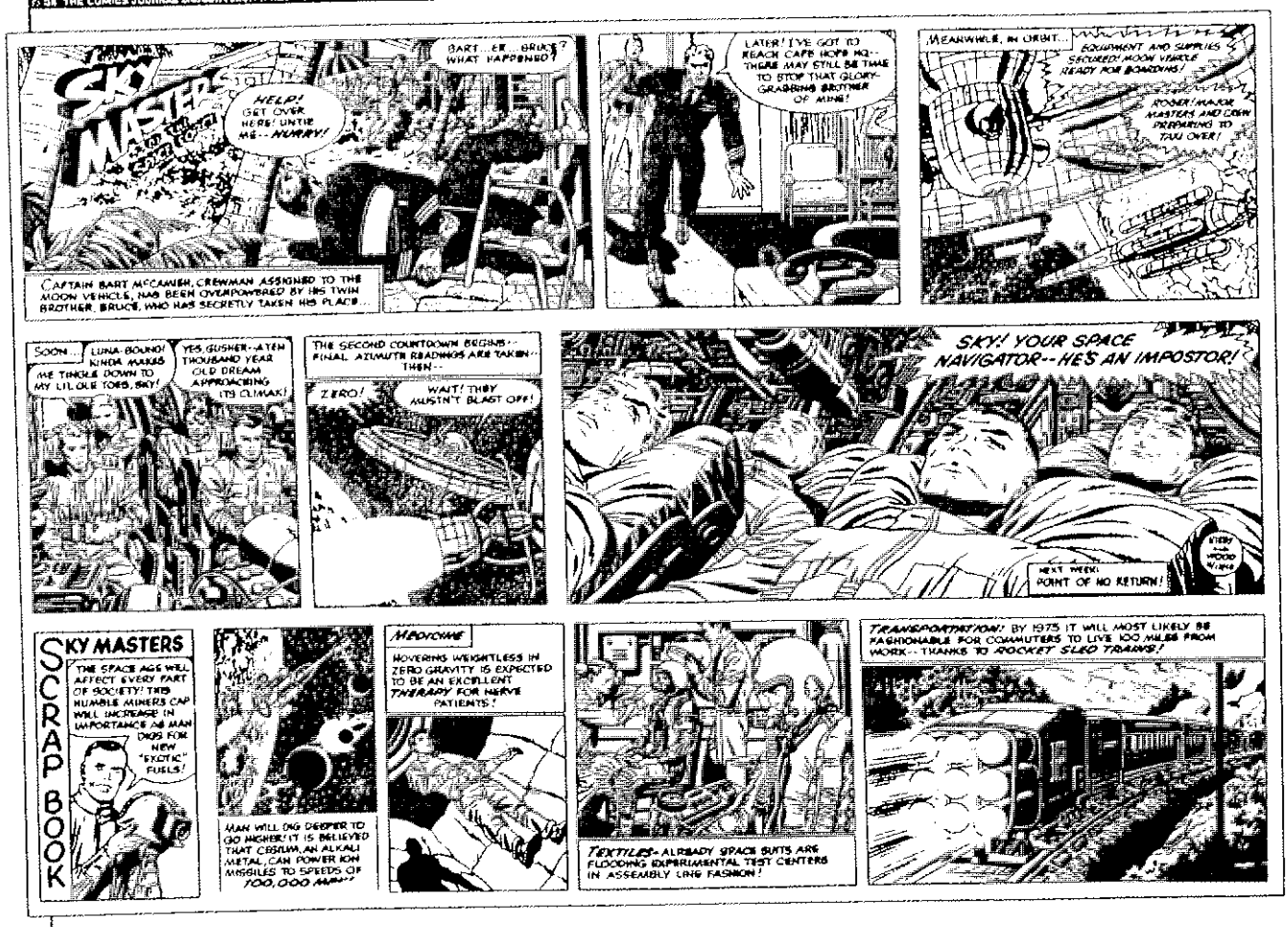


Sky Masters of the Space Force *strip from the late '50s*

KIRBY: Yes, I did. I enjoyed working on *any* story. I'm essentially a storyteller. You name the subject, and I'll give a good story on it. That's why when I came back from the war, I did some war stories for DC. And they did very well. The magazine sold.

TCJ: *Did* Skymasters *have a Sunday page?*

KIRBY: Yes, it did.

TCJ: *How long did the strip run?*

KIRBY: About two years.

TCJ: *I believe you started the* Skymasters *strip in '57. And I believe you also created* Challengers of the Unknown *for National in '58. So how did your affiliation with National come about? Did you just drop by the offices and look for work?*

KIRBY: Yes. I felt National had always been a respectable house, a prestige house. I liked the people who ran the place, I liked the publisher. I liked the people who worked for them. I always liked DC — they were fair, which was very rare in comics. [*Laughter*]

TCJ: *When you say they were fair — you still didn't get to own the strips you drew —*

ROZ KIRBY: We *thought* they were fair. [*Laughter*]

KIRBY: All right, I'll qualify it. I'll just say that nobody in the field had a contract from anybody. And DC wasn't the only publishing house in the field. There was also Timely and Dell and a lot of others.

TCJ: *But still, at that time, they owned everything you did, they paid a low page rate, they kept the original art.*

KIRBY: Yes, they did. But the idea was the artist came from a poor section of the city ... I was happy because I made enough money to give to my parents. I made enough money to get married on. I made enough money to enjoy myself a little more than I would have if I didn't have enough money.

TCJ: *Who did you deal with at DC? Did you have an editor that you dealt with directly?*

KIRBY: They had several editors. I dealt with Mort Weisinger, Julie Schwartz and Murray Boltinoff. [*At the time, Kirby worked with editor Jack Schiff, not Julie Schwartz.*]

TCJ: *Can you distinguish between the editors? Did they have different approaches?*

KIRBY: They were different personalities certainly, but they were all great to get along with. We're still good friends. Mort Weisinger is gone. When we first moved to California, Mort Weisinger came to visit us.

TCJ: *What kind of man was he? I understand he was a tough taskmaster.*

KIRBY: Everybody was a tough taskmaster. Mort Weisinger wasn't a particularly tough taskmaster. He was trying to do an editor's job. Comics have a caste system — an editor has to act in a certain way, an artist has to be humble, right? An artist has to be humble, an editor must be officious, and a publisher must be somewhere out in the galaxy enjoying godhood. It was a caste system, pure and simple. And it was accepted that way. Nobody thought of contracts, nobody thought of insisting on better deals.

TCJ: *Did you assume when you did a book — any one of the many books you've done — did you assume that the publisher owned it? Or did you think about it a little later and think, "Wait a minute, I did this and I didn't have a contract, and I don't see why he should own it 100 percent"?*

KIRBY: No, I was growing up and becoming aware of those things. Joe Simon knew about those things.

TCJ: *At the time, you just assumed that the publisher owned it?*

KIRBY: Yes. I assumed that he took it, OK? [*Laughter*] I assumed that he took it, and I didn't have the means to get it back. In other words, I didn't save my money for a lawyer. I was a very young man, and saved my money for having a good time.

TCJ: *Sometime in the mid-'50s, Bernie Krigstein tried to start a union among comic-book creators. Were you aware of that?*

KIRBY: I was aware of it. It was something that I knew would fail.

TCJ: *But you didn't go to any meetings?*

KIRBY: No, no. Unions almost had the connotation of communism.

TCJ: *You were wary?*

KIRBY: Everybody was wary. Remember, this was a time when communists marched through the streets, waving flags and shouting. The unions did the same thing, so you began to associate them. I'm speaking now as a human being, not as a businessman — the unions are great. The unions are great for the working people because they protect you, but I didn't see them that way as a young man. First of all, the papers would connect them with the communists — labor unions were communists.

TCJ: *Of course, the papers had a vested interest in doing that.*

KIRBY: Yes.

ROZ KIRBY: Also, at that time, each artist was making his own deal. Jack said, "Well, I make more money than them." Everybody can't make the same.

KIRBY: I was doing very well — my books were selling. Whatever I drew, sold.

TCJ: *When you say you were doing very well, what does that mean? What was your page rate in the '50s?*

KIRBY: Thirty-five to 50 dollars for a complete page. It depended on who you worked for. Some paid less. Some paid more.

TCJ: *Would that include the writing?*

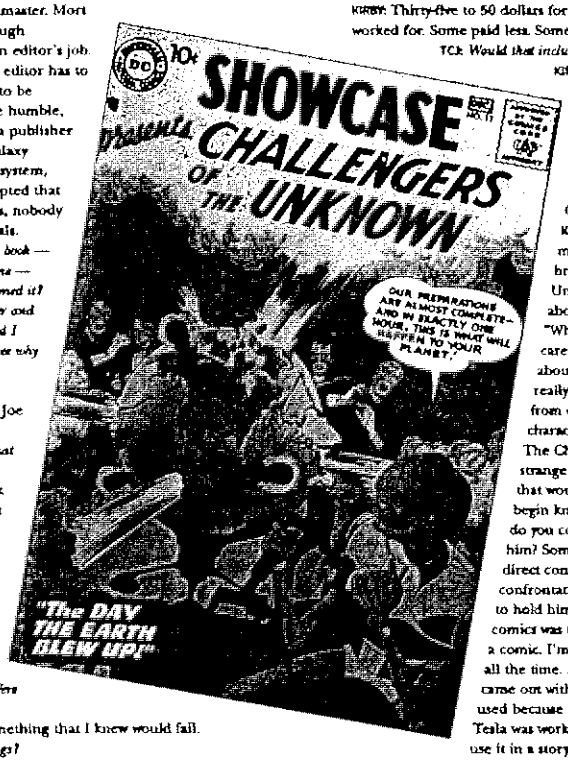
KIRBY: Yes, I gave them a complete page. Joe would ink it or someone else would ink it. I'd get somebody to ink it, or I'd ink it myself, and I'd get a certain amount from the publishers. That's how it was with *Challengers of the Unknown*.

