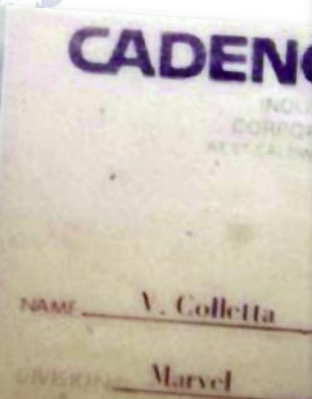


THE THIN BLACK LINE

Perspectives On
**VINCE
COLLETTA**
Comics' Most Controversial Inker

By Robert L. Bryant, Jr.





THE MYSTERY OF VINCE COLLETTA! HERO OR VILLAIN? YOU DECIDE!

In the history of comic book art, **Vince Colletta** is perhaps the most prolific inker ever, and certainly the most controversial. He jumped in at the last minute to rescue hundreds of comic books about to miss their printing deadline, often racing through the work of artists who fans say he should have worshiped. In the 1960s he gave **Jack Kirby's** *Thor* an atmospheric look many fans love even 40 years later, but got kicked off Kirby's *Fourth World* comics in the 1970s for omitting details.

Whether you loved his work or hated it, **The Thin Black Line** will enlighten, entertain, and expose a life and career as colorful as the four-color comic books Colletta labored on for decades. Join **Stan Lee**, **Roy Thomas**, **Joe Sinnott**, **Mike Royer**, **Carmine Infantino**, **Mark Evanier**, and dozens of other comics pros as they recall the **Vince Colletta** they knew and worked with, and pull no punches in their praise and criticism of the most notorious inker in the history of the medium—all surrounded by copious examples of Colletta art, including numerous “before and after” pencil to ink comparisons.

Did he save the Silver Age of comics—or ruin it?
You decide!



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THE THIN BLACK LINE:

Perspectives on Vince Colletta, Comics' Most Controversial Inker

Written by Robert L. Bryant, Jr.

Title page illustration by Michael Netzer

Inside front cover: Stan Lee's note to Sol Brodsky, from a *Thor* #139 page (1967)

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Colletta inks Sal Buscema; detail from *Defenders* #26 (1975).

THE THIN BLACK LINE

Chapter 3: INKING ASGARD

Among the gods, Colletta found a home.

There are different kinds of stories as well as different kinds of inkers, and Colletta's softer, moodier style worked well on one kind in particular: fantasy. Timeless fantasy.

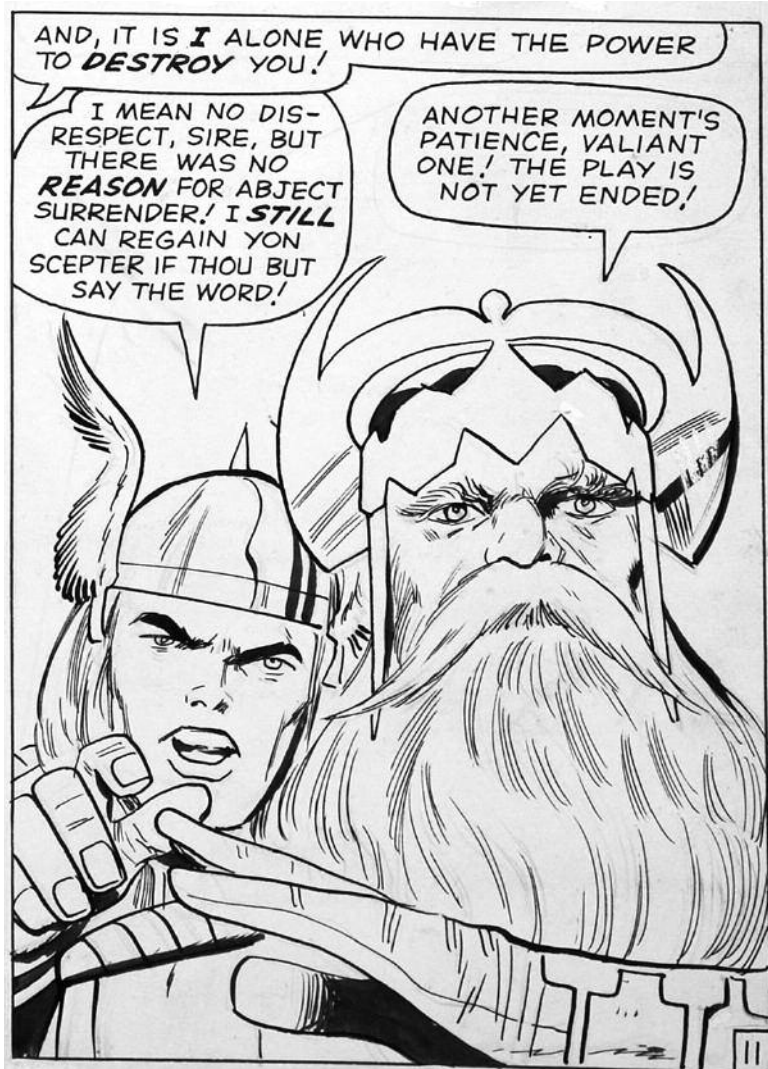
Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's *Thor* was a timeless fantasy (except when its characters sometimes wandered into New York City for a battle between gods or just a quick soda). Its elements were primarily natural elements: Rock, wood, leather, hair, horn, earth, air, fire, water. All the things that the Enchanted Forest is made of.

