

## An Interview with Scott Williams Part II

*In issue 63 of the CFA-APA, I published an interview I did with Scott Williams in 2004. The bulk of our discussion was about his comic art collecting habits and his appreciation of specific comic artists. What I left out, and what is included here in this second part, is our discussion about Scott's background, his influences and career as an inker, and some of the technical aspects of inking. At the time of this interview, Scott had just finished a very successful run with Jim Lee on Jeff Loeb's Batman story arc "Hush" (Batman 608-619) and had begun working with Jim and Brian Azzarello on Superman (Superman 204-215 – second series). The interview took place in Scott's La Jolla California office overlooking the Pacific Ocean...*

**Tony Marine:** So where were you born?

**Scott Williams:** Texas. I have no affiliation with Texas. Lubbock, Texas. I was a military brat, so moved around a lot. I didn't really set down roots until I was in my early teens.

**TM:** And you met Richard (Martines – fellow art collector) in Hawaii, right? How long were you there?

**SW:** Yeah. That was the first place that I... I was a military brat. I went to Texas and England and California and Florida, and we finally settled down in Hawaii. My dad retired there. So I got there when I was 12 years old, and stayed there till I was about 25. So comics got me hooked up with Richard. There was like a comic collectors club. This was way before original art ... it was all about collecting comics and stuff. We had similar interests. Comics and girls. Those were like our two main interests.

**TM:** Were you a big surfer?

**SW:** Not a big surfer. I surfed a lot. The first year there I surfed quite a bit and then just realized I didn't want to lug my board to and from the beach, so I did a lot more boogie boarding and body surfing. I did that right until I moved to San Diego. Now I very rarely go surfing.

**TM:** So what brought you here?

**SW:** Work. I knew my studio partner, Wilce Portacio, in high school. I met him; I was a senior and he was a freshman. The best artist I'd ever seen, especially for being a freshman.

**TM:** This was here?

**SW:** This was in Hawaii. His dad was in the Navy, he went to the same High School I did. I basically always latched onto the artists who were good. If I would take a drawing class or a life drawing class, there would always be like the vast majority of students and then there would be this one guy

**TM:** Yeah, there'd be one guy...

**SW:** There'd be one guy who was a stud, and I always went right to that guy and said, "Hi, I'm Scott." I'd strike up a conversation. I wanted to pick their brain, I wanted to watch them draw; it was what I was interested in. Most people, especially in high school in particular, take drawing classes as sort of like what they'd call their "free period." It was a slacker class. There were no midterms; there weren't final exams. You had to do some work but the teacher's not going to say "you suck, you can't draw," they just kind of grade you

if you put in some effort. I took it much more seriously, and so I always gravitated towards the better artists and Whilce was by far one of them.

**TM:** When did you start in the business?

**SW:** It really started off with a two-person studio, me and Whilce Portacio, because we were friends in high school. And then somewhere in the late 80's, we made friends with Jim and convinced him to come out to San Diego. So for a month or so, the studio was the upstairs loft in my condominium. And then we realized let's try to make it more of a business. So we went over to a two bedroom apartment, and rented that space, got an assistant, copy machine, and started to treat it like a real business, and then expanded it; brought in another artist, Joe Chiodo, and then it slowly kept snowballing and evolving into office space in Mira Mesa, and then finally when the Image stuff took off, we realized we need more space, and we kind of combined with Top Cow, Mark Silvestri's company. That was all part of Homage Studios. He made Top Cow; we were Homage Studios. Wildstorm kind of happened and we moved into here in about 93 and have been here ever since.

**TM:** When were you born?

**SW:** January 1960. The reason we were talking about Whilce is, he started working professionally in comics a little bit before me. Even though he was younger than me, he managed to get his first gig inking Arthur Adams on the first Longshot series.

**TM:** Oh, that was him? I remember that.

**SW:** I was trying to get my foot in door and was getting close but wasn't quite there. I asked if he needed some assistant help, and he did. He was living in San Diego at the time. He got here in 85. For about the first 6 months, I did some assistant work with him. I got my foot in the door, got introduced to some of his editors, some of the artists here, working at the time. Brent Anderson used to live in San Diego. I got to know him. I eventually hooked with him on an early series called Strikeforce Moraturi...