TCJ: *Can you tell me how you came about creating* Challengers of the Unknown?

KIRBY: *Challengers of the Unknown* was a movie to me. The science-fiction pictures were beginning to break, and I felt that the Challengers of the Unknown were part of that genre. I began to think about three words which have always puzzled me: "What's out there?" OK? What's out there? I didn't care about the East Side any more. I didn't care about Earth or anything like that. I thought, "What's really out there?" Then I began to draw characters from outer space, characters from beneath the earth, characters from anywhere that we couldn't think of. The Challengers were us contending with these very strange people. A guy would suddenly make a potion that would render him into a superman, and he would begin knocking down buildings with his bare fists. How do you contend with a guy like that? How do you stop him? Sometimes, I did it in a very clever fashion, not by direct confrontation. Sometimes, I did it by direct confrontation. I found ways to knock him out, I found ways to hold him, I found ways to weaken him. The fun of doing comics was finding this variety of ways in which to conclude a comic. I'm not the sort of fellow who does the same thing all the time. I began using a lot of science-fiction apparatus. I came out with the atom bomb two years before it was actually used because I read in the paper that a fellow named Nicola Tesla was working on the atom bomb. I said, "Great idea, I can use it in a story."

TCJ: *Looking back on it, do you see the Challengers as a precursor to the Fantastic Four?*

KIRBY: Yes, there were always precursors to the Fantastic Four — except the Fantastic Four were mutations. When people began talking about the bomb and its possible effect on human beings, they began talking about mutations because that's a distinct possibility. And I said, "That's a great idea." That's how the Fantastic Four began, with an atomic explosion and its effect on the characters. Ben Grimm, who was a college man and a fine-looking man, suddenly became the Thing. Susan Storm became invisible because of the atomic effects on her



Cover of Showcase *#11, 1957.*

body. Reed Richards became flexible and become a character that I could work with in various ways. And there were others — mutation effects didn't only affect heroes, it affected villains, too. So I had a grand time with the atomic bomb. (*Laughter*)

TCJ: *Before we get to* Fantastic Four *and your '60s period at Marvel, you also helped Joe Simon with* The Fly *and* Private Strong. *Can you tell me how that came about? Joe Simon apparently had left comics for a few years.*

ROZ KIRBY: Joe called Jack.

KIRBY: Yes, he had. I've always been a friend of Joe's, and I did *The Fly* and *Private Strong* with him. It was my last shot with Joe because he went back to commercial art.

TCJ: *Why did he go back to comics for that brief period?*

KIRBY: It was like a reflex action — you go back to comics. But Joe is older than I am, and I think a lot more grown-up in his ways.

He quit comics and began doing commercial art. There were things arising in comics that weren't exactly wholesome. But I stuck to it — it was the only thing I knew. I had to deal with that, and it hurt me in many, many ways. In many ways, it still hurts me. Thinking back on it, I just didn't know what else to do.

TCJ: *Do you remember at what point in your life you realized that you were devoting your life to comics, and that comics had become a career? I suppose it must have dawned on you at some point that you were a comic artist, and that your identity was that of a comic artist.*

ROZ KIRBY: His real dream was to make movies.

KIRBY: I wanted to make movies and was doing comics. In fact, later on I was dealing with producers and people who actually made movies — I still do. What I really wanted to do is make movies. If I made a movie, it would be a good one. If I made a movie and there was money to be gotten for that movie, I can tell you it would be a terrific movie. Steven Spielberg did what I couldn't do. (*Laughter*) Somehow he made it and I didn't.

TCJ: *Well, the movies' loss is comics' gain. Let me ask you this: you were doing* Challengers *around '57 or '58 and you also started working for Marvel around this time. Was there an overlap when you worked for both companies or did you go from DC to Marvel?*

ROZ KIRBY: He never worked for both at the same time.

KIRBY: I'd work for one and the situation would deteriorate, and I'd go back to the other, and I bounced back and forth like a yo-yo between Marvel and DC.

TCJ: *Do you remember why you left DC for Marvel in the late '50s?*

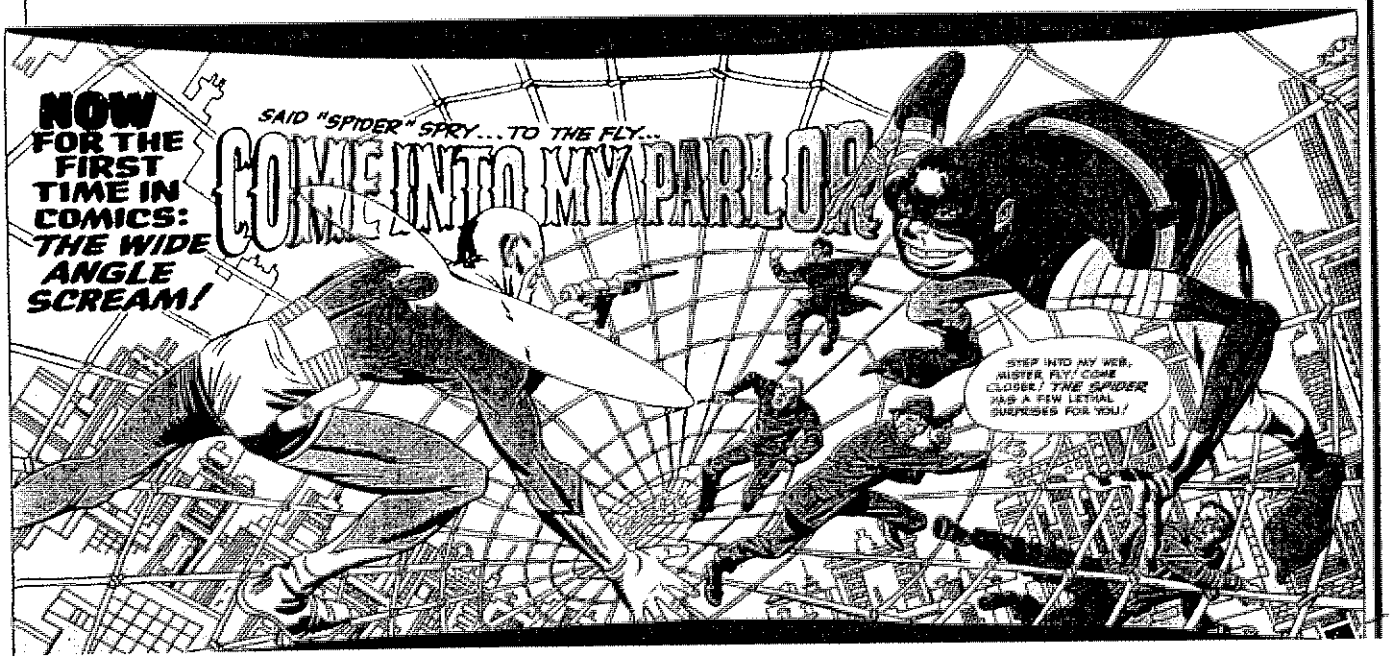
KIRBY: (*Pause*) No, I can't really remember. I don't exactly know what the circumstances were.

TCJ: *I just want to clear one thing up — did you write* Challengers *too?*

KIRBY: Yes, I wrote *Challengers*. I wrote everything I did. When I went back to Marvel, I began to create new stuff.

TCJ: *Now, I think you started doing monster books for Marvel. Did you enjoy doing those?*

KIRBY: I always enjoyed doing monster books. Monster books gave me the opportunity to draw things out of the ordinary. Monster books were a challenge — what kind of monster would fascinate people? I couldn't draw anything that was too outlandish or too horrible. I never did that. What I did draw was something intriguing. There was something about this monster that you could live with. If you saw him, you wouldn't faint dead away. There was nothing disgusting in his demeanor. There was nothing about him that repelled you. My monsters were lovable monsters. (*Laughter*) I gave them names — some were evil



Art from The Adventures of the Fly *#1, 1959.*

and some were good. They made sales, and that's always been my prime object in comics. I had to make sales in order to keep myself working. And so I put all the ingredients in that would pull in sales. It's always been that way.

"IT'S JUST JACK'S WORD AGAINST STAN'S"

TCJ: *When did you meet Stan Lee for the first time?*

KIRBY: I met Stan Lee when I first went to work for Marvel. He was a little boy. When Joe and I were doing *Captain America*, he was about 15 years old. He's about five years younger than me.

