

EXHIBIT JJ

JACK KIRBY INTERVIEW

Interviewed by Ben Schwartz on December 4th, 1987

Originally published in the UCLA Daily Bruin on January 22, 1988

(Ben Schwartz comments: *Maybe The Jack Kirby Collector isn't the place to say it, but Jack creeped me out. Upon reading my first Jack Kirby comic, Mister Miracle #18, a friend and I—John Francis Moore, a current comics writer—had identical reactions. Decades before we ever met—me in Kenosha, WI, John in Huntington Beach, CA—our respective seven- and nine-year-old minds wrapped around Mister Miracle's last issue and we thought: What IS this? Who are all these characters? Who is Vermin Vundabar, and that dwarf, and that huge woman Barda? And worst of all, Granny Goodness, who still ranks in my opinion as the most frightening character ever created in comics? And why was it the last issue? Superman, Richie Rich, Archie—they never had last issues. And that big stone guy at the end, Darkseid, laughing in that endless, awful way over a joke only he got—it was crazy. To us, everything about Mister Miracle #18 seemed dark, elusive, and confusing. What is this?*

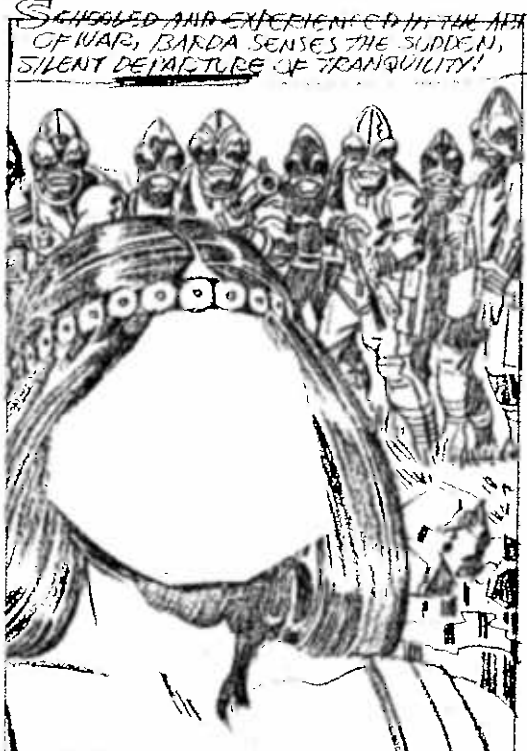
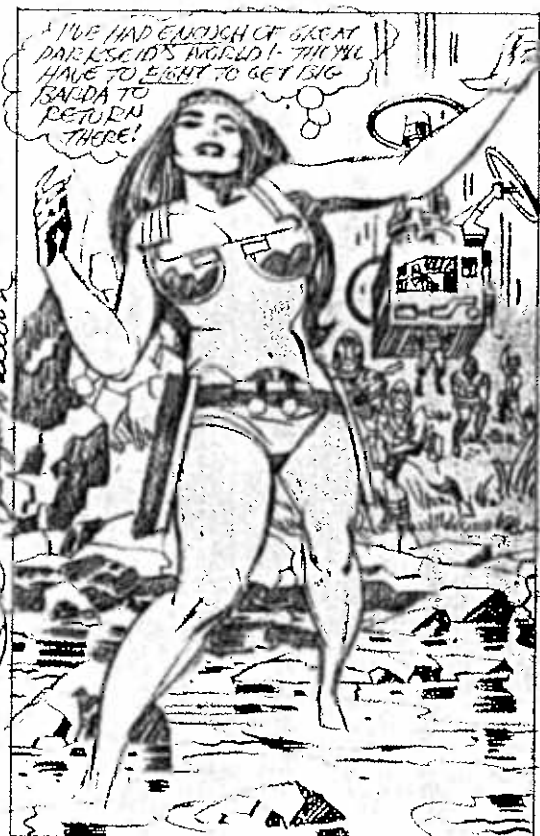
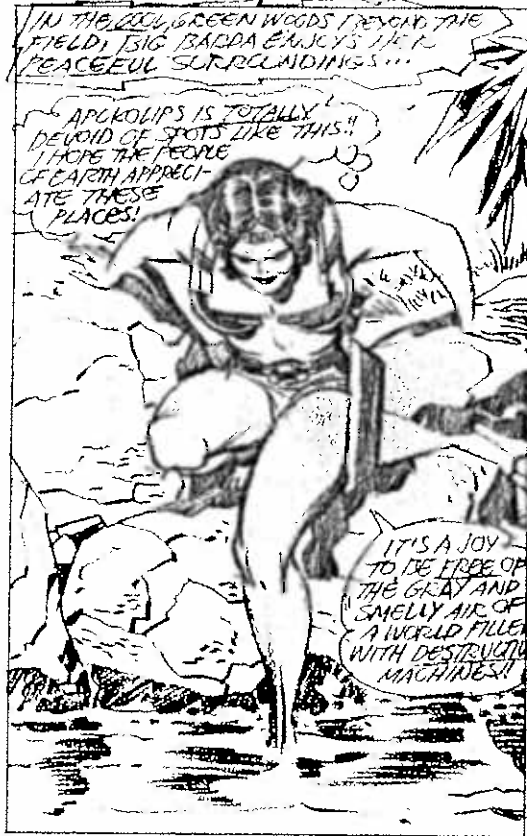
Like I said, Jack creeped me out.