**TM:** I remember that.

**SW:** That was my first regular inking gig. The rest is history.

**TM:** So, getting that work, is that...you got it because you knew these guys?

**SW:** No. It helps to get your foot in the door, but you had to have skills.

**TM:** And how did you get the skills?

**SW:** I drew all the time. I drew for fun, I drew for purpose, I drew because I was a workaholic, I drew because it was something I had a passion for. I had no concept of...It never even occurred to me to that I should think in terms of "how much money can I make?" It was about doing the comics, and if they paid for it, that was really cool.

**TM:** So when you were doing all this stuff, were you doing comics? Were you actually doing panels and pages?

**SW:** Yeah, panels and pages. Drawing it and inking it.

**TM:** Yourself?

**SW:** Myself. Clearly, I'm definitely much better known for being an inker, but I had no intention. That wasn't even a thought. And Whilce was the same way, he got in thinking he was going to be penciling, but in the meantime, just to kind of hold him over until he kind of defined his style and had shaved off the rough edges, he would get some work with inking. Inking is a discipline that has its own rewards, from a collaborative standpoint, and it was something that I got into, just kind of sashayed into and just never left. Only because I was one of those lucky guys that always managed to hook up with someone who was really talented, whose work combined with my skills on top of them, tended to make for pieces of art that were better than something I could produce alone and vice versa. Two components creating something that was better than either individual component. And I like that sort of collaborative element.

**TM:** So when you were doing this early stuff even before you got hired, were you writing your own comics because it was fun to come up with your own comics or were you saying "this is going to be my portfolio some day"?

**SW:** It was going to be my portfolio. It was because it was fun. At a very early age, I knew that I was going to get into comics professionally so there was always that in the back of my mind, that if I'm going to draw...

**TM:** So the stuff you were doing, you were just making it up?

**SW:** Yeah. Some of the characters would be Marvel or DC characters, some of them would be some of my own creations, some of them would be like lyrics from record albums and turn it into some sort of a story, but it was mostly to get better, and to have something to show. And every single year, for years, I kept thinking, "OK, I'm good enough now, I should be able to find work," and of course I was never good enough.

**TM:** You'd go to (portfolio) reviews?

**SW:** I'd go to the reviews, and I couldn't figure out..."well, they're not understanding me, they're not getting me." (laughter) Of course I look at that stuff now, and I go, "God, I wouldn't have hired that guy either, not even close." Even now, I can look at it, and here's a young 22-year old who's got some talent, who's not there yet. But at that time, I'm thinking, I'm there. I've arrived. Why aren't you guys understanding me?

**TM:** So they hired you on as an inker?

**SW:** They hired me on as an inker.

**TM:** How did you feel about that?

**SW:** It was great. I was doing comics. I could care less.

**TM:** But you were saying in your head, "this is a stepping stone, eventually..."

**SW:** I never thought of it as being any sort of lesser job or being something that I had to hedge or say I'd really rather be

doing penciling, but in the meantime I'm inking. I was very happy just to be doing comics, because it was such a fulfillment of a dream.

**TM:** Beats work, right?

**SW:** Yeah! Exactly! I was getting paid for stuff that I was doing on my own anyway. Now, the realities are I'm married and I have kids and a mortgage and all that type of stuff. I do need to make money in order to maintain my family and do what's right by them, but for years, I kept thinking, "God, I would have done this anyway! They're paying me, and it's just like it's just gravy." So I guess you could say in some ways I'm maybe jaded now, but that's probably not the case. You do have a responsibility to take care of your family and to make paychecks, but in some ways it's still sort of like my hobby that people are paying me to do.

**TM:** When did you meet Jim?

**SW:** Well, I met him... Jim's first job was penciling Alpha Flight, and Jim's first inker was Whilce. Jim was not living here at the time, it might have been St. Louis, I can't remember. They basically got assigned. Carl Potts was the editor at the time at Marvel. Carl hired Jim, and said "I'm going to have Whilce Portacio ink you." They met, they got along o.k. At some point, Jim came out here just to kind of hang out with Whilce and see San Diego and I met him then. We struck up a relationship. I inked him a couple of times on some early Punisher's, and he liked what I was doing over Whilce, so it was kind of a mutual respect for what each of us was doing. Then Jim's stuff just kept getting better, and at that time,

at Marvel, the plumb job was getting X-men. He got a couple of issues of X-men and he asked me to ink him and it was something I wanted to do too. It's about not only doing your work, but trying to get on the better and better books, and the ones that you enjoyed.

