

EXHIBIT B

THE JOE SINNOTT INTERVIEW

Interviewed by John Morrow on December 18, 1995

TJKC: THE JACK KIRBY COLLECTOR: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

JOE SINNOTT: Right here in Saugerties, NY. October 16, 1926. Seems like eons ago! (laughter) There are quite a few artists who live up here: Bernie Wrightson, Barry Windsor-Smith, Bob Oskner, Joe Staton, Jim Starlin. But I'm the only one born here. The rest migrated here from other places. I must've exploited the great things about Saugerties, and people heard it. I should have kept it quiet! (laughter)

TJKC: Did you grow up reading comic books?

JOE: The thirties were a great time for a kid to be growing up, aside from the Depression. When I was eight or nine years old, *Terry And The Pirates* and *Flash Gordon* came out. I couldn't wait from one day to the next to see how Terry was going to get out of some of the exploits he was involved in. We got the *New York Daily News*, which had *Terry And The Pirates*. Our next-door neighbor got the *New York Mirror*, which had *Tarzan* and *Bronco Billy* and *Mandrake the Magician*. Each paper had different strips, so you'd go around to the neighbors and trade with your buddies. It was a great period.

TJKC: Did those strips make you want to go into comics?

JOE: It's funny. You had no idea you had a chance of ever being an artist. I drew ever since I was young. Once for my birthday, I got a great big box of crayons. It had an Indian on the front, and I drew that Indian until I could draw it with my eyes shut. (laughter) I think that was the impetus that got me interested in comics. So I copied Terry, and Flash Gordon, and Smilin' Jack. I used to draw all the time, drawing all the newspaper strip characters.

The comic books didn't come along until later. I really don't remember reading comic books until around 1939, when I was 12 years old. My favorite early comic book was *Action Comics*. I used to love Congo Bill, more so than Superman. (laughter) I also loved Zatarra the Magician. I really liked Batman, that was my favorite, because it was well drawn. Bob Kane did a great job. And also I liked Hawkman, because it reminded me a lot of Alex Raymond's style. And the Timely books; we bought them and passed them around until they wore out. I would read the *Human Torch* and *Captain America*. *Captain America* was quite popular.

TJKC: Do you remember reading Simon & Kirby's *Captain America*?

JOE: I'm sure I did, but I didn't know who was doing it at the time. I remember *Boy Commandos*, but I never really associated the names. I just knew that it was a good comic book, and I liked the characters. I liked the way it was inked, but the names didn't mean anything to me.

TJKC: How'd you get started in comics? What was your big break?

JOE: Well, after I came out of the service, I saw a newspaper ad for

the Cartoonists and Illustrators School in New York City, run by Burne Hogarth. I had a lot of samples that I'd done of syndicated type strips, so I went down and they appeared to be highly impressed with them. They said I was a natural-born cartoonist; I thought they were pulling my leg so I would come to the school. But I signed up, and later on I realized I had a foot up on some of the other students as far as the cartoon field. I took a year of foundation, where we drew anatomy, and the second year I took cartooning.

In late 1949, one of my instructors there, Tom Gill, asked me if I'd like to work as his assistant. I learned more from Tom than I did from the school. I was actually doing professional work, and I had someone looking over my shoulder, making sure I did it right. Tom had accounts with Timely and Dell and Fawcett. He was a prodigious worker; he worked all day at the school, and at night he drew his strips. He even had a syndicated strip going. I was doing *Kent Black* and *Red Warrior* for Timely. We were also doing some movie adaptations for Dell. He was also working on the *Lone Ranger*, which I helped him on. It got to the point where I was doing all his work. At first he'd just do the heads to make it look like his work, and later he let me do the heads. I worked with him about nine months while I was still at school. I got married in the meantime, and I decided that if Stan Lee was buying my work from Tom, why not buy it from me? So I went over to Stan, and he gave me work right away. And that was really the beginning, in 1950.

TJKC: What was your first published work?

JOE: I'd only been at the school for a couple of months, and I took my work down to a place called St. John's. There was a woman editor there who liked my samples, and she gave me a five-page story for a *Mopsie* comic book.

Mopsie was something like *Millie The Model* at Marvel. It was a five-page filler called "Trudy." Right after that I hooked up with Tom Gill. The first thing I did for him was *Red Warrior* for Stan. And I did an awful lot of *Kent Blake*. The first thing I actually did for Stan was called "The Man Who Wouldn't Die." It was a western. It was a three- or four-page filler.

TJKC: What did you do between your first official work for Marvel in 1950 and when Marvel really took off a decade later?

JOE: I worked just for Marvel. In those days, the stories were short, 5 or 6 pages. There was no continuity, so a story could go in any book; if you did a western for *Two-Gun Kid*, Stan could put it in *Rawhide Kid* or one of the other westerns.

TJKC: What was it like working for Marvel then? How did you get your assignments?

JOE: I'd go down to the city on Friday, and Stan would give me a script to take home. I'd start on Monday morning by lettering the balloons in pencil. Then I'd pencil the story from the script and ink it



Kirby/Sinnott art for a *Nostalgia Journal* cover.



Uninked pencils from Fantastic Four #86, page 17.

and leave the balloons penciled. I'd pencil a page in the morning, and ink it in the afternoon. I never burned the midnight oil; I'd start work at 7:45 in the morning, and I'd work until about 4:30 in the afternoon. I always figured if you couldn't make a living in eight hours a day, you shouldn't be in the business. I'd bring the story back on Friday and he'd give me another script. I never knew what kind of script I'd be getting. Stan had a big pile on his desk, and he used to write most of the stories himself in those days. You'd walk in, and he'd be banging away at his typewriter. He would finish a script and put it on the pile. Sometimes on his pile would be a western, then below it would be a science fiction, and a war story, and a romance. You never knew what you were getting, because he always took it off the top. And you were expected to do any type of story.

The Korean War was on at the time, so we did a lot of war stories. The westerns were the old staples. Then the horror trend came along, and we did the *Journey Into Mystery* books and *Strange Tales* and *Weird*

Worlds. The short stories were a lot of fun to do, because you got a lot of variety. You never got tired or bored because the stories were simple, but quite clever; although it's often been said of Stan that, back in those days, the stories were all the same, just the names were changed. (laughter) But he knocked those stories out like you wouldn't believe. It was a real fun time to work, and we had all the work we wanted. The rates were really good for that period, until the Comics Code came into being, and it almost killed comics. That's when things really went into a tailspin, and Marvel suspended operations for at least six months.