It happened again. The next year, age 8, my asthma kept me home from school and my Mom bought me a "Mighty Thor" Treasury Edition, which reprints Thor's epic battle with Hercules and Pluto (over-sized comics still kick ass, by the way). Pluto appears as a Hollywood producer who forces Thor down an infinity stairway to Hades. His face twists into an evil leer and it felt—felt—expansive, confident, brilliant. It made me afraid; so much so that I had to put down the book and wait till bedtime to finish it (a mistake—the nightmares!); and at the end, the villains beaten and the day saved, Thor just sat on a rock out in the middle of the ocean, a lonely, bummed-out Thunder God. Huh? This is a happy ending? Superman never sat on rocks. Batman and Robin swung off into the night, case closed, Joker in jail. And Richie Rich—well, he was still rich. Again, I thought, what is this?

Yeah, Jack creeped me out. By the time I got to college I had pretty much written super-heroes off (and still do), but I started looking through Kirby reprints. I loved his oddly shaped characters. I saw the boldness of his original concepts as opposed to the ninety-ninth generation of them the publishers hacked out that month. I hunted up Mister Miracle #18. And instead of Jack overwhelming me, I grooved on just how big the guy thought, the power he packed into his panels, and how he leapt from

galaxy-sized concepts to those minute, slo-mo panel sequences he loved so much. And all those years later it still felt weird. Again I say "felt." Jack's comics don't look real, but they feel real, which is your take-home-pay long after your Mom throws out the book.

About this time I was writing and editing for the UCLA Daily Bruin and I gave myself the assignment of writing a series of interviews with cartoonists. I landed Will Eisner, Chuck Jones, and Milt Caniff. I wanted a fourth, so I started shelling Mark Evanier with phone calls. To get rid of me, Mark arranged some time with Jack. Half of that conversation still exists on tape, which you have here. Back then I thought, if I have a chance to talk to



Jack cut the Barda face out of this xerox from Mister Miracle #5 to restore the one Mike Royer altered while inking.

you're working as fast you do—I mean, is the idea to show these two as equals, with that balance?

JACK: Sure.

BEN: Okay. Then to do it that fast, did it just happen as you drew it?

JACK: No. My idea was that there is just as much strength in evil as there is in love, see? And that's why evil is such a danger—the fact that it is so strong—and so I would try to portray it that way.

BEN: Is that why *The New Gods* is about balance, too? You have Orion and the New Gods in *New Genesis* and then *Darkseid*—

JACK: Orion and *The New Gods* is an allegory, really. And the New Gods are just a continuation of the old gods. [In] the old gods, Loki was an evil god. Thor was a good god, a god of virtues. But not only as an allegory, I had Thor as a human being, examining himself saying: "Here I am, I'm supposed to be a great guy, right? Why do I kill people?"

BEN: Yeah, that's the last panel here [*Thor again*] where he's sort of asking, "What good is it to be a god if you have to temper it?"

