

DRAW!

THE PROFESSIONAL
"HOW-TO" MAGAZINE
ON COMICS AND
CARTOONING



#22

Spring 2012

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MIKE MANLEY
SPOTLIGHTS INKER
**SCOTT
WILLIAMS**

**FRANK
MILLER**

INTERVIEWED BY
DANNY FINGEROTH

**MILLER &
KLAUS
JANSON**

ART GALLERY OF
THEIR GREATEST
COLLABORATIONS

ROUGH STUFF'S
BOB McLEOD
CRITIQUES A
NEWCOMER'S
WORK

PLUS:

COMIC ART BOOTCAMP

CRUSTY CRITIC
**JAMAR
NICHOLAS**
REVIEWS
ART SUPPLIES &
TOOL TECH



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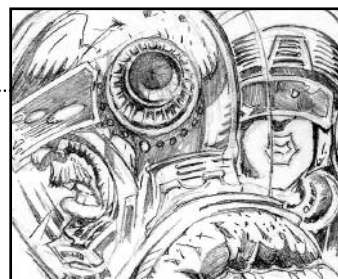
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SCOTT WILLIAMS

INKER'S WAR JOURNAL

**Interview conducted by Mike Manley
and transcribed by Steven Tice**

In recent times there has been quite a lot of talk about the state and future of comic art and the comic book inker. Will comics still be inked in a traditional way, or will everything go digital, the penciler tweaking things in Photoshop and thus not needing an inker? A huge ground shift has happened in the craft of comics in many areas; the digital wave has hit every aspect, from production to the way pencilers and inkers work together. Now pages don't always physically leave the penciler to be inked as they have for decades. Instead pages are often sent via email. Long gone are the days of pages sent only via FedEx or the mail.

The rise of the inker in the '60s at the Big Two, Marvel and DC, really developed and enshrined inkers who set house styles for each company, chiefly Joe Sinnott at Marvel and Murphy Anderson followed by Dick Giordano at DC. Over the next two decades the role of the inker grew even more important in the production of comic book art, the next generation of inker being trained at times by or being assistants of the previous generation. The '80s and '90s saw the coming of superstar inkers like Terry Austin, Joe Rubinstein, and Klaus Janson, to just name a few, and pencilers actually vied to have specific inkers on their work. The style of comic art also changed, becoming slicker and even more detailed.

In the late '80s Scott Williams began his rise to the top of the inking profession with his work teamed with penciler Jim Lee. Williams continued to gain popularity and influence to become perhaps the most important and dominant inker style-wise of the '90s, thanks to his work on X-Men. Williams became even more influential when the top Marvel artists bolted to form Image Comics, which became the dominate publisher in terms of artistic style.

DRAW! Magazine editor, Mike Manley, caught up with the always-in-demand Scott Williams to talk about the profession of inking, past, present, and future.

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(above) A double-page spread from *Uncanny X-Men* #267, early in Jim Lee and Scott's collaboration as the title's art team. Courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

(next page) This cover for *Conan* #220 marks the third published appearance of the team of Jim Lee and Scott Williams. Courtesy of Heritage Auctions.

X-MEN AND ALL RELATED CHARACTERS™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC. CONAN™ AND © CONAN PROPERTIES INTERNATIONAL, LLC.

DRAW!: So what are you working on today?

SCOTT WILLIAMS: I am working on *Justice League* over Jim Lee.

DRAW!: Is that going to be an ongoing series, or are you just doing a couple of issues?

SW: Have you followed any of the news about the DC relaunch?

DRAW!: Yeah, but I'm not up on the specifics of each title.

SW: Got it. Yes, Jim Lee, Geoff Johns, and I are doing a *Justice League* re-launch. It's part of the big new push from DC in 2011. They are really trying to do some different things, and it should be cool.

DRAW!: So how long have you been working with Jim, now? About 20 years, right?

SW: Yeah. We started off on a couple issues of *Punisher War Journal*, whenever that was; it must have been the late '80s. And then we did a few fill-ins of *Uncanny X-Men*, again, probably right around 1990, and then right after that we got a regular X-Men gig. So, you're talking over 20 years at this point.

However, I wasn't working with Jim exclusively during all those years by any stretch.

DRAW!: Right, there were a bunch of other artists you worked with, but he is probably your longest collaboration—

SW: Oh, without a doubt. And, clearly, he's the elephant in the room from the standpoint of, y'know, there hasn't been anybody bigger than Jim over the course of the last 20 years, so he's definitely the guy that I'm most known for, without a doubt.

DRAW!: What would you say, if anything, is the difference between inking Jim now and inking Jim then?

SW: I think that there is definitely a difference. And I don't know how much of it is a function of the way he draws versus a function of the way that I ink. And, also, just the natural progression that an artist goes through, some of it calculated, some of it just organic. People go through transitions where what was important in the past changes, and what's important now evolves.

DRAW!: So what are the differences of importance now?



(above) A panel from *Uncanny X-Men* #277, from the creative team of Jim Lee and Scott Williams.
 (next page) Jim Lee left *Uncanny X-Men* for the new spin-off series, *X-Men*, which Scott inked. But Scott also continued as inker for *Uncanny* over Lee's replacement, John Romita, Jr.
 BISHOP, GAMBIT, WOLVERINE™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

SW: Right, and I think that's why I gravitated toward Klaus, and still do, because what he would do is he would have those really bold, brush-chunky, think strokes, à la old school, whether it was Sinnott or what have you, but then he would mix in a lot fine line pen lines. He had both, and I still to this day do both. I really shoot for a very bold, lay it down with one stroke, almost Japanese brush inking style, and then, next to it, sort of have some fine line rendering, perhaps, or fine detail, and I like the mix. I like the mishmash of thin and thick, light and dark. To me, the stuff that bores me is when everything is the same, when all the line weights are the same and everything has the same texture. Now, I can easily contradict myself on that. It doesn't hold true 100% of the time. There have been times where guys like Kevin Nowlan will go in with, basically, spotted blacks, and then a very dead weight line, sort of like his Alex-Tothian masterpiece, that Batman/*Manbat Secret Origins* story. And then he would mix things up a little bit by adding some zip-a-tone, perhaps, but for the most part it wasn't a huge variation in line weight. So I understand that there are exceptions to every rule, but, as a rule, I've always gravitated towards guys that had a real wide variety and range of lines all sitting right next to each other on the same page. It may not necessarily always read immediately and instantly, but it appeals to my particular sensibilities. An emphasis on varied and lively lines.

DRAW!: When you were coming up, did you study formally? How did you pick up the techniques?

SW: I got a degree in Fine Art Drawing and Painting from the University of Hawaii, which is where I grew up. It was a way to learn how to draw, as I never had any intention of getting into comics as an inker per se. I was looking to get into comics as an *artist*. I knew from a very young age that I wanted to be into comics. But at the start of my career, inking just sort of fell into my lap. There was an opportunity to do it before a serious penciling gig appeared. I took the opportunity to get my foot in the door, and just sort of stuck. Inking has its own challenges, but it doesn't start with the most fundamental challenge, which is starting with a blank sheet of paper. But I don't think I got into it because it was easier. I got into it due to opportunity and a particular aptitude, and it was a logical and productive way for me to best utilize my talents. And the fact that I seem to be lucky enough to keep getting paired up with quality artists with each successive gig helped a lot. If I somehow had just been unfortunate enough to work with pencilers whose drawing skills or sensibilities didn't match with my own, I think it really would have pushed me much more towards penciling. I sort of had it in the back of my mind that the inking was a temporary gig, and eventually I'd just keep learning the ropes and would eventually start penciling full-time. I just kept getting better and better opportunities as an inker, and being a full-time penciler did not materialize.