TCJ: *Did you keep in touch with him at all?*

KIRBY: No, I thought Stan Lee was a bother.

TCJ: [*Laughter*]

KIRBY: I did!

TCJ: *What do you mean by "bother"?*

KIRBY: You know, he was the kind of kid that liked to fool around — open and close doors on you. Yeah. In fact, once I told Joe to throw him out of the room.

TCJ: *Because he was a pest?*

KIRBY: Yes, he was a pest. Stan Lee was a pest. He liked to irk people and it was one thing I couldn't take.

TCJ: *Hasn't changed a bit, huh?*

KIRBY: He hasn't changed a bit. I couldn't do anything about Stan Lee because he was the publisher's cousin. He ran back and forth around New York doing things that he was told to do. He would slam doors and come up to you and look over your shoulder and annoy you in a lot of ways. Joe would probably elaborate on it.

TCJ: *When you went to Marvel in '58 or '59, Stan was obviously there.*

KIRBY: Yes, and he was the same way.

TCJ: *And you two collaborated on all the monster stories?*

KIRBY: Stan Lee and I never collaborated on anything! I've never seen Stan Lee write anything. I used to write the stories just like I always did.

TCJ: *On all the monster stories it says "Stan Lee and Jack Kirby." What did he do to warrant his name being on them?*

KIRBY: Nothing! OK?

TCJ: *Did he dialogue them?*

KIRBY: No, I dialogued them. If Stan Lee ever got a thing dialogued, he would get it from someone working in the office. I would write out the whole story on the back of every page. I would write the dialogue on the back or a description of what was going on. Then Stan Lee would hand them to some guy and he would write in the dialogue. In this way, Stan Lee made more pay than he did as an editor. This is the way Stan Lee became the writer. Besides collecting the editor's pay, he collected writer's pay. I'm not saying Stan Lee had a bad business head on. I think he took advantage of whoever was working for him.

TCJ: *But he was essentially serving in a capacity as an editorial liaison between you and the publisher?*

KIRBY: Yes, he wasn't exactly an editor, or anything like that. Even as a young boy, he'd be hopping around — I think he had a flute, and he was playing on his flute. [*Simon confirms Lee's habit of annoying the bullpen with his flute playing in his book* The Comic Book Makers.]

TCJ: *The Pied Piper.*

KIRBY: Yeah. He'd come up and annoy me, and I told Joe to throw him out.

TCJ: *Stan wrote, "Jack and I were having a ball turning out monster stories." Were you having a ball, Jack?*

KIRBY: Stan Lee was having the ball.

TCJ: *You turned out monster stories for two or three years, I think. Then the first comic that rejuvenated superheroes that you did was* Fantastic Four. *Can you explain how that came about?*

KIRBY: I had to do something different. The monster stories have their limitations — you can just do so many of them. And then it becomes a monster book month after month, so there had to be a switch because the times weren't exactly conducive to good sales. So I felt the idea was to come up with new stuff all the time — in other words, there had to be a blitz. And I came up with this blitz. I came up with the Fantastic Four, I came up with Thor (I knew the Thor legends very well), and the Hulk, the X-Men and the Avengers. I revived what I could and came up with what I could. I tried to blitz the stands with new stuff. The new stuff seemed to gain momentum.

TCJ: *Let me ask you something that I think is an important point: Stan wrote the way you guys worked — and I think he's referring to the monster stories specifically here — he wrote, "I had only to give Jack an outline of the story and he would draw the entire strip breaking down the outline into exactly the right number of panels. Then it remained for me to take*

Splash page from Amazing Adventures #5, 1961.

"I tried to blitz the stands with new stuff."

Kirby self-portrait with Marvel characters.

Jack's artwork and add the captions and dialogue which would hopefully add a dimension of reality to sharply delineated characterization." So he's saying that he gave you a plot, and you would draw it, and he would add the captions and dialogue.

ROZ KIRBY: I remember Jack would call him up and say it's going to be this kind of story or that kind of story and just send him the story. And he'd write in everything on the side.

KIRBY: Remember this: Stan Lee was an editor. He worked from nine to five doing business for Martin Goodman. In other words, he didn't do any writing in the office. He did Martin Goodman's business. That was his function. There were people coming up to the office to talk all the time. They weren't always artists, they were business people. Stan Lee was the first man they would see, and Stan Lee would see if he could get them in to see Martin Goodman. That was Stan Lee's function.

TCJ: *Where were you living at the time, in '61-'62?*

KIRBY: We had a house on Long Island.

TCJ: *Did you deliver your work to Marvel?*

KIRBY: Yes, I did. Once or twice a month. I worked at home.

TCJ: *What were your working hours like?*

KIRBY: I worked whenever I liked to.

ROZ KIRBY: Mostly in the evening. He helped me during the day with the children.

KIRBY: It was a wonderful routine because I could do whatever I liked to do during the day. I didn't have to work in an office. I could work at home. I could work at my leisure. I worked 'til four in the morning. I worked with the TV and radio on — it was a great setup. I was a night person and still am.

TCJ: *Can you tell me your version of how* Fantastic Four *came about? Did Stan go to you?*

KIRBY: No, Stan didn't know what a mutation was. I was studying that kind of stuff all the time. I would spot it in the newspapers and science magazines. I still buy magazines that are fanciful. I don't read as much science fiction as I did at that time. I was a student of science fiction and I began to make up my own story patterns, my own type of people. Stan Lee doesn't think the way I do. Stan Lee doesn't think of people when he thinks of [*characters*]. I think of [*characters*] as real people. If I drew a war story, it would be two guys caught in the war. The Fantastic Four to me are people who were in a jam — suddenly you find yourself invisible, suddenly you find yourself flexible.

ROZ KIRBY: Gary wants to know how you created *Fantastic Four*.

TCJ: *Did you approach Marvel or —*

KIRBY: It came about very simply. I came in [*to the Marvel office*] and they were moving out the furniture, they were taking desks out — and I needed the work! I had a family and a house, and all of a sudden Marvel is coming apart. Stan Lee is sitting on a chair crying. He didn't know what to do, he's sitting in a chair crying — he was just still out of his adolescence. I told him to stop crying. I says, "Go in to Martin and tell him to stop moving the furniture out, and I'll see that the books make money." And I came up with a raft of new books and all these books began to make money. Somehow they had faith in me. I knew I could do it, but I had to come up with fresh characters that nobody had seen before. I came up with the Fantastic Four. I came up with Thor. Whatever it took to sell a book, I came up with. Stan Lee had never been editorial-minded. It wasn't possible for a man like Stan Lee to come up with new things — or old things for that matter. Stan Lee wasn't a guy that read or that told stories. Stan Lee was a guy that knew where the papers were or who was coming to visit that day. Stan Lee is essentially an office worker, OK? I'm essentially something else: I'm a storyteller. My job is to sell my stories. When I saw this happening at Marvel, I stopped the whole damned bunch. I stopped them from moving the furniture!

TCJ: *Now, did the success of* Justice League of America *over at National have anything to do with creating* Fantastic Four? *Did that prompt you to create the FF?*

KIRBY: No. It didn't prompt me. I felt an urgency at the time. It was an instinct. Here you have an emergency situation — what do you do? The water is pouring in through a big hole in the wall — you don't stop to put adhesive bandages around the wall to shore it up. You get a lot of stuff together and slam it against the wall and keep the water out. That's what I did.

TCJ: *Who came up with the name "Fantastic Four"?*

KIRBY: I did. All right? I came up with all those names. I came up with *Thor* because I've always been a history buff. I know all about Thor and Baldur and Mjolnir the hammer. Nobody ever bothered with that stuff except me. I loved it

in high school and I loved it in my pre-high-school days. It was the thing that kept my mind off the general poverty in the area. When I went to school, that's what kept me in school — it wasn't mathematics and it wasn't geography; it was history.

TCJ: *Stan says he conceptualized virtually everything in* Fantastic Four *— that he came up with all the characters. And then he said that he wrote a detailed synopsis for Jack to follow.*

ROZ KIRBY: I've never seen anything.

KIRBY: I've never seen it, and of course I would say that's an outright lie.

TCJ: *Stan pretty much takes credit in an introduction to one of his books for creating all the characters in* Fantastic Four. *He also said he created the name.*

KIRBY: No, he didn't.

TCJ: *The next character was the Hulk. Can you talk a little about how you were involved in creating the Hulk?*

KIRBY: The Hulk I created when I saw a woman lift a car. Her baby was caught under the running-board of this car. The little child was playing in the gutter and he was crawling from the gutter onto the sidewalk under the running board of this car — he was playing in the gutter. His mother was horrified. She looked from the rear window of the car, and this woman in desperation lifted the rear end of the car. It suddenly came to me that in desperation we can all do that — we can knock down walls, we can go berserk, which we do. You know what happens when we're in a rage — you can tear a house down. I created a character who did all that and called him the Hulk. I inserted him in a lot of the stories I was doing.

Whatever the Hulk was at the beginning I got from that incident. A character, to me, can't be contrived. I don't like to contrive characters. They have to have an element of truth. This woman proved to me that the ordinary person in desperate circumstances can transcend himself and do things that he wouldn't ordinarily do. I've done it myself. I've bent steel.