JACK: Of course, of course, and that's his problem. Loki finds no problem with that, see? In other words he's an arrogant type, see? He says, "As long as I've got this power and I'm born with it, what am I supposed to do—waste it?"

BEN: There are a lot of consistent ideas in your books, like the use of power.

JACK: Yes.

BEN: When was it that you first became conscious of these themes?

JACK: Well, just working in the comics field you can feel the pushes and pulls of power. In other words, the publisher was the All Power. In order to stay working you had to work along the publisher's guidelines or else you'd put out a magazine for yourself, which you couldn't do. In my day money was hard to come by, so risking money was a very hazardous task. So we stayed within the editor's guidelines—but my sales were very effective so the publisher couldn't argue much with me, see? So I had an easier time of it than the average guy.

BEN: Yeah, in the last ten years comics have changed where you'll have someone like John Byrne making hundreds of thousands of dollars.

JACK: Oh, sure.

BEN: And he has all this power to do whatever he wants. But for someone like you in your era, was it much different then?

JACK: Yes. Because I took a beating for John Byrne. It was in my generation that the publisher came to learn that sales depended on how you treated the artist. I mean, if he was really good—and that no idea was really a bad one. You gotta give an idea a chance to grow. And I did that with the *Marvel* books. I wrote the

stories. I wrote the plots. I did the drawings—I did the entire thing because nobody else could do it. They didn't know how to do it or want to do it and they didn't give a damn. They were taking money they invested in the magazines and putting it in something else. But I made a living off that. So I put out magazines that sold. I made sure they sold.

BEN: I've heard stories where an artist would watch a publisher tear up his pages if he didn't like him.

JACK: Sure!

BEN: And that amazed me. Because you think this is America, right? This shouldn't happen here.

JACK: Well, I'm telling you about an altogether different generation—a generation that did that. A generation that would take guys at the newspapers, telling a great story one day, and the next day they'd throw him out on his pants. You know, they'd just throw him out the door. And people were like that. So, they don't do that anymore. I think they've more or less grown up—and I thank God for that. I thank God that we can all sit and reason with each other.

BEN: So you think the industry has improved?



Unfinished Mister Miracle #3 page.

JACK: No. I see professionalism.

BEN: The *Village Voice* called your work a broad kind of Expressionism. Those things don't really concern you then?

JACK: No, they don't. What comes out is your interpretation. What comes out is your opinion. I've already formed mine, see? I can tell you I don't throw B.S. I'll never do that to you. I'm never gonna contrive anything so that it comes out clever.

BEN: I was impressed by how much you must have loved the medium because in the '50s comics weren't selling very well and it was difficult to get a job. Yet instead of going into advertising or anything else you stayed with comics.