**TM:** So Jim asked you to ink him?

**SW:** Specifically.

**TM:** So, he had a choice?

**SW:** Oh yeah, he had a choice. Because he wasn't coming on as a regular penciler, he was doing some fill-ins. So he had some latitude as far as asking for a specific guy. He asked for me and I did a couple of issues with him, and it wasn't too much longer that he got the regular gig and he asked me to come on board on that, and I did. We've been pretty much been working together every since.

**TM:** So that was fun, huh?

**SW:** Yeah.

**An assistant walks in and talks to Scott for a few moments, then leaves.**

**SW:** He helps me out with cleaning up pages, points out mistakes and stuff like that.

**TM:** Does he do any blacks for you?

**SW:** He would, and on rare occasions he does, but I tend to do all that stuff myself. I just tend to fill in the blacks as I go. I don't do the...

**TM:** Put x's in there...

**SW:** I don't do like outlines and then put an X in there. I actually make the black, because I don't keep the shape. (shows me a page from his work with Jim Lee and Brian Azzarello on Superman) It's like all the little blacks and stuff like that, they're never like the exact shape of the outline. I just go along with the side of the brush and just hit the stuff. At some places, it goes from line work gray into solid blacks, and it's easier for me to tell if I'm doing it right if I actually put the blacks in and then fade the line with the grays, to make it work.

**TM:** That's awesome.

**SW:** And it's easier for me in some ways, like you see the lines from the helicopter and the door, in some ways it's almost easier for me, rather than outlining the lines or doing it with white-out, I'll just fill in the blacks as I'm going, and create the white edge. I did a cover, that one I was telling you about over the weekend.

**TM:** Oh yeah, the deadline.

**SW:** Yeah. Wonder Woman and Superman...(shows me a kick-ass cover)

**TM:** That's awesome.

**SW:** ...and like all this type of stuff in here is all kind of abstract little shapes. It's just easier to do it on the fly, rather...

**TM:** Figuring out where to indicate the blacks...

**SW:** Yeah, than making lines and putting X's in them. I know that in some ways it is faster and more efficient to do it that way, but this stuff, the artwork is

so complex, that it's just faster. It's just the way I'm working right now. I've done it in the past, where I've left little lines and put little X's and then hand them off to an assistant to fill in the blacks, and the stuff tends to look flatter, it doesn't pop.

**TM:** What's "MB"? (written on the cover) What does it stand for?

**SW:** Michelangelo. It's based on the Pieta.

**TM:** Why the "B"?

**SW:** I don't know, is that his last name? Did Michelangelo have a last name?

**TM:** Maybe. I don't know.

**SW:** I was kind of wondering the same thing myself.

**TM:** Nothing's coming into my head...

**SW:** Did people have last names...??

**TM:** I think back then it was like whatever city you were from...

**SW:** It could be.

**TM:** I'll look it up for you (it's Buonarroti). That's awesome. What number is it? (the cover)

**SW:** That would be 210. It's the first solicitation that goes in the preview magazine and stuff, so that's like usually way ahead. The issue that just came out was #206, and that just came out this last week, and I'm working on #208, and that's #210 (the cover in question).

**TM:** Beautiful.

**SW:** Thanks.

**SW:** What do you think of the Superman storyline? Have you read it?

**TM:** I've only read one or two issues. I wasn't in love with it. I didn't like his...he did what, Batman last before that? I didn't like that either.

**SW:** Between you and me, it's not floating my boat either, but I'm withholding judgment until I read the last issue. I want to see how it gets going. There's more stuff happening...you'll like this (he pulls out more art). Here's a really cool double page spread I got today. It's got like Aquaman...

**TM:** Oh wow.

**SW:** Later on in the issue we get into some Avenger kind of a thing, some JLA stuff, and it's pretty cool. So it's kind of like, visually and action-wise it's picking up. It has some cool stuff happening.

**TM:** I think, well, he's popular right? Maybe I didn't get it the first time around; I'll re-read it and see, give it another shot. Like Dark Knight 2, when that came out, I was like...

**SW:** The second one?

**TM:** Yeah.

**SW:** Oh, I can't read that. I got maybe about a third of the way through the first issue, and I gave up. And I was a huge Dark Knight fan, the first one.