TCJ: *Was the child caught between the running board?*

KIRBY: He wasn't caught. He was playing under the running board in the gutter. His head was sticking out, and then he decided he wanted to get back on the sidewalk again. But being under the car frightened his mother. He was having difficulty crawling out from under the running board, so his mother looked like she was going to scream, and she looked very desperate. She didn't scream, but she ran over to the car and, very determined, she lifted up the entire rear of that car. I'm not saying she was a slender woman. [*Laughter*] She was a short, firm, well-built woman — and the Hulk was there. I didn't know what it was. It began to form.

ROZ KIRBY: You also said the Hulk reminded you of Frankenstein.

KIRBY: The Hulk was Frankenstein. Frankenstein can rip up the place, and the Hulk could never remember who he formerly was.

TCJ: *Well, this is probably going to shock you, but Stan takes full credit for creating the Hulk. He's written, "Actually, ideas have always been the easiest part of my various chores." And then he went on to say that in creating* The Hulk, *"It would be my job to take a clichéd concept and make it seem new and fresh and exciting and relevant. Once again, I decided that Jack Kirby would be the artist to breathe life into our latest creation. So the next time we met, I outlined the concept I'd been toying with for weeks."*

KIRBY: Yes, he was always toying with concepts. On the contrary, it was I who brought the ideas to Stan. I brought the ideas to DC as well, and that's how business was done from the beginning.

TCJ: *Stan also claimed he created the name "the Hulk."*

KIRBY: No, he didn't.

ROZ KIRBY: It's just his word against Stan's.

TCJ: *There was a period between '61 and '63 when you were just drawing a tremendous number of books.*

ROZ KIRBY: May I make one point? In all these years, when Jack was still creating things, Stan Lee hasn't been creating things. When Jack left Stan, there wasn't anything new created by Stan.

KIRBY: Yeah. Stan never created anything new after that. If he says he created things all that easily, what did he create after I left? That's the point. Have they done anything new? He'll probably tell you, "I didn't have to."

TCJ: *Can I ask what your involvement in* Spider-Man *was?*

KIRBY: I created Spider-Man. We decided to give it to Steve Ditko. I drew the first *Spider-Man* cover. I created the character. I created the costume. I created all those books, but I couldn't do them all. We decided to give the book to Steve Ditko, who was the right man for the job. He did a wonderful job on that.

TCJ: *Did you know Ditko?*

KIRBY: I knew Ditko as well as any man could. Ditko is a withdrawn, silent type.

TCJ: *Did you guys get along well?*

KIRBY: I got along with him. I can only speak for myself. I liked Steve very much.

ROZ KIRBY: We bumped into him three years ago in New York.

KIRBY: He surprised me. He was very sociable, and we socialized, and he's very open with people now.

TCJ: *What kind of guy was he?*

KIRBY: He was a very withdrawn guy. I never bothered him because I felt that

Kirby's cover for Amazing Fantasy *#15, Spider-Man's first appearance, 1962.*

Kirby's rivalry with chief of Stan Lee and Marvel editor Roy Thomas: Page from Mr. Miracle *#6, 1972. Inked by Mike Royer.*

that's the way he wanted it. I talked to him when it was necessary. I believe that Steve was the kind of guy that wanted it that way. He was a wonderful artist, a wonderful conceptualist. It was Steve Ditko that made Spider-Man the well-known character that he is.

TCJ: *Do you like his work?*

KIRBY: Yes, because it's got a definite style that you could recognize anywhere. You can point to any picture that Steve makes and say, "Ditko did that." It's individual.

ROZ KIRBY: They all look Polish.

KIRBY: Yeah. All his characters look Polish! [*Laughter*]

TCJ: *I don't have an exact chronology of everything you did, but I'd like to go through a few of them. You did* Sgt. Fury. *Can you explain how that came about? Did you create* Sgt. Fury?

KIRBY: Yes. Sgt. Fury was the head of a battalion or something.

ROZ KIRBY: I was downstairs with him in the basement when he was figuring out what the logo should be. If Stan Lee wants to know who created him, he can ask me. I was with him.

KIRBY: I didn't have to take anybody else's strip to make sales, and my purpose was just to make sales.

TCJ: *How did all those books in the '60s come to be created? Would someone at Marvel say, "We need another book"?*

KIRBY: No. I'd come up with them.

TCJ: *You would just come up with them on your own?*

KIRBY: Yes, I would come up with them.

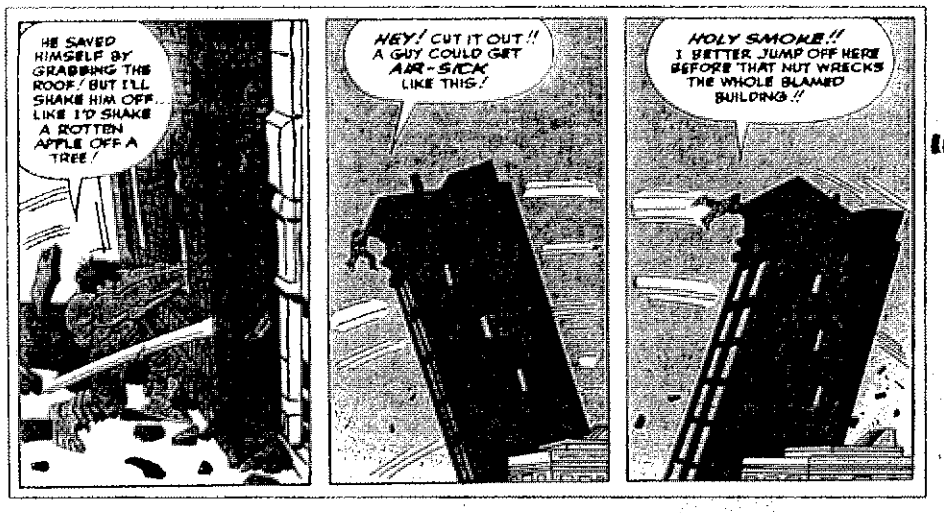
ROZ KIRBY: When he left Marvel and went back to DC, Carmine Infantino gave him carte blanche.

KIRBY: I gave them *The New Gods*.

TCJ: *Did you ever have any occasions where you were running out of space and there was too much story? How did you structure a story so that you didn't have a problem of ending a story too abruptly?*

KIRBY: I wrote a story so that it would gather momentum to an end. Sometimes you can make a very dramatic story which ends quietly — without any dialogue. I never had stock endings. I didn't believe in stock endings. To make the [*reader*] happy was not my objective, but to make the [*reader*] say, "Yeah, that's what would happen" — that was my objective. I knew the [*reader*] was never happy all the time. You take the Thing, he'd knock out 50 guys at a time and win — then maybe he'd sit down and kind of reflect on it: "Maybe I hurt somebody or maybe we could have done it some other way," like a human being would think, not like a monster. In other books, the guy would knock out the gangs and that would be the end of it. You would see the guys in jail, and that's it.

TCJ: *I always thought that one of the emotional anchors of*



Panels from Fantastic Four #25, 1964. Inked by George Bausser (working under the pen name "George Bell").

the Fantastic Four was the tragedy of the Thing.

KIRBY: He was a tragedy. Can you imagine yourself as a mutation, never knowing when you were going to change, and what you'd look like to your folks or people that you love. Everybody seemed to associate me with the Thing because he acted like a regular guy. No matter what he looked like, the Thing never changed his personality — he was always a human being, despite his physical change. Ben Grimm always remained Ben Grimm. I think that's why the reader liked him; that touch of reality. You can't really change a guy unless you injure his brain, or if he sustains some sort of injury in a situation.

TCJ: *Jack, did you put a lot of yourself into the character of Ben Grimm?*

KIRBY: Well, they associated me with Ben Grimm. I suppose I must be a lot like Ben Grimm. I never duck out of a fight; I don't care what the hell the odds are, and I'm rough at times, but I try to be a decent guy all the time. That's the way I've always lived. Because I have children … In other words, my ambition was always to be a perfect picture of an American. An American is a guy, a rich guy with a family, a decent guy with a family, with as many kids as he likes, doing what he wants, working with people that he likes, and enjoying himself to his very old age.

TCJ: *Do you have a favorite among all the books you did at Marvel?*

KIRBY: No, they were all good. Every goddamn one of them was good. There were some that I thought were standouts, but they didn't overshadow the other books. I liked the Planet Ego — that was innovative, using an entire planet as a personality.

TCJ: *Can you explain how you worked? According to Stan he would give you a plot, you would draw it, and he would write it. Now would you dispute —*

ROZ KIRBY: [*Stan*] would say that he needs the story, and I think they talked two minutes on the phone, and then Jack would go off and write the story on the side of the art.

KIRBY: Stan didn't know what the heck the stories were about.

TCJ: *I've seen original art with words written on the sides of the pages.*

KIRBY: That would be my dialogue.

TCJ: *You would talk to Stan on the phone — what was a typical conversation like when you were plotting* Fantastic Four: *what would he say and what would you say?*

KIRBY: On *Fantastic Four*, I'd tell him what I was going to do, what the story was going to be, and I'd bring it in — that's all.

ROZ KIRBY: [*Stan*] would always say, "Great."