TJKC: What did you do once the Marvel work dried up?
 JOE: Things started getting tough financially, so I went over to DC. I don't remember who I talked to at the time, but the guy was quite obnoxious. He said, "You guys from Marvel come over here because you don't have any work, and you expect us to give you work!" He was ranting and raving. I didn't get any work at DC, but I remember there was somebody else at the office. I think it was Julie Schwartz, but I can't be sure. He came over to me and said, "Don't pay any attention to him. Your stuff looks good, but we don't have any work for anybody." So I got work at *Classics Illustrated*. Then I sent some samples to a guy in Ohio who published *Treasure Chest* books. He had Reed Crandall working for him, and he said I'd fit into their plans. I used to do all the biographical stories for *Treasure Chest*; the life of Kennedy, and MacArthur, and Eisenhower. I did the Wright Brothers, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb. These were all 64-page stories. It was a real fun book, but it was only distributed in the Catholic schools. It was doing quite well at the time, around 1959-1960.

I was doing all kinds of work at that time. Vince Colletta called and wanted to know if I'd pencil romance stories for him. So I was doing five romance pages a day for him for Charlton, and he was inking them. Even when Marvel started back up, I did that for Vinnie for about five years. They were easy to knock out; a lot of heads and clinch shots. Dick Giordano was the editor at Charlton at the time, and we had a good association. Dick and I did a lot of commercial work together, for Radio Shack and General Electric in the early-to-mid 1960s.

When Stan called me up and said Marvel was starting back up with the monster books, I told him I couldn't put all my eggs in one basket. I had a good account at *Treasure Chest*, and I liked the type of art I was doing there. So I kept the account at *Treasure Chest*. I was also ghosting some Archie stuff for a friend of mine.

TJKC: At what point did you become aware of Simon & Kirby?
 JOE: Through the late 1940s, I saw a lot of the romance books. The Kirby romances really stood out because of Jack's unique style. It was a very heavy-handed style, and Simon did a great job of inking Jack. That was the first thing. But then I lost contact with Jack's work, because when you're working professionally, you're not really paying that much attention to other people. I would look at a few other comics. I bought the EC books, because of John Severin especially. When Severin drew an M-1 rifle, you knew it was an M-1 rifle; he was so authentic. Stan always used to tell us to buy John Severin's stuff, because he never draws anything incorrectly. Stan was really impressed with John, and I certainly was.

TJKC: How did you start inking Jack's work?
 JOE: Up until that point, around 1961 or so, I had never inked anyone else's work. When Stan called me, I thought I was doing him a favor. I

really didn't have the time to ink it, but I felt I was helping him out of a jam, because he didn't have anybody to ink it. So it was no problem. It was either a monster book or a western. I'm a little vague on which book it was, I'd have to look up my records.

TJKC: Were you ever concerned about getting pigeon-holed into doing only inking?

JOE: No. Work to me was work. I was long past the ego stage of wanting to see my art in comics; that happened twelve years before. It didn't matter, as long as the paycheck came in. From an artist's standpoint, I was doing my best stuff for *Treasure Chest*. The Marvel stuff was more of a production line type thing. We did the books quickly. It wasn't a piece of art, so to speak.

TJKC: After inking a few more monsters and westerns, how'd you get put on inks for *Fantastic Four* #5?

JOE: When Stan sent me the pages for *FF* #5, he didn't even tell me what it was. I didn't even know the *Fantastic Four* existed, because I didn't go to the newsstands and buy books. When you went to Stan's office to give him the work you'd completed, he had a rack on the wall with maybe 20 books in it. You'd look to see if your latest book was there, and if it was, Stan would let you take a copy. But you couldn't take anybody else's books, so I never looked to see what anybody else was doing. I wasn't aware the new age was coming. But I couldn't have been more impressed when I saw it. It knocked my socks off! It seemed like Stan was really hitting his stride as a writer. The characters were so great, even though you saw similarities between the old Human Torch and Johnny Storm, and Reed and Plastic Man. The way he put them together was just unbelievable.

TJKC: What do you remember about inking that first Thor story in *Journey Into Mystery* #83?

JOE: I probably remember that more than anything I ever worked on. When I got it, I said, "Gee, what a great character." Especially Dr. Blake slamming that hammer on the ground. I thought that was a great idea, like Captain Marvel saying "SHAZAMI!" I thought that was a novel way for the incapacitated doctor to turn into this viking god. Stan and Jack just did a tremendous job on it.

For years, a lot of people thought that Dick Ayers inked it. He's probably gotten five or six reprint checks that should have come to me. (laughter) I did the cover and all the inside art. I also did the cover to #84, with the firing squad scene. I started to do the inside; I may have done two or three panels. I had committed myself to a story that *Treasure Chest* wanted me to do, a big 64-page story. It came in when I got the pages for *Journey Into Mystery* #84, so I sent them back to Stan and told him I had another commitment.

TJKC: Was this the same commitment that only allowed you to ink a couple of panels of *Fantastic Four* #6?

JOE: I don't think so. It could have been a similar situation, though.

TJKC: I've always wondered what you worked on between *Fantastic Four* #6 and when you came back to the book on #44.

JOE: It's funny. You do so much, you forget what you've done. I did a few Thor stories in *Journey Into Mystery*. (Editors Note: These were in #91, 92, and 94-96.) At the time, the rates at Marvel were terrible, and I was really rushing my work. Not that I wasn't trying my best at Marvel, but I did the best I could with the limited time we had. My main account artistically was *Treasure Chest*. Looking back I wish I'd done better work on Thor, but at the time it was just another job, and I certainly didn't think the character was going anywhere. At the time, I was probably penciling and inking one page of Thor a day, doing three or four pages of romance for Vince Colletta, and squeezing in some Archie after supper.

TJKC: From *Fantastic Four* #44-on, were you strictly a Marvel company man, or were you still doing a lot for other companies?

JOE: Oh, no. But Marvel was my biggest account. I did the *FF* every month, at 18-22 pages a month. It seems like I was always doing another book for Marvel. I was doing odds and ends like *Thor* and *Captain America*, inking different people like Gil Kane and Gene Colan. I remember one year I did over 100 covers for Marvel. But *Treasure Chest* was a steady account until they folded in the seventies.