Colletta landed on the title in 1964, as inker on the "Tales of Asgard" feature that ran in the back of *Journey into Mystery*, which later became *The Mighty Thor*. By 1965, Colletta was inking the whole book, and he remained the title's regular inker through 1969 and, more sporadically, into 1970, Kirby's final year on the book. (Bill Everett handled a string of *Thor*s in late 1969/early 1970, and Everett's inks remain a favorite of readers such as Arlen Schumer and Mark Evanier.)

It was on "Tales of Asgard" that Colletta's offbeat style began to grow on readers. It was also on that backup feature, Arlen Schumer argues, that Kirby's style began to mature, and he really began "giving gravitas to the Thor myth."

"I think that with *Thor*, Stan Lee wanted a Superman knockoff," Schumer said. "I think Lee tried to standardize [Thor] with the secret identity and the whole deal."

(Thor strikes his



VOLSTAGG YELLS FROM SAFE
DISTANCE - FIGHT ON BRAVE THOR
YOU HAVE VOLSTAGG IN RESERVE

BEHIND VOLSTAGG A MUTINEER
TOSSES A MACE WITH
ACCURACY

JOURNEY MYSTERY 122

28 28

WHILE, TOWERING ABOVE ALL OTHERS, THE AGED, BUT STILL POWERFUL FIGURE OF VOLSTAGG LOOMS MENACINGLY, AS HIS GIGANTIC STENTORIAN VOICE BOOMS OUT--

FEAR NOT, THUNDER GOD! THOU HAST THE SUPPORT OF INVINCIBLE VOLSTAGG!

THE MERE SIGHT OF MY NOBLE SELF MAKES STRONG MEN TREMBLE!!

A FEW STOUT BLOWS FROM THY HAND WOULD NOT BE AMISS EITHER, ENORMOUS ONE!



OF COURSE, SON OF ODIN! I WAS MERELY AWAITING THE PROPER MOMENT TO STRIKE!

THIS WILL STILL THY BOASTFUL TONGUE!

AND NOW, WHO SHALL BE THE FIRST TO FEEL THE WRATH OF VOLSTAGG!



BNANNG!

TO YOUR HEELS, BRAVE COMPANIONS!!

A JACKAL HATH FELLE THE LION OF ASGARD!



HE ACCOMPLISHED MORE IN DEFEAT THAN HE COULD HAVE IN VICTORY!

HIS VERY FALL TOPPLED HALF OF THE MUTINEERS!!