KIRBY: And that's all Stan Lee would say, "Great." [*Laughter*]

TCJ: *Did he ever have criticisms of your storylines — would he ever say, "I think you should go in a different direction," or anything like that?*

KIRBY: No, no, no, he took them verbatim. If Stan Lee had ever done that, I'd have been over to DC in about five minutes.

TCJ: *I think you were drawing much of the time three books a month, and those books must have been about 24 pages — so you were turning out roughly 75 pages a month. Was that a strain?*

KIRBY: No, I like working hard. Not only that, but if you look at some of my old pages, notice the expressions on the people — they're very real expressions. I was totally immersed in the characters. I penciled fast, I wrote fast. Nobody could have written it for me because they couldn't have understood the situation or what to do.

ROZ KIRBY: He never wrote the story ahead of time, he wrote while he was drawing.

KIRBY: In other words, I'd never planned a story —

TCJ: *That's my next question. When you were doing a story — say, the first Dragon Man story* is Fantastic Four *that took place on a campus — would you plot that out in your mind?*

KIRBY: No, no, I'd take it from the beginning, then say, what would he do? Here he is, he's a dragon — this guy is in a mess! He's really a human being, but he's a dragon — what would a human being trapped in those circumstances do? Then I'd come up with an answer. I didn't plan out the entire story. I had to do it panel by panel because I had to think for each individual. Sometimes even after I thought it out, the story would come out different because on the way something would happen and this guy would have to make other plans.

ROZ KIRBY: I never remember in all the years that Jack ever erased a panel.

TCJ: *Is that right?*

KIRBY: Yeah.

TCJ: *How did you come up with the Black Panther?*

KIRBY: I came up with the Black Panther because I realized I had no blacks in my strip. I'd never drawn a black. I needed a black. I suddenly discovered that I had a lot of black readers. My first friend was a black! And here I was ignoring them because I was associating with everybody else. It suddenly dawned on me — believe me, it was for human reasons — I suddenly discovered nobody was doing blacks. And here I am, a leading cartoonist, and I wasn't doing a black. I was the first one to do an Asian. Then I began to realize that there was a whole range of human differences. Remember, in my day, drawing an Asian was drawing Fu Manchu — that's the only Asian they knew. The Asians were wily …

"I'm not saying you can, and I'm not saying you can't get a hernia, but I'm not ruling out that you might possibly, if you find the right niche, you might possibly lift that building. Maybe not far. Maybe an inch above the ground. Maybe it's not a large building, but you can do it."

Panel from Thor *#155, 1968. Inked by Vince Colletta.*

TCJ: Was your conception of the Silver Surfer what he eventually turned out to be?

KIRBY: My conception of the Silver Surfer was a human being from space in that particular form. He came in when everybody began surfing — I read about it in the paper. The kids in California were beginning to surf. I couldn't do an ordinary teen-ager surfing so I drew a surfboard with a man from outer space on it.

TCJ: How did you come up with Galactus?

KIRBY: Galactus was God, and I was looking for God. When I first came up with Galactus, I was very awed by him. I didn't know what to do with the character. Everybody talks about God, but what the heck does he look like? Well, he's supposed to be awesome, and Galactus is awesome to me. I drew him large and awesome. No one ever knew the extent of his powers or anything, and I think symbolically that's our relationship [with God].

TCJ: I always thought that the Marvel period in the '60s was your most fertile artistic period.

KIRBY: Yes. Comics to me became more than a livelihood. It just became …

TCJ: Would you call it a passion?

KIRBY: Yes, because I did it in a passionate way. I found that I could be creative in a dozen different ways, and I created one thing, and when I finished that, I created another. I began to think of various new things to do.

TCJ: Can you tell me why the period in the '60s was so creatively fertile for you? Were there circumstances that contributed to it?

KIRBY: Marvel was on its ass, literally, and when I came around, they were practically hauling out the furniture. They were literally moving out the furniture. They were beginning to move, and Stan Lee was sitting there crying. I told them to hold everything, and I pledged that I would give them the kind of books that would up their sales and keep them in business, and that was my big mistake.

TCJ: [Laughing] Right. So you feel that it was that pressure that forced you to create all those characters and to plunge into —

KIRBY: I had to make a living. I was a married man. I had a wife. I had a home. I had children. I had to make a living. That's the common pursuit of every man. It just happened that my living collided with the times, and the times meant going back to Marvel. I mean, that's what I did best. I'd be very bad at anything else. Being the creative guy that I am, I found a way to grease up the Marvel machinery, and I did. The scripts that came out of it are still there today.

TCJ: So, it was to a large extent circumstance that compelled you to produce.

KIRBY: Circum-stances forced me to do it. They forced me.

TCJ: Was there a sense of excitement during that period when Marvel was starting to take off?

KIRBY: No, there wasn't a sense of excitement. It was a horrible, morbid atmosphere. If you can find excitement in that kind of atmosphere — the excitement of fear. The excitement of, "What to do next?" The excitement of what's out there. And that's the excitement that always existed in the field. What am I going to do now that I'm not doing anything more for this publisher? I can go to another publisher. I have to make a living.

TCJ: That's an "excitement" born out of desperation.

KIRBY: It was desperation, but it was creative desperation. It was creative desperation because that's when a man really begins to think hard, and of course it hearkens me back to the creation of *The Hulk*, which I told you about, and this woman who lifted a car. If you want to do it, you can lift a building. I'm not saying you can, and I'm not saying you can't get a hernia, but I'm not ruling out that you might possibly, if you find the right niche, you might possibly lift that building. Maybe not far. Maybe an inch above the ground. Maybe it's not a large building, but you can do it.

I've seen man do everything. I think man is the kind of animal that is capable of doing anything, whether it's good or heinous, whether it's easy or horribly, horribly difficult.

TCJ: When Marvel started to take off — when Marvel was becoming popular on college campuses and achieving a media profile and so on — was there a sense that you were at the center of an exciting creative movement?

KIRBY: No. I knew by then that I was only going to make — I was making a fairly good living. I was making good money, and my marriage was going fine, and I was thinking of moving possibly to a better place.

ROZ KIRBY: But it was a little encouraging when we heard about college students taking an interest in all the books.

KIRBY: Oh, yes. Comics was acquiring a wider audience. Of course, it's universal today, but you can't acquire a wider audience without being creative. You can't find that anywhere today.

TCJ: Did you find that fulfilling?

KIRBY: Of course it was fulfilling. It was a happy time of life. But, slowly management suddenly realized I was making money. I say "management," but I mean an individual. I was making more money than he was, OK? It's an individual. And so he says, "Well, you know … " And the old phrase is born. "Screw you. I get mine." OK? And so I had to render to Caesar what he considered Caesar's. And there was a man who never wrote a line in his life — he could hardly spell — you know, taking credit for the writing. I found myself

coming up with new angles to keep afloat. I was in a bad spot. I was in a spot that I didn't want to be in, and yet I had to make a living. So I went to DC, and I began creating for them.

TCJ: *You were getting a page rate at Marvel?*

KIRBY: Yes, I was getting a good page rate.

TCJ: *Did your page rate increase substantially in the '60s as the work became more popular?*

KIRBY: Yes, it did. My object was to help the publisher to make sales. That was my job. It wasn't a job of being a Rembrandt.

ROZ KIRBY: It wasn't that big an increase.

TCJ: *Do you remember approximately what it went to from the beginning '60s to the late '60s?*

ROZ KIRBY: I don't remember what the page rate was.

TCJ: *Do you think your page rate doubled during the '60s?*

ROZ KIRBY: I don't think it doubled.

KIRBY: I don't think it doubled, but it gradually grew, and it grew faster than it usually did.

TCJ: *The sales of the comics grew faster than they now did.*

KIRBY: Yes. And that's what it depended on. I knew it would depend on the sale of the comics. If sales of the comics began to dwindle, then your salary is going to be stagnant. If sales fall more, they're going to lower your salary. If it dwindles even further, your salary is going to be a lot lower than you usually make. It goes the other way, too.

TCJ: *But it's by no means certain that if the sales increase substantially, your page rate will increase substantially.*

KIRBY: It depends on the kind of person you are.

TCJ: *Did you have to ask for increases, or did they simply offer them to you?*

KIRBY: No, no. I had to ask for them. There's a class system in comics.

TCJ: *Can you explain that?*

KIRBY: OK. The artist is the lowest form of life on the rung of the ladder. The publishers are usually businessmen who deal with businessmen. They deal with promotional people. They deal with financial people. They deal with accountants. They deal with people who work on higher levels. They deal with tax people, but have absolutely no interest in artists, in individual artists, especially very young artists. They're not going to be that interested in very, very young people. They pat you on the head and say, "How are you, Jackie?" Things like that.

But the fact is that very young people were the ones who did the work and enabled these guys to continue the kind of lives they liked. But they never recognize that. If they don't think you're important, they'll treat you in that particular manner. Their accountants are more important to them than you are, and yet you're making the sales that they depend on. It's an odd setup, but it exists. A very young person can come up with an idea — well, Superman is the classic example, see? All these businessmen are at the top of the pyramid, but the entire pyramid is resting on two little stones, and the pyramid denies the existence of these stones because it's so big. It's loaded with officials, but the little stones are the ones that are holding it up because that's where the support is coming from, and I was in the same position.