TJKC: Let's talk about your work habits, particularly during your work over Jack's pencils on *Fantastic Four*. How many pages did you ink a day?

JOE: I could ink three Kirby pages a day by 4:30. Kirby was easy to ink. A lot of times he would throw in a big machine, and it would take time, just the mechanics of doing it. But we did it on the big pages. I could use a lot of brush; I really worked fast with a brush. At one time I probably worked 90% brush, if not more, with pens only on small heads and hands and straight line backgrounds. Jack did these big panels, maybe four panels to a page. He didn't have the eight and nine panels that came later. Those early days with the big pages, each one of his panels was like a splash page, they were just magnificent. And Jack's stuff was fully penciled; I could really knock them out.

Some of the stuff that I worked on years later was all from breakdowns; even John Buscema's work, except the early stuff, the *Silver Surfers* and some of the early *FFs*. Then John got into breakdowns, and nobody was looser than John. It didn't slow me up at all, but on some of the younger guys I worked with, it required an awful lot of work on my part. Some of them were feeling their way, and some threw everything but the kitchen sink in their work.

TJKC: You've mentioned that with Jack's *Fantastic Four* pages, you got the whole book at once. Did you read the entire story before you inked it? Were the pages already lettered when you got them?

JOE: In most cases, yes. Once in a great while, they wouldn't be, but that was very, very rare, because Stan was such a professional. He always got the work done. Later, I did a lot of work with people where the dialogue wasn't there, and that made it difficult because a lot of



Joe's art (pencils and inks) for a Dr. Doom toy package.

the art was vague. You didn't know what expression was supposed to be on the faces unless you had the script, and they didn't always send the script. But with the Kirby and Lee combination, they left nothing to be desired. Everything was there, and it was so easy for you. It was just the mechanics of doing it. Of course, you had to be careful. I always felt that I at least did what the penciler put down, but in most cases I probably added to it and made it a little bit better than it actually was originally. Certainly in Kirby's case, you didn't have to do any drawing. I did occasionally, but you really didn't have to.

TJKC: When the pencils came in, did the covers come with the stories, or were they sent later?
 JOE: The cover was generally done first, because it required more production at Marvel than the actual artwork.

TJKC: Did that cause you any confusion? Especially on *Fantastic Four #44*; you wouldn't know who any of the characters were.

JOE: It could have, but it seems like it never did. Later on, when I was working with Buckler or people like that, I noticed some changes were done on covers at the Bullpen, and not always for the better. Sometimes they would make a stat of it and flop it, just to have the characters facing the other way. (laughter) This ruined the original art, so you hated to see corrections done for no particular purpose. It didn't improve the cover, it actually detracted from it.

TJKC: Did you ever use assistants on any of the Kirby stuff?

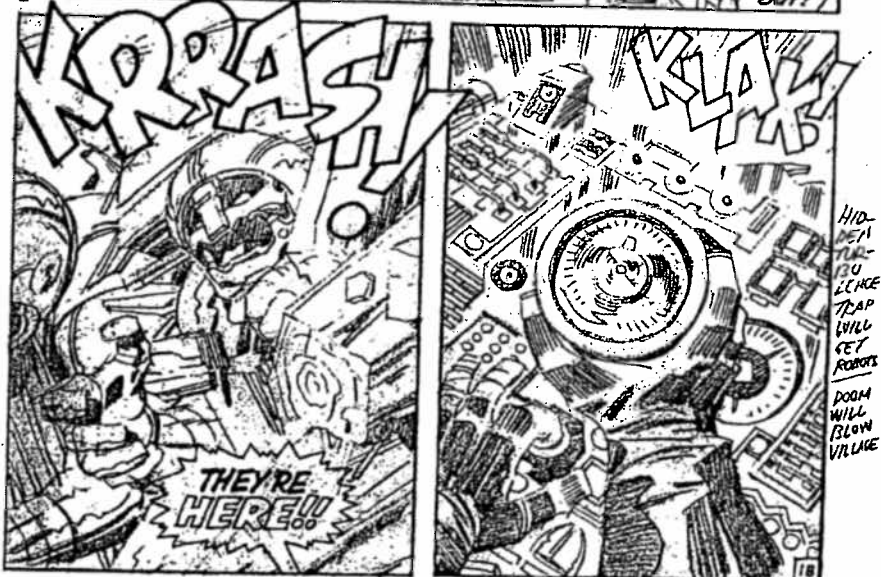
JOE: Never. Not one line.

TJKC: I've always wanted to know — when you ink an explosion, do you use a ruler for those straight, tapered explosion lines?

JOE: Oh, sure. I always used a ruler for those. Originally I used a 659 pen and a #3 Windsor Newton brush. They were the only tools I used other than a compass and a ruler. I never used a french curve; everything I did was freehand. After quite a few years, I discarded the 659 pen because the paper got so bad, and it would dig into the paper so much. I went with the 201 Hunt pen, and I was able to really press down on the Hunt without it splitting or breaking.

I had a certain technique for doing those lines; I would really press hard. I was able to get these really thick and thin lines, and I always went from the border-in, and flick it, so to speak. I would do it quite rapidly; I was quite fast with the ruler. And I'd use the Speedball pen for those little black dots you saw in galaxies and fireballs, and things like that. I had a couple of different size Speedballs.

There were a few things I did that I felt were innovative back in those days, that were picked up by other people. There was a certain way I used to treat dirt and rocks, which I loved to draw and render. I used to love it when Jack did an erupting volcano, because I loved getting in there with a brush and doing some heavy inking. I put a lot of detail into stuff like that. Of course, Jack had a lot of detail, but I probably even added more to his buildings. Jack was so great with those bricks he used to put in, and I'd put little cracks in the bricks and



More uninked pencils from *Fantastic Four #85*. Note Jack's request for a deadline extension!

(STAN-ALWAYS-HIG--TO-GET-LAST-TWO-PAGES-TO-SEE-IF-CAN-FIND-ROBOTS--HAD-TO-MAKE-ADDITIONS--)

things like that. Sometimes I may have overdone it, but I think it was creating a style kids loved in those days.

