DRAW!

The Professional "How-To" Magazine on Comics, Cartooning and Animation

TWO MORROWS

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BILL SIENKIEWICZ

THE LEGENDARY COMICS ARTIST AND ILLUSTRATOR REVEALS HIS PROCESS

JEFFREY WATTS

AND THE WATTS ATELLIER OF THE ARTS

PLUS! REGULAR COLUMNISTS

JERRY ORDWAY

JAMAR NICHOLAS

AND MIKE MANLEY AND BRET BLEVINS'

COMIC ART BOOTCAMP

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DRAW!

THE PROFESSIONAL "HOW-TO" MAGAZINE ON COMICS & ILLUSTRATION

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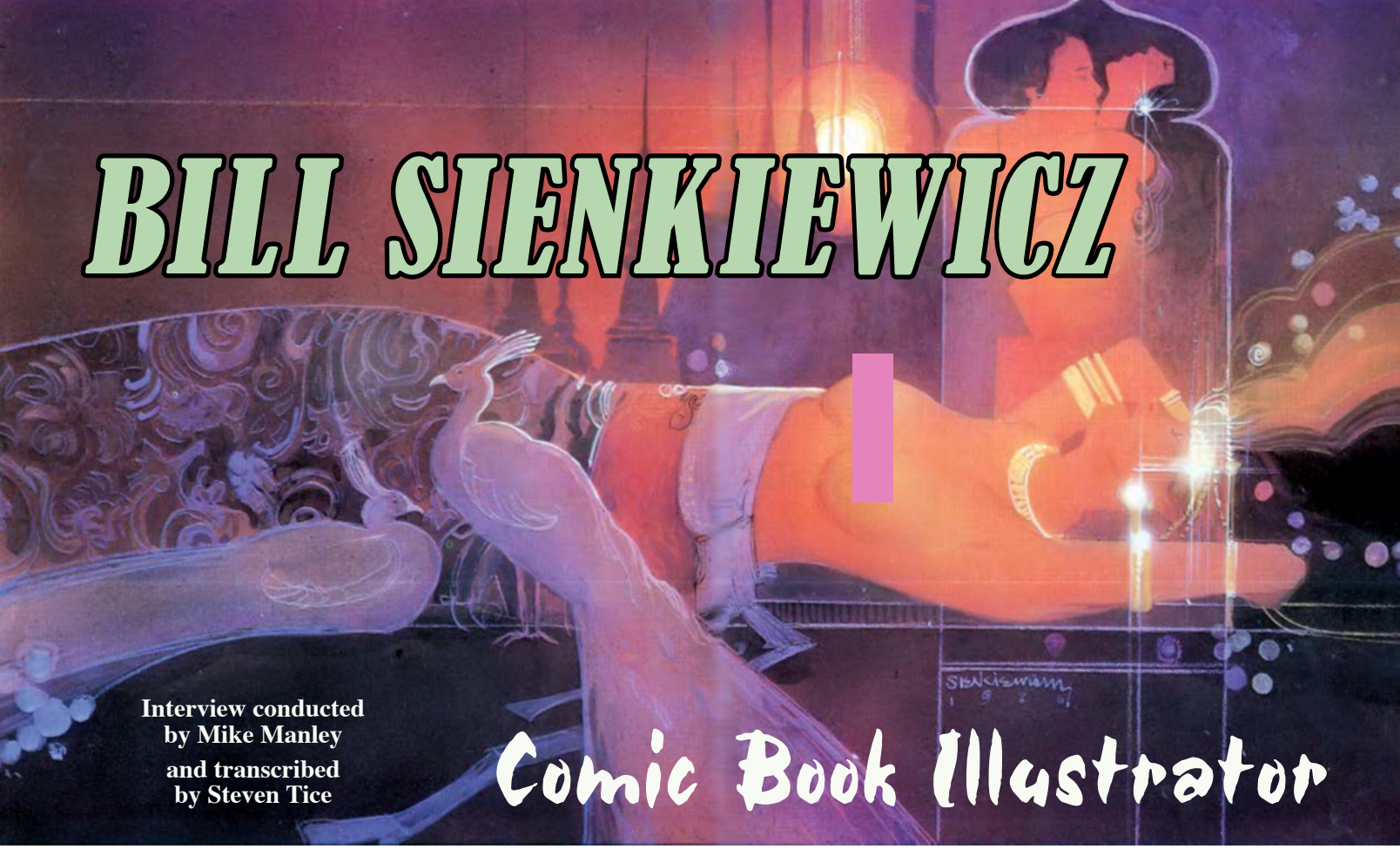
TABLE OF CONTENTS



BILL SIENKIEWICZ

Comic Book Illustrator

Interview conducted by Mike Manley and transcribed by Steven Tice

DRAW!: So how goes it today? What are you working on today in your studio?

BILL SIENKIEWICZ: I'm working on some inks over my friend, Ian Dorian. I promised I would work on the series he's doing. He's a really terrific guy and a great friend of mine, and I've worked with him in the past, so I'm enjoying this. I've got other projects I'm working on that are taking up a lot of time, so this is one I'm sort of doing as I can take the time to do it.

DRAW!: What's the series?

BILL: It's called *Law of Resistance*. It hasn't come out yet. Jim Krueger is writing it. It's an independent, not for one of the big companies. I'm not really sure how it's all going to come together. I'm sort of the hired set of hands in terms of finishes, and unless it concerns me directly, at certain times I don't really pay attention to all that. With the project I'm doing with Kelly Sue [DeConnick], we know it's Image. And then I'm doing a bunch of covers and stuff for DC and Marvel, so I'm spinning a number of different plates.

DRAW!: Are you working on his originals? Are you doing blueline? Are you doing it digitally?

BILL: I've got his originals, so I'm working on those. And I'll be doing some stuff over Denys Cowan again soon. Mostly when I'm inking I prefer working over actual pencils.

Just as we're talking, I'm realizing, oh my God, I'm doing a *lot* of different gigs. I'm working with Kevin Eastman on four pages a month of *Turtles*, and those I'm doing over bluelines. What I'm doing there is printing out his bluelines, and I'm inking them very, very large.

DRAW!: Larger than 11" x 17"?

BILL: Oh, yeah. Actually, the first ones, it would get up to around 18" x 24", because it allows for so much play with the line, so I can actually take a really thick pen—I usually use a chisel point more recently.

DRAW!: You mean like a Speedball lettering pen?

BILL: It's called a Pilot Parallel Pen [a calligraphy pen]. It's 6 mm wide, and when you turn it on it's edge it's a hairline. It's like ice skating on paper with ink—that's the way it feels. With Ian, I'm actually jumping from regular inking nib points and whatnot. It's interesting working over different people. When I'm working over Denys, I have a certain approach, and when I'm working over Kevin, I've got a whole other approach and things I'm trying to pull out of what he's doing, and then inking over Ian, because Ian's more of a sculptor—that's primarily what he's known for—his work has kind of a sculptural quality. I find that when I'm inking Denys, I'm inking a little bit more in terms of graphic shapes and patterns, which actually fits a little bit more with my own approach, my own sensibility. But with Ian, I'm actually getting into doing the anatomy. So it's kind of an interesting array of styles that I'm working with.

DRAW!: Denys has a sort of Sergio Toppi influence with the textures. I usually use the 108 when I ink Bret Blevins or

Page 23 of *Moon Knight* #12 (left) inked with a Hunt #102 pen nib, and page 11 of *New Mutants* #29 (right) inked with a Gillott 1950.

somebody like that, but with Denys a stiffer pen seemed to fit that feeling.

BILL: Right.

DRAW!: What are some of your favorite pen nibs? Do you use the old 102 standard?

BILL: I use everything. I have a whole slew of pen nibs that I try. I mean, a lot of times I'll take marker pens, the ones with the fiber tips, and I'll open them up, even if they say they're pigmented, and flush out the ink and fill them with India ink so they're permanent and don't wash away. So I'll get into some periods with those, and I find that at a certain point I kind of max out on the feeling of the fiber point, and I want something that's crisper, so I'll go and I'll work with a Gillott 1950. When I was working on *New Mutants*, I was working with that. I found that it was really good for crisp and angled lines, and it had a certain level of flexibility. But I use the 102, 107, 1950, 290, and 291. And then I've been using these Esterbrooks, as well.

DRAW!: I have a bunch of those that I bought off of eBay years ago. I had a whole box, and they're like nails. The metal on those is really heavy-duty.

