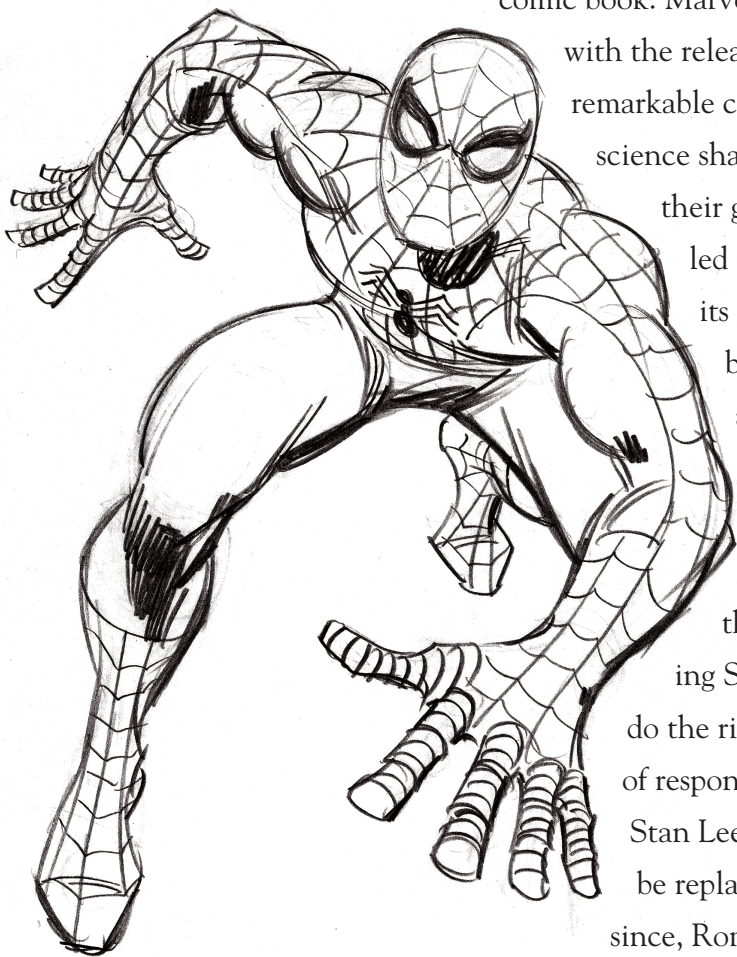


THE ROMITAS

A ROYAL FAMILY OF AMERICAN COMIC BOOK ILLUSTRATION

By Tom Spurgeon

The year 2010 will mark 45 years in the mainstreaming of Marvel Comics, perhaps the most significant ongoing event in the history of the comic book. Marvel began its revitalization as a publishing entity in 1961 with the release of *Fantastic Four #1*, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's remarkable comic book where modern superheroes transformed by science shared center stage with monsters, romance and even their golden age counterparts. The success of *Fantastic Four* led to other superhero titles as Marvel slowly transformed its line in that direction. By 1966, comic book fans had begun to catch up with the special goings-on at Marvel, and the mainstream media started to follow, intrigued by the mix of genres and the real world touches individual books brought into their fantasy storylines. Combining sales, public acclaim and media interest, the flagship title of Marvel's new comics was *The Amazing Spider-Man*, the story of a teenage superhero trying to do the right thing despite having to shoulder a lifetime's worth of responsibility. The year Marvel broke big was also the year Stan Lee decided that the departing artist Steve Ditko would be replaced by veteran cartoonist John Romita. In the 40 years since, Romita and his namesake son John Jr. have been the primary artists behind some of the best and most important runs in comic book history, all for Marvel Comics, as the company has become a worldwide presence in books, licensing and film. In a very special and unique way, modern Marvel is the Romitas and the Romitas are modern Marvel. Their careers are a remarkable accomplishment, outclassed only by the special relationship between father and son.



ABOVE:
SKETCH OF SPIDER-MAN

OPPOSITE:
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #119

SPIDER-MAN

MARVEL COMICS GROUP TM

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

20¢ 119 APR 02457

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN



YOU WON'T STOP HULK FROM SMASHING DAM! NOTHING CAN!

MAYBE NOT, GREENSKIN-- BUT I'M STILL GONNA TRY EVEN IF IT KILLS ME!

WHICH IT PROBABLY WILL!

SPIDEY vs. THE HULK!

