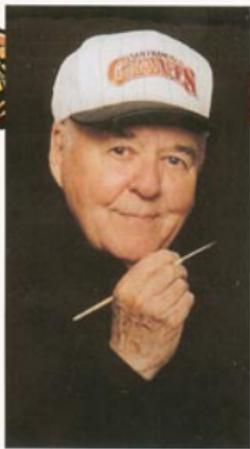


Brush Strokes With



Greatness



THE LIFE & ART OF

JOE
SINNOTT

by Tim Lasiuta

JOE SINNOTT by Arlen Schumer

When discussing the art of comic books, inevitably the discussion encompasses the twin art forms of penciling and inking, each discipline defined by disparate ends and means, yet so united in their common graphic goal that, when each are at their best, they comprise a yin-yang of perfectly balanced artistic collaboration.

While a great penciller must provide the essential framework of the art, it is up to the inker to not merely trace the pencils with India ink in a robotic display of mimicry, but, by intuitively understanding the uniqueness of the pencils, lend them their proper and correct shape and form, and thus, metaphorically bring them to life.

The history of comic book art is peppered with but a handful of great penciller-inker collaborators, teams who demonstrated, by their artistic prowess, this understanding of their respective roles in the creative end product: Ross Andru and Mike Esposito; Curt Swan and George Klein; Carmine Infantino and Murphy Anderson; Gene Colan and Tom Palmer; and Jack Kirby and Joe Sinnott.

Sinnott fortuitously began inking Kirby on **The Fantastic Four** in late 1965, right when the King embarked on what is arguably the greatest phase of his long career, the full flowering of his creative dynamism exploding the Marvel Universe. Coincidentally during this fertile period, Kirby also developed the many artistic tropes and stylized delineations of speed, power, and energy (“Kirby Krackle”) that have since become graphic standards for generations of comic artists.

Sinnott was there to ink and codify it all, giving Kirby’s complex and sprawling pencils a sensitive, flexible contour and attention to detail that his FF predecessors, Dick Ayers, Chic Stone and Vince Coletta could never have. They were all too one-dimensional: Ayers too heavyhanded with his

brush, Stone too cartoony with his uniformly thick outlines, and Coletta too finelined with his scratchy pen (better suited to Kirby's Thor work) to give Kirby's new, multi-dimensional pencils the discriminatingly detailed and time-consuming inking they deserved.

Sinnott had in his inking arsenal what those others didn't: both a bold brushline that was able to give Kirby's supersized figures the heft and weight they commanded, as well as a fine penline that seemingly never missed the tiniest of dots in Kirby's Krackle or a single rivet in the King's outrageous, outsized technology. Sinnott's brushline also had a natural thick-thin range to properly finesse Kirby's true graphic signature, the omnipresent squiggle, found on everything from musculature to machinery, as no other inker had before or since.

Of course, aficionados of Mike Royer's inking of Kirby at DC Comics in the 1970s might disagree. They claim Royer's inks were the truest to Kirby's pencils, and have cited Kirby's own endorsement of Royer's work as such. While it is true that Sinnott would often "fix" details of Kirby's work that Kirby would either overlook or pencil sloppily—like crooked eyeballs or costume details—Royer's more so-called "faithful" inking indirectly exposed a harsher aspect of Kirby's pencils, a rough-hewn quality that, in its uniformity of rendering by Royer, lacked depth from foreground to background. Nevertheless, Royer has his adherents, and, while such a subjective argument can never be settled, I maintain Sinnott to be Kirby's greatest inker.

And if Kirby is indeed the greatest penciller in comic book history, and his FF work his greatest single body of work, then Joe Sinnott can justifiably stake a claim as the greatest inker in the history of the medium.