(left) Journey Into Mystery #123 detail. (above) JIM #122; Colletta was a good fit for "Tales of Asgard."

hammer on the ground and *bang*—he’s transformed into hobbled Dr. Don Blake, who spends his time caring for the sick. Clark Kent had his phone booth; Don Blake had his cane. Blake/Thor also had a mortal girlfriend, nurse Jane Foster, who often needed protecting from various super-threats, but mousy Jane lacked the fire and grit of Superman’s Lois Lane. Jane would go on to flunk Odin’s “godhood test” anyway, and Thor would hook up with the graceful goddess Sif.)

It was artists like Kirby and Steve Ditko, Schumer said, who strained at the Marvel leash, who pushed beyond the industry stereotypes, and who pulled the company into the future. You can see that happening in *Thor*, he said.

“You can chart Kirby’s development through *Thor*,” Schumer said. In the beginning, it’s relatively typical superhero stuff, but in some stories, you can see the book’s past bumping up against its future. Consider *Journey into Mystery* #114 (1965).

The lead-off story is “The Stronger I Am, the Sooner I Die,” in which Thor tangles with Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man. (He touches a rock—he becomes rocky!) The inks on that story are by Marvel mainstay Chic Stone, done in his signature bold, thick blacks. Stone was a popular inker of the era, and his style works well for the book’s main story—standard superhero fare, more or less. Bad guy gains superpowers. Bad guy tangles with good guy. Nobody wins right away. Come back next month.

Then you turn to the book’s “Tales of Asgard” backup story, titled “The Golden Apples,” a loose retelling of “Little Red Riding Hood,” only this time the characters are gods and goddesses. And it’s inked by Colletta. It’s a remarkable contrast, even though it’s all by the same writer, Lee, and the same artist, Kirby, and produced at the same time

as the rest of the book.

The story doesn’t even involve any of the regular *Thor* players. The tale goes like this: Haakun the Hunter stops his horse to greet Iduna, who is traveling through the forest, on her way to Asgard with a basketful of “golden apples of immortality.” She intends to give them to Odin. Haakun bids her a peaceful journey, and Iduna goes deeper into the woods.

She’s being watched by a fierce wolf who is more than a wolf—he’s Fenris the wolf god. “Those apples must be mine!” he vows.

He shape-shifts into human form, greets Iduna and sneaks a look at her golden apples. “What strange hands you have!” Iduna says. “So grasping—so brutal! And what an odd voice you have!! Like the guttural snarl of a wild beast!”

Fenris changes back into wolf form, apparently intending to kill Iduna. But Haakun the Hunter has doubled back—he hurls his battle-axe at the wolf god. Fenris instantly shrinks himself to the size of a kitten—the axe misses, but boomerangs back, “slashes through the very fabric of infinity itself,” and hurls Fenris into a smoky, rocky netherworld. Haakun and Iduna continue their journey—“a tale which has been handed down through the ages.”

“The Golden Apples” is filled with tones and textures you don’t find elsewhere in the book—the blurred sketchiness of the horse’s hooves; the rough lines of the forest; the patterning of the girl’s woven basket; the scritch-scratch roughness of wolf god Fenris’ feral mustache. All these help make Asgard feel like a different world, as if it’s physically built out of different stuff than Earth is.

And “Tales of Asgard” was a perfect showcase for that world. Freed from the main *Thor* storyline, its tales could wander down all kinds of curious



Jack Kirby, 1973.

paths. Who would have thought you could get so much drama out of a black horse wandering a village? ("The Dark Horse of Death" in *Thor* #132: "The fearful flee before the mighty ebony stallion—while those of stouter heart stand fast! Yet each man knows that the beast will stop before one warrior—the one who is fated to die!")

Some fans no doubt wish Lee had kept Colletta bottled up on the backup feature, rather than turning him loose on the main book. Colletta's rough, raw, scratchy,



Thor #129's "Tales of Asgard" back-up.



inked-with-a-pen look enhanced the book's natural elements even as he erased, simplified or silhouetted some parts of Kirby's panels—buildings, crowds, detailing—that he apparently didn't want to take the time to ink. (Or that he might have felt were not necessary to the panel—a distraction?)

Gone were a sword here, a rock there; detailed background characters and carefully crafted buildings sometimes vanished into silhouettes. Occasionally, even foreground characters became silhouettes. (To save time, or because Colletta felt that a full silhouette was more visually striking than an “open” figure?)