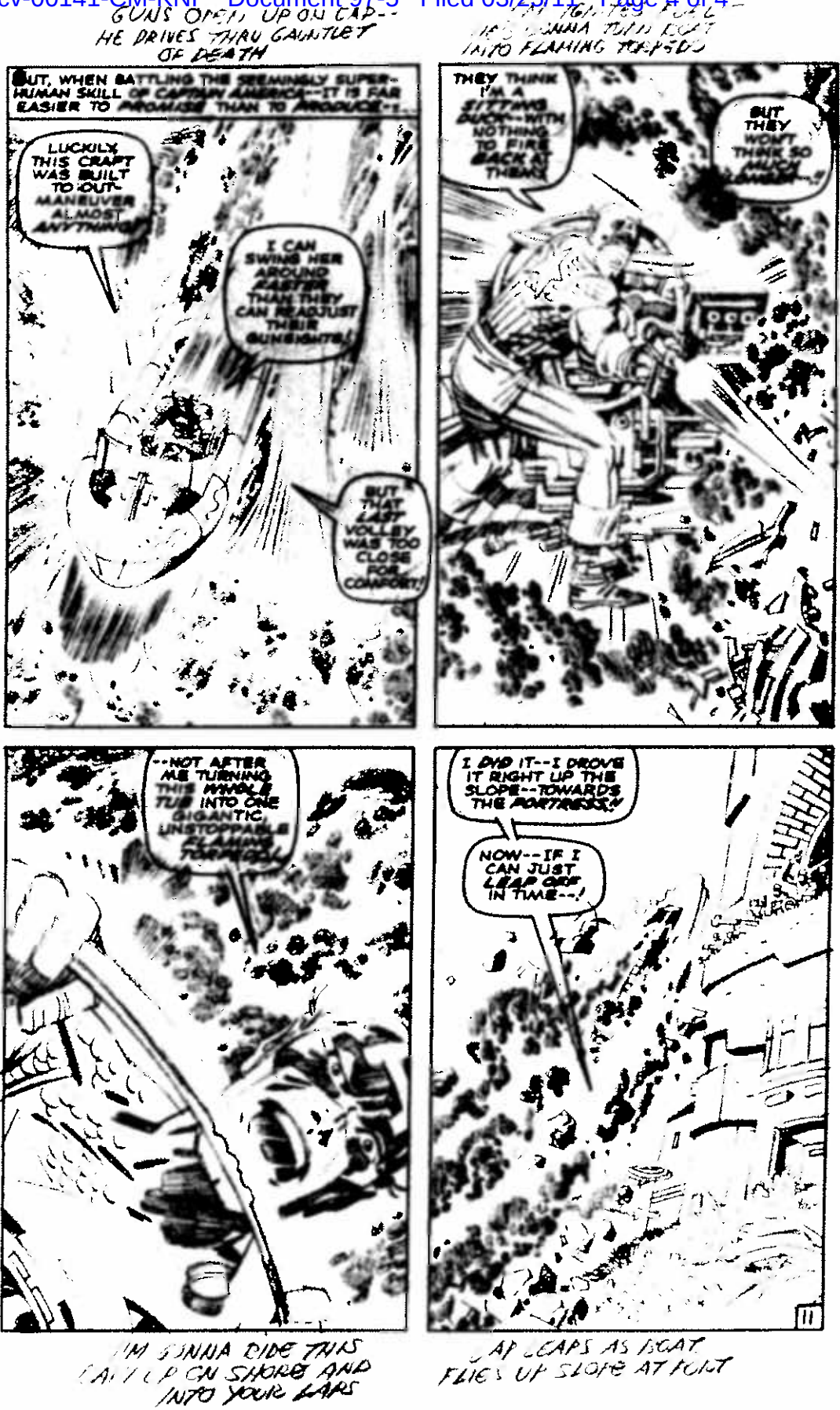
JACK: Yes. Joe Simon went into advertising. He said, "The hell with it." And Joe was very good at advertising. Actually, that's his medium. He did well. The only thing I knew best was comics and I went back to Marvel and Marvel was in very poor straits—all comics were in poor straits—and boy I can tell you, when I went into Marvel they were crying—and Stanley was going into the publisher and lock up that very afternoon and I convinced him not to do it. And of course I didn't change things in one day; but I knew that in a couple of months I could do it. And that's where all your *Fantastic Fours* come from. That's where *Thor* comes from. I took anything powerful that could sell a magazine—and I did.

BEN: Was that your intent? Milt Caniff told me that he felt his first job was to sell the newspaper.

JACK: Of course.

BEN: So when you went in there, you were thinking, "Well, if we do this, this, and this, we can really market it and sell it."

JACK: Oh, it's more than that. Today they sell about 40,000 to 50,000 books. And I understand there are issues of DC that sell 100,000. And I can understand that, DC is a very good outfit. But in my day if I sold less than 500,000, I'd hang my head in shame. *Captain America* was selling 900,000 a month, and that's a lot of magazines. It just proves that comic books don't attract any more than that. In my day they did; and not only that but I used to see my own lawyer sitting and reading a comic book on the subway, okay? I saw Wall Streeters sitting on the subway in New York. They would be reading comic books—and I think it was because the comic books were good. Aside from the fact that it was a new medium—



An action-packed page from *Captain America* #103.

it was a good medium. And I think that's what they should strive for now—their best. It isn't enough to say, "I'm gonna create a new galaxy," if you know what I mean. It's enough to write one good book and have 500,000 guys say, "Boy, that book is good." That's professionalism, see?