BILL: On some of them, yeah. I actually have the ones, it's like 375 or something. I forget what the number is, but they're pretty flexible. They're a little bit more like the 290s. But I bend the very, very tip up so that it's got a little bit of an angle to it, and it allows me to get thinner and thicker lines. I also use these Sailor pens from Japan, as well. So I've jumped from all different kinds of pens and brushes. Even working on one panel I'll jump from one pen tool to another, because I want a thicker line for, say, the strokes in a woman's black hair. If I'm doing a small figure in the background, I might use a 102 or a 659 Gillott—one of the thin ones. I think the 659 is pretty similar to the 102 except it's a little bit more flexible. But the 102, to me, is the standard. It's the one I probably have used the most over the years. Between that and the 1950. I think the 102 is what I used mostly on *Moon Knight*, and the 1950 was what I used most on *New Mutants*. My favorite tool right now is whatever I have in my hand, because I'm still always looking for the perfect tool.

DRAW!: [*laughs*] That's one of the things I always found fun about inking other people's stuff rather than inking my own stuff is that you would maybe use tools or approaches you wouldn't necessarily use on your own work.

Zen aspect to it, but it can also be monotonous, too, because it becomes formulaic.

BILL: Oh, yeah. To me the whole concept of inking and finishing is a misnomer anyway. To me it's all drawing.

DRAW!: Right. Because the best inkers of the old days were full-fledged artists. They were just maybe not as dynamic with layout or, like, Frank Giacoia was very good, but he was supposedly too slow to do monthly stuff. But the guy was a great inker on somebody like Kirby or Buscema.

BILL: Oh, yeah, absolutely. That's totally the case. But what happens is you get into a whole thing of rendering a nose, and getting the highlight of that nose, and after a certain point it's like, "Okay, I've rendered highlights on noses 15,000 times. Maybe I've played that to death." You can find these little tricks, and at a certain point it's almost like, "Nah, I'm tired of the tricks."

DRAW!: I'm doing the two strips, *The Phantom* and *Judge Parker*, and I feel like when I'm doing that, it's almost like being an actor. I'm playing a role. *The Phantom* I think of as sort of a brush style because it's from the '30s. It's been around 80 years now, and the readers expect there to be a continuity. If I went in and completely changed it up, like he had veins on his costume and stuff, the people who have been reading it would go, "What is that? This is not what I want." So I feel like there's a role that I am playing that I wouldn't necessarily do on something else.

Detail of Bill inking John Buscema from *Wolverine* #10.
Wolverine © Marvel Characters, Inc.

BILL: Oh, yeah, yeah. That I totally understand. When I inked Sal Buscema on *Spider-Man*, when they first approached me to do it, they asked if I could ink it like Scott Williams. And this is after I'd not been doing as much comics stuff. I was doing more illustration/advertising stuff. So when they asked me if I wanted to do it, I was like, "Look, you've got the wrong guy for that. I'll do it, but I'm going to see what Sal's work says to me." So I ended up inking it very, very bold and brushy. And Sal loved it. When I saw him—we hadn't really met before. I had seen John [Buscema] a lot at the offices. When I met Sal, we were at this show together, he came up and he gave me a big hug. It was actually some of the most fun I've ever had.

DRAW!: I inked him once on an issue of *Spider-Man*, and it was so much fun, partially because, whenever I've inked guys like him or Gil Kane, I felt like, "I'm really working in comics now. I'm inking Gil Kane." [*laughs*] I thought it was interesting when you inked John Buscema on *Wolverine*, and then you guys did something else together after that, too.

BILL: Yeah, I did a Galactus thing with him. But the *Wolverine* job, man, I remember how much fun I had on that. That's still one of my favorite—I wish I had some pages from that, because I didn't save anything. But, yeah, "The Gehenna Stone Affair," I think it was called. I really loved it. I loved working over him, because he would put down very few lines, but whatever lines were there were just perfect.

DRAW!: I know. It looks amazingly simple, but you realize how much knowledge—it's like the Nine Old Men from Disney know exactly where to put that line, how to indicate all that form and volume with, like, four lines on a leg.

BILL: Oh, it's so true, so true. And I think a lot of guys get trapped into sort of repeating that rendering. The tendency to simplify seems ingrained, at least it is in most of the guys that I really admire. A lot of the flashy sort of rendering and everything else, at a certain point it feels like it becomes very surface, and I find the stuff that really gets me going is the stuff that's underneath, the design. I mean, it's great to have a great surface on something, don't get me wrong, but it's not the step that drives me as crazy as some of the other stuff.

DRAW!: Having followed your career, it was obvious in the beginning that you turned a corner. You were also starting to do illustration, so you were bringing your other influences to what you were doing. Were you getting any resistance at the time from that at all, or were people like, "Yeah, this is cool!"

BILL: Well, the editors were cool with that, but Shooter used to bust my chops a lot. Jim and I got along great, but it wasn't comics-centric in terms of the influence I was pulling from, so he would regularly bust my chops. Especially when I was

Bill's inks (right) over John Buscema's pencils (left) for *Galactus: The Devourer* #5, page 1.
Galactus, Silver Surfer © Marvel Characters, Inc.

doing a lot of the painted stuff. He'd say there's a lot of artsy-fartsy stuff, because the coloring I was trying to go for was more painterly colors and a little bit less full-on spectrum. The Hulk's green might be more of a grayish, sick green as opposed to lime green.

DRAW!: What do they say, "The grays are the soup of painting"? They hold painting together. Really great artists, their grays aren't gray. They're full of all kinds of great color.
BILL: Oh, yeah, they absolutely are. And, again, that whole thing about what defines good colors, everything has to be taken in context, so it's what it's next to.

DRAW!: When you were living in New York, were you studying at the Art Students League? Were you taking classes?
BILL: Yeah, I was taking some classes. I was taking more classes in Connecticut. I'd take some watercolor classes or painting classes with my friend Joe Chiodo when we both lived in Connecticut. But when I lived in New York, a lot of that was really going to museums, and doing life drawing—a lot of life drawing, a lot of painting. I mean, I would go to museums and study, but most of what I was learning was kind of self-taught. I did go to art school, but at a certain point, all art is—

DRAW!: Where did you go?
BILL: I went to school in Newark, the Newark School of Fine and Industrial Arts. It was a four-story brownstone in Newark not too far from Rutgers' campus. The art school was on the top floor, and then the rest of the building was a music and dance school. There was a lot of jazz, and amazing singers were there, dancers. Savion Glover was there. Melba Moore used to go there. So some of the teachers I had were not only painters, but were jazz guys. They played at Carnegie Hall and stuff like that, so I learned about jazz at the same time. We'd have our all-day painting class on Fridays, and we'd get some bottles of Old English 800—because, when you're in Newark, you're drinking Old English and smoking Kool cigarettes. I think they handed those to you when you got to the city limits. [*Mike laughs*] And then we would just paint and listen to music. Either we were listening to records or listening to what was coming up from the floors below.

DRAW!: That must have been a fun and a transformative time for you.

BILL: Oh, it was absolutely that, because I grew up in farm country in northern Jersey, where the idea of music was polkas and Johnny Cash. And I love Johnny Cash, but at a certain point when you're listening to country-and-western stuff… I mean, my grandparents would listen to Lawrence Welk, and of course, I wanted to shoot myself, you know? [*Mike laughs*] Growing up listening to rock-and-roll and then getting into jazz and blues was a real big culture shock for me.

DRAW!: I always have music. I'm either listening to NPR or something like that, or I'm listening to the music all day. Usually I watch TV at night just as a change. Is listening to music a big part of your creative process?

BILL: Sometimes it really is. It depends on what I'm doing. I may have something on in the background, like some podcasts or Vice TV—just something on in the background.

DRAW!: Something that makes you feel good.