“One of Vinnie's favorite tricks was if something wasn't absolutely necessary to the picture, it went into silhouette,” said penciler Joe Staton. “No matter how much time anybody put into drawing perspectives or something, if it could be blacked out, then it was. And if you had some black in the panel, you could erase a lot more. So Vinnie erased things; he blacked out things.”

Erik Larsen owns some original

Thor pages, and he has studied them closely. In *Thor* #125 (1966), there's a panel in which Hercules flings away the fallen sequoia that's blocking a passenger train. (“One side, mortals, whilst Hercules clears the tracks!”) Colletta whited out, or erased, “the entire train” from the background of the panel, Larsen said.

“He took the train out,” Larsen said. “Compositionally, the train wasn't necessary. It did kind of look a little silly sitting there. It's something of a distraction. So I can't look at the final product and go, ‘That was a mistake to do that.’ I don't think it was a mistake... but it's still kind of a ballsy move.”

In other cases, Larsen said, the stripped-down Colletta look brought with it some problems. One of them involved Asgard, home of the gods: In some Colletta *Thor* pages, Larsen said, Colletta seems to have deleted many of the background players, the gods on the street. Sometimes, Asgard looks “unusually deserted... it should have been kind of teeming with guys.”

In a battle scene from a “Tales of



(left) Majestic inks from *Thor* #158. (above) Colletta routinely omitted figures, as seen here from *Thor* #166.



More pencils to inks comparisons, from *Thor* #166 (above) and #144 (below)—note the missing mace!

Asgard” story in *Journey into Mystery* #112 (1965), the leering head of the King of Jotunheim vanished sometime between leaving Kirby’s art board and arriving on Marvel’s printing presses. The revised panel became more of an over-the-shoulder shot, in which the King’s no-longer-visible head is blocked by his body. Done by Colletta or an assistant? Done for the sake of art or commerce? Nobody knows.

In *Thor* #144 (1967), the showdown with the Enchanters in New York City,

shortcutting abounds. When Thor and his pals spot the energy-crackling spirit of the Living Talisman at their window, Colletta deletes a framed document on the wall and a footstool on the floor, and “checkerboards” an elaborate little medicine cabinet. A cityscape gets checkerboarded a little later on, when Thor, Sif and Balder rush out into the street to face a couple of Enchanters. Later, in a closeup of the Thunder God’s hand grabbing an Enchanter’s ankle, Colletta deletes the bad guy’s mace—an



element that took up a third of the panel in the original pencils.

(As it happens, this same issue of *Thor* is the one that was to feature the famous cover that reportedly was “too detailed to be inked,” so Kirby drew another one. The original featured Thor hanging onto a floating chunk of New York street while one Enchanter bashed at him with a mace and another stood by with a

sword. Above them, a sky full of Kirby Krackle; below them, a sprawling section of Manhattan. The simpler, revised cover showed Thor charging the villains from the Enchanters’ point of view.)

Just to take a closer look at how Colletta would “edit” pencils: In *Thor* #154 (1968), we get two panels showing evil Loki appearing suddenly on the streets of New York and panicking a crowd of on-lookers. “*Be-gone, thou puny mortals!*” rages Loki, resplendent in his horned helmet. “I have had *enow* of thy witless babbling and

startled glances!” The bystanders take off running. (They overreact just a little bit, perhaps—Loki’s not that terrifying; New Yorkers have seen much worse, even in the 1960s.)

In the first panel, in Xeroxes of the original art, there’s a man in a hat standing just to Loki’s left, and his outstretched fingers point to Loki’s shoulder. In the Colletta-inked version that was



Innocent bystanders feel the wrath of Colletta’s eraser, in *Thor* #154.



actually published, the hat man is gone; where he stood is a bare wall.

In the next panel, we see the Big Apple residents running away in fear from Loki. In the original pencils, Kirby drew a man scrambling to get up off the pavement, where he apparently has fallen. He's gone in the published version, replaced by dead space.

Two or three of the fleeing bystanders have also been silhouetted. Buildings in the background have been turned into simple checkerboards.