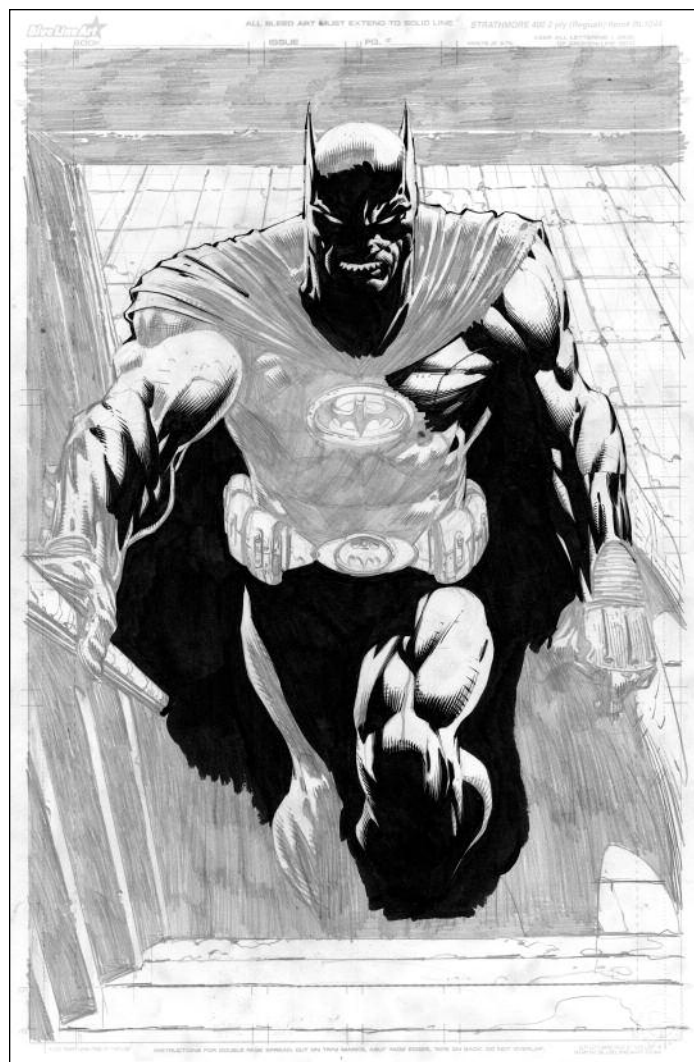
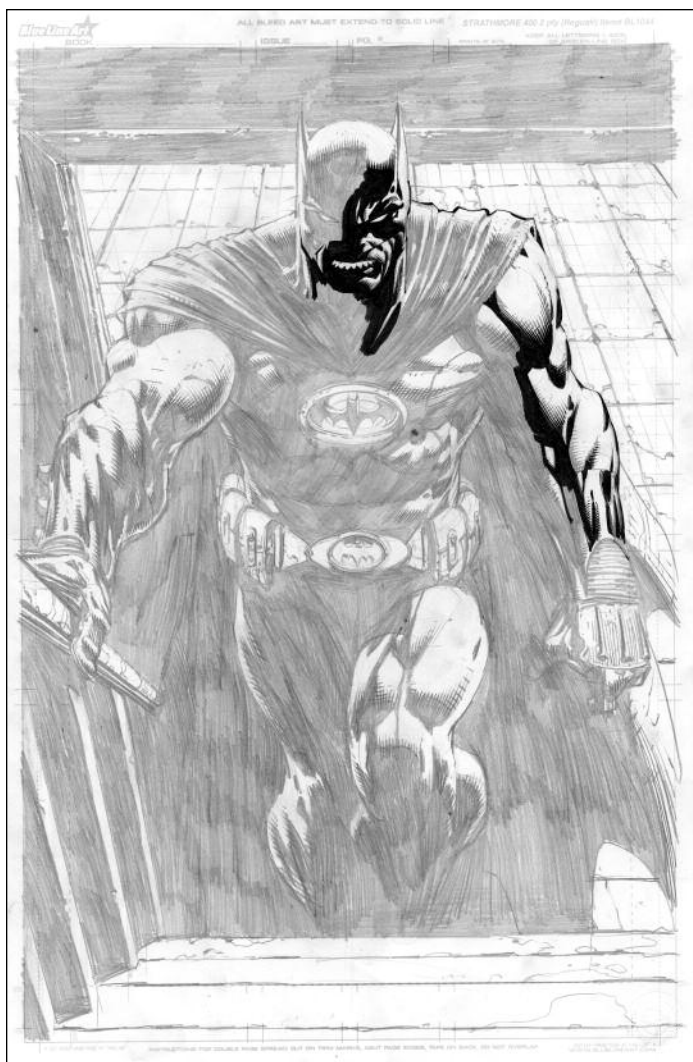
TOOLS

DRAW!: How did you pick up which tools to use? Which tools did you use then?

SW: Well, at some point I became exposed to the *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* book by Stan Lee and John Buscema. There weren't a lot of text books on making comics, and this book might not have been the perfect learning tool for an up-and-coming inker, but it did provide a peek behind the curtain.

DRAW!: Though it was pretty light on inking.

SW: Right. There wasn't a lot there, but it gave you some fundamentals. I mean, it showed you the crow quill, it showed you what a brush was, it showed you how to rule a line, it showed you the different highlighted textures and sensibilities to inking. I never thought inking was particularly complicated. It's certainly difficult to master, and it takes a certain craft and facility and, yes, talent to manipulate the tools, and there's a lot of trial and error, but, obviously, once you get certain tool fundamentals, like which tools to use—don't use a ball-point pen, and, generally, don't use Rapidographs. I mean, shoot, you can



use a rusty nail if you want, if it'll give you the line that you want, but generally there're a few certain tools that you can use that'll put you on the right path.

DRAW!: I believe Terry Austin used to ink everything with a Rapidograph when he was starting.

SW: Yeah, I know, so that's why I'm saying every rule has an exception, and inking is no different. But the point is that, really, once you kind of understand which tools to use, then it really comes back down to your drawing skills, your drawing sensibilities, and practice, and trial and error. I think the drawing skills are first and foremost, by far. I think even an artist who has a scratchy, ugly line, if his drawing is sound, I'll like it. It doesn't have to be a clean, slick, polished line. Of course not having a nice line might hinder your acceptance in being hired by a given editor, that's true, but in terms of appeal to me and putting you on the right path, the quality of the line is not the important part. The solidity of the drawing and the understanding of fundamentals is the most important part. And that's what I've always focused on.

DRAW!: Oh, I 100% agree, because, basically, all of the best inkers were guys who drew well, and maybe they weren't all as dynamic as a Buscema or Kirby in the old days, but they knew how to draw a hand, they knew how to draw faces, so they didn't destroy shapes, form, they didn't flatten out somebody's features.

SW: Yeah, and that still holds true today. And there are inkers whose work has a nice line who I, frankly, am not particularly impressed with, because I sort of sense that they're at the mercy of the penciler. They can't fill in the gaps. They can't interpret. If you give them a nice, completed pencil line, then they'll be able to pull something out, but if you give them anything that's vague, or anything that requires a certain level of drafting skill, that's where, I think, their limitations begin to show.

DRAW!: Have you changed your tools from the beginning to now? What are the tools of your trade?

SW: Well, I started off—again, I think it may be counter-intuitive—I thought learning how to ink with a brush would be easier than learning how to ink with a quill, so I started off inking with a brush. Or at least having more success with the brush. Finding a good brush is much harder now, but back then it was the old Winsor & Newton Series 7s.

DRAW!: They kind of suck, now, though.

SW: Yeah, they really do. Brushes in general suck now. Finding quality material, be it brushes or pens or paper, is a serious problem right now. It concerns me a great deal.

DRAW!: You know which ones I like right now? I don't know if you guys have a Dick Blick near you, but I've been using the

STEP BY STEP—DARK KNIGHT: To the left and right, you can see various stages of Scott's inking over David Finch's pencils for a splash page from *Dark Knight* #2. He starts with Batman's face and arm, then proceeds to block in the figure. Notice that leaves the small details (Batman's utility belt, the cracks in the floor tiles, the texture of the stairs) for last.

BATMAN™ AND © DC COMICS.

Dick Blick Series #4, and they're actually better than—

SW: Raphael's?

DRAW!: No, they have a store brand. Even with the real expensive brands, it really depends upon the brush you get, because the quality is all over the place.

SW: Oh, without a doubt. That's why I was saying that finding quality materials is tough right now.

DRAW!: But the Blick brushes are cheap and decent.

SW: I abandoned the Winsor & Newton Series 7s years and years and years ago and found that the Raphael 8404, the 8408, were great. But even in the early days, you'd only get a certain percentage of them that were serviceable. If you bought ten at a time, maybe seven or eight of them would be real solid. Now if I get ten, depending on which batch I get them from, they may all blow. I can't use any of them. Or maybe only two or three are any good, and when you're talking brushes that are 20 bucks a pop, there's a realization that you're just sort of spitting into the wind.