**TM:** Me too.

**SW:** I'll never read it. It didn't look good. It looked horrible.

**TM:** So early on, who were your influences?

**SW:** From an inking standpoint, it was all the guys that were doing work as I was trying to hone my craft and become a professional - Terry Austin and Klaus Janson and Joe Rubenstein, and all the guys who were doing the good work in the late 70's and early 80's. That was the time that, any comic that I picked up, I was looking and trying to dissect and pick apart, and try to figure out what was working. And that was at the time when the fan press started to come on a little bit more, and I'd read interviews with the guys, and so they were becoming sort of you know my... they weren't my peers, they were the generation prior to that, they were the ones that were getting the good gigs, and I was trying to figure out what it was that they were doing that was landing them the good gigs. If you looked at their work over a collective period of time, you realized the one thing they all had in common, is they never did a bad job. There were some artists who could pony up everything that they had and do the occasional good job, but they couldn't do it consistently. Especially a guy like Terry Austin, every job he did was consistent. Every single job he did was absolutely consistent. There was never...If you look through his run on X-men, it's really hard to find an issue where it's like, "oh man, Terry took this issue off - he still inked it, but you can tell he hacked it out". I'm sure there are a lot of pages that he's more proud of than others, and you can nitpick stuff, but basically it was totally and always consistently...

**TM:** Another inker, since you were talking about it, mentioned to me that he wasn't really crazy about Austin inking Byrne on that stuff. I liked it. I liked the stuff, but I like Rubenstein better on Byrne. I like Byrne on Byrne even better.

**SW:** Yeah, yeah.

**TM:** You like Terry's inking on Byrne?

**SW:** Yeah, but I thought the work that Rubenstein did on Captain America was brilliant, the stuff was killer, but it was very different. The one thing about Terry Austin and Byrne is that it's not just that in a vacuum, it was that it was just one of those magical little comic book times where you had the writer and the artist and the inker all doing some of the best work of their career at the same time, and that was a long sustained run. In today's comics it's hard to imagine that for a good 3 years, 4 years, however long they were doing the book. From Issue 108 to, what was it, 141? That's a long, solid run of good stories, character development, these guys building on what Chris and Dave had done on their initial run on X-men. So I don't think... I think a lot of people like the Byrne/Austin stuff, not just because it's Byrne/Austin, but because of what it came on in the series that it had, and the character development and the story lines which that had like 3 or 4 clearly classified as classic story lines within that 3 or 4 year story arc. If Byrne and Rubenstein had been together for a longer period of time... because I think they only did what, 7 issues of Captain America?

**TM:** I don't even know.

**SW:** It's a good little chunk of work, and they did really good work together, but it's not that long epic run. Byrne on Byrne, right after X-men, was great stuff...

**TM:** For a while...

**SW:** ...and arguably, as good as anything that Byrne and Austin did, but because the Byrne/Austin stuff made such an impression on people, it was always going to be measured, and it was always going to be compared to the Byrne/Austin stuff. It was a little different, a little funkier, and it had an organic quality to it, and it was a little more open, there was the perception that there was a little less detail...

**TM:** I liked it better because I thought it was pretty detailed still...

**SW:** It was.

**TM:** ...and I think Byrne was a better penciler a few years later

**SW:** He probably was. I think I would agree, that Byrne was a better penciler...

**TM:** And he's a good inker.

**SW:** Byrne at his best is a damn good inker. And I'm a big proponent of pencilers inking... it's funny, me saying this because I'm an inker and I count on and depend on pencilers needing somebody else to come in and pick up the inking chores. But virtually all the best pencilers, all look best when they ink themselves.

**TM:** Like Neal Adams for example.

**SW:** Like Neal Adams. In my opinion, Jim Lee looks best when he inks himself.

**TM:** Really?

**SW:** It's not as polished, it's not as slick, but there's a purity that happens with ... I can just go down the list - John Buscema, Berni Wrightson, Barry Smith, Neal Adams, Frank Miller, and I'm a huge Klaus fan. Huge. If you want to talk about inking gods, Klaus is my inking god.

**TM:** Yeah, huh?

**SW:** He's the one guy. If I had to narrow it down to one guy, Klaus...but I still prefer Frank on Frank. There's a purity that happens. It's like when you and I were talking about Tom Palmer inking Neal Adams, Tom Palmer was the most polished inker who could bring greatness to Neal's pencil, but Neal inking Neal on throwaway elements, with just a few little flicks of his pen, got a purity and a structure that's... you look at it, and you just go "it's Neal". Whereas with Tom Palmer's stuff, it looks great, but then you kind of look at it, and it's like "well, this is really Palmer here, and this is kind of Neal here." Neal on Neal is just pure. That's just the word I keep going back to, there's just a purity to it, and virtually any artist, I can't think of a single artist...and some artists who ink themselves, their inks are really horrible, they're crude, they're really bad inks, but there's a purity to it that I really like and really respond to. There is an eye candy effect that happens when Terry Austin inks John Byrne, but there's a purity that gets lost a little bit.