The motion lines Kirby placed around Loki's arms, to show that he's throwing his arms wide in a gesture of threat, are gone. In the published version, Loki holds his arms outstretched, but unmoving.

Does any of this change the story itself? Well, not really. Loki still appears in NYC and the locals still run away.

Does any of this damage the art itself? Kirby fans would say yes. The intent of the art is the same, but the details are different. Something got lost in translation. And since Kirby was virtually never late turning in his pencils for his books, fans ask, why were the deletions necessary if Colletta didn't have to ink the *Thor* books in a breakneck hurry?

Franklin Colletta offers this answer: Because *Thor* wasn't necessarily the only book in his father's lap at the time. If Colletta were still alive, his son says, "Maybe, by now, he would have told the crazy Kirby fans who like to say, 'Well, Jack's stuff was never late,' to take a retrospective peek at all the other uninked pages sitting there next to Jack's stuff. In addition to there being only so many hours in the day, often Marvel's priority was the late book, not the Kirby story."

Stan Lee, who was both writer and editor on *Thor* during the 1960s, said he had not been aware of any erasures on *Thor* pages and did not know there was a controversy about



(left and above) Missing/altered cityscapes from *Thor* #147 and #144, respectively.

the erasures. “I was pretty much unaware of it. This is a surprise to me,” Lee said in a mid-2009 interview.

Lee said he had never noticed anything missing or changed when he looked over the pages after they were inked by Colletta. “When I got the inking back from Vinnie, it looked fine to me. Nothing seemed to be missing. I didn’t look at it under a microscope.”

There’s some irony, and maybe tragedy, in the situation. Colletta “was inking Kirby at his most mature time,” said Arlen Schumer. For Schumer, Kirby was comics’ Michelangelo, at the peak of his powers. “There [Colletta] was, inking the Michelangelo of comics,” Schumer said—and taking shortcuts.

These kinds of shortcuts were not common among inkers in the 1960s or later, according to Joe Sinnott. “Only with Vinnie. I can’t remember anybody else who took the kind of shortcuts Vinnie did.”

Not all the inkers working in comics at that time were necessarily brilliant artists, Sinnott said, but they gave the work everything they had. Colletta, despite his talent, did not, according to Sinnott.

But, at the same time... under Colletta’s inks, Thor’s golden locks looked like hair; his hammer looked like rock; its thong looked like leather. The

monster Mangog’s giant horns looked like old bone. The wolf-god Fenris’ bristly mustache looked like it would itch like a bastard. Colletta subtracted detail from *Thor*, but added texture and mood.

Maybe that was a fair exchange. Maybe it wasn’t. But Colletta stayed on *Thor* for about five years—six, counting the “Tales of Asgard” backups—and the book sold and kept on selling. (The sensuous eyelashes Colletta gave Thor’s girlfriend Sif couldn’t have hurt. Only a goddess could have eyelashes like those.)

One example of the Colletta texturing that sticks with Erik Larsen is the sequence in *Thor* #127 (1966) when the Thunder God battles



A note from production manager Sol Brodsky tells Vince to fix inconsistencies in Kirby’s artwork on *Thor* #156.





royal lackey Seidring, who temporarily possesses Odin's power. During the battle, Seidring wraps Thor in "a vortex of liquefied wolfbane"—a floating ball of lethal water. As he struggles inside the watery wolfbane, Colletta shades Thor in fine, scratchy linework. "I was looking at those panels and going, man, if anybody else had inked that, it just would not have been anywhere near as cool," Larsen said.

Colletta deleted background detail, to the fury of the then-few Kirby fans with access to the original pencils, but that lack of detail gave *Thor* a timeless look and feel, just as a fairy tale about thee-thou Norse gods should have had. And by late 1966, by the time of the "Living Planet" storyline, Colletta had

found a formula that seemed to please most readers—not too heavy on the brush, not too light on the pen. A good example of this "sweet spot" would be the often-reprinted four-issue "Mangog" storyline. (To Larsen's eye, however, Colletta never really recovered from Marvel's decision to shrink their original art pages by a few inches around 1967.)