TCJ: *Did you see the publisher of Marvel often in the '60s?*

KIRBY: No. Management meant the editor. I'd see the publishers occasionally. They'd come out of their office. I worked at home all the time. I never worked in an office, so I'd bring in my work maybe two times a month, maybe three. Sometimes I'd come up late, and everybody was leaving the office, and the publisher would come out, and he'd go, "Hello, Jackie." I'd say, "Hello, Mr. So-And-So." And of course this guy was Mr. Big. I'd say, "Hello, Mr. Big." Mr. Big'd come out of his office and pat me on the head. "How are you, Jackie?" And that was it. That was my relationship with the publisher.

TCJ: *You think they still have that attitude?*

KIRBY: Yes, I do. I think the editor has that attitude.

TCJ: *At the time, did you feel that you were being condescended to?*

KIRBY: Yes. I was being condescended to, but for the sake of my mother and then for the sake of my wife and then for the sake of my children, I existed in that kind of atmosphere. I hate to be condescended to. I'm not the kind of guy that likes that kind of thing. There are times when you work with people you feel like punching in the mouth.

Panel from Thor #158, 1968. Inked by Vince Colletta.

TCJ: *Probably most of the time.*

KIRBY: All right, there's lots of people who work in offices where they have a difficult time. Today we call it pressure, but it's not pressure. It's relationships. That pressure can be eased by better relationships, the way I see it. This was a relationship frozen in a ladder-type structure with the publisher on top, and so if you were on the bottom rung, it was quite a thing for the guy on the top rung to say, "Hello, Jackie."

TCJ: *Can I ask you how you were paid? Were you paid on a weekly basis?*

KIRBY: I was paid when I brought my script in. I was a free-lancer. You got paid on a weekly basis if you worked in the office, and I never worked in the office.

TCJ: *So you brought in an issue of* Fantastic Four, *and they simply gave you a check?*

KIRBY: They'd send the check out. They wouldn't give the check to me, but I'd get the check the following week. They were prompt with their checks. We never had any difficulty because I was making sales for them, and there was a good relationship there.

TCJ: *How did you feel during the '60s when Stan became a personality in the books, and sort of became the official spokesman and figurehead for Marvel Comics?*

KIRBY: Well, Stan became a personality through his relationship with the owner.

ROZ KIRBY: Can I say something? It bothered me a lot when it said Stan Lee this and Stan Lee that. If they wanted to be fair, they could have said, "Produced by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby." But he didn't have to say, "Written by." He didn't have to take the *entire* credit. He'd put down drawn by Jack "King" Kirby and all that stuff.

KIRBY: Yes, and he'd be very flippant.

ROZ KIRBY: Jack took it with a grain of salt, but I was the one who was very hurt by it all.

TCJ: *I see. Did you ever talk to Stan about the application of credit?*

KIRBY: You can't talk to Stan about anything.

ROZ KIRBY: Every so often he'd put down, "Produced by."

KIRBY: Yeah, sometimes he did. Stan was a very rigid type. At least, he is to me. That's how I sized him up. He's a very rigid type, and he gets what he wants when the advantage is his. He's the kind of a guy who will play the advantages. When the advantage isn't his at all, he'll lose. He'll lose with any creative guy.

ROZ KIRBY: And I could never see Stan Lee as being creative. The only thing he ever knew was he'd say this word "Excelsior!"

TCJ: *Well, what I wanted to ask you was, what did you think of Stan creating this public personality where everything was stamped with "Stan Lee Presents"? He manufactured himself as a kind of grand figure.*

ROZ KIRBY: That's what he wants.

KIRBY: I think Stan has a God complex. Right now, he's the father of the Marvel Universe. He's a guy with a God complex.

TCJ: *Did you see it coming in the '60s when Stan was putting his name all over the place?*

KIRBY: Well, you don't have to see a thing like that coming. It was happening, and I didn't know what to do about it. Stan Lee was the editor, and Stan had a lot of influence at Marvel, and there was nothing you could do about it. Who are you going to talk to about it, see?

TCJ: *Was Stan your basic contact with Marvel?*

KIRBY: Yes. I'd come in, and I'd give Stan the work, and I'd go home, and I wrote the story at home. I drew the story at home. I even lettered in the words in the balloons in pencil.

ROZ KIRBY: Well, you'd put them in the margins.

KIRBY: Sometimes I put them in the margins, sometimes I put 'em in the balloons. But I wrote the entire story. I balanced the story.

TCJ: *How long were your discussions with Stan Lee when you were discussing the next* Thor *or the next* Avengers *or the next* Fantastic Four? *How long would you talk to Stan about it?*

KIRBY: Not much. I didn't particularly care to talk to Stan, and I just gave him possibly some idea of what the next story would be like, and then I went home. I told him very little, and I went home, and I conceived and put down the entire story on paper.

TCJ: *How do you feel when he talks about what a great guy you are, what a terrific coworker you were, which he does frequently when asked about the good ol' days?*

KIRBY: Why wouldn't he say that?

ROZ KIRBY: Yeah. Look what Jack did for Marvel.

KIRBY: Why wouldn't he say that? If I hadn't saved Marvel and if I hadn't come up with those features, he would have nothing to work on. He wouldn't be working right now. I don't know what he'd be doing now. He wouldn't be in any editorial position.

TCJ: *Do you think he believes that, or is that a public relations facade?*

KIRBY: I say it's a facade, and what he really means is he loved taking me. I just hope that you don't find yourselves in a position where you have to deal with that kind of a personality.

ROZ KIRBY: I'd like to say something if I could. Jack created many characters before he even met Stan. He created almost all the characters when he was associated with Stan, and after he left Stan, he created many, many more characters. What has Stan created before he met Jack, and what has he created after Jack left?

KIRBY: And my wife was present when I created these damn characters. The only reason I would have any bad feelings against Stan is because my own wife had to suffer through that with me. It takes a guy like Stan, without feeling, to realize a thing like that. If he hurts a guy, he also hurts his family. His wife is going to ask questions. His children are going to ask questions.

TCJ: *Were you very — active isn't the right word — but were you on top of things during that period? Did you know what was going on?*

ROZ KIRBY: Of course. Jack was right down there working in what we called the dungeon. We had the basement then, a studio down there in the dungeon. Whenever anybody called, or Jack came to the office, I was usually there. It hurts to this day when my grandson sees Stan Lee's name and he knows what his grandfather did, and he asks, "Why is Stan Lee's name all over?" That's hard to explain, you know.

KIRBY: Yeah. So why shouldn't I be hurt? Why shouldn't my family be hurt? I know my wife is sore at me —

ROZ KIRBY: No, I'm not sore.

KIRBY: — because I say these things, but I'm deeply hurt because it hurt my family. There's nothing I can do about it. I'm not going to be believed at Marvel. I'm not going to be believed anywhere else unless … Actually, my own fears probably prodded me into an act of cowardice. It's an act of cowardice. I should have told Stan to go to hell and found some other way to make a living, but I couldn't do it. I had my family. I had an apartment. I just couldn't give all that up.

TCJ: *Because you didn't have alternatives?*

KIRBY: I didn't have alternatives, and DC wasn't that big an alternative. In fact, I began to do as much work at DC as I could.

TCJ: *At the risk of sounding partisan, let me ask you this: Every time I read something by Stan or see Stan speak publicly, I'm struck by how obvious a bullshit artist he is. Was he always that way?*

ROZ KIRBY: Yeah.

KIRBY: Yes. Yes, I knew Stan when he was a young boy.

ROZ KIRBY: He was Mr. Personality. That's what he was.

KIRBY: If you ever get to talk with Joe Simon, Simon will tell you exactly what the hell Stan Lee was. He was just a little wise guy, and he came from a family that was

upper-middle class, and he could do whatever he liked. He could say whatever he liked. I'll be frank with you. We considered him a pain in the ass. He grew up to be exactly what we considered him.

TCJ: *Actually, there was at least one other character I wondered about, which was Thor. Your run on* Thor *was also an incredibly imaginative period, which lasted quite a few issues.*

KIRBY: Yes. I loved *Thor* because I loved legends. I've always loved legends. Stan Lee was the type of guy who would never know about Balder and who would never know about the rest of the characters. I had to build up that legend of Thor in the comics.

TCJ: *The whole Asgardian —*

KIRBY: Yes. The whole Asgardian company, see? I built up Loki. I simply read Loki as the classic villain and, of course, all the rest of them. I even threw in the Three Musketeers. I drew them from Shakespearean figures. I combined Shakespearean figures with the Three Musketeers and came up with these three friends who supplemented Thor and his company, and this is the way I kept these strips going — by creative little steps like that.

TCJ: *Some of the Asgardian landscapes, it seems like you must have taken great joy in —*

KIRBY: I did. I took a great joy with inventing new kinds of mechanisms. I invented new kinds of machines. I've been a student of science fiction for a long, long time, and I can tell you that I'm very well-versed in science fact and science fiction. I'm 71 years old, and so I've seen all this new conception. I used to read the first science-fiction books, and I began to learn about the universe myself and take it seriously. I know the names of the stars. I know how near or far the heavenly bodies are from our own planet. I know our own place in the universe. I can feel the vastness of it inside myself. I began to realize with each passing fact what a wonderful and awesome place the universe is, and that helped me in comics because I was looking for the awesome. I found it in Thor. I found it in Galactus.

