Marvel Visionaries: John Romita Jr.
HC by J. Michael Straczynski

Celebrating the artwork of John Romita Jr., a legend in his own right, on the anniversary of his first work on Amazing Spider-Man! Tony Stark battles alcoholism! Spider-Man battles the Juggernaut though the streets of New York! The dawn of a New Universe! Daredevil and Kingpin celebrate Christmas! The Punisher joins the mafia! Also featuring the Hulk, Magneto, Professor X, a masterful retelling of Daredevil's origin, and more! Collects Amazing Spider-Man 229-230, 36, Annual 11, Iron Man 128 & 256, Uncanny X-Men 183 & 309, Star Brand 1, Daredevil 253, Punisher War Zone 1, Daredevil: Man Without Fear 1-2 and Hulk 25 & 34

My Personal Review:
You just gotta love these Marvel Visionaries tomes, dontcha?

This new one surveys the career of one John Romita Jr., beginning with one of his earliest works in 1977, up until 2002. Now, the more you love comics, the more you will love this book. But even a novice or neophyte will find this stuff terrific.

The introduction is written by his father; it's a lovely piece, as one would expect from a proud father, but it also sets up the subsequent comic stories in proper perspective, as one would expect from a legendary comic artist who spent over 20 years as Art Director at Marvel Comics. An artist who's earliest work was on Daredevil, and who's Spider-Man is considered by many to be definitive.

The first little tale, a minor piece from a Spider-Man annual, is flat and relatively unsophisticated...his father's influence clearly visible in the faces of Peter and Mary Jane. But the second one, from his early, noteworthy run on "Iron Man", shows a huge leap in storytelling technique. This particular story was one dealing with Tony Stark's alcoholism, and it demonstrates Romita's growing confidence. JRJR (as he signs stuff) was learning, and learning fast.
We then get two Spider-Man stories...even an uninitiated reader will notice a significant improvement in story pacing and composition, even if the inking renders the drawings less dramatic.

Up next: an X-Men tale from 1984, and this is where things really start coming together. Facial expressions are better, fight scenes are better, anatomy is better...

The next story, the first Star-Brand, simply shows off his new, bold drafting ability, and his ability to create a "new" character from scratch. It's more significant in noting that Al Williamson was his inker, a guy who proved to be one of JRJR's best embellishers.

We then get a terrific Daredevil/Kingpin piece, and a thrilling Iron Man story. Yes...thrilling. It read like some sci-fi action suspense flick, "Andromeda Strain" crossed with that early Spider-Man comic where he was trapped under all that machinery. If you know comics, you know what I mean. JRJR's artwork is just masterful...note the posture of Iron Man in certain scenes. All you need to know about the character...his confidence, his intelligence, his calm...comes across in a few well chosen shots.

As he develops, you can literally see him absorbing other influences...beyond his father, you can see John Buscema in some of the faces, Jack Kirby in the hands...particularly those monolithic fists on certain heroes.

With the Punisher episode, he adds some of Neal Adam's cinematic dynamics and some of Frank Miller's bold compositions and shadows. Yet it is all clearly JRJR. He's not copying. He's "using"...using all he's learned and been exposed to, and letting it come out and serve the story.

The books ends with some frankly amazing stories. You get two from the epic "Daredevil: Man Without Fear" miniseries, a Xavier origin story from X-Men (showing Romita's talent with quiet, non-action, "dramatic" stories), an action-packed brawl between the Hulk and the Abomination, and finally, and it really could not have been anything else, the famous Amazing Spider-Man 36.

The 9/11 book. One of the best comics ever created. A work of such staggering emotional power, you will feel the need to show it to non-comic people.
It's the best example of the use of a medium to help fans cope with 9/11; you get the feeling it helped the creators as well. Sort of the way Bruce Springsteen's "The Rising" was HIS way to cope, yet proved to be a touchstone for millions of fans too.
As much as I love Bruce, even his record didn't NAIL the grief, the shock...the epic horror of the Tower attacks like AS 36. In an extraordinarily strange way, it felt "real."
It could have only been made by a comic artist who was there at the time. I guarantee you that once you've read it, you will never forget it.

I found myself flipping back to the first story of the book, and I could NOT believe how much this artist grew. From an average journeyman, to one of our modern masters...he's not good, he's awesome.

And here is his story, for us to see...how the son of a great artist becomes one himself. A great reading experience.

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