DRAW!: That's why I was saying I was using those Dick Blick Studio brushes, because I found those to be....

SW: Consistent quality?

DRAW!: Yeah! I mean, I like them. You have to pick them—you know, spit test them in the store—but I find they do well.

For the money, if you blow through one a week or month, what the heck. It's, like, eight bucks or something like that. So, I take it you were using, what, a crow quill pen?

SW: Yeah, yeah. Getting back to the question, I started off doing more brushwork and then realized that, just to get some versatile lines and some different types of lines, I had to figure out how to use the crow quill, and that takes a little longer getting used to, understanding the angle that you have to hold the sucker at. And I had to figure out why, when you buy them by the gross, or by the box, or whatever, some of them are split down the middle, and sometimes the tong isn't split down the middle. You pull out one pen nib and it makes a reasonably decent line, then you pull the next one in the box, and it either won't make a line or it makes a



crappy line or digs into the paper or you have wash the oil off. You know, all the little tricks of the trade that you start figuring out.

DRAW!: Or they explode on you when you're inking. [laughs]

SW: They explode. Especially when you're in a groove, when you get a really nice one and the metal gives a little bit, it's nice, and you're just ripping along and making big, fat lines as well as thin, little fine lines, and then they just blow up, and you hope to God a piece doesn't fly into your eye or whatnot. Yeah, I've had multiple exploding episodes.

So I started off my career doing a lot of brushwork, but very quickly went into probably an 80/20 split, with crow quill being 80 and the brush being 20. I usually used a Hunt 102, and then a little



(left) **STEP BY STEP—DARK KNIGHT:** Scott's final inks for the David Finch-penciled *Dark Knight* #2 splash page.
 (above) **STEP BY STEP—JUSTICE LEAGUE:** Jim Lee's pencils for the cover of *Justice League* #1, along with the start of Scott's inking.
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bit later on the Gillott 850 and the 659, and used those through the bulk of the *X-Men* years and the early *WildC.A.T.s* and Image type stuff, and then eventually coming back to the 102. However, I almost completely dropped all my pen work in favor of a brush when I started my DC work and “Hush” in particular. It sort of reintroduced my love affair with brush inking and opened the door to a fresh look at my work. More experimentation, though not without a cost. A lot of the “Hush” stuff, which by all reasonable measures should have been inked with a crow quill or some other fine line tool, was brushwork and was done so because I had rediscovered this old, great toy, and probably gave me carpal tunnel or nerve damage or whatever, because it was just insane some of the stuff I was trying to do with a brush. Types of things that didn't really lend itself to brush. It was a challenge that I really wanted to attempt at that point in my career—a different look in my work, a more organic look, or a little more fluid look, but still recognizable as my work—and doing it with the brush just blew through that creative door. As a result I'm now mostly a brush guy again.

Although, having said that, a lot of the stuff I'm doing on *Justice League* right now is back to quill. Part of that it is because I kind of get bored a little bit too easily. I kind of get with a tool, or get with an approach, for a period of time, and then I get bored with it and just want to change things up for reasons that only,

probably, my shrink would be able to tell you. I don't know why exactly it is. I think everybody gets bored doing the same thing, and there's a certain tactile quality to inking, and I think after I while I just get bored with that same feel, that same motion, and the sameness of the line. Then the pages start to blur from one to the next a little bit, I realize I'm using the same techniques and the same tools over and over and over again, and it creates a sameness that I think, “Well, if I'm bored, then the people who are reading the stuff are probably bored, too, at least the ones that are tuned in to something as subtle as the ink line.” So I kind of start changing things up. Now I'm at a point where I flip it on and off like a switch, back and forth, back and forth. I used to feel very—I think inkers in general have a bit of an anal retentive quality in that I felt like if I inked Batman's cape with a brush, I had to be consistent throughout, and there had to be a consistency in the visual language of the ink line. There is a logic to that thinking. But now I'm like, no. One page I'll do it in brush, the next page I'll do it with a pen, and the variation in line and line quality—if it doesn't make sense in a logical way, I don't care. [laughter]

DRAW!: So today what are you using, a 102?

SW: Today I'm just using a 102, yeah. And in an hour, I'll bust out the brush again. Very consistent, yes?



STEP BY STEP—JUSTICE LEAGUE: A detail shot of Scott's initial inking (previous page) for the cover of *Justice League* #1 shows him starting with the foreground figures. With each stage he works farther back, spotting blacks as he goes, though he does not usually complete each figure before moving on to the next. With Batman (right) he only leaves the larger black areas of his pants and cape.

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DRAW!: Every inker has their bucket list—the people that you wish you could have inked, but who have passed on into the Great Art House in the sky. And now you're inking Neal Adams, though I assume by now you're probably done with inking Neal Adams on the *Batman: Odyssey*.

SW: Yeah, that was a big one I got to cross off the bucket list.

DRAW!: So who are the top five pencilers that you haven't inked, that you would love to ink?

SW: Most of them are probably still around, though they are guys who usually ink their own work. I've never inked a Frank Miller job, would love to. Probably not a surprise knowing what big Klaus guy I was, but having said that, there are a lot of Frank Miller jobs of Frank inking himself that I like even better than what Klaus was doing. A little bit of apples and oranges. I think the line that Frank used over the years was a lot different than the line that Klaus used. I thought that Klaus, as an inker, did a remarkable job of interpreting Frank during the period of time that they worked together. Having said that, I thought Frank's line on a lot of the work he did was great, where he was experimenting through *Ronin*, and through the *Elektra* graphic novel, and even from 300, on *The Dark Knight Returns*, and some of the covers that he did for *Lone Wolf and Cub*. A lot of that stuff is very appealing. I always thought that I was so tuned into that stuff that I could do a good job on Frank. Whether he would agree, or anyone else would agree, is subject for debate, and something that is open for interpretation. And, actually, a couple years ago I did a Frank Miller piece in a sketchbook that was a Dark Knight Batman and Robin statue sketch that he did mid- to late '80s. I inked that in a much sleeker line than maybe I would have if I'd have been actually inking a gig for Frank. If he said, "Scott, I'm doing such-and-such. I'd like you to ink me. Show me what you would do," I don't think I would have done it in the slicker style that I did the Dark Knight piece. But that was for a different audience and with a different sensibility. But that was a lot of fun to do. And so he would be one of those guys.

I would love to have a chance to work on Mike Mignola's stuff, but, again, he inks his own work. Let's see.... There are certain guys I would never in a million years ink. I would never ink Kevin Nowlan, and he would never have me. I would never ink Bernie Wrightson. These are some of my favorite artists, but I would just ruin them. There are certain guys that just have their own line and their own sensibility. At one point, when I was doing that sketchbook of inking different artists in different styles, there were certain guys that I thought that I could handle, and certain guys that I thought would be almost impossible to handle. The Wrightsons of the world, he's got such a line that I just can't imagine—I could do no justice to it. There would be nothing on the horizon but failure trying to approach something like that. I just think guys like Wrightson, or guys like Nowlan, who have such a distinctive style, I just don't see any upside to doing any of that stuff.

I'm trying to think if there's anybody else. Yeah, I really wish John Buscema was still around. I think I could do some interesting stuff with John. I wouldn't be scared of it, because I think his style lends itself to a lot of different approaches.

DRAW!: Yeah, I still wish he was around, too. I was always very envious that Jerry Ordway got to ink him. He's one of the guys I



(above and next page) Neal Adams' pencils and Scott Williams' inks
for *Batman: Odyssey* #4, page 10.

BATMAN™ AND © DC COMICS.

would have loved to ink. It's like, when I got to ink Steve Ditko on that one Marvel job, I felt like, "I'm a real cartoonist now! I'm a real inker now!"

SW: Yeah! And, one way or another, I mean, I've inked a lot of guys that I'm not particularly recognized for, but I've gotten to do something with them. I think everybody from Jack Kirby, to Simonson, to John Byrne, to Michael Golden, to Rick Leonardi, to Todd McFarlane, and Barry Windsor-Smith, and now Neal Adams.... There are a lot of guys that I've inked professionally—

DRAW!: Did you ever ink Gene Colan?

SW: No, I've never inked Gene Colan. He would be hard. He would be hard. Trying to interpret the grays and graduated tones? I would be better suited for it now than I was years ago, without a doubt, but I think he would be hard. I think I could do something that might work, but that's tough.