**TM:** When you started out, did you try to emulate someone's style?

**SW:** Klaus. There's a relationship between Klaus and one of my favorite artists, Neal Adams, because Klaus started off as Dick Giordano's assistant. And Klaus in his early days had a lot of Neal in him, a lot of Dick Giordano in him. So as a kid, being a huge Neal Adams fan, it was a logical progression. If you see early Klaus inking guys, especially like Gil Kane...

**TM:** On what stuff?

**SW:** Oh, some of the early Daredevils that Gil Kane did. There was a giant size Defenders that Klaus inked over Gil Kane, and there was a "What If?" issue that Klaus inked over Gil Kane. I was always a big fan of Gil's stuff, but it was interesting seeing a Neal and Dick protégé' ink Gil. He brought a little something extra to the table. You have at least one of the Camine Infantino/Klaus Janson originals.

**TM:** I love it. It's one of my favorites.

**SW:** That's just like maybe six months after some of that Gil Kane stuff.

**TM:** Yeah? I don't really see a Giordano/Adams...

**SW:** It's there...That's a few years into Klaus's professional career. If you go back a couple of years earlier, when he's inking Gil Kane, it's really Dick Giordano-ish. But it's Dick Giordano ala Neal Adams. Because Dick started off not looking like Neal's inks, but obviously absorbed some of the Nealisms. So early Klaus is like late Dick, which is a lot like Neal. (laughter) So



long story short: Klaus was somebody that I could kind of come into, it was a comfortable fit for me, because I was such a Neal fan, but then I was able to watch Klaus evolve into something that looked nothing like Dick or Neal or anybody else. He kind of evolved into his own style, and it was such a ballsy, gutsy approach. And it just so happened too that eventually he also hooked up with one of my favorite pencilers, Frank Miller, for very different reasons. Neal, it's pretty, it just looks pretty. The characters are ... the women are gorgeous, the men are hunky hunks, (laughter) they're very rugged and handsome, and they've got chest hair. But then you've got Frank Miller, whose stuff is kind of off-putting in sort of its starkness, and it doesn't have that aesthetic prettiness to it, but the story telling is top notch, and he was doing a run on Daredevil that was very much unlike anything I'd ever read. So that made a huge impression, so I was able to kind of go from the Klaus/Neal/Dick Giordano type stuff, and then get into the Frank Miller storytelling angle, but also watch Klaus's inks evolve and become so gutsy that it was a revelation.

**TM:** When did you think that you'd developed your own style?

**SW:** It took a couple of years. I was doing professional work. I started off looking very much like Whilce's ink style, because Whilce was a big Neal Adams fan too, so we both kind of came from the same place, and then Whilce was the first guy that I watched ink professionally and watched how he laid down the line, and watched what his approach was, and also both of us were thinking that Klaus and Terry Austin were sort of like the top inkers of that

day, and we really wanted to try to work our way up to the point where we were top inkers too, so they were as good a target as any to try to match. So we'd discuss it, we'd talk about it, we'd do our work and critique each other, and go through a process of trying to dissect each other's work. So we were coming from the same place, we were watching each other work; we were feeding off each other. My stuff for a year or two looked very much like Whilce, and then depending on the penciler, I would kind of start going off onto my own thing, so I would say three or four years into being an established pro, I started going off into my own direction.

**TM:** What were you doing at that time? Do you remember?

**SW:** I think some of the first stuff where I was really developing a style of my own, ironically, might have been when I started inking Whilce on Punisher. He'd gone off and started doing pencil work. I started inking him and took his pencil work and used it as a launch point to start experimenting with my ink style. And I could do that with him because he knew me, trusted me, and he was willing to let me try some things. Whereas before that I felt like my job was to just be the inker, stay back, don't make a lot of noise, get the work done, get it done on time, make it look as good as I could, but not to impose any of my personality into the inks. Whilce knew me well enough, we were coming from the same place, that he trusted me to experiment on his...it took a lot of courage for him to let me kind of find my voice on his work. That was probably where it began. I inked some stuff over Mark Texiera, where I came up with a few ciphers; a few

different original bits that I was able to pull out and make work, and then it evolved inking Jim.