TCJ: *Let me ask you something that's been on my mind for many years, and that is, I thought Vince Colletta did not do your pencils justice.*

KIRBY: Yes.

TCJ: *In fact, he was one of the weakest inkers on your work, and he inked a lot of the Thor books. How did you feel about his work?*

ROZ KIRBY: Didn't you like Sinnott the best?

KIRBY: I liked Sinnott the best. I like Mike Royer. Colletta was a good professional inker, but I didn't care too much for his particular style.

TCJ: *He seemed to mitigate the power of the drawing.*

Penciled page from Thor *#143, 1967.*

KIRBY: Well, there was nothing I could do about these things at any rate. It was the company that hired these guys, and it was the company that gave them the assignments, and my part in asking for an inker or suggesting an inker was nil. I never made the choice.

ROZ KIRBY: Some of the inkers would actually erase pencil lines.

KIRBY: Yeah. They'd erase my pencil lines. And so I could do nothing about it. I couldn't make those choices. My main concern was just making a living. I wasn't going to get temperamental and fight about inkers or anything else. In short, I did what I had to do to supplement my family.

TCJ: *When did you guys move out here to California?*

ROZ KIRBY: Uh, '68.

TCJ: *'68? So you were still working for Marvel when you moved to California.*

KIRBY: Yes.

TCJ: *And I believe you left Marvel around '70 or '71, if I remember correctly. You left Marvel somewhere around* Fantastic Four *#102. You just did a couple of issues past the #100 mark.*

ROZ KIRBY: Yeah. That's right.

TCJ: *Now, can you explain the circumstances of why you left Marvel, and why you left at that particular time?*

KIRBY: There comes a time when you've had a gut-full of everything. I had a gut-full of Marvel, a gut-full of New York.

ROZ KIRBY: And Carmine Infantino gave Jack the opportunity to do his own work.

TCJ: *He came out here and courted you?*

KIRBY: Yes. He came out here, and he was very kind to me.

ROZ KIRBY: He came to the house on Passover, and I gave him a matzo-ball soup, and he hated it. {*Laughter*}

KIRBY: I guess matzo-ball soup doesn't agree with everybody.

TCJ: *Had you known Infantino prior to his contact with you?*

KIRBY: Yes, I did. Infantino was an artist, and he was always a very good artist, and then he became the editor and publisher of DC.

TCJ: *Now, when you say you had difficulty with Marvel, can you clarify what you mean by that?*

KIRBY: I'll clarify it by saying I'm basically a man. I'm basically a guy from the East Side. I'm basically a guy who likes to be a man, and if you try to deprive me of it, I can't live with it. That's what the industry was doing to me, and I had a gut-full of that. I couldn't do anything less. I had to get myself as far away … Well, although Carmine was nice to me, I wasn't having a great time with him. He was an artist who didn't know how to be an editor or a publisher. It was his first joust with that kind of —

ROZ KIRBY: But, he gave you the opportunity to do your own work.

KIRBY: Yes, he gave me the opportunity to do *The New Gods*, and *The New Gods* was actually a blessing to me because I got off on another course, and *The New Gods* made sales for DC.

ROZ KIRBY: He had complete control over the writing. He picked his own inker. He could do anything he wanted.

KIRBY: Yeah. Nobody bothered me out here, and I did *The New Gods* as I saw 'em. I did *The New Gods* as I felt they should be done.

TCJ: *Was it a tough decision to go from Marvel to DC?*

ROZ KIRBY: No, because he made more money. They offered him more money.

KIRBY: DC was actually like a haven because I was an individual there. I was able to do something under my own name. In other words, if I wrote, "Jack Kirby" wrote it. If I drew, "Jack Kirby" drew it. And the truth was there, and I began to write and draw, and I felt at last a sense of freedom, and with the sales rising from those books, my freedom became more apparent to me, and I felt a hell of a lot better.

TCJ: *When Infantino came out and talked to you, did he offer you all this, or did you actually negotiate for it? Did you tell him you wanted more control over the work?*

ROZ KIRBY: He just said we'd like you to work, and Jack said, "Well, I'll give you three books."

TCJ: *But it was Jack who basically made the suggestion that he do the books, that he have control over them, and so forth.*

KIRBY: Yes. That's what I wanted, and I told Carmine, and he gave them to me. And the books I did for DC were —

ROZ KIRBY: They offered him *Superman*, but he said he wouldn't take *Superman*.

KIRBY: No, I wouldn't take *Superman*.

ROZ KIRBY: But he says, "What's the worst-selling book?" and {*Infantino*} says, "*Jimmy Olsen*." He says, "Give me *Jimmy Olsen*, and I'll see what I can do with it."

KIRBY: I took *Jimmy Olsen* because it was a dog. It didn't have the sales of *Superman*, and I felt the best way I could prove myself was taking a book that was slow and speeding up its sales. That's the way to prove yourself. And so I took *Jimmy Olsen*, and *Jimmy Olsen* became part of the series of books that I did for DC, and they all made money. *Jimmy Olsen* was making money. DC couldn't believe it. {*Laughter*}

TCJ: *How was your relationship with DC during that whole period?*

KIRBY: Oh, it was … I had some trouble with them, too.

ROZ KIRBY: Not at the beginning. They let you alone, and they didn't bother you. When you started doing *The New Gods*, they didn't bother you.

KIRBY: No, they didn't bother me when I was doing *The New Gods*, but there was temperaments to contend with, and they had all new editorial people. There was a lot of different temperament to contend with.

ROZ KIRBY: They changed his Superman's head.

KIRBY: Well, they …

TCJ: *They had Murphy Anderson redraw all of your Superman heads, didn't they?*

ROZ KIRBY: Now everybody does Superman a different way.

KIRBY: They cut the heads off my Superman, and then they replaced them with a standard Superman head.

TCJ: *Did that bother you?*

KIRBY: Yes, it bothered me, of course, because a man is entitled to draw things in his own style. I didn't hurt Superman. I made him powerful. I admire Superman, but I've got to do my own style. That's how I would see it, and I had a right to do that, and nobody had the right to tamper with your work and shape it differently. What if he gave it to an amateur? Think of what an amateur might do to your work.

TCJ: *Luckily, they would never do such a thing.* {*Silence*} *A little joke.*

KIRBY: {*Chuckling*} Yes. Let me say that all the editorial decisions coming down from administration weren't always wise.

TCJ: {*Laughter*} *That's putting it kindly.*

KIRBY: Let me put it that way.

TCJ: *When you made the decision to go to DC, I assume you called up Marvel and told them that you were leaving and that you weren't going to do any more work for them. What was the reaction at Marvel?*

KIRBY: First of all, Marvel already had very popular strips going, and they didn't throw any ropes around me to hold me. It was my decision. They knew I was going to make it anyway, and so I went over to DC to do it.

TCJ: *So Marvel didn't attempt to win you back?*

KIRBY: No, they didn't attempt to win me back.

TCJ: *Hmm.*

ROZ KIRBY: They didn't care because they had all these artists waiting in the wings who drew like Jack Kirby. Kirby imitators.

TCJ: *How do you feel about the people who don't merely draw the characters you created, but duplicate your whole style or copy from you directly?*

Panels from Tales of Suspense *#92, 1967. Inked by Frank Giacoia.*

KIRBY: I think they're betraying themselves. I don't think they'll make an impression that way. First of all, they destroy themselves. They destroy their own image. What they do is perpetuate my image. Their storytelling is not going to improve sales, so how could copying my work help them in any way? There can't be two Jack Kirbys and there can't be two Carmine Infantinos and there can't be two Stan Lees.

TCJ: *Thank God.*

KIRBY: We're all individuals.

ROZ KIRBY: Actually, we received a copy of a strip from a young fan, and copies of *Thor* — of one of Jack's old *Thors* — and then of the new *Thor*. You lift up the page and they're actually traced.

KIRBY: Yes. They're doing that now. They're tracing my figures and using them in panels, but even if they trace my figures, it only comes out awkward in the panel itself in conjunction with the background and the type of story that it is. I can tell you my figures are well drawn, and they're very saleable, but doing it in maybe one or two panels is not going to sell that story, and that's amateur thinking, and if Rembrandt were doing comic books, and I took one picture of Rembrandt's and put it in a comic-book story, it would make the entire story look awkward. The reader would be mystified. He'd lose track of his story and would begin to wonder why this figure was so different from the rest of them. If you distract the reader, you cannot tell the story. You can't put anything into that story that doesn't belong there. The artist's style has to be true to his own imagination, and he has to have his own way of telling the story, and the reader associates all that, and it makes it easier for the reader to absorb. If you put any distraction — you can do it in a movie, you can do it in the theater — if there is any distraction that halts the story or makes it look awkward, it's like an actor faltering on stage. He's got to get up as quickly as he can and continue the action without trying to break up the movement of the script. That's what happens to an inker or a penciller. To imitate somebody else is to inject something into the story that will distract the reader. Once you distract the reader, the story has no point.