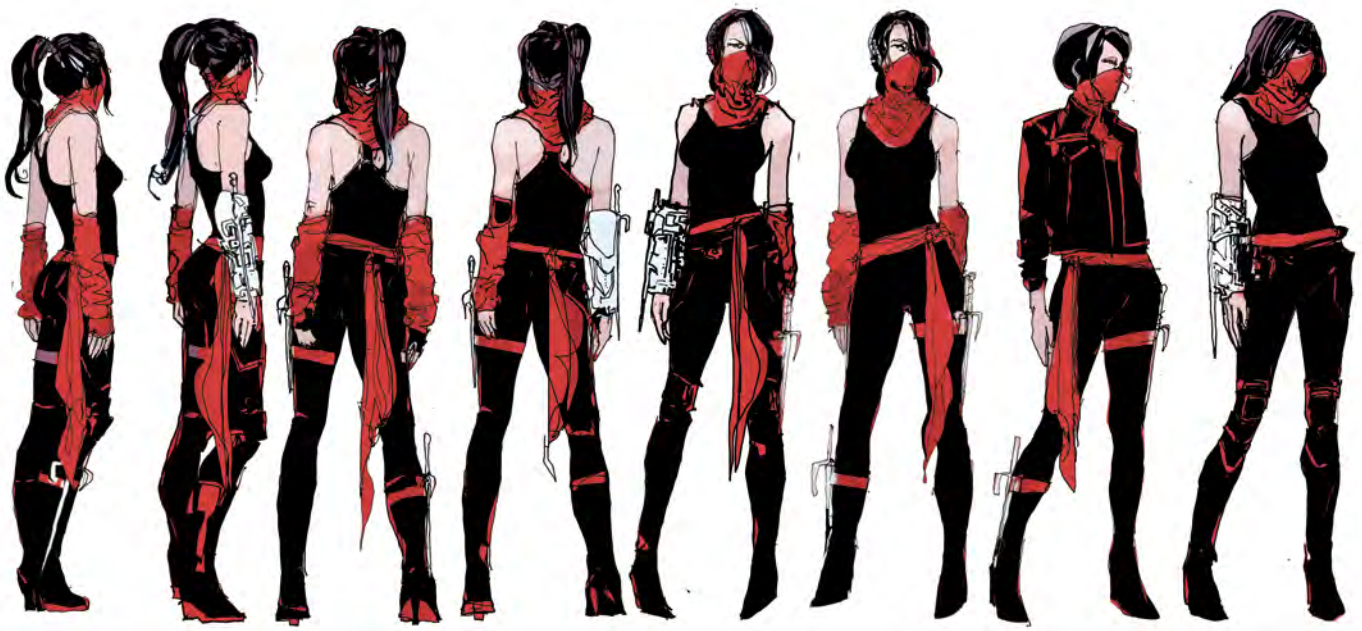
BILL: If I'm writing, I usually have to have music or silence—nothing that's really distracting. But if I'm inking or working on a painting, the finishing parts of the process, it's like walking and chewing gum at the same time. That I can do. But when I'm working on something that requires intense concentration in terms of pacing, then I cannot breed distractions.

DRAW!: You said the other day that you're a night owl. Do you find that you have more productive times of day? Do you have a strategy where you block out your time?

BILL: I find that, invariably, I usually get into the best groove about an hour or two before I'm ready to crash. When I was working on *Elektra* in New York at the studio with Denys Cowan and Michael Davis, I would spend the whole day going from bookstores, to the museum, to doing life drawing at cafes. And I'd get to the studio and I'd vomit out, like, a page or two of *Elektra*, and I'd be spent, because it was sort of like all building up. I didn't really luxuriate in any kind of fussiness. It just came out, and I was literally spent.

It depends on what I need to get done. There are days when my schedule is so crazy that I end up getting up at, say, two or three in the morning, and I can get into a good groove in the morning hours, because even though I'm a night owl, I actually like the morning when the sun's coming up. I find that mentally I'm probably the keenest in the morning hours. Like, I'll be working on the crossword or something, and I'll find that any other time of the day, the answers might be elusive, but in the morning, if I'm up and it's that golden time before everybody starts leaving for work and everything, I find that my acuity is spot-on. Things are a lot easier, and things just sort of come to me. It's like having that mental palate cleansed so I can get into a groove. But at a certain point now, if I'm working on something and it's a really tight deadline, I'll just plug in until it's done. And on the really, really tight crunches, I'll get into a place where I don't have time to make mistakes. And it sounds kind of grandiose and sort of bizarre to say that, but I know enough about how to get a job to be professional quality, and if I want to experiment or play around, that'll be on something else. Part of experimentation is that something could go south or sideways very quickly, and part of the fun and part of the problem is "How do I save this?" But there are certain points when I'm working on something that has to get done within a certain time frame where I'm just slashing in the blacks and going in with the pen and ink and rendering out, and deciding on the big, thematic scheme. I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel at all.

DRAW!: I took a class with a guy, and he said what he would do is he'd get pretty close to the end of a painting, and then he would purposefully mess something up on the painting to force



Turnaround for Bill's recent redesign of Elektra.

himself to redefine some aspects of what he was doing, and maybe you end up coming up with a solution that you wouldn't have if you had just worked straight ahead to the finish. But, yeah, doing that on something that's due at 5:00 is probably not the best idea.

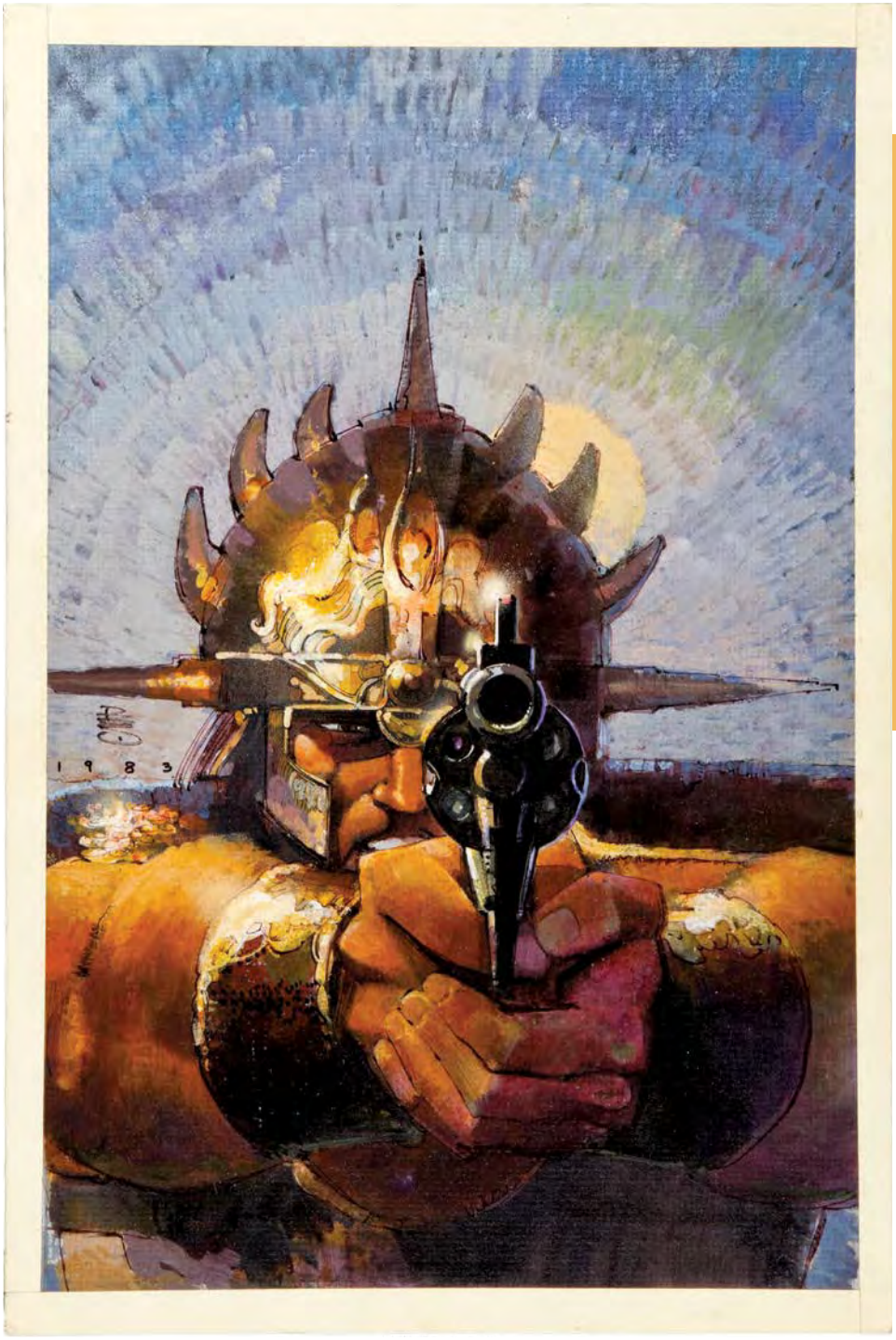
BILL: Well, yeah. I haven't deliberately tried to mess a piece up, because pieces will go sideways all on their own, but if something's a little too facile, I'll end up feeling like I need to change it up, so I'll throw a different speed pitch at it. And if it works, great. If not… There have been pieces that I've fought with and worked on to get them to finish, and hated them when they were done, and then came back later and loved them. And then there are other times I've been fighting with a piece and I realize that it's not worth it to invest more time in it, and I'll end up starting the piece over.