**TM:** How would you define your style?

**SW:** I don't know. Me at my best is controlled chaos... I tend not to like stuff that looks real canned. I want the stuff to look effortless, even if it's really meticulous, a lot of detail, precision, I want it to look as if it came off my brush or my pen in one stroke. I don't want it to look like I had to carve out the line, or I had to come up with a series of lines through a tedious effort. I want it to look as if it just flowed. Sometimes it can still look very controlled, and very precise, but I want to try to straddle the line where it looks, where there's an energy to it. I like balance. I like energy. And a lot of what Klaus was doing in his prime was like that, where he had these really clean, slick lines but they were very bold, you can tell he just laid down the pen, laid down the brush, one stroke, boom. There would be a calf or a bicep, and it was like one line, but it was a perfect line. You could just tell he nailed it with the very first stroke. That's what I want to do with all the stuff I do. Everything I do. And sometimes I don't. Sometimes I do have to work the line, I actually do have to make a couple of passes in order to make it look right, but if I do that I try to camouflage it, make it look as if I did it in one pass. That tends to keep the stuff looking spontaneous and fresh, even if it's under control, even if it's tight. Bill Sienkiewicz is another guy whose work I really admire.

**TM:** He's awesome.

**SW:** I love the energy, and he takes way more chances than I do. I took a few

chances on some of the Batman stuff; it's a little edgier than some of the more high-techy looking stuff. But a lot of the more high-techy looking stuff was done for a reason. When we did X-men, which was the first time I tried doing very controlled type stuff, both Jim and I were harkening back to the Byrne/Austin stuff. We both wanted a very kind of science-fiction-y, high-tech looking team book, and I would bring my inking sensibilities to it in such a way that it was harkening back to Terry Austin; very controlled, very tight. That's not my instinctive style. My instinctive style is much more Sienkiewicz-y, much more Klaus-y, but over the years we evolved that style with the X-men, and that's kind of what people wanted and that's kind of like the series we were doing. Fantastic Four, Divine Right, it just became very polished and very slick, very kind of Terry Austin. If you had Klaus on one side, and Terry Austin on the other side, we definitely were, as far as my work goes, it was definitely leaning much more towards Terry. My natural inclination was more on the Klaus side. I kind of brought a little bit of that to the Batman stuff, and it's still kind of hanging in there a little bit with the Superman stuff, although character-wise, he's probably more in the high tech camp. Metropolis is not the gritty Gotham City. Gotham City was a lot of shadows, a lot of textures, a lot of splatter, a lot of those things that you think of as being a little edgier, darker, more noir, that's what the Batman stuff had.

**TM:** So you had more freedom on that?

**SW:** I had a lot more freedom; it was a lot of fun. The Superman stuff is fun, but it's kind of a different kind of a way.

In some ways it's a bit of a step back. I would prefer going and keeping the edgier stuff, which we're kind of trying to do, but...

**TM:** It's hard, on this character.

**SW:** It doesn't fit this character quite as well.

**TM:** So where do you think it would fit, what would you like to do and go in that direction?

**SW:** I'd go back to do Batman again. I was a huge Batman fan anyway, of all the DC characters; I was a huge Batman fan anyways. Jim is one of the more perfect Batman artists ever.

**TM:** Yeah, he is.

**SW:** It's probably hyperbole, and I think I'd probably get a lot of people disagreeing with me - a lot of people would say Jim was born to draw X-men. I now am a firm believer Jim was born to draw Batman.

**TM:** I like his Batman stuff better.

**SW:** In fact, just today, I got scans from him from Italy from this issue of Superman that has a whole sequence with Batman and the JLA, and his Batman has never looked better.

**TM:** Are you going to try to incorporate some of that in the inks?

**SW:** Probably. I don't think, within a concept or within an approach that you've taken on a book, you can't go way off in a different direction for a single character, for a single segment of a story line, you have to stay within the

parameters of what you've already established. But I don't think it's going to be... The Batman and the Superman in this issue of Superman will look recognizable to the people, who saw Hush and liked that Batman. It'll be very recognizable. It's just his take on Batman; he just came up with a very iconic version. And his two biggest influences are Neal Adams and John Byrne, so there's an obvious attraction that I have because they are two of my favorite guys, too. So it's very easy for me to like. Trust me, I've talked to some art collectors, whose opinion I respect enormously, who couldn't stand what Jim did on Batman.