TJKC: As a kid I always wondered why his art didn't look that good in the other books! (laughter) Now I know it had a little to do with you. But how much "fixing" of Jack's work did you do when you inked?
 JOE: Well, Stan told me anytime I wanted to take any liberties with Jack's work, to do it. Originally, I thought I was "fixing" his ears, or making his women a little prettier, or a little leaner in the hips. But I realized later, that was Jack's style, I shouldn't be doing it. Even when Jack's eyes weren't on the same plane, this was Kirby. So I reverted back, but probably not soon enough. Instead of drawing my Alex Raymond ears, I'd draw Kirby ears. But there were things that I really



Sue returns in this final uninked page from FF #86. Note the John Romita figures in panel 6.

did spruce up, like Reed's hair for example. I really got in there and made it nice, fine, wavy hair. Jack was a little heavier on his pencils. I used a little more finesse than Jack used in his pencils. I fine-tuned him, so to speak. Everything was there certainly; I just made it a little slicker.

TJKC: When you started on *Fantastic Four* #44, did you look at previous Kirby inkers' work for inspiration?

JOE: No. I never looked at anybody's inks, even when I was starting out. I was very much influenced by Milton Caniff's inking style, because of the way he slashed his wrinkles. I liked the looseness of his wrinkles. But then I got into Alex Raymond's tightness. I think I had a combination of Raymond and Caniff. When I was younger, I was more inclined to be Caniffish in my approach to inking. But I never looked at anybody else's inking in comic books. I never studied anybody else's

inking. I just knew what I wanted to do. Mainly, I was concerned about spotting blacks. I always had good brush control. When I first went to the Cartoonists And Illustrators School, I was working with a pen. Burne Hogarth came along and knocked the pen out of my hand and said, "I don't want you working with a pen here. We do nothing but brush." I was 21, and I didn't know cartoonists used brushes. (laughter) That's how naive I was. But in those days, when you lived out in the boondocks, you didn't know what was going on in the comic field. I never knew how artists worked, or their approach to drawing or inking. I thought they used post office pens to ink; that's all I ever used as a kid.

TJKC: Being as objective as possible, compare other inkers' work on Jack to what you did—for instance, Colletta, Giacoia, and Wood?

JOE: Certainly, Wally Wood was a great inker, and a great artist. But I think he overpowered Jack too much; it came out looking too much like Wally Wood. It looked great, but it wasn't Jack Kirby. I thought that Frank Giacoia was a real professional inker. I thought he did a tremendous job on Jack. I especially liked the way he did *Captain America*. Giacoia was a little heavier than I was, but I think we used our blacks very similarly. If you look quickly at some of Giacoia's work and some of my work, maybe in the late FFs, they were fairly similar. Mine was maybe a little finer, with a little more technique, but Giacoia was real professional.

Everybody always brings up Colletta, but Colletta was a real professional. He certainly didn't enhance Jack's work, but he got the work done, and that's what Stan wanted. A lot of times, the main criteria was to get the work done. When I go to schools to talk to kids, I often tell them, "If you ever want to be a professional cartoonist, make sure you get the work done first, and then secondly, do it as well as you can in the time that you have." Have it consistent. Don't have the splash page a real masterpiece, and by the time you get to page ten, it looks like you're doing it left-handed. You've got to be consistent. And Colletta did get the work done. I don't think he ever missed a deadline in his life.

TJKC: Well, there were some Colletta pages that I thought were really very nicely done.

JOE: Oh, I often said that Colletta could do beautiful work when he had to. But he often was given a job, and was always rushed. He was the type that could

do ten pages overnight if he had to.

TJKC: With you on inks with *Fantastic Four* #44, the art took a huge leap in quality over previous issues. Do you think it's just coincidence that the stories and characters did too, or do you think Stan and Jack were inspired by the new look?

JOE: I'd like to think that would be so. I know Stan was. Jack would never comment on my work. Jack and I seldom if ever talked. The only time I ever met him was the 1975 Marvel Convention in New York City.

TJKC: So you never ran into him at the Marvel offices?

JOE: Never. I never went down to the office. There was one stretch of over 20 years where I didn't go to the office, and I'm only two hours away. Everything was done by mail. I'd talk to Stan once a week, and



Splash page from one of Joe's numerous Treasure Chest stories.

never talked to Jack. If there were any notes Stan wanted me to be aware of, he wrote it in the borders or made a special note on a sheet of paper. Jack never made a comment to me directly about the artwork, or what I should or shouldn't do. But I admire that in him. Jack was very gracious.

TJKC: Many people have pointed out that your inking had an effect on how Jack drew.

JOE: I really believe that. I could see Jack's work change a little bit—I'm not saying to my style of inking. I was aware of that fact years ago, but I never gave it much thought. It did cross my mind that there were certain things I saw in Jack's work that looked similar to my work, the way I treated certain things. There were little things; the way I treated, not so much explosions, but special effects. The way I treated dirt. Little things that didn't mean anything in and of itself, but in the whole scheme of things it all added up. I've always tried to impress upon young people that backgrounds are so important. That's why I wouldn't want anybody doing my backgrounds on the Kirby stuff. Later on, when I inked other people, because of the time element, I did get a background person. I had a guy working with me, he was tremendous. What I would do, especially on *Thor*, was I would do half of the book, and he would do half. He adapted his style to suit mine, but his stuff was just tremendous. I hated it when he moved out on his own, but I encouraged him to. He's done some real fine work.

TJKC: Did inking Jack's work make you draw more like him?

JOE: I don't think so. Certainly, if someone asks me to draw one of the FF characters, I'm sure a lot of the Jack influence will come out in my drawing. Nobody ever drew the Thing like Jack, but I feel I do a good Thing when I draw him. My Thing is just a little more involved than Jack's; Jack's is maybe a little simpler. Same way with Reed; I might make Reed a little handsomer than Jack made him, and make his hair a little finer. But I certainly loved the way Jack did his muscles. When I draw things on my own, certainly I'm not in a class with John Buscema, but I draw like John Buscema. I draw handsome heroes, and I draw fairly beautiful women like John and John Romita. I was often amazed at how similar my art was to John Buscema's. I always thought that we were a good combination. We worked very well together, especially doing *Thor*. But back to Kirby, yes, I'm sure a lot of my stuff, untalking to myself, probably came out looking a little bit like Jack's. I'm talking about pin-ups and drawings like that. But if I was to do a story, it probably would look more like Buscema than Jack.

TJKC: In *Fantastic Four*, was there one character you particularly liked inking more than others?