Stan Lee still stands by the basic style that Colletta brought to *Thor*.

"I liked it," Lee said. "A lot of people didn't. He inked with a very thin line. A lot of people thought it should be heavier. But Jack Kirby never complained."

Colletta "did a good job" on *Thor*, Lee said. "He didn't ink the way Joe Sinnott did, and Joe was wonderful. But [Colletta] had his own style. I had





(previous page) Colletta's own work could be inconsistent at times, as this rough inking from *Thor* #152 shows.

(this page) Balder gets a break, as Colletta eliminates one of the warriors Kirby drew into this fight scene from *Thor* #157.





(above) *Thor* #154: the lefthand character is omitted here, and in the prior panel—Colletta's choice, or an editorial decision? (below) Kirby drew a chair in the pencils, but it's missing in the inks.

no problem with Vinnie's inks." They looked good and they "colored up" well, Lee said.

(But on at least one occasion while editing *Thor*, Lee expressed irritation with Colletta's inks. In *Thor* #139 from 1967, there's a sequence where Sif teleports herself and Thor from a New York City subway tunnel to Asgard. Colletta made the characters into smoky half-silhouettes—kind of a neat look, actually. In the margins on that original art page, Lee wrote a note to production man Sol Brodsky: "Sol, V.C. ruined this inking. Jack had much more detail—the figures were recognizable!" There were other occasions when Lee would write margin notes critiquing Kirby's art or even the lettering on the book.)

To Roy Thomas, an ex-schoolteacher who had begun

working at Marvel as a writer in the mid-1960s on titles like *The Avengers*, Lee's support for Colletta was based on both Colletta's professionalism and his personality. "He was one of the relatively few artists who socialized with Stan at various times," said Thomas. "He had more access to Stan than most artists did."

Lee and Colletta loved each other, said Lada St. Edmund, one of Colletta's actress/model friends. "He adored Stan Lee. He would always talk about Stan Lee like he was the Second Coming," St. Edmund recalled. Lee, for his part,





(above) More changes in *Thor* #154, leading one to believe this issue had a tighter than usual deadline.
 (below) A figure goes full-silhouette in *Thor* #144. Was it for expediency's sake, or to simplify the design?

seemed “awestruck” by Colletta and “treated him like a rock star,” she said. “I remember Vinnie being very embarrassed by it.”

“Stan saw Vinnie as a valuable artist,” Roy Thomas said. “He may have erased some of Jack Kirby’s pencil lines, which Stan wasn’t that much worried about; what Stan cared about was what he saw as the finished product that came in, and he was very happy with the finished product, and the readers were very happy with the finished product.”

Despite the criticism Colletta gets now, “Vinnie was quite popular back in the ‘60s as the inker on *Thor*,” Thomas said. “When [Marvel would] have these little contests and things in the early days, he would finish as one of the top inkers. So it’s not as if Stan was flying in the face of reader demand by keeping Vinnie Colletta doing *Thor*.”

Jim Salicrup points out that in the 1960s, when Marvel was only publishing perhaps a dozen monthly books—barely enough to fill out the modest “Mighty Marvel Checklist” of titles—“Stan tried to give each title a strong identity of its own. So even though Stan might write most of the titles, or Jack might draw several, they didn’t all feel exactly the same. Vinnie’s inking added something

to Kirby’s art that gave *Thor* a really classy look that stood out from the other titles.”

Colletta defender Eddie Campbell on his blog compares the feel of *Thor*



to *Lord of the Rings*—“that kind of old-worldly adventure”—a style unique in the era of NASA and the original *Star Trek*.

“(Colletta) gave *Thor* a kind of Hal Foster look,” said Tony Isabella. The inks even matched the rough, cracked lettering on the book’s cover logo.

Colletta’s son Franklin says: “*Thor* and ‘Asgard’ were miracles even more than they were masterpieces. You try inking one of those splash pages.”

On *Thor*, Colletta also softened

some of the stylistic touches that were Kirby trademarks, such as the “Kirby squiggle”—the wavy lines that apparently started out as a way of designating reflections on shiny metal, but that soon began appearing on people’s bodies as well.