DRAW!: Because Janson did a good job on him.

SW: Yeah, Klaus did a good job. I think the only guy that I've ever seen Klaus do that probably wasn't appropriate was when he inked John Byrne. And the inks were actually beautiful. They



were beautiful inks, but they were too heavy-handed; they took away from John Byrne's aesthetic on those *Avengers* issues to the extent that they were distracting. I think that was the only time I've seen Klaus ink somebody where I thought, "Beautiful linework, but not appropriate."

DRAW!: It's funny, because the only John Byrne art that I own, I have a couple pages that Klaus inked probably over Byrne's looser, breakdown pencils on *Wolverine*. And that only because it had a lot of great, interesting texture.

SW: Oh, like I said, the ink line itself, and the textures and everything that he brings to the page is gorgeous. But there are cer-

tain—I mean, it's part of the reason why I would never ink a Wrightson or a Kevin Nowlan. There's a certain purity there. It's especially true where artists ink their own work and are best known for having their own work inked by themselves. There's a certain style, a sensibility and aesthetic, that the pencil artist brings to his own inks that, for me, just are cemented as the standard, and any deviation from a secondary ink artist is just off-putting. Just wrong. And it's almost pointless, because your hand doesn't work that way, and your mind doesn't work that same way, as an inker coming in from the outside, to do justice to it. John Byrne definitely has benefited from a lot of different inkers, but you do have to have a certain stylistic aesthetic that works, and I think Klaus is a guy who has a certain style aesthetic that doesn't necessarily work on John Byrne, but for 99% of the other pencils out there, it works just fine.

NEAL ADAMS

DRAW!: So how was it inking Neal Adams?

SW: It was excruciating. It was excruciating in a wonderful sort of way. What I didn't realize when I started the gig, though, was that we were working at cross-purposes. And by that I mean, Neal was really thinking—and rightly so—in very contemporary terms. He draws the way that he draws now, and he inks the way that he inks now, and he likes both those approaches. When I was looking at his pencils, I'm thinking, "Okay, how can I translate this in ink into Neal circa 1971?" I have a huge Neal Adams art collection, and I pulled out all of his artwork and just started looking at his *Green Lanterns*, his *Batmans*, his "Deadmans," and his *Avengers*, and most of the stuff he inked himself—not so much the stuff that Dick

Giordano inked, or the stuff that Tom Palmer inked. Not that they didn't do a great job, but I was trying to get more of the soul of what Neal was doing and sort of that pure Neal line. And I was inking everything in an energetic, spontaneous, but very reined-in style, and very delicate lines, but, again, with a confidence and a cocksureness that I think Neal had back then. Today, Neal's line is much different, and I don't even know how he would describe it. I'm not quite sure how I would describe it. But it's a much different line, and I think when he saw what I was doing, I'm not sure it went down right. I think he felt it was so different than what he's doing now that he changed a lot of it after the fact—changed it digitally. He didn't change any originals. I sent him

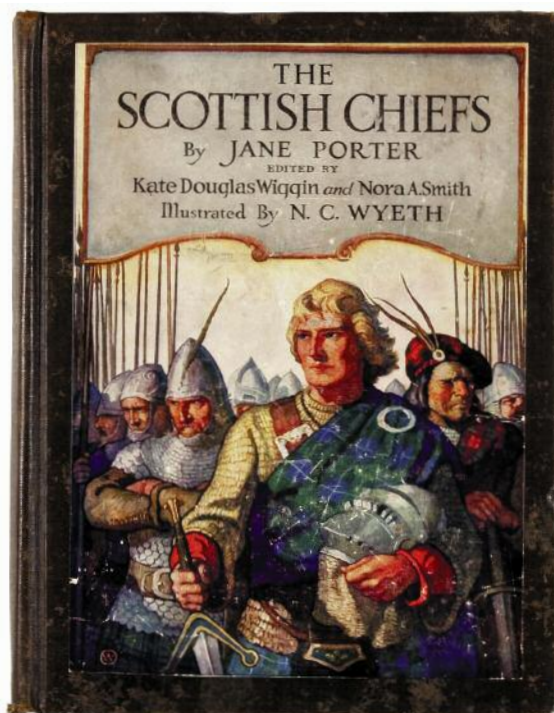
COMIC ART BOOTCAMP

ILLUSTRATION

BY MIKE MANLEY



MANLEY

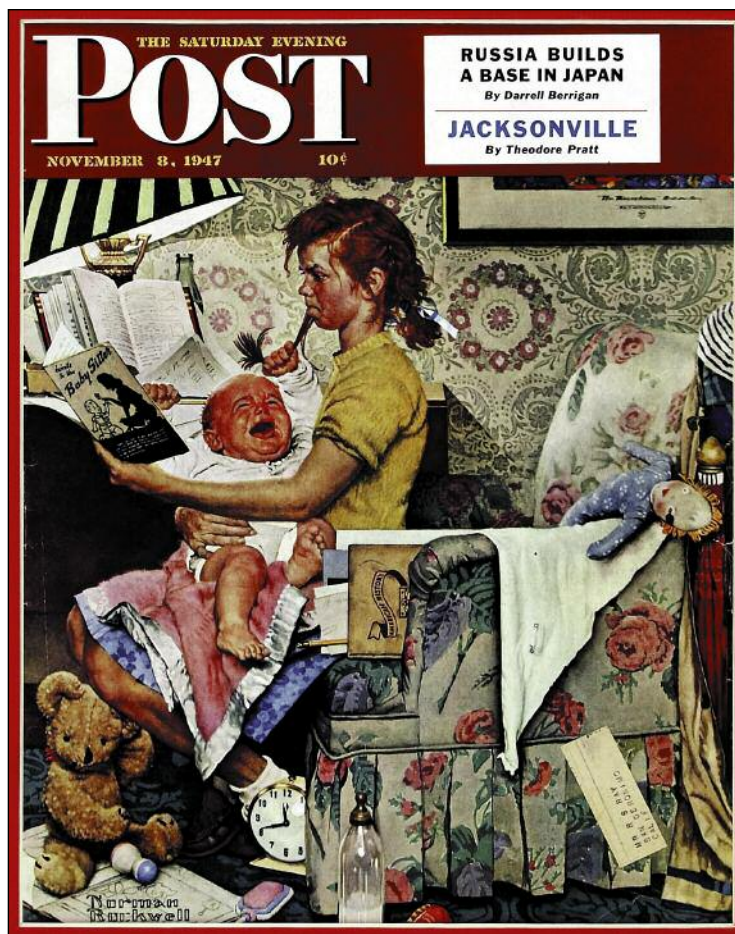


(above) N.C. Wyeth provided covers and illustrations for many classic children's novels.

(right) Norman Rockwell's paintings graced many a cover of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

(below) James Bama is best known for his *Doc Savage* book covers.

DOC SAVAGE™ AND © CONDE NAST.



This time out with “Comic Book Bootcamp” we are going to delve into the emerald realm of Sherwood Forest and the world of illustration. In the last year I have had the opportunity to illustrate two book covers featuring Robin Hood for the fine folks at Airship 27. I have always loved illustration, specifically the golden age of American Illustration. Norman Rockwell, Dean Cornwell, and N.C. Wyeth are three of my favorite artists in any field. I have always thought of illustration as a sister field for comic artists and cartoonists to work in, and in fact many of the best and most famous cartoonists moved into illustration from comics, like Frank Frazetta, Mort Künstler, and Frank Godwin (*Connie*, *Rusty Riley*) to name just a few. Hal Foster of *Prince Valiant* fame started as an illustrator and moved into comic strips, first with *Tarzan* and then with his most famous creation, *Prince Valiant*.