JOE: Far and away, I liked working on the Thing, no matter what he was doing. Even though he was time-consuming; the mechanics of doing the Thing took time. But he was fun to work on. I loved working on Dr. Doom. I like flowing things; I like capes and robes. I liked the Mole Man because of his flowing tunic. I didn't like Galactus for that reason—I'm only talking from an artist's standpoint. He took time to do, and he was so metallic-looking. I never liked Iron Man for that reason. I didn't like drawing those disks on his shoulders and his chest.

TJKC: What about the Silver Surfer, since he's so metallic?

JOE: It's funny, I liked drawing the Surfer, although you've got to be very careful with his egg-shaped head. He's like drawing Spider-Man. If you're not careful, you've got to use white-out and do it over. As an inker, you don't want to waste time. You've got to be careful with the Surfer, he's so smooth and sleek. The Surfer, I think, was one of Jack's greatest creations. I love the way he foreshortened the Surfer's arms.

I liked all the female characters Jack drew. I liked drawing the Invisible Girl. I never thought Stan did enough with her. I loved Crystal. I loved Lockjaw, in fact. I always felt Stan didn't take advantage of Lockjaw like he could have. I used to like Wyatt Wingfoot, I thought he was a good character. I liked those days when Johnny was in college. They didn't exploit that enough, I felt. I thought it was very appealing to the college crowd.

I loved the Mole Man. I loved doing the craggy caverns underneath the city, and the bowels of the Earth erupting. Jack was great at that. Just fantastic stuff.

But it's amazing when you think of the characters Stan and Jack created. Unbelievable! I'm talking about some of the incidental characters. The secondary villains, for example. The Monocle, and Diablo. You could go on and on.

TJKC: Was there one character you hated? For instance, did all those grains of sand from the Sandman drive you crazy?

JOE: No, I enjoyed the Sandman. The sand didn't bother me at all. It was the metallic things that bothered me, like Dr. Doom's mask. Jack drew him differently every time he drew him. In the early issues, he looked like he had a leather mask on with stitches. Then he went to the rivets. He'd have them around the eyes sometimes, sometimes around the mouth, sometimes around the nose. You never knew where they were going to be.

TJKC: Did you fix those kind of things?

JOE: Oh yes. I tried to be consistent, and keep them where I felt they should be. And as you probably know, a lot of times Jack used to put three fingers on the Thing, and sometimes four. (laughter)

TJKC: Poor Joe! You had to sit there and count the fingers on the characters! (laughter)

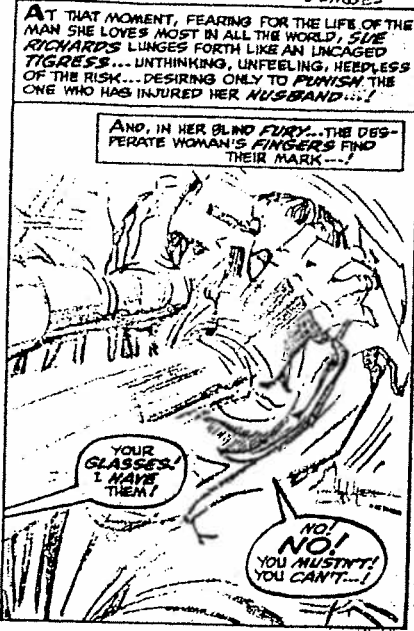
JOE: I remember one time, Buscema drew Reed with three arms! He was stretching all over the cover, and it was hard to see where the arms and legs were coming from. But we figured it out, he had three arms. (laughter) But that could happen with Kirby even.

TJKC: When did you start getting original art back, and how was it divided up?

JOE: I forget the exact year. I don't think I got anything back while Jack and I were doing the FF stories; it had to be after. When I was doing Jack's work, I was just doing inking, and I really forget the split-up. After Jack, I did what's called Finished Art. The split-up was a lot different. For example, if it was a 20-page story, it might've been 11/9. I never complained about anything to Marvel. I felt even that was an unfair split-up for the inker, because on some of the breakdowns I got, there was nothing there. There were stick figures, and I had to do all the drawing really.

SUE GOES WILD -- SHE GOES
VISIBLE - ATTACKS MOLEY - GRABS
GLASSES

HURLS THEM AWAY AND
PUMMELS MOLEY



THE ANGRY FEMALE -- DEADLIER
THAN THE MALE WHEN
HER BROOD IS THREATENED

MOLEY IS HELPLESS -- HE
IS EXPOSED TO LIGHT -- HE IS
NOW BLIND HIMSELF

Sue goes nuts! Uninked pencils from FF #89, page 14.

TJKC: What did you think of Jack's collages?
JOE: I never liked them particularly.

TJKC: Did they pose any specific problems for you as an inker?
JOE: No, I just couldn't see the purpose in it. I always felt Jack could've done better penciling the stuff. Maybe I didn't like the way they reproduced.

TJKC: When those pages appeared in a story, did you get the collage art with the pencils?
JOE: No, I didn't. I saw a pencil rough, like a thumbnail sketch of what it was going to be. But I don't recall ever seeing the collage art.

TJKC: In *Fantastic Four* #62, there was one where Reed is floating through the Negative Zone, and the Thing and Invisible Girl are

watching on a big screen helplessly. When you got the art, were only the figures penciled, and you would just ink those?
JOE: Exactly. I never got the collage before I did the inking.

TJKC: Is there a single issue of *Fantastic Four* that you're particularly proud of? Or is there one where you feel things really didn't click?
JOE: I don't think there were any that I felt were bad. There were a few covers I didn't like; I never liked Jack's montage covers for some reason. I always thought Jack was much, much stronger on his splashes than he was on his covers. Some of the splashes should've been covers. Maybe it was the way they were colored; Marvel had some troubles with their grays, especially on the *FF* covers. But I didn't feel any of the stories were below mine or Jack's standards. In fact, even when we got up in the 80s and 90s, I felt the work was still improving; at least the art was. We didn't have the opportunity to really show off the story like we could have with the old pages. We had the smaller art pages to do, and we had more panels to do. Jack still did a tremendous job, but he needed space for his dynamic layouts. I think going to the small pages hurt Jack a little bit.

Looking back, #51 was a great story. Of course, the Inhumans in #47 was a great story. You can start picking them out. Even up in the 90s, with "Ben Grimm, Killer," that was a good series. I think that's when Giacoia came on for the first time.