Colletta consistently made the “squiggles” look more organic—like ridges of muscle—when they were used on characters’ bodies. When they appeared on metallic objects—such as

Thor’s helmet—Colletta tended to turn them into thick black lines with just a hint of the “wave.”

Another Colletta touch: Sometimes, he would let the patterns on an object define the object’s shape. For example, if he was inking a man’s tie, and the tie had horizontal stripes, Colletta might drop the vertical containment lines around the tie and let the stripes by themselves define the shape. Sometimes he’d drop the containment lines around Thor’s tiger-stripe leggings and let the striping alone do the work.

Colletta brought a more naturalistic approach to Kirby’s highly personal style. Some fans liked it because it



Perhaps due to it being a full-page image, Vince inked this detailed shot from *Thor* #157 without omissions—a daunting task for any inker.

looked more classical, more mainstream. Others didn't because it wasn't exactly what Kirby had drawn. (And in most cases, it would be many years before fans had access to published copies of Xeroxed penciled pages in order to know what Kirby had drawn.)

This was the Colletta touch, and the Colletta touch worked on *Thor*; and it worked for years. It's impossible to think of the series without Colletta's thin black lines. (When they do the *Thor* movie, the Thunder God should be surrounded by a thin ink line, with crosshatching on his powerful arms.)

Colletta's "scratchy pen line" inking style "perfectly suited Thor's world," said Arlen Schumer. He added: "*Thor* dealt in mountains and forests and valleys—European, rural, in a

sense, which is where myths come from." The finishes by Colletta, Schumer said, almost felt like "engravings."

You had a cover showing Thor sprawled in a pile of bricks, ravaged by the Wrecker (*Thor* #149)? Colletta made the Thunder God look as scratched up as the environment he was in, Schumer said. You had a cover showing Thor battling a Storm Giant (*Thor* #159)? Colletta made the giant look ancient, weathered, "grizzled," Schumer said.

And even when the book veered away from more organic environments into steel-and-plastic science fiction—the Colonizers of Rigel, Galactus—Colletta generally rose to the occasion, Schumer said. "I was pleasantly surprised at how slickly Colletta inked the 'tech' stuff," he said.

But for Schumer, if Colletta has a claim to fame, it's *Thor* and nothing else. "Colletta's whole career," Schumer said, "is because he inked Kirby on *Thor* in Kirby's mature phase."

In 1982-83, penciler Alan Kupperberg landed a run on *Thor*. Colletta's fine lines from the '60s stuck in Kupperberg's mind. *Thor*, and especially the book's "Tales of Asgard" backup feature, were Kupperberg's favorite work from the Colletta portfolio.

"I grew up with it at a special, very formative time of my life," Kupperberg said, "and the work exists in my mind as a fact of life. Vinnie Colletta is hard-wired into my brain, like a hundred other artists that influenced me."

So, here was Kupperberg, drawing *Thor* for Marvel. And here was



This note on the cover art for *Thor* #148 emphasizes Vince's "go-to-guy" status for deadlines.



(above) In *Thor* #157, this nicely rendered figure of Hogun was omitted, throwing the panel off-balance. (next page) The missing left hand doesn't hurt the story, but there's no credible reason to omit it.

Colletta, inking stuff for Marvel. Kismet! "I begged for Vincent as inker the entire time," Kupperberg said. "I finally got him on my last issue. Finally, my Thor looked like *the* Thor. Vinnie was perfect on *Thor*."

Once 1960s readers bought into Colletta's approach to the *Thor* material, they tended to stand by him. Some even complained when they thought he was changing his style, relying more on thicker, heavier "brush" inks, to be more like Sinnott.

In the letters columns of *Thor* #158 (November 1968), reader Alvin Grinage Jr. of Pennsylvania wrote:

"Jack's pencils are as fine as ever, but Vince Colletta! Whew! Is he sick? Does he have amnesia and thinks he's Joe Sinnott? His inks now are terrible! What happened to his beautiful, awe-inspiring penwork? Please, Vince, go back to your magnificent 'fine lines.' Your style was unbeatable and part of what made Thor's mag what it was.

