

JACK KIRBY INTERVIEW

Conducted by Glenn Danzig with Mike Thibodeaux in the early 1990s
Transcribed by Glen Musial

GLENN DANZIG: I'm doing an article on how the prices for your artwork have jumped, especially since I've been collecting, and it's kind of great. Is it gratifying to see people really appreciate your stuff now?

JACK KIRBY: It would be gratifying to anybody, to know that what you're doing is not only valuable but worthwhile. It appeals to people. That's immensely gratifying. I enjoy that feeling.

GLENN: Do you think there'll be another age like [the 1960s] again? That stuff was just so imaginative.

JACK: Certainly, of course. Because, as time goes on, changes come with new times and those changes have to be interpreted by the people of that particular period.

GLENN: Do you think there'll be Renaissance guys like you and Joe Simon and Stan Lee, who were under the gun and had to produce ten titles a month? These guys now do one book and they can't even get out twenty pages in a month.

JACK: At that particular time, the business was young. The routine was certainly not developed as well as it is today. So we did what we instinctively felt had to be done.

MIKE THIBODEAUX: You still had the quality, though; the quality was good.

JACK: I've always had the quality because it was the kind of quality I wanted. I felt that each man that does any kind of a task believes that he can do it. I mean, when you consider the kind of environment I came from, you say, "A fella that came from the Lower East Side — where did he get the idea that he could draw, and do art, and develop his art to a high degree?" Well, I did.

GLENN: Y'know, there are a lot of artists now who can draw technically good drawings, but there isn't the heart behind it; there isn't that excitement. When you see a Kirby drawing, it jumps off the page! Now you look and say, "Okay, it's balanced, but...?"

JACK: My stories were true. They involved living people, and they involved myself. They involved whatever I knew. I never lied to my readers.

GLENN: It came out in your artwork. Whatever was going on inside you and where you came from, it came right out in your artwork — what happened in your life. That's what I'm saying: Maybe some of these artists, because of the way the world is now — I don't know if it's coming out in their art. Maybe they haven't lived the stuff that you lived.

JACK: I must admit that at the time I started, it was certainly a period of turbulence and doubt and fear, and everything was happening to give people cause to think. Not only that, it gave people cause to fight, and so I found myself in the midst of that kind of a period. And what came out of me, you'll find in *Captain America*.

Captain America would fight six guys at a time.

GLENN: Y'know, you always had a knack for that misunderstood kind of anti-hero. Not so much Captain America but — well, even Captain America. In the beginning, he was this skinny kid, y'know? And when you re-did the Sub-Mariner, he goes back home and his race was gone after he was a bum in the bowery, or whatever.

JACK: Every story has to have a little pathos.

GLENN: Something somebody can associate with, who's feeling maybe not in time with the world.

JACK: Actually, I was telling myself and the reader that we can do it! If we want to write a good story, then we could write a good story. If we want to run a mile, we can run a mile. If we want to win a hockey



Cover pencils from *Captain America* #210.

MINUTES LATER, AFTER SUB-MARINER HAS LEARNED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF MAGNETO'S PLIGHT (WHICH ALL FAITHFUL MARVELITES SAVORED IN ISH #63 OF X-MEN), THE POWER-MAD LEADER OF EARTH'S EVIL MUTANTS MAKES A FATEFUL PROPOSAL--

NEITHER YOU NOR I ARE TRULY HUMAN, NAMOR! NEITHER OF US WILL EVER BE TRUSTED BY THE WORLD ABOVE!

THEREFORE, WHY DO WE NOT JOIN FORCES? THINK OF IT, SUB-MARINER-- YOUR POWER COMBINED WITH MINE! WHO COULD HOPE TO STAND AGAINST US?

Jack Kirby



Kirby pencils, Sinnott inks from Fantastic Four #102.

game, we can win a hockey game. And I did; I played hockey in the gutter in New York. I played with wooden sticks, with people who wanted to win, too. And it's human to want to win; to beat the other guy and say, "I won this game and I feel great about it." Why? Because I know I would. And that's the way I felt. Now, when I began to draw, certainly I wasn't Rembrandt. I drew on the tenement floor and I remember the janitor coming up and bawling me out, and he'd erase my drawing on the tenement floor. And I would draw another one, y'know? (laughter) And, of course, I found out that I liked it and I pursued it.

GLENN: A lot of people don't know that you actually scripted a lot of these stories — most of them. Even the Marvel stuff.

JACK: I did.

GLENN: You always gave the villains — Dr. Doom, or Magneto, or Sub-Mariner, or whoever — they were the ultimate villains and they were evil, but they had their other side; the internal turmoil. You

would always see them fighting with themselves they actually had their own personality. They weren't just evil guys and that's why you'd love 'em. They actually had personality, too. You could identify with them.

JACK: I saw my villains not as villains. I knew villains had to come from somewhere and they came from people. My villains were people that developed problems. What was wrong with Dr. Doom? He was a very highly-regarded scientist and what happened was that there was an explosion in his laboratory and it ruined his face. It scarred his face for life and, being the perfectionist that he was, he had to hide that face. And how did he hide that face? In a mask of iron and steel. Doctor Doom became a man with a deep, deep problem, and a man with a deep problem is going to give all the people trouble. (laughter) These are the roots from which villains spring if you dig deep beneath the stereotypes, and I did, y'know?

There were people on my block who became gangsters; there were people on my block who became cops. My best friend said, "I'll become an artist like you. I'll take you to my mother and you can tell her that you're making money at drawing," and of course he told his mother. He said, "Jackie is an artist and they're paying him for his drawings, and if I do the same, they'll pay me, too." And his mother says, "No, no!" I remember that. People really believed in stereotypes and she says, "I know all about artists and I want you to be someone—something different." She says, "I want you to go out and get a decent job." (laughter) When I came back from Basic Training, my friend was a New York policeman and he retired as a police inspector. Can you find a job more decent than that? Mothers being the sacred objects that they were, a man would obey his mother.

GLENN: Back then also, if your dad was a cop, they wanted you to be a cop. And if your dad was a plumber, they wanted you to be a plumber.

JACK: Of course; that kind of thing was prevalent.

GLENN: Was there any pressure on you to *not* be an artist?

JACK: No, no. My dad was a factory worker, and my dad loved me and my mother loved me. They always supported me and whatever I wanted to do, they knew that I would do the decent thing.

GLENN: Even in the lean times, did they say, "Go do your art"?

JACK: Yes, yes. They had a deep faith in me. I loved them for it. I made up my mind to make my parents proud of me and I tried my best. Of course, I'd have tried my best in other fields; it could have been in any field. My object was to make my parents proud, and I loved them deeply.

[At this point, there is a break in the recording, and it resumes with a discussion of the Achille Lauro incident: In October 1985, members of the Palestine Liberation Front, a member-organization of the PLO, hijacked the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro while it was at anchor in Port Said, Egypt in the Mediterranean Sea, and held its passengers hostage. Many American tourists were on-board, including elderly, wheelchair-bound Leon Klinghoffer, who was a boyhood friend of Kirby's. The terrorists shot Klinghoffer in cold blood and threw his body overboard. To rub further salt into the wound,