DRAW!: In fact, the first time I saw your original art was on my first trip to New York, going up to Marvel. I was staying with Bret [Blevins] in that house he was living at in Ridgefield, and he had a Conan piece that you had started to work on, a cover, I think, for *Savage Sword*, and you had gotten part of the way into it, and then it looked like you had abandoned it and had done something different.

BILL: That probably was the case. That wouldn't be something out of the norm.

DRAW!: Those pieces probably allowed you to experiment in a way, too, doing a cover for *Savage Sword* or something at that time.

BILL: Oh, yeah. It was like being paid to go to art school, so I could try a whole bunch of different things. The cover I did for the *What If?* Conan with the gun, the background is very N.C. Wyeth on that one. It may not look it to other people, but it totally is screaming N.C. Wyeth to me, with the way I painted the sky. Of course you know, being influenced by Bob Peak and by so many of the great illustrators, it was a chance to really play with design. Because I actually really wanted to get into illustration, doing *TV Guide* covers and posters. And at the time was when everything started going sideways, again, to be more photographic.



Bill's painting for the cover for *What If...?* #43, featuring a Wyeth-esque sky.
Conan © Conan Properties International, LLC

I'd always loved comics, and I told my father I wanted to do comics, and when I tried to get in, I still had another year of art school to go. I thought I was going to get, hopefully, a pinup or some kind of education in terms of a critique, and it just so happens I ended up getting a career out of it. So I never did graduate, even though they've offered me to come back and teach, and they gave me and a bunch of other people these lifetime awards from the school. Which is kind of odd, because at the time I remember being in perpetual arguments with the administration because I wanted to take not just illustration or fine art, but I wanted to take advertising classes. You had to pick a certain curriculum, and I wanted to mix it up. I wanted elements of advertising, and fine art, and illustration.

Caricature by Rachel Ordway

The RIGHT way, the WRONG way, and the ORDWAY!

CONTINUITY

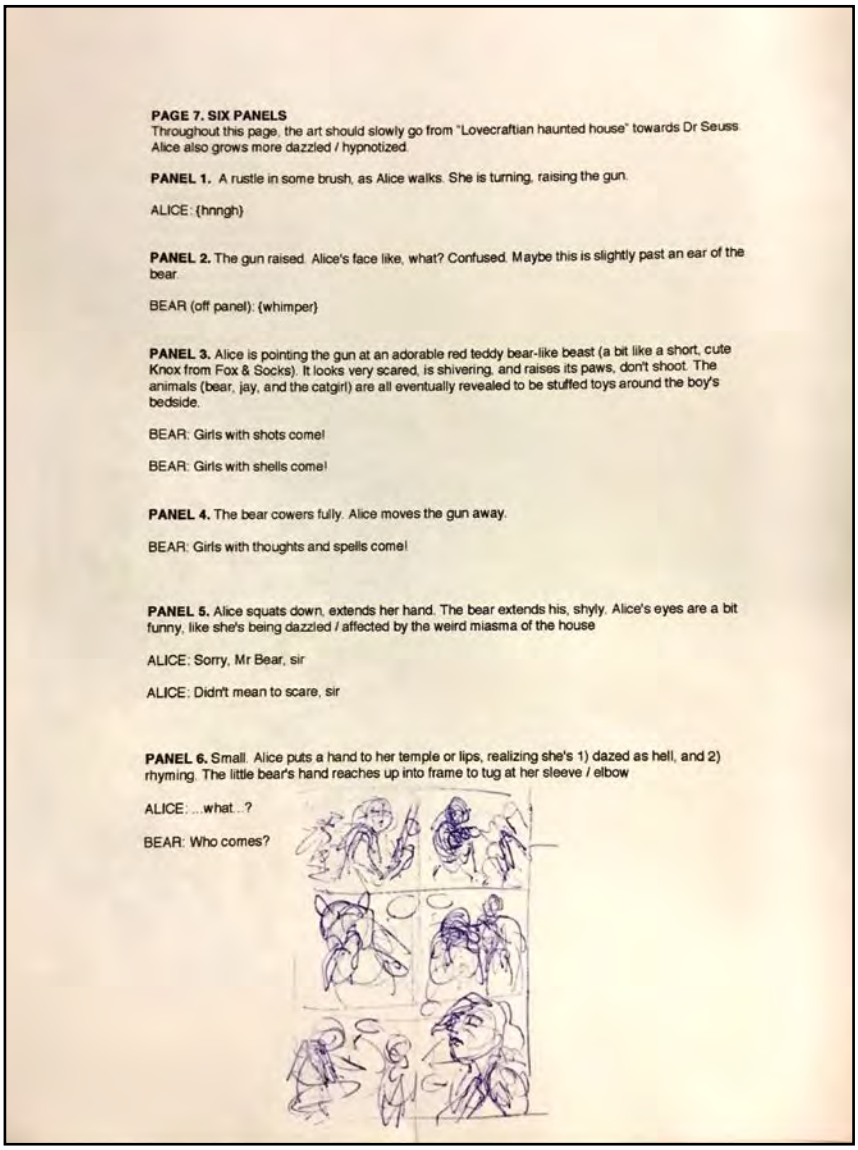
by

JERRY ORDWAY

I've been thinking about what to demo for you, dear readers, and have decided to show how I work when I am inking my own continuity. The process may break a few rules here and there, but I think it's important to show that there is no one "right" way to draw. We all develop our processes after trying to conform to the accepted ways, and I find many fellow professionals have veered from the path with a work method that suits them best. In my case, I work in different ways from time to time, out of a need to shake things up. Sometimes I will feel the need to draw tight prelims at a small size, scale them up to final art size, and ink or pencil. If you are drawing a complicated perspective-laden sequence, drawing small scale can make far away perspective points easier to manage, where they might be two feet off your paper at full size. It can also help when trying to coordinate a lot of overlapping characters, or elements to lay them out at a tiny size.

I recently completed a pencils-only comic project which was to be finished by the inker printing out and rendering on bluelines. I drew tight prelims, then enlarged and traced off super-clean pencils, to make the inker's job easier. Had the actual art boards gone to the same inker, I would have penciled directly onto the paper, since construction lines are not as confusing in graphite as they might be in non-repro blueline ink.

For the examples shown here, a page from a recent *Semiautomagic* story written by Alex DeCampi, my method is this:



PAGE 7. SIX PANELS
Throughout this page, the art should slowly go from "Lovecraftian haunted house" towards Dr Seuss. Alice also grows more dazzled / hypnotized.

PANEL 1. A rustle in some brush, as Alice walks. She is turning, raising the gun.

ALICE: {hnngh}

PANEL 2. The gun raised. Alice's face like, what? Confused. Maybe this is slightly past an ear of the bear.

BEAR (off panel): {whimper}

PANEL 3. Alice is pointing the gun at an adorable red teddy bear-like beast (a bit like a short, cute Knox from Fox & Socks). It looks very scared, is shivering, and raises its paws, don't shoot. The animals (bear, jay, and the catgirl) are all eventually revealed to be stuffed toys around the boy's bedside.

BEAR: Girls with shots come!

BEAR: Girls with shells come!

PANEL 4. The bear cowers fully. Alice moves the gun away.

BEAR: Girls with thoughts and spells come!