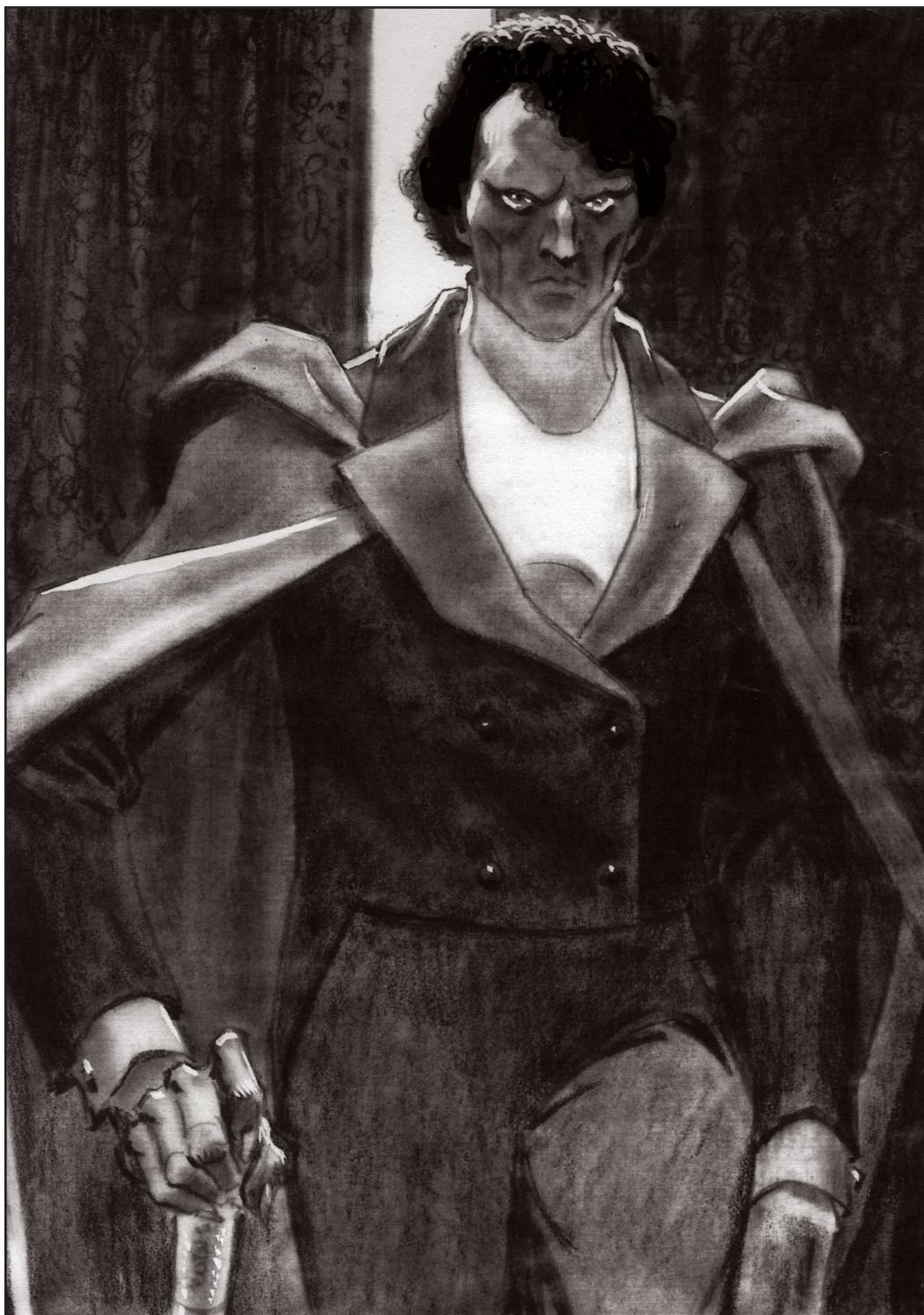
THIS IS THE BIG ONE!!

John Romita was born in 1930 in Brooklyn, New York, the oldest child of an eventual five kids. He was by his own accounts an average neighborhood

kid during the waning decades of his home borough's 50-year span when it could offer itself as a legitimate rival to the giant skyscrapers and pungent cultural excesses of Manhattan. In the days of John Romita's

youth, Brooklyn still had its own culture, its own politics and its own baseball team. Save for the harsh economic realities of a worldwide Depression - and the Romita Family was certainly aware of the hard times - it was a reasonably good time to be a kid in America. This was particularly true of a place like Brooklyn, and doubly so for a male child with an eye towards the visual arts. The first 15 years of John Romita's life ran hand in hand with the glory years of two equally powerful visual narrative art forms. The film industry, now mostly out of New York and New Jersey and located out West, had at the very least established itself as a frequent and somewhat affordable entertainment option for all social classes. Some might say it vied with Sunday church services as the most important shared experience of all Americans. New York's still thriving newspaper economy and a growing national distribution

system yielded beautiful results in the full flowering of the comic strip page. Romita, like all boys of his generation, read comics and watched movies.



ABOVE:
SKETCH

OPPOSITE:
HUMAN FIGURE SKETCH



JVR
'49

Cartoonists were a half-step below movie stars and sports heroes in the imagination of the American public, and their art form came to stand for an opportunity to see financial reward from entertaining a wide, national audience. Seven times a week, with

color on Sundays, young and old could thrill to several dozen newspaper serials and joke strips of every conceivable kind in a language of words and pictures so common that nearly everyone understood it. The photo had not quite yet overtaken the cartoon as the dominant visual expression for news,

and film offered up its own breed of moving cartoon shorts, so the familiarity of such images gave the newspaper comics a kind of ubiquitous and salacious currency. Everyone could read comics, and most people did. Teenage girls who, if born 50 years later might have watched a television soap opera, thrilled to the growing number of dramatic serials; boys like Romita who in a later time might spend their time absorbed in video games found solace in the far-flung thrills of the adventure strip. Romita was a fan of virtuoso artists like Roy Crane, Noel Sickles and particularly Milton Caniff, who had cornered the market on romance and high adventure in the comics page first in Dickie Dare and later in the smash hit Terry and the Pirates. Romita studied the immensely popular Caniff strip with devotion. As much as he enjoyed the cartoonist's lush art, the young man who would later join the adventure strip fraternity himself always

found he was taken in by story more than visual effect. He could hardly study a small part of Terry Sunday before finding himself simply reading the whole thing, washed away to foreign lands by its confident, highly skilled creator.



"Terry and the Pirates"

Milton Caniff's Famous Cartoon Strip

ABOVE:
MILTON & THE PIRATES

OPPOSITE:
DICKIE DARE & TERRY AND
THE PIRATES STRIPS