"But I guess I can't blame you," Alvin continued. "On the *FF*'s letter

pages, I always see comments of praise on Joe Sinnott's inking, and hardly ever see any praise of your inking on *Thor*'s letter pages. I guess I would turn to Sinnott's style myself if everybody seemed to like it, but believe me, your style was tops even though you don't receive much praise and recognition on the letter pages."

Sadly, the bullpen did not reply to Alvin's letter, or to another one complaining about the fact that "only the villains" have separate teeth in their mouths, while the good guys have "a solid block of white" between their gums.

In *Thor* #164 (May 1969), another Pennsylvania reader, Gordon Matthews, wrote in to remark on what he saw as Colletta aping Sinnott—but in this case, he liked it.

"*Thor* #159 was magnificent!" Gordon wrote. "...This is the first really great issue of *Thor* since sometime before you dropped the *Journey into Mystery* title.... The art was up to its old standards. With Colletta trying to imitate Sinnott and reprints of early Kirby art, it was a

refreshing change to see really great art on *Thor* again.”

The Pennsylvania fans had a good point: Colletta was using more blacks and appeared to be using more brush inks by 1968 than he'd been using in his first 18 months or so on *Thor*. It was a more conventional, maybe more satisfying, look for most readers. But the thin black lines were always there, too.

“When Stan Lee chose Vince to ink *Thor* over Kirby's pencils, it was a successful team-up which never hurt sales,” said John Romita Sr. “...If fans didn't like it, Stan probably would have changed inkers.”

To Sinnott, *Thor* represented Colletta's best work as an inker. Other inkers and artists felt the same way—something about the Thunder God's world clicked with Colletta.

When future Marvel penciler Herb Trimpe was serving in Vietnam with the Air Force, it was a Kirby/Colletta *Thor* that helped introduce him to Marveldom. “One of the guys got some comics in the mail,” Trimpe said. “That was my first introduction to a Marvel comic book. I had been an EC fan early on, but I was bowled over by the comic—the story, the art and the freshness of the presentation.... The comic was a *Thor*, and it was penciled by Jack Kirby and inked by Vinnie Colletta. It looked great.”

“I did like his work on *Thor*, and the romance stories he penciled and inked in the early '50s,” said Dick Ayers. “Vinnie was like the girl with the curl in the middle of her forehead—‘When she was good, she was very good, and when she was bad, she was horrid.’ Probably it was due to his use of assistants. The ‘pure’ Colletta was good.”

When others inked Kirby's *Thor*, Erik Larsen points out, you could see precisely what Colletta brought to the book, and what he took away. Colletta would “scribble in a lot of scratchy-scratchy details, and there'd be less of that with other inkers,” such as George

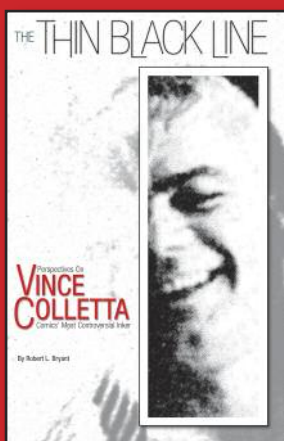
Klein and Bill Everett, said Larsen. “Yet they'd be keeping more of what Jack did.”

You can debate this for years, and fans have. At the 1996 Kirby Tribute Panel at Comic-Con International: San Diego, the talk turned to *Thor* and Colletta and fill-in *Thor* inker Bill Everett, who had been one of the Golden Age superstars:





(above) From *Thor* #144, this intricately rendered pencil panel is simplified through shortcuts and silhouetting. The basic feel remains, yet the inks don't do justice to the art.



In other chapters, you'll learn about Vince's upbringing, the truth about his alleged mafia connections, his work on romance comics, the Fantastic Four, and Kirby's Fourth World, plus his controversial departure from the comics field, with commentary from his son Franklin Colletta, and comics pros including **Stan Lee, Roy Thomas, Joe Sinnott, Mike Royer, Carmine Infantino, Mark Evanier**, and more!

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