PANEL 5. Alice squats down, extends her hand. The bear extends his, shyly. Alice's eyes are a bit funny, like she's being dazzled / affected by the weird miasma of the house

ALICE: Sorry, Mr Bear, sir

ALICE: Didn't mean to scare, sir

PANEL 6. Small. Alice puts a hand to her temple or lips, realizing she's 1) dazed as hell, and 2) rhyming. The little bear's hand reaches up into frame to tug at her sleeve / elbow

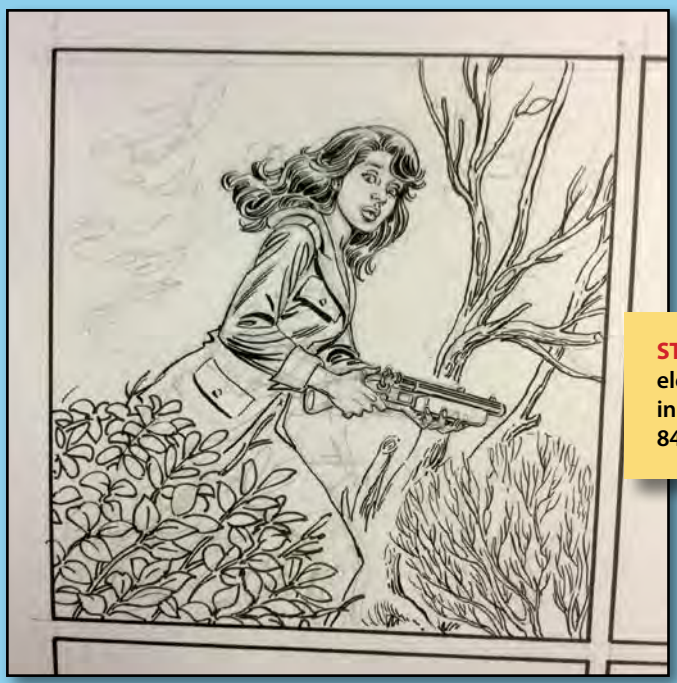
ALICE: ...what...?

BEAR: Who comes?

STEP 1: I execute a tiny thumbnail drawing (see previous page and left) to show the basic configuration of panels and layout, which I then refer to as I scribble on the actual art boards, and proceed to ink. This method is more of a free form adventure, and feels comparable to a tightrope walker working without a safety net below. I can scribble a loose structure for the whole page, or work panel to panel, from the top of the page down, or the bottom of the page up. It is a fair criticism to say you could make some big mistakes working like this, but I like the danger! Looking at my thumbnail, I can change angles, and play with the camera distance from the subject, but I know what has to happen on each page and each panel, so the mistakes are usually minor.

I am working from a full script, not a plot or outline, so I know I am dealing with six panels. The sketch is really a way for me to visualize the basic flow and composition without any extra detail. I try to imagine balloon placement at this stage, since it is very important to compose a panel which leaves enough space for lettering, and almost as important, to lock down who speaks first if there is a back and forth conversation between characters. You can compose the most brilliant panel of art, but if the letterer can't place dialogue on it, it's a big problem. Don't lose track of the fact that this is all about storytelling, not just pretty pictures!

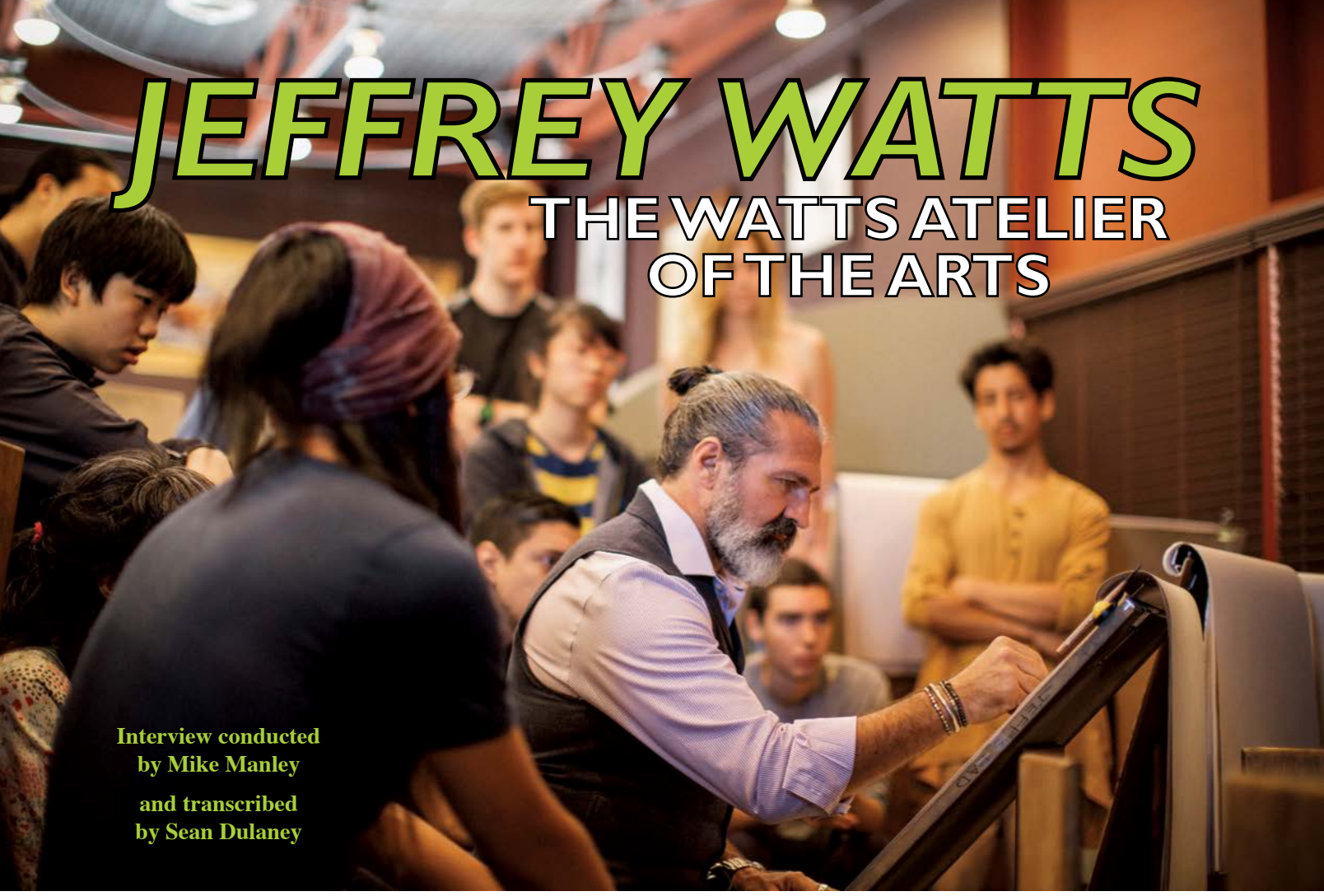
STEP 2: The level of penciling here is as finished as I need before starting to ink. I pulled the camera back a little, but the composition matches my thumbnail.



STEP 3: I inked the main figure and most of the background elements with a Hunt #102 crow quill dip pen and Pelikan drawing ink. I saved inking the spruce tree for my brush, a #4 Rafael series 8404 Kolinsky, again using Pelikan ink.

JEFFREY WATTS

THE WATTS ATELIER OF THE ARTS



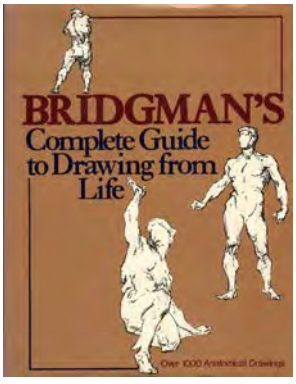
Interview conducted by Mike Manley

and transcribed by Sean Dulaney

JEFFREY WATTS: Hey, Mike! How are you doing?

DRAW!: Good, good! How are you?

JW: Hanging in there. Getting work done. Working on a new [George] Bridgman book—kind of a companion book to the Bridgman book that I've been working on forever to try to get out with our online program. It's kind of to revamp the Bridgman book into cleaner [Frank] Reilly drawings, combined with Frazetta drawings, combined with photo reference of models in the poses of Bridgman, and all that kind of stuff. It's one of those projects that is just swallowing me up on top of everything else.



DRAW!: I can imagine. That's a book that's really hard to decipher, because it's his class drawings. It was one of the books you could always find in the library. Everybody looked like a Jim Starlin drawing.

JW: Yeah, yeah. My dad used to have it on the shelf, and I used to try to draw from it when I was in high school. It was great, but it needs a *Bridgman Unabridged*. It needs a book that tells you how to study from that thing, because it's pretty hard.