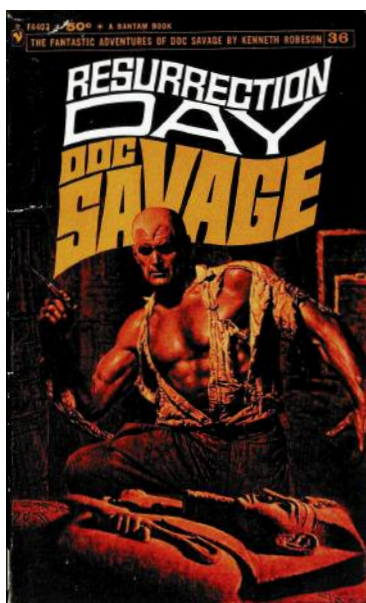
Foster employed the same skills he used in doing realistic and researched illustrations for magazines like *Popular Mechanics* and brought them to bear in the comic strips, ushering in a sense of realism and believability and setting a level of craftsmanship to which other cartoonists and illustrators strived. In the '50s, when the comics industry went through its first big downturn, many cartoonists left comics for the much more lucrative field of illustration. Some, like

Frazetta, never came back. Frazetta himself went on to great fame and fortune as a fantasy and paperback cover artist.

As a teenager I used to haunt many local used bookstores on the search for his paperback covers, and along the way I discovered a lot of great illustrators, from John Berkey to Frank McCarthy and James Bama. I collected old *Saturday Evening Post* magazines for covers by Norman Rockwell and illustrations by many artists of the golden age of illustration, such as Dean Cornwell, Mead Schaeffer, Albert Dorne, and more. All throughout my career as a comic guy, I have continued my interest and passion for illustration.

A little over a year ago I met Ron Fortier via Facebook after he left a nice comment on one of my fine art paintings I had posted. In short order this lead to Ron offering me an opportunity to illustrate a cover for one of Airship 27 and Cornerstone Publishing's upcoming books, *Robin Hood: King of Sherwood*, by I.A. Watson, a new book telling the stories of Robin Hood.

In this article I will focus mainly on the second of the two book covers I painted for the series. The first cover of the series garnered me the Pulp Factory “Best Cover” Award. When Ron emailed me about the second book in the series I was pumped to get started on it.





(above) Mike's submitted rough sketch and finished painting for the cover of *Robin Hood: King of Sherwood*.
(next page) Photo reference shot by Mike for the cover of *Robin Hood: Arrow of Justice*.

© MIKE MANLEY

For the first cover in the series I talked to Ron and Art Director Rob Davis. I set about doing some sketches and came up with a final sketch, which I submitted.

Next I set about gathering my reference for the illustration, and this led me to employ one of my best friends and fellow student and studio mate at school, Will Sentman. It just happened to be my luck that Will looked the part of a young Robin and had the costume, as he is a Ren Faire fan, and had a bow and arrow to boot.

I set up a photo shoot in my living room, and Will posed as close as he could to my sketch. My idea was to use the pictures I shot for the lighting and details I wanted in the final illustration, but I did not want the photos to be something that I was a slave to. I wanted to use the photo merely as a tool to aid me in details and lighting. I looked to artists like N.C. Wyeth, who did employ some photography, but was not in any way a slave to them. In fact, Wyeth was a big influence on me in doing both of these covers.

USING PHOTO REFERENCE

On the second cover of the series, *Robin Hood: Arrow of Justice*, I again employed Will and also my friend Alina Osipov as Maid Marian. This time I did the photo shoot at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where we all attend. The action on the second cover takes place as Robin and

Marian break into the castle, and I figured the school would be the perfect backdrop and stage. It was a pretty hot day for us as I tried a lot of different set-ups with both Will and Alina. I had in my mind what I wanted to do for the cover this time, so I went about placing Will and Alina in a variety of poses and angles knowing that I would probably not use any one picture, but choose parts of many.

I shot many photos that day and later spent a good bit of time sorting them down to a useful handful. I then sat down and did my sketch. I referenced the photos, but ultimately ended up not using much from the ones I shot of Alina. I was not happy with the poses of the figure, but they were great for her hair and face. Once I was happy with the sketch, I submitted it to Rob and Ron for approval.

In the end I only took parts of the photos and made up most of the figure of Maid Marian, as I was just not happy with any of the photos I shot. I should also mention that I never use the color from the photos I shoot, but rather the values, and I also bracket the exposures and then adjust them in Photoshop to capture details. There is a great recent book called *Norman Rockwell: Behind the Camera*, by Ron Schick, which details Rockwell's process and how he used photography. It's a fantastic book and one I highly recommend not only as a Rockwell fan, but also for its detailing of how to use photography as an aid, not a straightjacket. Once the sketch was approved, I moved into production.

Hardboiled Hero **FRANK MILLER**

Interview conducted via phone
by Danny Fingeroth
transcribed by Steven Tice
and copyedited by Danny Fingeroth
and Frank Miller

WRITER
ARTIST
SPOTLIGHT



(above) Miller's cover
contribution to 'Mazing Man #12.
(right) Prelims and final art from
Frank's "Sin City" book *The Big Fat Kill #2*.

BATMAN AND ROBIN,
'MAZING MAN'™ AND © DC COMICS.
SIN CITY™ AND © FRANK MILLER.

FRANK MILLER changed the way comics are done, starting with *Daredevil* and moving on to re-envision Batman in *The Dark Knight Returns*. Other triumphs for the writer-artist included *Martha Washington*, *300*, and, of course, *Sin City*, which was turned into a sleeper-hit movie which he co-directed. Frank also wrote and directed *The Spirit*, based on Will Eisner's classic character. His recent work includes *Holy Terror*, and the upcoming sequel to *300*, *Xerxes*.

I spoke with Frank via phone on March 11, 2010, and he answered some follow-up questions via email in November, 2011.

DANNY FINGEROTH: Did you always want to write your own comics, Frank? You came to Marvel drawing other people's stuff. Was writing always your ambition?

FRANK MILLER: It always was, because I always saw the two crafts as one thing. I grew up drawing my comics on a piece of typing paper folded in half, showing my mom and saying, "I'm doing this for the rest of my life!"

DF: What did she say when you said that?

FM: She said, and I quote, "You can do anything if you set your mind to it."

DF: Who are your influences in writing and art? Who got you excited about wanting to do comics professionally?

FM: Well, the first two would be a guy by the name of Curt Swan, and then Jim Shooter. I grew up reading superheroes. Later I fell in love with the work of Steve Ditko and Stan Lee, and Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. Then years and years went by, and I discovered Will Eisner and fell madly in love with his combination of words and pictures.

DF: Where did you discover him, in the Warren *Spirit* reprints?

FM: Yup! I was bicycling, as I always did, from Montpelier, Vermont, to Barre, Vermont, two towns that are very close together, and came across this oversized, weird-looking comic book and thought, "Who is this new guy? He's amazing!" Then, of course, I saw the copyright and it said "1942."

DF: Had you read the Jules Feiffer's *The Great Comic Book Heroes*, which introduced Eisner to a new generation?

FM: I had read the Feiffer book and seen Steranko's Eisner tribute in his *History of Comics*, but it wasn't until I sat down and read the *Spirit* story "Sand Serif" that I realized what Eisner really did.

DF: What was it about that story that got to you?

FM: It broke my heart. It showed me that comic books could break my heart. Beyond showing guys walking in shadows along waterfronts and all that wonderful imagery, it showed a hero facing a moral challenge, and addressing it.

DF: A deeper moral challenge than the Marvel heroes of the day were facing?

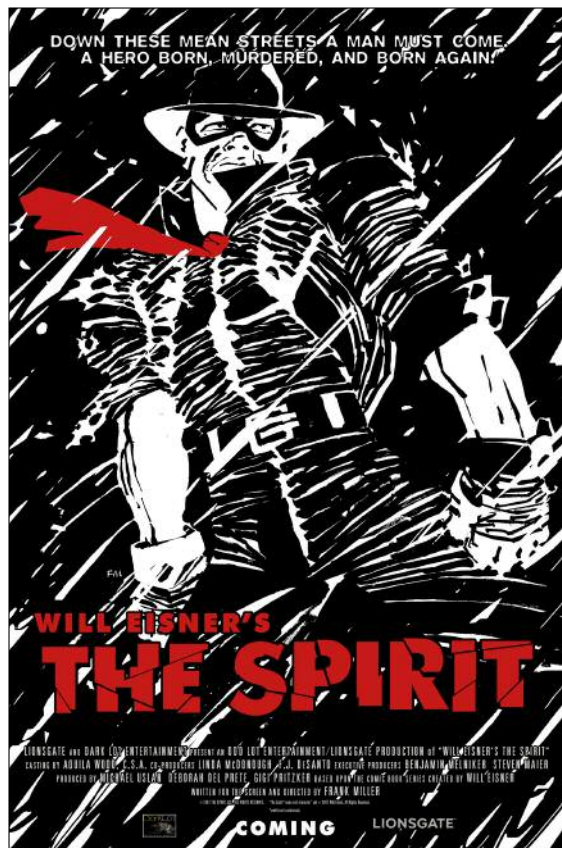
FM: I thought so, because he had that classic line, which I kept in the *Spirit* movie, "I've got to find Sand Serif and bring her in." Which I, of course, stole when I did Elektra. I just changed the lingo. I had Daredevil say, "I've got to find Elektra and bring her to justice." But, come on, it was a cold rip-off.