**TM:** Really?

**SW:** They saw it as either maybe a poor man's Frank Miller, or they just flat out didn't get it. It had nothing to do with the original art, or any of that. It's just literally his interpretation of Batman. They didn't get it. Too busy, too posey...

**TM:** I loved it man...that was some good stuff.

**SW:** That's what I mean - everybody's got their own little taste, and predilections...and interests. It's hard for me to think of any artist whose appeal is absolutely universal. There are some artists whose appeal is more widespread than others, but nobody's universal, there's always going to be somebody who thinks that this guy is the best and there's always going to be somebody who thinks that same guy is like the worst.

**TM:** I haven't heard any negative things about your stuff yet.

**SW:** I have. Which is good because it keeps me thinking. It keeps me thinking that I'll never please everybody. It keeps me grounded. I'll never please everybody. There's always gonna' be stuff I'm gonna'...it keeps me always trying to think in terms of how I can get better. It's like "o.k., they didn't like this. What can I do to get them?" I've already got...these guys are in my camp already, they like what Jim's doing, they like what I'm doing. I've got them, now what did this guy not like? I want to try to figure that out. Let's keep pleasing these guys over here who are already in my camp, but I want to please this guy. I want to get everybody in my camp and it's never going to happen but the ultimate goal is to get everybody to like what I'm doing. If I was just doing art for myself, I wouldn't care what anybody says, but I'm doing art as a commercial medium. I want everybody to like it. Not everybody's going to like it; I'm very realistic about that...

**TM:** It's like pop music.

**SW:** Yup. It's like pop music. It's absolutely like pop music.

**TM:** When I think of the 90's, the art style of the 90's, I think people saw what you were doing early on and took that and ran with it.

**SW:** Actually in some ways it's probably derided now. It took me a while to realize that it probably does have a very distinct time attached to the look of it. Whether you call it the Image style or whatever, it definitely looks like it's from a particular period. Anybody whose work is viewed by the masses over a period of time, they're always going to have a period of work where

they're not real proud of it. It's not because they weren't doing there best but because they tend to evolve. There's stuff from the early 90's that I still really like, and there's stuff that is kind of embarrassing.

**TM:** My point was that you influenced a lot of people.

**SW:** That whole school. It wasn't just me, but probably because I was on some of the more bigger profile books. If you had to sort of synthesize it down, in much the same way we, from an inking standpoint, we talked about Terry and Klaus and Rubenstein during their period, those are the guys that everybody tended to mention of that period and probably that early 90's period, my name is probably one of the ones that would be mentioned.

**TM:** Definitely.

**SW:** There's reality to that.

**TM:** Do you like it? How do you feel about that?

**SW:** It depends on if the people who are mentioning it are coming from a positive standpoint or a negative standpoint.

**TM:** Not the critique of your art, but the fact that so many people wanted to draw the way you did, the way you and Jim...

**SW:** I took it as the biggest compliment. It's two things, when there was a lot of stuff coming out that looked a lot like what we were doing, it was kind of annoying in that I kept thinking, "can't you guys come up with something on your own?" But I understood the commercial reality and some of it was

imposed. Some of it was editorially imposed. It was “X-men or Wildacts that Jim and Scott are doing are the best selling comics. We want to sell lots of comics too, so will you please make your stuff look like theirs?” So it wasn’t always...

**TM:** That’s been around forever.

**SW:** Yeah, it has been around forever and that’s the way it is. There were artists whose stuff, who had been around for a long time, who looked nothing like the work that I did or the work that Jim did, who started looking like us. That was when it was getting kind of weird, almost creepy. But on the other hand, it’s a compliment. Whether it comes from a good place or a bad place, it was a compliment in that, that’s what people saw as being where the medium was at that time. At the same time, just like we were talking about pop music, stuff that burns really hot tends to burn for a very short amount of time. So I was always worried that we were going to be so yesterday’s news in such a short amount of time (laughter).

