

EXHIBIT TT

JACK KIRBY INTERVIEW

(Originally presented in the 1975 Comic Art Convention program book)
Interviewed by Steve Sherman

Many tributes by intelligent critics have been written about Jack Kirby. The only thing missing from the analysis, and the celestial praise, and the biographical notes is the man's own words. And Jack Kirby is no slouch when it comes to words. He is articulate, idea-oriented, and pointed. We may see his work as so basic that it seems instinctive, but Jack has an observer's eye and an awareness of his effectiveness which make him a commentator worth listening to—as you will find in this interview, garnered from conversations Mark Evanier and I had with him when we were planning a companion volume to the King Kirby Portfolio.
Steve Sherman, 1975

QUESTION: What is it that would compel a man, such as yourself, to stay up all hours of the night, penciling comic books?

JACK KIRBY: Probably something in my psychic make-up! I decided to do comics because I liked comics. I developed a deep interest in them at a rather early age and ventured to answer an ad which publicized a cartoon correspondence course. I was probably twelve or thirteen at the time. What makes me stay up all night? Probably because I want to make a living!

Q: You're asked constantly where you get your ideas from. Any clues?

KIRBY: An idea can come from anywhere. The process of creation has no standards. You either think it out by yourself or talk it out with someone else or with a group... but eventually you come out with something. Ideas are everywhere. The guy in the shipping room might come up with something and what he has to say might be quite valid. The fellow in charge has to have an editorial sense. In other words, he must recognize the salability of an idea. And, while anybody may have an idea, it is the person with the editorial capability who will recognize its relevance to the particular situation at hand. *Black Magic* came about because we saw a trend emerging in comics back in the fifties; something begun by others but which we had to pick up on if we didn't want to get left behind. It wasn't a new idea to use all those ghosts and spooks, but it was a saleable idea at the time and we were fortunate to get involved in it early. We had to compete with E.C., so it was tough.

Q: At that time, you and Joe Simon were editing, writing and drawing for the Crestwood people. And you had quite a staff under you—some men who could rival or even surpass the crew at E.C. Editorially, were you trying to do things differently?

KIRBY: E.C. was very basic in their approach to horror. By that I mean, they left nothing to the imagination; same with most of the other horror producers. That may have been part of their downfall. You can only throw that kind of thing at the public so long before they develop an immunity to it. I think we were a little more restrained with our stories, but that may be because we were putting out a lot of

romance comics and it mellowed us somewhat.

Q: The material you did for Crestwood was, more or less, superior to what you were producing, just before and after your employment there. Was this due mainly to your having editorial control?

KIRBY: Yes—in Crestwood, we had complete control of editorial policy, of writing, of artwork. We set our own standards and Joe and I just about had complete say over our material. We tried everything! We were getting into satirical strips for the first time. I tried to do a satirical super-hero with Jack Oleck's *Fighting American* in order to get something new and, hopefully, get some response from a declining readership. They did as well as any books of their time. It sounds like I might be finding excuses, but the field was in very bad straits at that time. Not only did publishers have internal pressures, but they also had external pressures. One day a guy might buy a new car, and the next day find the publisher cleaning out the offices. They were in a shaky frame of mind. Only the publishers with outside sources of revenue had any confidence at all.



The drawing that became the cover for the 1975 Comic Art Convention program book.

Q: You had a fine staff, though.

KIRBY: Extremely talented! Some of the best men the field has ever seen were part of our staff. It was a wonderful time to work in the field—if you neglect the financial problems. I wouldn't class the fifties as the greatest period in comics—it was, to be frank, a really ugly period. Ugly clothes, cars, people. But it was a time when the most productive people in comics were still in the field. Marvin Stein was with us—he was a first-rate man and one of the best artists we had. Mort Meskin was at his height. Steve Ditko was blossoming out and doing fine work. There were still writers and artists around... Good ones. It was certainly akin to working in a sort of Renaissance period.

Q: Were people trying to break into the field at that time?

KIRBY: Well, I think many more were trying to get out. (laughs) But, yes, we had guys coming up who wanted to break in. People like Jules Feiffer, Roy Lichtenstein. If their stuff looked good, we'd give them a script. More than once, we'd give a guy a script and never see him again.

Q: As the fifties drew to a close, the super-heroes began to return. When you began the *Challengers of the Unknown*, were you striving more for a super-hero rebirth or for breaking into science fiction and adventure material more?

KIRBY: The issues I did were still formative and I can't answer for what DC did with them. But they were heading for the super-hero image when I left. In many ways, they were the predecessors of the FF.

Q: At this time, you also started again at Marvel.