DF: It would be like Superman saying, "I've got to find Lois Lane and bring her in."

FM: Yeah. And I think we all have a Sand Serif back there somewhere.

DF: At least one.

FM: Well, yeah. If we're lucky, it's more than one. But there's always that one. It's your Bobby McGee. It's the one you'll never forget.



(above) Frank's poster art for *The Spirit*.

(below) Frank Miller's *Daredevil* via Will Eisner.

THE SPIRIT™ AND © THE WILL EISNER ESTATE.
DAREDEVIL™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.





Some of Frank's earliest work for Marvel included this 1980 cover for *Marvel Spotlight* vol. 2, #5 (left) inked by Bob Wiacek and a 1980 "Captain Marvel" story in *Marvel Spotlight* vol. 2, #8 (right) inked by Bruce Patterson.

CAPTAIN MARVEL, DRAGON LORD™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.

DF: Most people's first memory of your work is on *Daredevil*. But where did you first break in?

FM: There's no way to explain this without prefacing it. I bothered Neal Adams a lot, and he kept on letting me come to his studio. And he hated my work.

DF: Why did he hate it?

FM: He just told me it was terrible. And I went on from him to Joe Orlando at DC Comics, who also hated my work, and various other people who hated my work. And eventually I showed something to Neal that impressed him enough where he said, "The guy can't draw, we all know that. But his storytelling is budding." He gave me my first job at Gold Key Comics doing *Twilight Zone*. I did a few *Twilight Zones*, and then I got down to DC Comics, and eventually Paul Levitz offered me *Claw the Unconquered*. And I went to Jim Shooter and I said, "I'd rather do something for Marvel. Can you guarantee me regular work?" And he said, "I can only make you a personal promise. You will work regularly here." So I got to draw things like "Captain Marvel" and so on. And then I had the utter audacity to request *Daredevil*. Gene Colan had just quit, and Frank Robbins had taken it over, but it was an issue-by-issue thing. And I applied for the job and got it.

DF: Did you go to art school?

FM: No. I only learned by practicing at home, ripping off everybody from Barry Smith to Neal Adams, and then learning directly from masters like Al Williamson and Neal Adams.

DF: From copying their work, you mean?

FM: No, I mean from invading their studios. [laughter] And having them show me how bad my work was.

DF: What made you think you could just go knock on their doors? Was it naiveté?

FM: It was a combination of naiveté, and also—Danny, I got fired off every job I ever had. I couldn't make it as a truck driver. I couldn't make it as a bus driver. I couldn't make it as a janitor. For me, it was do or die.

DF: Did you have art teachers in high school who encouraged you?

FM: Yeah. I had one art teacher in particular, Bruce Brooks, who was a wonderful teacher, and he encouraged me. And I had a brilliant teacher, Jeff Danziger, who's actually now a renowned cartoonist, who encouraged me to write. He said that my talents were more in the writing sector. Now he and I are good friends,

and we're both almost the same age. But when he was in his 20s, he thought I'd make a better writer than an artist.

DF: Did you write as a teenager?

FM: Oh, yeah, yeah. I wrote all my own stuff. Who else was going to do it?

DF: I mean did you write prose—short stories, or detective fiction, anything like that?

FM: Yes, I did. I did it very badly.

DF: Has that material ever been published anywhere?

FM: If it had been, I wouldn't tell you.

DF: So Shooter gives you the shot on *Daredevil*. I guess technically the editor was Al Milgrom?

FM: That was Al Milgrom. I worked with Al Milgrom and Jo Duffy.

DF: Klaus Janson had been inking it before, and so that's how you two first got paired up?

FM: Yes. And I called up Klaus and begged him to stay on the book because I knew somebody had to soften the rough edges and make sense out of my pencils, and he did a beautiful job. I think Klaus and I had kind of a magical collaboration, because he would take my stuff and he would really take the rough edges off it, and really pull out what was inside it, meanwhile adding that snap and confidence to the ink line, so that we developed a style that was ours. It wasn't either of ours, and I really felt that we had a rapport that was pretty amazing considering we almost never socialized.

DF: Klaus brought a visual continuity from the previous *Daredevil* days to your first run on the book, and made it a seamless transition.

FM: I thought he and Gil Kane were astonishing together on the book, and I was out to imitate that a lot at the beginning. And, of course, there was the Eisner influence.

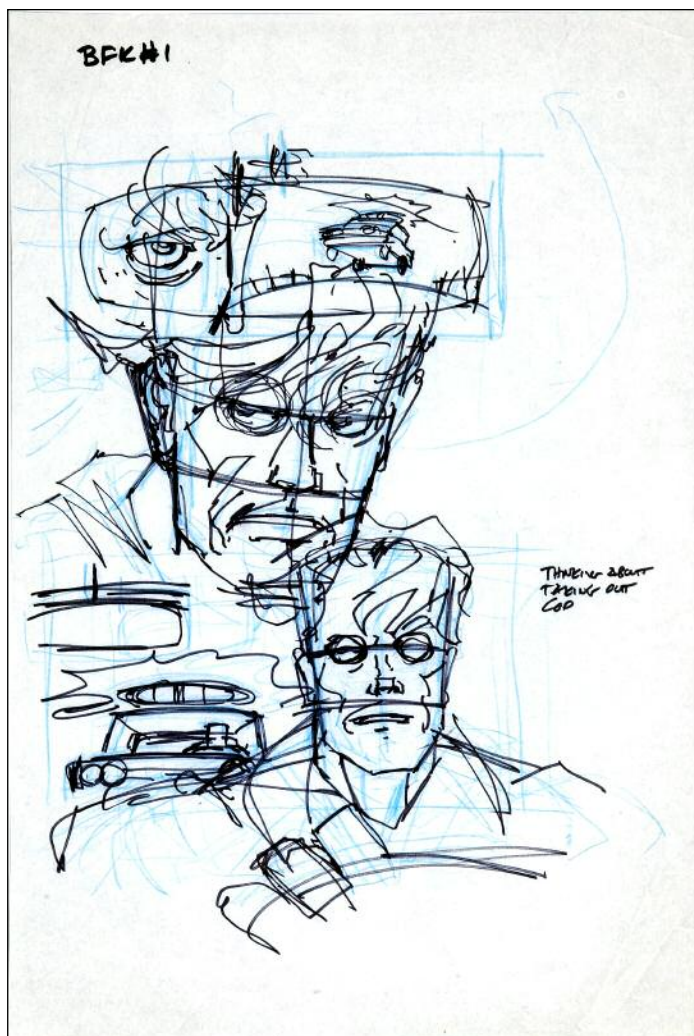
DF: As with every artist, those influences are there, but you've synthesized them.

FM: Well, it's all mixed in with a country kid new to New York and falling in love with it.

(top and far right) The cover (inked by Joe Rubinstein) and opening splash page art (inked by Klaus Janson and courtesy of www.ha.com) of Frank's first issue as the penciler for *Daredevil*.
(right) Frank's cover art for *Daredevil Visionaries: Frank Miller*, vol. 1, which collects the first issues of Frank's run.