TJKC: I wanted to ask you about that storyline. After almost 50 issues, you missed inking *Fantastic Four* #93. Were you on vacation, or inking another book?
JOE: I needed a vacation. I wanted to go down to Phil Seuling's convention. I think it was the first convention I ever went to. I remember I told Stan I needed a week and a half off, and the *FF* was coming in. So he said, "No problem" and he got Frank Giacoia. But here again, they were just jobs to me. Looking back, I wish I would've done #93, but I didn't think of those things in those days. But I liked the two that I worked on. I loved the splash on #92 where the Thing has the collar, and he's in chains.

TJKC: I love the art in those issues. It's almost like a machine did them; I couldn't believe human hands were able to create art that perfect. (laughter) Every line is exactly where it should be.

JOE: People used to come to me and say, "Don't you think Kirby's not doing as well as he did?" Just look at #91 and #92 and tell me if Kirby was slipping at all. Wasn't that great stuff? I look at some of the originals today, and it's too bad they weren't still on the big pages. They look great on the small pages, but they would've looked tremendous on the big pages.

TJKC: You missed inking #96 and #97 as well.
JOE: For the same reason. I felt burnt out.

TJKC: Did Marvel's switch to small-size art as of #68 cause you any difficulties? I imagine you had to use more pen on the smaller size art.
JOE: Exactly. And I think it affected Jack. He might not have said so, but it had to. Before that, he had bigger panels and fewer panels. I don't know why there were more panels on the smaller pages, but it had to restrict him a little in his layout.

TJKC: When the office made art changes to Jack's work, were they generally on the pencils for you to ink? Of did they paste them on after the inking?

JOE: They could've made a change to Jack's pencils, but I don't recall any particular incident. I do remember we did the cover of #98, with the story on the Moon. The cover was beautiful when we finished it. We had a lot of blacks on the Thing, and it looked real good. That was one of the rare covers I got back that Jack and I had done on the *FF*. They whited-out the chest of the Thing, and then outlined some of the stones. They didn't want it as black as Jack and I had put it. I was really disappointed that they'd done that.

TJKC: They put word balloons on it, too.

JOE: I hated word balloons. There was no need for them. I always liked symbolic covers. I think Stan liked to put balloons on the covers, but to me, it detracted from the composition.

TJKC: *Fantastic Four* #73 had Thor, Daredevil and Spider-Man as guest-stars. Inside, it's pretty obvious they redrew Spider-Man.

JOE: Jack had a strange way of doing the web. I've seen drawings of Jack's where he inked the character himself, and he never completed the web. If Jack had a weakness at anything, it was drawing the head of Spider-Man.

TJKC: Were you aware of how popular *Fantastic Four* was while you were doing it?

JOE: I used to read the letters pages, and for a long time I thought they were writing the letters down at the office. They may have been, but I knew some of the people who were writing in. When all these fans I knew started writing in, I guess I realized it was popular. Stan used to tell me it was.

TJKC: Didn't you win some ACBA awards as best inker in the 1960s?

JOE: It was the Alley Award, which I won two or three years in a row. I don't remember the years. I never won the ACBA award. In fact, I don't think Marvel fared well in general. If I remember right, DC usually clobbered us. Maybe the fans should have voted!

TJKC: What can you tell me about *Fantastic Four* #108? Were the pencils all pieced together when you got it?

JOE: It was all pieced. That story was really mixed-up. (laughter) At the time, I said, "They'll never replace Jack Kirby. The *FF* will never be the same." And with as many good artists as they had on it, it never really was the same. Never. It couldn't be. Of all the books Jack did, the *Fantastic Four* was incomparable the way Jack did it.

TJKC: Did you follow Jack's DC work after he left Marvel in 1970?

JOE: No, I really didn't. I'd see *New Gods* occasionally. Marvel used to send me the books, and a lot of times they would send me DC books too. I used to browse through it, but it didn't impress me as much as the *FF*. But I didn't study it really; it might've been more impressive if I had. It just didn't look as good as some of the Jack I had seen, or at least that's what I believed at the time. It had nothing to do with my working on it; I'm talking about Jack's original pencils. But I so associated him with the *FF*, that I felt nothing could compare with that.

TJKC: When Jack went back to Marvel in the mid-70s, did you ever request to ink his work?

JOE: I never called Stan and said, "Why don't you put Jack and I together again?" Stan often told me I could have any book I wanted, but I never asked for anything. I did whatever they sent me. It could be a guy just starting out, or a real experienced guy like Gene Colan or Neal Adams. I did whatever they asked me to do. A lot of the time, I did characters that I wasn't happy with. I didn't like the books, I didn't like the characters. I did them because I was doing a job, I was a good company man. But I never understood why they didn't put Jack back

on *Fantastic Four*. I don't remember what I was doing at the time, but it certainly wasn't as important as what I could've been doing with Jack.

TJKC: You did work together on the *Silver Surfer Graphic Novel*. How'd you feel about that book?

JOE: At the time, I didn't think it was Jack's best work. I didn't think it was up to the usual great Kirby standard. But when I look back at it now... gee, there was some nice stuff in it. There were a lot of pages where there really wasn't much going on story-wise. It could've been much more impressive.

TJKC: Hadn't he evolved a lot since you worked on *Fantastic Four* together? Hadn't he gotten a lot looser?

JOE: Oh, there was no question about it. That was very evident. He didn't put as much into it as I felt he could have. Certainly the shots of outer space were tremendous, he did some great special effects. I really enjoyed working on those type pages. But there were some pages that were very simplistic, more so than Jack should've done or could've done. But what do you think?

TJKC: It's not my favorite thing he ever did. But on most of that later Marvel work, while I enjoy it on a certain level, I can't get that excited about it. After about 1973, I have a harder time getting into the books. *JOE:* Well, I'm sure Jack lost a little enthusiasm when he came back to Marvel. Maybe he felt he wasn't being treated the way he should've been. And I agree to a great extent. Why not put him back on the *FF*? That was still their big book. *X-Men* hadn't come along yet, I don't think. But whatever the case, I always felt there was no combination like Jack and the *FF*.



Classic Thing vs. new Thing; Joe's pencils and inks from a Marvel pin-up.

TJKC: Why did you stay exclusively with Marvel all those years?