TCJ: *You were doing* The New Gods *material for DC. What led you to leave DC?*

KIRBY: Like I say ...

ROZ KIRBY: Carmine Infantino? [*Laughter*]

KIRBY: Like I say, there are people in editorial positions that shouldn't be there. This seemed to be a period where Marvel and DC were relying on the wrong people in the right positions. These were the people who were wrong for these positions.

ROZ KIRBY: Then, Marvel finally said, well, they offered him even more money than DC, and they let you have the freedom to do the same kind of book that you were doing for DC for Marvel. That's when you did *The Eternals*, *2001: Space Odyssey*...

KIRBY: Yeah, I did some fine work for Marvel.
ROZ KIRBY: It was still the matter of —
KIRBY: I did my own stories.
ROZ KIRBY: It was all a matter of income, of making more money.
TCJ: *Did your relationship with DC deteriorate over the course of your stint there?*
KIRBY: Yeah, there was always an editor who would operate in the wrong fashion. There were some editors who were still affectatious. If a guy is affectatious, he's going to interfere with your work, and he's going to want to say that you did the work, but he did the creation. In other words, he influenced the entire —
TCJ: *Frankly, I thought your last stint at Marvel was a little halfhearted* — The Eternals *and* 2001: Space Odyssey *and so forth.*
ROZ KIRBY: Yeah, because it was an afterthought. After he did *The New Gods*, what more could he do?
TCJ: *Anticlimactic, right?*
ROZ KIRBY: An anticlimax.
TCJ: *Let me ask you this: in the '70s when you were working for DC and you went back to Marvel, do you think you were more aware of your subservient position to publishers then than you were perhaps previously?*
KIRBY: Yes, and like I said, I'd had a belly-full of being subservient. I had to find something else to do, and I did. I went to the animation houses [in *Hollywood*]. I went to new fields. I did what I should have done in the first place. Joe Simon went back to commercial art, and he found his place in life.
ROZ KIRBY: He always wanted to go to Hollywood.
KIRBY: I wanted to go to Hollywood, and I finally did.
TCJ: *You're also a born cartoonist.*
KIRBY: I'm a guy who had to perform some way. I had to perform in some way. If not as an actor, I'd perform as an artist. It would have been something that would be outstanding in its own way.
TCJ: *Can I ask you who you were dealing with at Marvel when you went back in the '70s? Did you have an editor that you were dealing with? I'm not sure if Stan was very involved …*
ROZ KIRBY: Jack just wrote, and he had his own books. He didn't have an editor.
KIRBY: Yeah.
ROZ KIRBY: Mike Royer did all the inking here. We sent them a complete package.
KIRBY: Yeah. We sent them a complete package.
TCJ: *Can you tell me how your affiliation with Pacific came about?*
KIRBY: Well, it came about normally. I began meeting people at conventions. I met the people from Pacific.
ROZ KIRBY: The Schanes brothers.
KIRBY: Yeah, the Schanes brothers.
ROZ KIRBY: They asked Jack if he wanted to do books for them. This was at a time when Jack never got any royalties, and they said he'd have complete control and he would get his royalties.
KIRBY: On *Captain Victory*, I got royalties.
ROZ KIRBY: And they said, "Do you have another book for us?" So Jack said, "What should I do?" He had a 50-page synopsis for a TV show or a movie. So I said, "Why don't you just take this in and break it down into the comic book." So actually *Silver Star* was the storyboard for a movie.
TCJ: *I see. Now how did that relationship work out?*
ROZ KIRBY: We had to call every minute — "Where's the money? Where's the check?" "It's in the mail." [*Laughter*]
KIRBY: She remembers a lot more than I do.
ROZ KIRBY: But they usually, finally, got it to us.
KIRBY: Yeah, they finally got it to us, but …
ROZ KIRBY: We're still friends.
TCJ: *Did you find that to be a pretty good relationship?*
KIRBY: It was a frustrating relationship because of that kind of thing.
ROZ KIRBY: We had to get on the phone constantly.
KIRBY: In other words, it's a question of reminding people. I didn't like to be in that position.
ROZ KIRBY: It was embarrassing for me because I had to handle the whole thing.
KIRBY: And she still does today.
TCJ: *Would you consider that to be better than your business relationship with Marvel and DC and how you were treated?*
KIRBY: There were no personalities involved. They treated me like a human being. I treated them like human beings. On a personal level, there was no problem. On a financial level, it was a problem of regularity.
ROZ KIRBY: Jenette Kahn has always been very kind to us and when [*DC was*] approached to do some toys, they wanted to do some *New Gods* figures, and she came in one day — she was at the Beverly Hills Hotel — and we had a meeting with her, and she said, "Look, we know what Marvel always did to you. You were always getting screwed all your life, and we want to be fair. We feel that you created this, and that you should get something out of it." They were very nice about it. We had nice meetings and they were very fair about it.
KIRBY: And they still are. Jenette Kahn is a fine person. On occasion we'll get to New York, and I'll see Jenette Kahn, and we'll have a wonderful time. So I think the comic field has gained in that respect.
ROZ KIRBY: At least she had heart, let's put it that way.
KIRBY: With that kind of management, a deal could be made on a humane level.
ROZ KIRBY: We were very close to Julie Schwartz. We love him. He drives us nuts, but we love him. [*Laughter*]
KIRBY: I always had good relations with Julie Schwartz, Murray Boltinoff, Joe Orlando.
TCJ: *Let me ask you this: Looking over your life's work, are you pleased with what you've done? Are you satisfied?*
KIRBY: I know I've done quite a bit. I know that in my hunger for making a living, I might have created a few monsters. Maybe that's natural. I don't know. But I can tell you that Marvel was my making, and I can tell you that DC never lost anything from any of my work.
TCJ: *Creatively, how do you feel about your career?*
KIRBY: Creatively, I've done well. Creatively, I've never done anything —
ROZ KIRBY: You were ashamed of.
KIRBY: Not being ashamed of, but I've never done anything bad. I can't do anything bad. It's got to be professional. It's got to look professional. It's got to read professional. In other words, it serves its purpose by entertaining a reader, see? If a carpenter makes a chair that's comfortable for the person who's going to sit in it, he's done his job. If a train engineer gets a train in on time, he's going to make someone happy who's waiting at the station. And if an artist draws the kind of a picture that people are going to enjoy looking at, or he makes a visual story which people are going to enjoy reading, he's done his job. I can say that I've done my job extremely well. My only beef is that a lot of people have put their fingers in whatever I've done and tried to screw it up, and I've always resented that. I always resent anybody interfering with anybody else trying to do his job. Everybody has his own job to do. If he's good, he'll do well, but if he's mediocre, he's not going to do as well as he should. I believe that I'm in a thorough, professional class who'll give you the best you can get. You won't get any better than the stuff that I can do. In the Army, during the war — which my wife won't talk about — [*Laughter*] I didn't know whether I'd make it or not, but I can tell you that I did my very level best, OK? And that, scared or not, I did my job, and I

would do my job wherever I am. If I had to, say, give up my life for my family, I wouldn't hesitate a minute, and if I had to do anything for a good friend, I wouldn't hesitate a minute. I wouldn't ask any questions at all. I'm that kind of a guy. I'm a guy who'll do it. If you ask him to do it, and he wants to it, you'll get a full measure. I've never done anything halfheartedly. It's the reason my comics did well. It's the reason my comics were drawn well. I can't do anything bad. I won't do anything bad, and I resent very deeply bad people who haven't got the ability, who try to interfere with the kind of work I'm trying to do because nobody's going to benefit from it. If you're a thorough professional, and they won't let you do a professional job, nobody's going to benefit from it. The people who produce it won't benefit. The people who buy it won't benefit from it. They're going to get a half-assed product, and I believe that's what the editorial people in comics at that time bought. They bought a half-assed product, and I believe that's what they got in return. They got half-assed returns.

ROZ KIRBY: Have you been satisfied with what you've done?

KIRBY: Have I been satisfied with what I've done?

TCK: *Yeah.*

KIRBY: If I've done it myself, I've always been satisfied. If somebody interfered, it always created a bad period in my life.

TCK: *What was the most creatively rewarding period in your career?*

KIRBY: I believe when I was given full rein on *The New Gods*. I was given full rein on *The New Gods*, and I was given full rein on *Mister Miracle*. *Mister Miracle* was a fine strip. I was given full rein on many other strips which sold extremely well and made me very happy. I was happy doing them because as a professional, you've got to take the credit for it, or you've got to take the beating for it. I don't like to take a beating without being responsible.

TCK: *You don't want to take somebody else's beating.*

KIRBY: I don't want to take somebody else's beating. That makes me unhappy. So, right now, I can tell you, I'm a happy man because whatever I'm doing, I do for myself and I do a little creating here and there for others, and they work out very well. I feel like an independent man, and I am. This is the kind of feeling I always wanted. You can rarely get that. Well, I could rarely get that in the early part of my life.

TCK: *I think most people can rarely get that. You have to fight for it.*

KIRBY: Yes. ✧

Penciled page from Fantastic Four *#76, 1968.*