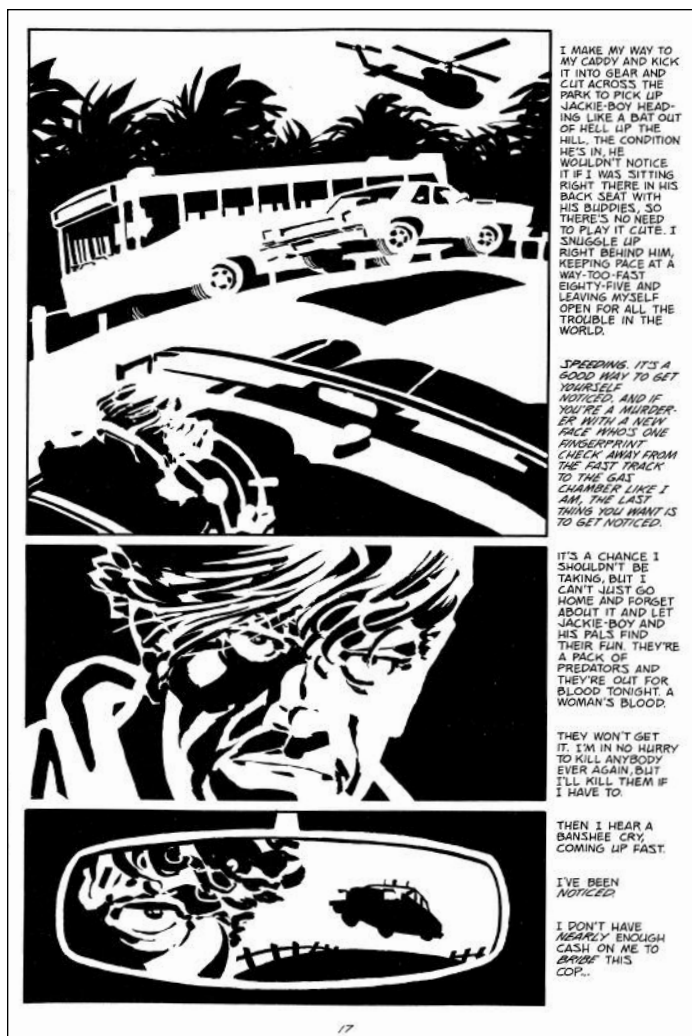
DAREDEVIL™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.





Frank's preliminary layout sketch for a scene in *Sin City: Big Fat Kill #1*, along with the finished panels. As you can see, Frank decided to place a larger establishing shot at the top of the page. He then swapped the first two panels of his layout in order to better establish just who is looking into the rearview mirror. The third panel, which was pushed to the top of the next page, he turned into a silhouette, which heightens the look of concern on Dwight's face.

SIN CITY™ AND © FRANK MILLER.



girls and sharp cars and guys in trench coats. I was first introduced to the *300* story when I was about seven years old, and there was a clunky old Universal movie called *The 300 Spartans* that I spent too much of my adult life thinking how much I wanted to adapt the story, until finally I turned somewhere around 40 and I said, "I'd better do this thing with *300* while I can." That has led to a much greater exploration of the Greek material, and a much greater realization of how important it is, how compelling it is, how moral it is.

DF: With the story arc "Born Again," you came back to Daredevil after doing the landmark Batman stuff. Why did you come back, and what was different about the character when you returned to him?

FM: Well, I got offered the job, and the story presented itself. I had just moved to California and it was much more expensive than I

thought it would be, and so I was in financial straits, and there's a sense, when you're all of a sudden in financial trouble, of your whole world falling apart, and I thought, why not put Matt through that? And from that came the business of bringing in Karen Page vastly transformed, and the Kingpin discovering Daredevil's secret identity and dismantling his life. So it was kind of like vanity, but it was also a way for me to break the character down to his absolute core and get rid of all the stuff I didn't like about him. One of the reasons that I kept him out of his costume so much in the series was that I wanted him to come back fresh and new.

DF: What made you decide to just write it, and not draw it?

FM: David Mazzucchelli was available, and I was really, really busy. It was the same time I was doing *Dark Knight*, and *Elektra: Assassin*, and God knows what else. And I thought that it'd be really fun to see it through somebody else's eyes.

FRANK MILLER/ KLAUS JANSON

THE TITANIC TEAM-UP

A gallery of one of the greatest
collaborations in comics' history

FM

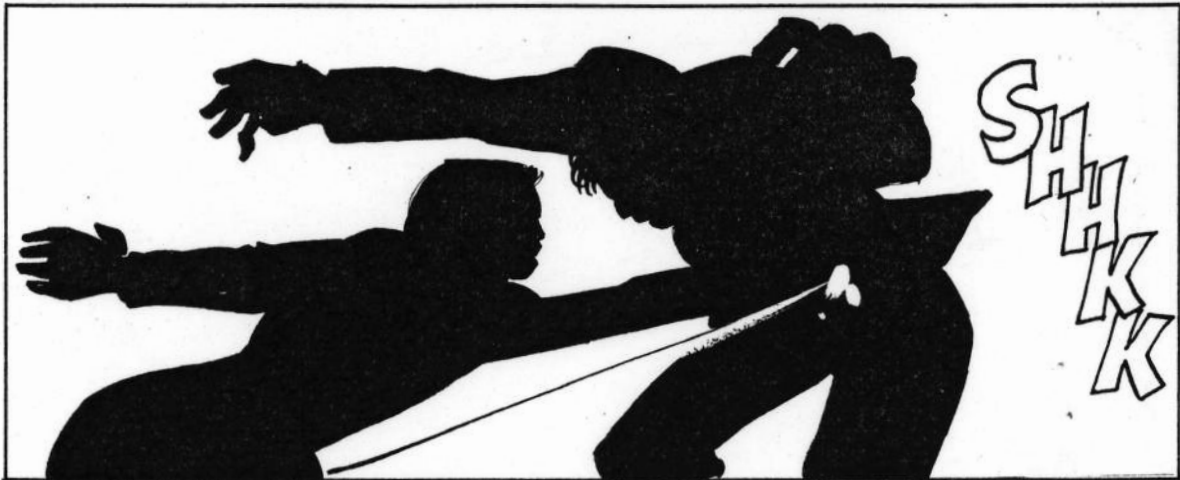
FOUR
COLOR

DD#190
PAGE TWELVE



(above and next page) Frank's breakdowns and Klaus' finished inks for *Daredevil* #190, page 12.

ALL CHARACTERS™ AND © MARVEL CHARACTERS, INC.





The CRUSTY CRITIC

by Jamar Nicholas



Salutations once again! It is I, your humble recorder of the rolling ruler, the artistic surveyor of supplies, the Crusty Critic, here again to help you navigate through the sometimes daunting but always fun world of finding great art supplies to help you get through another comic book assignment.

What we all want from our art supplies is great quality, great price (if you can get it), and great quantity! The worst thing in the world is to be in the middle of a deadline tornado and to run out of that one thing you need to get to the finish line—be it a special brush, that paper that feels just right as your pencil slides across it, or, in this case, the fuel that great comic pages are powered by: ink! I've said this before in previous columns, and it should go without saying, though I'm saying it anyway—YMMV. Your Mileage May Vary with whatever art supplies you find and use. Something that I thought was awful you may love, but my hope is that you may discover something new from my research.

INK

Every comic book artist has in their arsenal a shelf or drawer full of ink for finishing comic pages. While a majority of younger cartoonists have found their way with disposable markers and technical pens like Microns or even the brilliant Eberhard & Faber PITT series pens, there's always the need for a real, old-school, tried and true bottle of ink. But which one?

Since you are readers in good standing of *DRAW!* magazine, you already know that, as a professional, the only ink you should be using should be permanent India ink. This is the most important rule to keep in mind as

you shop for a brand, as inks that do not mention permanency will come back to haunt you, fading or bleeding, as non-permanent inks are not created to stand the tests of time. You want to approach all of your art as something that needs to be archived, so make sure you check your labels.

Some newer ink brands may not say that they are "India" brands of ink, such as the new FW Acrylic Artist's Ink, but just keep scanning the label, as it should let you know if the ink is water-resistant. That's the deal-breaker.

For this article, I have called forth aid from my good friends at Allegheny Art Company in Pennsylvania, my local store and my first and last stop for shoring up lots of test inks. Allegheny has a great selection, is well-lit, cheery, and has a great staff that knows their stuff. If I can help it, I will give my business to the small art shops whenever I can—sometimes hanging out in the shop and talking about art for an hour with the staff is worth it. If I tried that at the big-box places, I'm certain the constable would be called on to rid this Crusty Critic from their establishments.

The Crusty Critic will review each ink for this article on a five-beret scale under these parameters:

QUALITY: Is it a well-made product?

DARKNESS: How the ink lays down on the page—darkness is key for this Crusty Critic.

CONSISTENCY: Was the ink like water or slick and squiddy?

PRODUCT SIZE: We all want to stretch

our dollar. Product size factors in on the score.

I have also included a test swatch where I show the way our inks lay down on paper.