That's one of the things I used to do in our classes. I redrew all of his drawings, but also doing them in various techniques. First I would do them in charcoal in our style—very clean. I'd clean up all his linework, take out all his scribbles, decipher which insertion lines were correct and which ones were necessary, and then I'd take Frazetta and look at poses that are very similar to the angles that are in the Bridgman book. Then I'd go to photos of muscle builders in similar poses. Between those three things, you will get a really good cross-reference of how to actually utilize that book. It worked really well in class, so I did it for an online program—it was about 40 hours total.

DRAW!: Now that's 40 hours of you breaking down the Bridgman drawings?

JW: Yeah, me redrawing them. I took this model, Yoni, we have who is built almost identically to the guys in that book. He's not steroided or anything, just a naturally big, bulky guy who looks just like those guys. I took him and shot him in all the poses, and then after I redrew the Bridgman drawings, we would draw from that reference and extrapolate what you were learning from Bridgman using an actual model, and then go to Frazetta and look how it was exaggerated to make it really fantastic.

DRAW!: Right, right. The story is that Frazetta copied that book in a weekend, and then he knew anatomy. That's one of his legends.

JW: I know. He was such a character. [*laughter*] A long time ago at Comic-Con, he came out. I met him at my booth, and we talked for about an hour. I was doing a painting of one of his characters because I was trying to practice at the booth. So we sat there and talked, and then I got his number. I called him and we talked again one time. And then I went out to meet with him and spent the whole day with him and Ellie. I spent, I don't know, 15 hours with him right before he had that stroke, and I was just able to sit and talk to him about his life, his journey… everything. We were sitting out on his porch down in Boca Grande, Florida, and he had all these pieces just stacked around this little condo. I'd go in and grab one, come back out, and we'd sit and talk about it. It was one of the highlights of my career as an artist. Twenty years of doing Comic-Con was all worth it for just that one time where I got to make that connection. Once he had that stroke, he wasn't that accessible to the public.

DRAW!: Was that his second stroke, or the one that made him draw with his left hand?
JW: I'm trying to think of the year, because it was a major stroke, and then I did see him two years later. He had moved back to be with his kids up in Pennsylvania. I went out with a bunch of our teachers and we did this road trip, and we saw him. By that time, Ellie was at the museum and he had an oxygen tank. He was dragging that thing around, but he came out. He couldn't remember that much by that time, so it was kind of… I didn't really want to see him after that first meeting I had with him, because I thought that was about as good as it was going to get. We sat and watched *Night of the Hunter*—

DRAW!: Oh, that's a great film. It's the only film that Charles Laughton ever directed.
JW: Yeah! He was like a little kid watching that. He was 80, 75, or something like that, and it was as if he were five years old. But he was the sweetest guy ever. And I was worried about coming out to see him because when you meet your heroes like that, maybe they're going to disappoint you. You've heard all these rumors about him being kind of a jerk or this or that…. He was just the sweetest guy. And he would've given me a painting if Ellie hadn't been there. He's just the most giving guy. She was the one who policed him and made sure he wasn't doing anything he shouldn't be doing.

DRAW!: I was friends with Al Williamson, and they were good buddies. Al was the same way. He was still like a teenager in many ways. He had a movie projector, and we'd have movie nights and watch old movies. [*laughter*] I think the guys of that generation, movies are really important to them.
JW: That's what fed them. Frazetta and all those guys, they all thought like movie directors. I mean, all good comics guys do, but he had that staging ability like Hitchcock—the perfect timing, the perfect money shot, the perfect angle, the perfect distribution of weight. Everything was set up like that perfect key frame in a movie. I just loved his stuff. My dad was an illustrator, and he'd be tearing up those Edgar Rice Burroughs books, recycling them and keeping the covers. We had this stack of Frazetta covers I'd sit and draw from when I was five. So growing up with those heroes, and getting to meet one and spend a day with him, it was freaky and weird, but what an opportunity. He was one of my favorites of all time.

Jeff's first meeting with Frank Frazetta at the San Diego Comic-Con.
Photo © Jeffrey R. Watts

DRAW!: It's weird now because there are students who are fans of fantasy art, which all comes out of him, and they have no idea who the guy is.
JW: Isn't that crazy? I mean, you look at his book and you have [George] Lucas hanging out, and [Sylvester] Stallone…

DRAW!: I went to the IlluXCon and met Erik [Gist], your buddy and fellow teacher. I'd met him there a couple of times, but one of the things I really noticed last year when I was there, when you look at the guys who came pre-*Star Wars*, their artwork is much more individual than the stuff that's coming out now. If you walked through the room, there were a lot of great artists there, but a lot of the stuff looks more similar than when Frazetta and [John] Berkey and those guys were doing it. You would never confuse a Berkey painting for a Vincent Di Fate painting.
JW: I totally agree. I think now everything is more accessible and it's so incestuous. Everyone's kind of stealing from everyone, and you've got a lot of digital guys who are kind of manipulating that way. Individual development just doesn't happen as much it doesn't seem like. Or it's changing. I don't know.

DRAW!: I've been following your school for several years. When I was thinking about going back to school, yours was one of the places I looked at. I basically didn't want to relocate to California.

Detail shots of Jeff's gesture painting, "Gypsy Spirit," in progress.
Gypsy Spirit © Jeffrey R. Watts

skill set is so weak. They won't let you repeat those classes, and no parent is going to let you retake Head Drawing for another $40,000 a year.

JW: Oh yeah, exactly. They're hamstrung by their own bureaucracy and their own structure. It's great if you want to be an engineer, or a surgeon, or whatever. That's great. The structure of that educational system is fine for that. But if you look at just the arts, you cannot get a Master-quality person out of that kind of training.

DRAW!: Unless they are the one in a thousand people….

JW: Of course you're going to get some anomaly which the university is going to claim came out of there, but they would have been good on a desert island. You're going to get one Syd Mead, just a genetic phenom, if you've got billions of students. There is a guy from Korea who can draw pretty much anything from memory. He has a photographic memory like Rain Man. He's sort of a genius savant. You're going to get one of those once in a while, but if you want to get consistent, quality people out working, I mean, our percentage of students who actually turned professional is at a high level—ten times higher than of boutique art schools. My opinions of teaching are so strong, because I've just seen so much and I've watched the collateral damage and the fallout, and I've been able to avoid it simply because my father was savvy enough to understand—and he left Art Center early. He never bothered graduating.

DRAW!: A lot of these schools end up becoming diploma mills. Because of the accreditation, they have to teach a certain way. But the way you've set your school up, it's like the Academy used to be in Philly when Eakins and those people were there, long before all the accreditation stuff came in. You didn't go there right out of high school usually. You did other stuff, *then* you went there. You might have to take Cast Drawing three or four years before Eakins said, "Okay. You're good enough to go on to Life Drawing." When you were finished there, you actually went to France. Then you went to another atelier in France and you studied with that guy until he gave you the recommendation to go to the big school. So you spent twelve years easy going to art school.

JW: Yeah, and I told people this. It's a 12- to 15-year stint before you're able to go for Pixar or DreamWorks and those guys. And it should be. I was at IlluXCon two or three years ago—Pat had me come out—and I was doing portfolio reviews. I was talking to some kid from, I think, San Francisco Art Academy, and the kid was unbelievable. He was so arrogant and entitled, and his skills just weren't there. It was like, "You've got to be kidding me." And he goes, "Well, these guys are fanatical out there and I just don't want to work that hard." And I'm like, "Well, you're going to be pumping gas then." Because the guys that are good are intensely driven. Many of them are OCD'ers; they're grinders. They're like any industry that when you get to the top echelon, you've got crazy, fanatical people. I'm not saying it's healthy, and I'm not saying it's always fun, but those are the people you compete with.

I was over in Russia a couple of years back with one of my students whose parents were Russian, and we went and toured around. We went through the Russian Academy….

DRAW!: I've heard that place is fantastic.

JW: Yeah, that quasi-militant style of training can produce some amazing talent. This style of training harkens back to the Soviet era of Communism. And you go over to China, it's the same way.

DRAW!: That's why figurative painting didn't die. Communism was great for painting. Wasn't great for living [*laughter*], but Communism was great for painting. If it hadn't been for the Communists and the illustrators, all of that knowledge would have been beaten to death by the Modernists.

JW: Most of Europe lost its way when it comes to traditional training. You know that book, *The Twilight of Painting*, by R.H. Gammell? That's a good one.