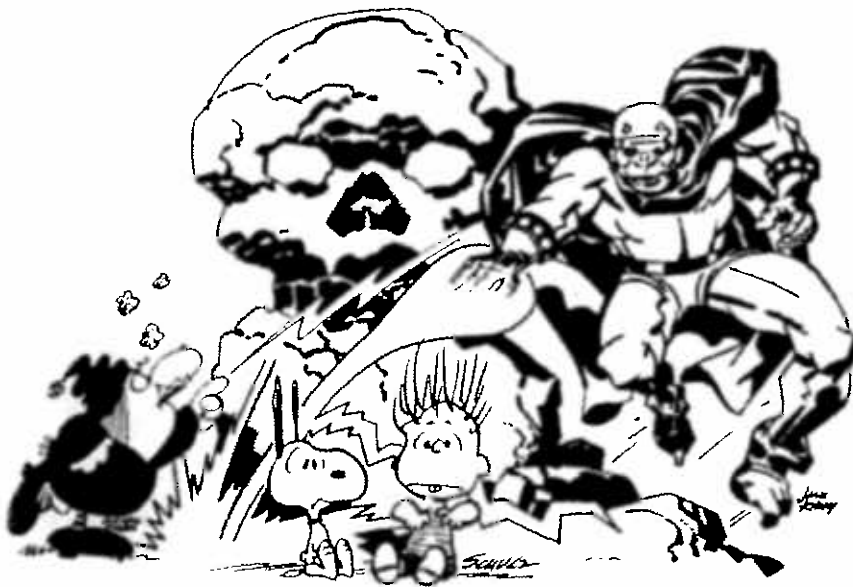
KIRBY: Right. I was given monsters, so I did them. I would much rather have been drawing *Rawhide Kid*. But I did the monsters... we had Grottu and Kurrgo and It... it was a challenge to try to do something—anything with such ridiculous characters. But these were, in a way, the forefathers of the Marvel super-heroes. We had a Thing, we had a Hulk... and we tried to do them in a more exciting way.

Q: About your drawing. At your fastest, during that time, do you have any idea how many books you were doing?

KIRBY: I felt, for a while, like I was doing them all. The stuff I wasn't penciling, I was doing layouts on. I got the books going—I think that was mainly my function—so that, as Marvel acquired a top-notch staff, they could keep them going. You should remember that prior to this the entire staff consisted of Stan Lee, Sol (Brodsky) and Artie (Simek). Artie was in the most secure position, because no matter what, the books had to be lettered. Anyway, I laid out the first *Iron Man* and plotted it and Don Heck finished it up. Same with *Daredevil*—Bill Everett penciled it over my breakdowns. And I'd pass them on to other people.

Q: Were you penciling much faster then?

KIRBY: Yes—there were lots of pressures and I was struggling most of



The Demon meets Broom Hilda, Snoopy, and Linus! Does anyone know what con this was from?

the time. I prefer to pencil three pages on an average day or if it's a cover, about three hours.

Q: What do you consider a good artist?

KIRBY: One with imagination and the ability to tell a good story. How well a man draws cuts no ice with me, if what he's trying to express comes out vague and choppy.

Q: What about writers?

KIRBY: The same type of man. A guy with a fertile, active mind. The writer I respected most is now deceased.

His name was Eddie Herron. He created the original Captain Marvel and was responsible for numerous stories which I considered top rate. He also fathered the Red Skull.

Q: Was it easier to write the stories back then?

KIRBY: Well, maybe not easier in terms of the time required. In simplicity, yes. By that I mean World War II lent itself to good dramas. The whole thing could have been written by some hack out at Warner Brothers. It was a black and white issue with a villain who was so completely evil that it was just made to order. Anything you did in World War II was an act of nobility. If you hung Hitler or killed hundreds of Germans, you were on the side of the Angels. I once got a letter from a Nazi who told me to pick out any lamppost I wanted on Times Square because, when Hitler arrived, they'd hang me from it. It was typical of a genre of fans who have long since died out.

Q: You enjoy reading the mail, don't you?

KIRBY: Yes, I love it. I think that's because I love the fans—even if some of them are Nazis. But when we were doing those romance comics at Crestwood, you should have seen the mail we got. There was some lady who wanted me to adopt her daughter because she could tell from my stories that I was a good man!

Q: Why was it always Simon and Kirby?

KIRBY: Simon was bigger! He was also the letterer, most of the time. With a parlay like that, I didn't have a chance. He's also older than me—like a big brother. He was great at layouts. One of the few true professionals this field has seen. He still is.

Q: So why did he give up comics and get into magazines?

KIRBY: He was discouraged. A lot of guys were and Joe wasn't the first guy to try for bigger things. When Crestwood went under, it was typical of a lot of bad breaks we all had to put up with. A lot of guys got out of comics for one reason or another... C.C. Beck, Eisner, Kurtzman... People of importance to comics left. I suppose I'm considered some sort of a dinosaur in the field, but I'm sticking with comics. I feel it's an important and powerful medium. I feel it's been belabored by people who have an ax to grind—it's been down and it should be lifted to a point where it really proves its national importance. This is a visual age and comics are a visual medium. Not only can the intellectuals grasp it, but also the common man. And, despite what a lot of people may say, it's the common men who make history. ★