ROUGH Critique

**Constructive
analysis and
criticism of a
newcomer's work
by
BOB McLEOD**

On these pages each issue, I show a sample page sent to me by a young artist struggling to break into comics and I try to offer as much constructive advice as I possibly can to get him or her up to the next level and hopefully closer to getting work with the major publishers. We all need to be able to accept criticism if we hope to improve, and we should be our own toughest critic, so nothing anyone else might say will be any worse than our own self-criticism.

This time, we have a page drawn by Stuart Roddy, who's been studying at the Joe Kubert School, so I think they've already critiqued this page, and I'm following in their wake. He's very graciously and courageously allowed me to share this critique with all of you. I can see a lot of progress comparing this most recent page to the other samples Stuart sent me of his earlier work. But whatever good advice they no doubt gave him at Kubert, I can still see a lot of room for even further improvement.

I do think Stuart definitely shows some real talent, and he's working hard and doing a lot of things well. Just the fact that he's studying at the Joe Kubert School and also submitting his work to me shows how serious he is about improving his art and getting into comics. It takes that kind of 110% commitment to make it to the pro level. I like his sense of drama, and his subtle details and interesting lighting. His art is fun to look at, which is one of the main things you want from a comic artist.

But his storytelling and design have some problems. As a reader of this page, I'm confused about some things, and you don't want the reader to be confused. The primary thing in all areas of creating comics, whether it's writing, penciling, inking, lettering, or coloring, should be clarity. As with many beginning artists, it's the basic fundamentals Stuart needs to work on most. Before you get to all that interesting surface detail, you need to lay a solid foundation to build on. Too many beginners can't wait to get to the rendering at the end, so they rush the underlying structure at the beginning, and don't put enough thought or effort

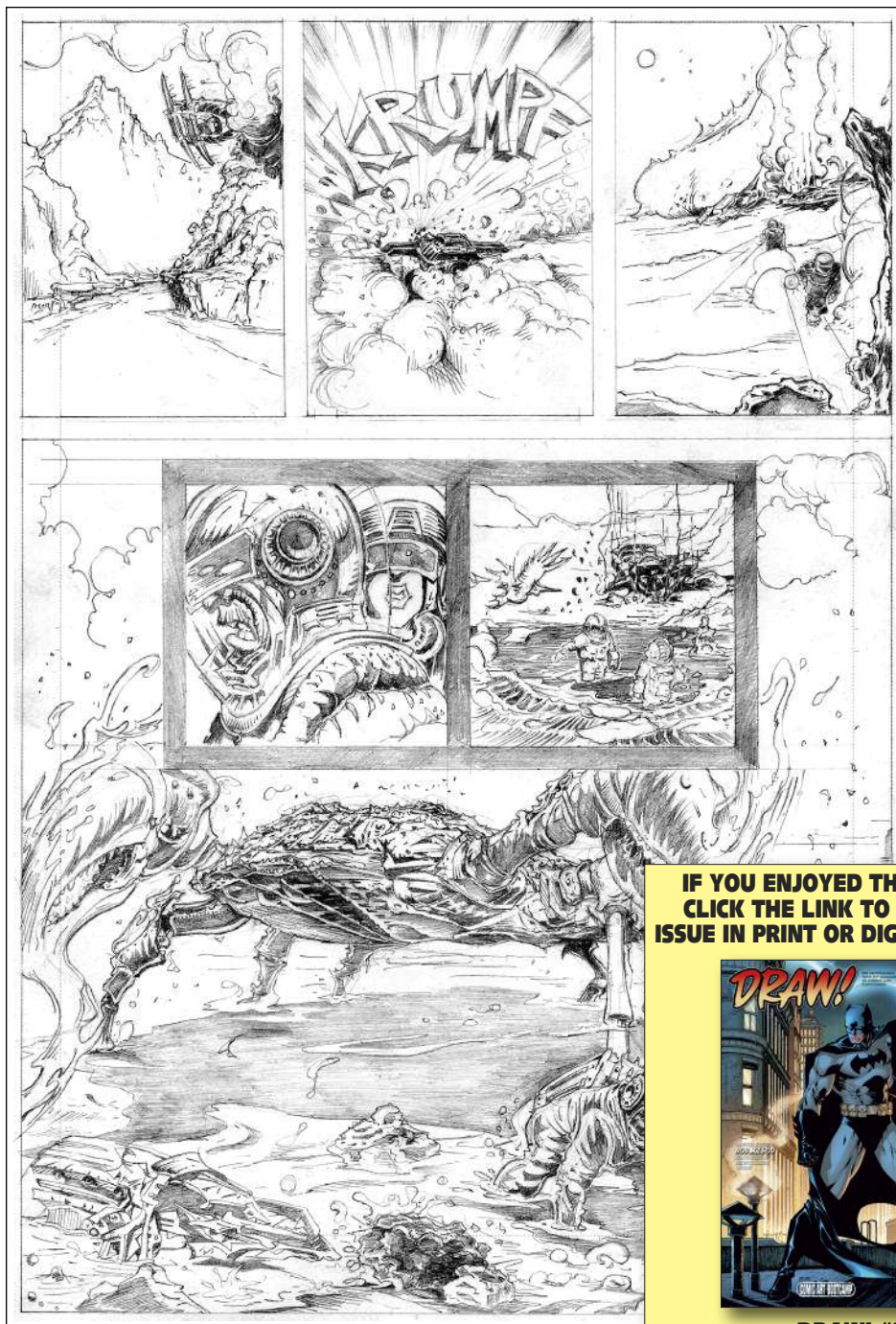
into it. I know I was definitely that way, and I still have to fight the urge to get to what I consider the "fun stuff," which for me is definitely not the layout. But it has to be done well, because it's one of the most important steps.

I tell my students that each minute you work on a drawing is less important than the one before it, and that includes the very first minute. In fact, in many cases the first few seconds will determine how well the drawing comes out in the end, even if that's many hours of effort later. That's because if you're drawing in a productive way, roughing in the entire drawing, you need to quickly establish the basic positions and proportions in those first few seconds. If you don't start out well, all the fancy rendering in the world can't fix bad proportions or positioning. If you do start out well, everything after that is just a matter of refining and polishing. So the thinking you do before you ever make a mark with the pencil can actually be more important than how well you draw. You have to put that mark in the right place before you worry about making it a pretty mark.

All representational art starts out as abstract design, and the stronger the design, the better the art. So on a page of comic art, you first of all have several vital decisions to make: how many panels are you going to use, what shape are they going to be, where are they going to be, and how big are they going to be? That's a lot of very important thinking, but it's just basic graphic design combined with visual storytelling. Stuart's design of the panel shapes, placement, and size appears good at first glance, but it can be better.

First, he has the spaceship crashing in a nice three-panel sequence, so that's an excellent start. This crash could of course be shown much bigger and more dramatically. A spaceship crash landing on an alien plant and the crew setting out to investigate is a very dramatic situation, and it could easily take up an entire page. But for the purpose of this sample page, it's really just a set-up for the subsequent scenes, so these three panels are just right for that.

**"If you don't start out well,
all the fancy rendering in the
world can't fix bad propor-
tions or positioning. If you
do start out well, everything
after that is just a matter of
refining and polishing."**



Joe Kubert School student Stuart Roddy's pencil sketch
© STUART RODDY

Next, mainly just for variety, but also for the page design, he has two "inset" panels (so named because they're set into other panels). The first is a close-up introducing us to the characters, so that we care more what happens to them next, which is another smart storytelling move. It's usually good in any case to have a mix of close-ups, long shots, etc., just for variety, whether it serves the story or not. However, these look squeezed by that thick, black panel border, as if he barely managed to get them into the picture. Which he did, because his inset panels are so small!

The next panel is a long shot, which is also a good choice, showing (I think) water rushing at them from behind, but it's way too small and cluttered. It's a panoramic establishing shot the size

of a postage stamp, reduced in size by your original art. The thing is, these are small because there's a

Finally, he's got the big money shot, with the monster rising up out of the water, so he's wisely given that a nice, big panel... except that his inset panels are covering up a third of it, including part of the monster's threatening claws, which are too important to mess with. Focal points like claws, heads, hands, feet, etc., need to be carefully placed so that they're unobstructed. So those inset panels need to be enlarged and raised up away from the monster.

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DRAW! #22

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