DRAW!: When I graduated from high school, I actually wanted to go to Art Center, which I think was $3,000 a year at the time. That was too expensive for my dad. One of my best students when I was teaching her in high school wanted to do concept art, and I said Art Center was the best school, but now it's between $60,000 and $70,000 a year. By the time you're

done, you're spending $250,000. And the thing is—and I try to explain this to the students—that industry is really brutal. And now it's global.

JW: Yeah, it's saturated with Chinese and Vietnamese artists.

DRAW!: Schools in Korea are turning out hundreds of people who will do this for practically nothing. When you and I started, it was guys like your dad, guys in his generation. You knew who you were competing with. But globalization really changes the whole playing field.

JW: Jamie Jones and Craig Mullins, they're old school guys who moved from the traditional to digital and are still able to kind of edge out people. But it's not that far before you have just a truckload of them. And it's hard. I think there's a lot of work out there, but it's—I was talking to Erik the other day and he sees the writing on the wall with where his illustration career is going, and that's why he came to me looking to possibly become the new director of Watts Atelier. I'm 46. By the time I'm 50, That might be the ideal time for the transition. I need to get into doing my fine art at the highest level I can. I trained to be in the Super Bowl, not sit on the sidelines.

"Gypsy Spirit," one of Jeff's more finished gesture portaits.
Photos © The Watts Atelier of the Arts

DRAW!: And you want to do it before your eyes start going.

JW: Exactly! You never know what's going to happen. In my mind I said, "Okay, I'm going to do this online school, and I'm going to get this thing to be the best online school I can possibly make it and see if we can get something happening here that's really special." I really think we can. We're well on our way. It's such a new area that you're kind of dealing with infrastructure problems that don't even have solutions. You've got streaming and server issues and all this crazy stuff that just….

DRAW!: If you did this five years ago, it'd be even harder.

JW: Oh yeah. I mean, we've got people from Bangladesh, from China, from all over who are taking the classes. But their issue is either that their internet is weak or….

DRAW!: How do you deal with language issues?

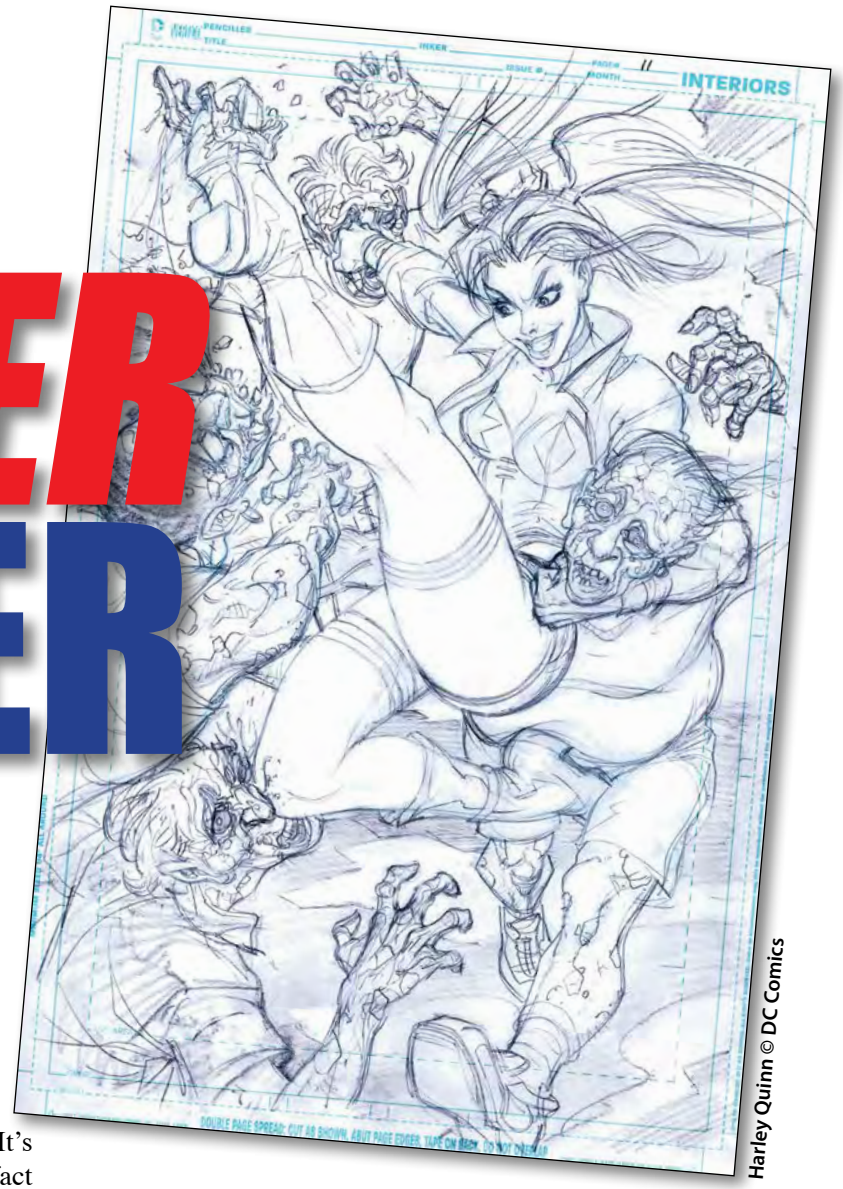
JW: Luckily most of the world speaks English well enough to where it hasn't been that big of a problem. I mean, I'm sure it will probably deter some people. It's a visual language obviously, and so I think at some point we may look into some translation software. But that's getting better and better. Google is doing some amazing stuff. I mean, pretty soon the translation software is going to be phenomenal. It's probably a matter of a couple of years off, so I'm not all that worried about that at this point. What I'm worried about is producing the absolute best content while I can hold onto the skill sets, because a lot of it is like Latin. They're dead languages visually, but they are so beneficial to training that people aren't really getting it. You know? If you learn Latin, you can break down the derivative of almost any word and understand its meaning. Even though it's dead, it's incredibly useful.

DRAW!: You're trying to have your basic courses where people learn how to use charcoal, ink, watercolor, oils, gouache….

COMIC ART BOOTCAMP

the POWER of PAPER

by Mike Manley and Bret Blevins



Harley Quinn © DC Comics

Consequences. While teaching a recent class and helping a student struggle on an ambitious piece, I brought up consequences in regards to the creative process of executing the drawing they were engaged in, or any piece of art for that matter. The student was worried about the consequences of trying a certain technique which they had not tried before. But I told them it was fine to "mess it up," and you have to risk that on any work. It's a crucial step in an artist's growth to be sure, to accept the fact that it might go great or it might go poorly; either way you will learn a lot. Learning from the ruined or bad piece of art sounds completely wrong to a young artist, but an older artist realizes how true that fact is.

That class led me to thinking about how this idea of consequences is such a vital part of making any artwork. All art is a result of many choices, the final piece is the result many decisions by the artist along the way, sometimes thousands of them, building up like sediment. The Italians even have a word for it, *pentimento*. It's a term that describes a drawing or painting which shows the traces of previous work by the artist, showing where they have made changes on the work as they progressed.

We can sometimes learn as much or even more from our mistakes. I know I have. Mistakes and failure are as much a part of learning to draw or paint as falling and skinned knees are to learning to walk and eventually run. All young artists want to run with their heroes. Sometimes the false legs of the digital media can stunt or trip the young artist though.

The computer is becoming more and more dominant today as a tool, and a lot of great work is produced with it as a medium, just like oil or watercolor, etc. But I do see a downside in the digital ways of working for the younger developing artist. I feel it can have a weakening process on the core skills a young artist is forging for the battles ahead. I have seen how this can result in often a bad or weak drawing.

In this "Bootcamp" I want to concentrate on what I have often witnessed as a teacher and have often talked about with my fellow professionals (and many times with Bret over the phone). The digital wave has fully washed over the entire world, especially in the commercial fields. Every month it seems some new digital program or tablet, etc., is rolling out. This is not an anti-digital rant, but I feel the commercial world and schools often push the tech onto young artists before their foundations are solidly set. Drawing is thinking, and the tech can get in the way.

You can't deny the fact we all need to use and master the various programs and digital tools to stay afloat in the choppy waters of commercial art. As an example, when I started storyboarding in the late '90s, it was an all-paper process. The last show I actively boarded on was *Secret Saturdays*, and that was all done on paper. Now if I did storyboards I'd need to use Storyboard Pro and a Cintiq.