JOE: I worked continually for Marvel for 46 years. There was never a year at Marvel where I wasn't doing something. I've always been loyal to anything I've been associated with. I always felt I was a good Marvel employee. DC used to call me occasionally, wanting to know if I'd come over and do this and do that. But Marvel told me whatever DC offered me, they'd pay more. They told me I was the highest paid inker in the business, and I believed them. What reason would I have to go over to DC? I was getting paid the best, and I was working on characters I liked—Thor and the Fantastic Four. That was just before they put us under contract, and gave us great benefits and vacation. I had a lot of friends over at DC. Mike Carlin was a good friend of mine, and Dick Giordano was a good friend. A lot of the DC guys I never knew, though. Only just recently did I get to do a piece of art with Curt Swan.

TJKC: What did you do?

JOE: They've got a book out now, I think it's called the *Superman Gallery*. It's a bunch of nice Superman illustrations by different people. Curt had done a close-up of Superman breaking through a concrete wall. Mike Carlin had been asking me for years to work on Curt, and I always turned him down, and this was a good opportunity. But of all the things Curt ever did, I wish he had done a full-figure Superman. Except for the fact that you can barely see his "S" for all the rocks breaking through, it could've been anybody. But I enjoyed working on it. I might've inked it a little bit too slickly, but it came out fairly well.

TJKC: Not counting yourself, who is your favorite penciler?

JOE: Favorite penciler is tough. The top four would have to be Kirby, Buscema, Romita, and John Severin. And I'd have to say Gene Colan is a very underrated penciler. I could go on and on. I can't speak so much for the DC guys, I didn't follow them as much. But certainly Kubert and those guys were tremendous.

Marvel had so many good professionals. Sal Buscema was a real professional, and I always enjoyed working with Sal. I always thought we did a real creditable job on a lot of books: *Ms. Marvel*, *ROM*, any character they threw at us.

TJKC: What about inkers?

JOE: I've got to say Frank Giacoia. And I loved the way that John Severin inked his own work. I loved the way that he inked his westerns especially; that gritty style. Of course, Dick Giordano has always been a favorite of mine. Tom Palmer's another favorite of mine. Terry Austin's a good friend of mine and a great inker. And a protege of mine, Charles Barnett, is doing wonderful things and I expect him to have a great future. But you can go on and on. You hate to mention names, because you're going to overlook somebody.

TJKC: How many children do you have? Did any of them inherit your artistic ability?

JOE: I have four; two boys and two girls. Actually, my youngest son Mark was quite good, but he couldn't do the superheroes. He did humor comics especially well. All the time he was growing up, he had a little table next to mine. He really knew his comics. He got married very young, and he moved out when he was twenty. I really missed him because he could tell me when I was doing something wrong. He would come by my desk and say, "Dad, Thor doesn't have that

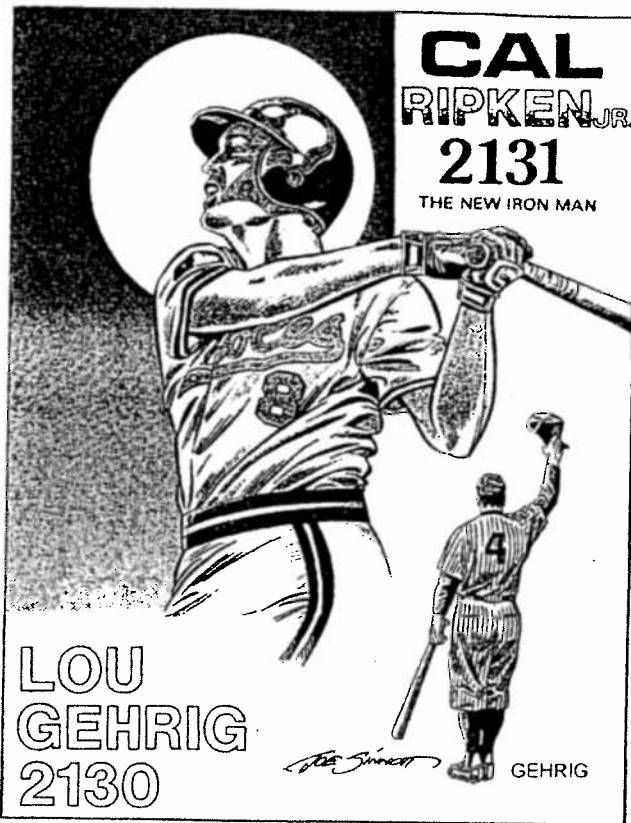
belt buckle anymore." (laughter) He knew what issue the costumes changed, and when different characters appeared. So when he moved out, I really missed him. He was like a librarian gone astray.

TJKC: Tell me what you're doing now.

JOE: I just finished five *Spider-Man* Sunday pages that Paul Ryan penciled and Stan wrote. I've been doing that for three or four years since I retired from Marvel. I'm still working for Marvel freelance. They call me up and want me to do certain things. If it appeals to me I'll do it. I've done a lot of their trading cards, and I just inked a Sergio Aragones 8-page story for *Sergio Massacres Marvel*. (laughter) I did the Fantastic Four segment. It was real fun, I couldn't turn it down. I didn't want to do any continuity, but when they said it was Sergio, I had to do it. The machinery he put in there is a take-off on Jack of course, and I think it looks real good.



More uninked pencils from *Fantastic Four* #89.



A beautiful example of Joe's sports cartoons.

Christie's Auction House wanted me to do recreations of some FF covers. They wanted me to do #5, #49, #57, and #100. I only finished #5 and #57. #57 was really exceptional. In fact, Marie Severin colored it for me. She did a tremendous job on it.

I do a lot of sports cartoons on the side. I really love baseball. I've done a lot of baseball cartoons. I've got three up in the Hall Of Fame in Cooperstown.

TJKC: Who's your favorite baseball team?

JOE: The Giants. I've been rooting for the Giants for 50 years. When they moved to the West Coast I still rooted for them. In fact, when I was out in San Diego, as luck would have it, the Giants were in playing the Padres! I took in two games. I was staying at the Marriott, and the Giants were staying there! I knew some of them from past years, and I saw all these guys. If I had known it sooner, I'd have been down in the lobby shooting the breeze with those guys.

TJKC: What do you do for fun when you're not inking?

JOE: For many years, I managed a men's softball team. I'm into local sports quite a bit. I coached Little League and boy's basketball.