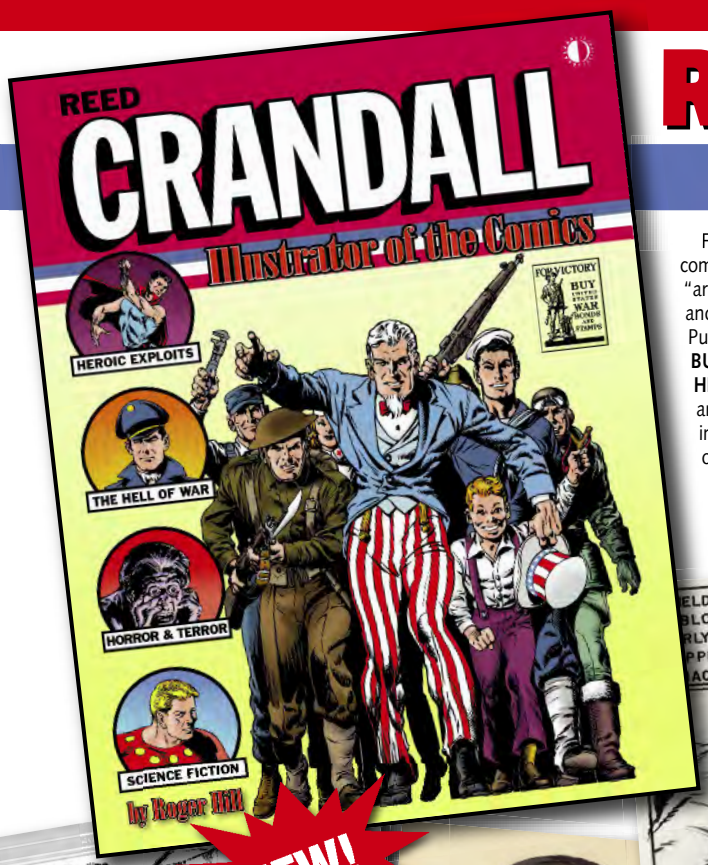
I have stood as a teacher and witnessed the consequences, the weakening effect of digital platforms in the development of a young artist's drawing skills. There is a seductive aspect

***Judge Parker* daily: Because of the nature of this strips, I did this all-digital. This helped with the diner interior. I drew that separately and the figures in each panel on different layers. I found an okay picture of an old diner and another of some state policemen, and pasted them together. This gave me scale for the other figures, and for the waitress in the second panel, which I also drew on a separate layer.**

Judge Parker © North America Syndicate, Inc.

REED CRANDALL

Illustrator of the Comics



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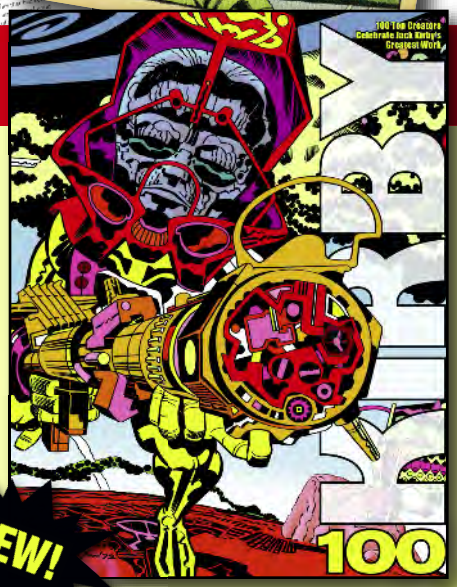

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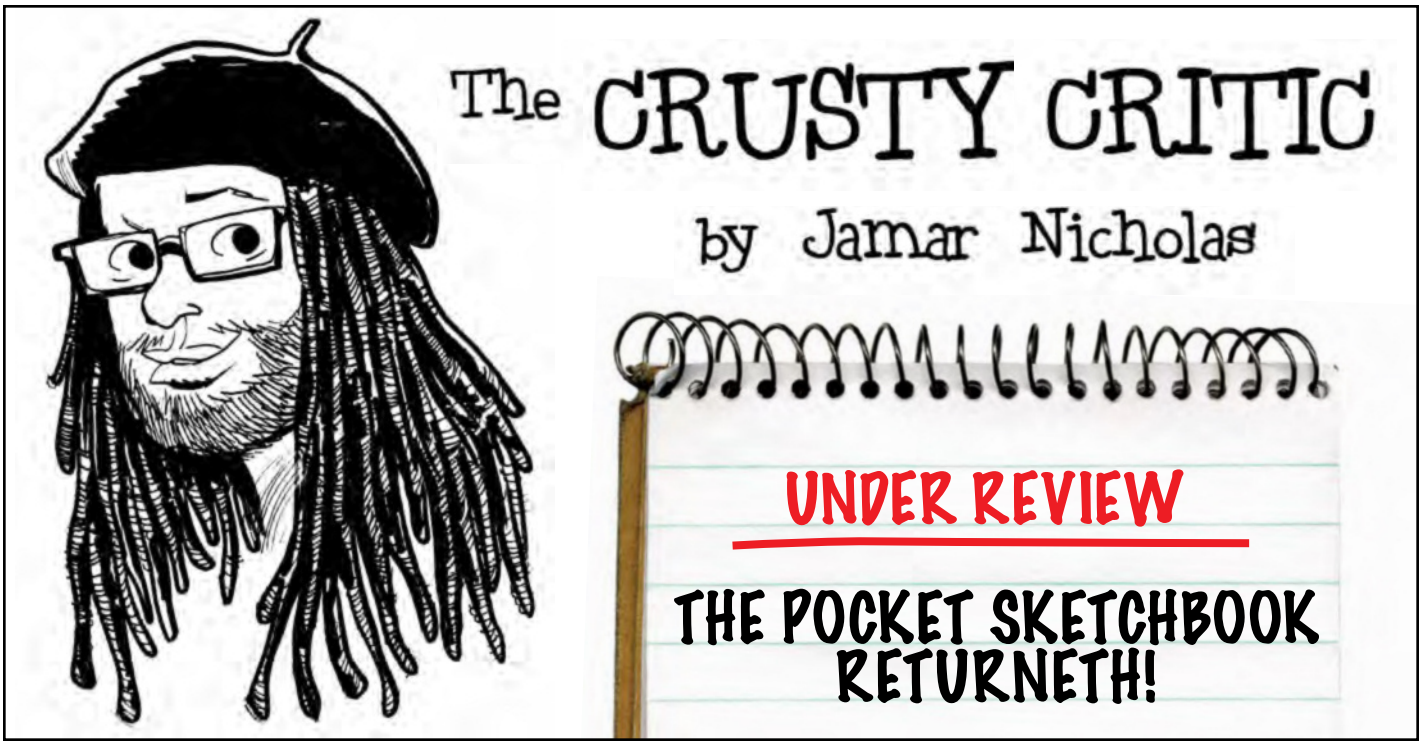

Hello again to all and sundry! It is your friendly neighborhood Crusty Critic, who is back from art war, your tired soldier-at-art-arms, here again to write you letters from the front lines. And as you know, my letters aren't a profession of my long-lost longing for my dearest Millicent. It's a war report on what this Crusty Colonel has witnessed during art reconnaissance. My mission is clear, dear *DRAW!* readers—to find the art supplies, tools, and hacks that will bring victory at your art table. *No supplies, no surrender!*

Jamar's Crusty Collection of pocket sketchbook's.

Ask any cartoonist, doodler, animator, or illustrator what they use to record creative musings, scribbles, or scrawls on, and you'll get a ton of different answers. Some like to keep notes on a project in very nice and expensive bound books, for ease in finding things when needed. Others reach for whatever is nearest, like the back of the cable bill envelope. Myself, I've had an ongoing love affair with pocket notebooks.

The accessibility of having something so close at hand (or at back pocket) makes it hard to pass up. How many of us have a lightning bolt of an idea and then forget it because we didn't write it down?

Now, living in an age where almost everyone has a cell-phone, it is a lot easier to jot a note down, but I'm just as quick to forget something because I'd rather draw it than type it—input is as important to capturing an idea as is the idea itself—so for me, the phone is out. I need something immediate, and nothing beats that than good old analog: paper and a writing tool.

Oh, what a time we live in! If you recall some of my earlier entries on pocket-sized sketchbooks, such as the JAWNS wallet/