Also, would you believe I'm a part-time disc jockey? (laughter) Once a month, another fella and I co-host an hour-and-a-half of Bing Crosby recordings over a Poughkeepsie radio station. It goes all the way to New York City, so it covers quite a bit of territory. I have close to 1300 Bing LPs alone, and old radio shows on tape from the 1930s and 40s. And I do Bing drawings for different Bing fan clubs. I do the covers for their fan magazines, and the dust jackets for books they put out on Bing. I've done record covers on Bing, caricatures, and full-color paintings. That's a hobby that I really enjoy doing.

TJKC: Since you started as a penciler, do you have any regrets that you're known so widely as an inker?

JOE: (laughter) Yes I do. I regret that people don't know about the stuff that I penciled. Especially *Treasure Chest*—some of the stories I've done that really didn't get much exposure. But hey, I'm proud of some of my inking. I did two books with John Tartagliano for Marvel: One on Pope John Paul, and the other on Mother Theresa, which I felt were some of the best inking I ever did. It was a labor of love. So I'm proud of my inking, but I'm also proud of a lot of the pencils I've done. I've done some real fine jobs over the years, on a variety of subjects.

TJKC: Why do you think you're so many people's favorite Kirby inker?

JOE: You hate to say it, but if it's possible, I think I added a little bit to Jack's work. If he had any rough edges at all, I think I smoothed them out. I was slick. But I think it was because I could pencil myself. I think that's the reason his work looked better, because I was able to make things look better, no matter what it was. If it was a car, or a piece of clothing, or a head, or backgrounds. And I never slighted Jack; I tried to do as well as he had given me. I never did fault him in any way.

TJKC: How did Jack's work compare to other pencilers you've inked over the years?

JOE: No one was ever as consistent as Jack. Jack never left anything to my imagination. There were little things here and there that I did change over the years, but I didn't have to. Everything was there. Every little button had the thread, you could see the thread holes in the buttons. Everything was so perfect. Kirby, consistently, was the same on every story; it was so detailed. Every black was in there; I never had to add a black unless I felt it needed it to balance the page a little more. It was loose in a sense, but detailed in another sense. You can't say enough about Jack's work.

TJKC: Lastly, what are you most proud of from your years of inking Jack's work?

JOE: The thing that I'm most proud of is the fact that I worked with Jack. He was the greatest comic illustrator of all time, and I was able to do so much work with him. To be associated with him, to be part of his art, is compensation enough for me. I couldn't ask for anything more. ④

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THE FF AND THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE '60s

by Darcy Sullivan

People who were already into comics circa 1961 and picked up *Fantastic Four* #1 always remark on how strange it seemed, a perspective nobody younger than them can truly share. In the same way, those of us who grew up in the '60s reading *Fantastic Four* probably have a different perspective on the comic than those either younger or older than us. To many of us, *Fantastic Four* was the myth of our time.

Generally, when people talk about superheroes' mythic quality, they're talking about the way superhero stories use larger-than-life characters to tell universal stories about the Nature of Man. That's true of *Fantastic Four* as well—they are a peculiar nature myth, in fact, representing as they do the family of earth, wind, fire and water—but in the 1960s the stories the comic told seemed specific to that time. To those of us young enough to grasp but not follow world events, *Fantastic Four* read like an allegory, a secret history of the 1960s.

Take Galactus and the Silver Surfer. On the one hand they represent the father and the rebellious son, but to us they symbolized all the terrible dread hovering over us in the 1960s, and the strange mixture of idealism and power needed to stand up to the Establishment. For kids with only an inkling of the Vietnam War and the resistance to it, Galactus' tale seemed pregnant with hidden meaning. What was that mind-blowing trip the Human Torch undertook to save Earth but a consciousness-altering psychedelic experience?

Indeed, rebellious children were all over *FF* in those days. The weird infant from #24, the Impossible Man, even those no-goods on Yancy Street reminded us readers that youth had different, sometimes unfathomable priorities, and an often-surprising strength. Sometimes they seemed negative at first, then turned out to be all right after all—just like T'Challa, whose other name, for the Black Panther, sounded a bell even for us kids.

In this respect, the Inhumans probably struck the deepest chord. Within our world, these stories told us, are other communities that, though strange to us and perhaps confrontational, are not necessarily bad. As proto-hippies, the Inhumans made the burgeoning underground culture intriguing even to us straights.

Indeed, *Fantastic Four's* general sense of discovery fit right into the zeitgeist of the '60s. Many comics before and since have emphasized conflict, but few if any have conveyed the same spirit of exploration. What blew us away back then wasn't the size of the fights but the constant uncovering of vast realms: Hidden Lands, Negative Zones, micro-worlds and the like. No perspective was absolute—another dimension was always whirling above us, beneath us, within us. *Fantastic Four* embraced the era's inclinations toward introspection,

cultural anthropology, and internationalism.

But *Fantastic Four* was more than mere phantasmagoria. It was grounded in a very specific Earthly setting, New York City. This was back when artists drew backgrounds more often than not, so the city's Kirbyized buildings kept the whole thing rooted in reality. Kirby clearly loved and romanticized the town—the men in his 1960s NYC still wore hats and smoked pipes. Still, the city's presence made the stories seem more real, and thus more meaningful.

To many of us, *FF* was more "relevant" than the comics that would be so dubbed, including *Spider-Man*. Comics that wanted to be "hip" traded in triviality, and cast a very short shadow. (Most of them were painfully unhip anyway, even if we were to young to tell.) *Fantastic Four* was all about the cosmos, but we felt in the stories and in Kirby's grandiose drawings the progress and panic of our time, the huge ambition of our Great Society and the corresponding terror that social change might strip away our (white middle-class) centeredness and privilege. Nothing as specific as *Spider-Man* (or the later *Green Lantern*) could encompass the profound emotions of a society questioning itself.

FF was a big comic for a generation facing big issues. It continually noted that we (or Ben, or anyone but Reed Richards) couldn't hope to understand the forces at play, just as we readers couldn't fully comprehend and process a President's murder, the drafting of unwilling men to combat, or the Cold War's machinations. And just as America still struggles to come to terms with the 1960s and the changes it wrought, we grown-up readers may never work out what Johnny Storm saw as he zoomed through the timeless ether, or why Ben Grimm was constantly turning on his friends, or what visions sparked Kirby's radical machinery designs. We only know we experienced something great enough to linger, and important enough to influence us still. ④

The FF meet Spider-Man, in this Kirby art from a 1970s Marvel calendar.