**TM:** Right, you’re fired!

**SW:** Yeah, cause it kinda’ took on almost cartoonish proportions of all the different people that were trying their hand at the style that we’d come up with that it made me nervous. It made me nervous to the point that, at the time we were probably at our height, at our most popular point in the early, early 90’s, and people were staring to pick up on it and do it in their own comics, I was telling Jim we’ve got to come up with something different. Otherwise it’s going to be like this cycle where they’re borrowing from us but we’re sort of

feeding it and probably borrowing from them...I wanted to stay ahead of the curve. We didn’t do that as much as I would have liked and it took us a while. In some ways I actually think Batman was probably sort of the final breakout. I don’t think the Batman stuff, to me, looks like the whole 90’s Image stuff. It doesn’t look like that to me...

**TM:** No. There’s definitely...

**SW:** I see it different. I see a difference in Jim’s approach and there was a difference in my approach. You can still see it’s Jim, and you can still see it’s me. There are the telltale things that will probably never change, but in my mind, for what it’s worth, it looks different. But you’re talking 10, 11, 12 years later so it took a while for us to figure out what we wanted to do, but it was different.

**TM:** How much freedom do you think today’s inkers have, including you?

**SW:** They have less than they used to.

**TM:** Yeah, compared to...

**SW:** Because of the pencilers um...

**TM:** Being so detailed.

**SW:** They tend to be detailed and very tight and I don’t think they understand that the nature of penciling and inking is a collaborative endeavor. They basically see the inker, for the most part, as basically doing nothing more than making their artwork camera ready but within the confines of the vision of the pencil artist. They don’t particularly like the inker bringing his take or his personality to the table, which is why

you're starting to see a little bit more of the computer inking, the darkening, which is strange because nobody thinks it looks good. Nobody likes it! I suppose there are some cost benefits but nobody likes it but it's a way for them to have...if they're not willing to ink it themselves, and very often they're not willing to ink it themselves, it's a way for them to have a lot of control over their artwork.

**TM:** Are there any inkers today that you think do still bring a lot, that get away with it? Basically imposing their ideas on...

**SW:** It's hard to say because so many...I don't get to see what the stuff looked like before. I don't get to see as much as... I tend to see so much relatively tight pencil work that it's really hard to say if there are a lot of inkers who, either are or can or are willing to bring their personality to it.

**TM:** Do you think the electronic darkening is going to ever replace inkers?

**SW:** I hope not. I don't know of anybody who wants that to happen except the few pencilers who seem to be using it these days. There are some inkers who have a distinctive style and occasionally are put together with at penciler who can accept that style. Actually, I thought one of the more interesting looking, talk about the old Image style of art, Mark Silvestri's recent run on X-men I thought was a very nice looking run. It was only 4 issues.

**TM:** Who inked him?

**SW:** It was mostly Joe Weems. Matt Banning inked some of the first issue and both their takes were real nice. Mark is a lot like Jim. They're probably 2 of the most inker friendly artists there are in that they put a lot of information in their art, but there's wiggle room for the inker. An inker can actually do a lot of different levels of interpretation and have the stuff still look nice, have it still look like the pencil artist, whether it's Mark or Jim, but there is enough room for the inker to come to the table and bring something that expresses them. On the first issue of Marks X-men run there were 2 inkers, there was Matt and Joe Weems, and both of them look different but they both look great and it still looked like Mark after all was said and done. So it is possible, it does happen and it can happen but it does seem to be much more rare. The artwork that I read as a kid back in the 60's and 70's, that stuff, there was always a different look depending on who inked it.

**TM:** It was a collaboration.

**SW:** You could have one penciler over a 5 year period with all these different inkers and each job would look very different from the other because the pencils were much looser and a lot more of the burden went to the inker to bring something to the table and it's much less the case today.

**TM:** How much freedom do you have with Jim's stuff?

**SW:** A lot, a lot. He can range from very, very tight pencils to pretty loose pencils, but even the tightest pencils, he trusts me to do what I want to do and on the loosest pencils all of the necessary

information is there from a structural standpoint but I have a lot of freedom as far as line weights and textures and just sort of the general look. Part of the reason I've worked with Jim this long...part of it is some of the more high profile better paying and better received gigs in comics but part of it is because his stuff is so good and he gives me the type of pencils that most inkers would like which is very complete but a lot of room for you to put your own stamp on.

**TM:** Does he ever want somebody else inking just to have somebody else inking...

**SW:** Probably. Sometimes he'll ink himself and I like it when he does. When he inks himself now I make photocopies of what he does and I then try to pick it apart. I can't ink like him because he's a lot like the Klaus's and the Sienkiewicz's of the world in that he's very much more raw, his stuff is very gutsy. I joke with him that he could actually ink with a rusty nail and it'll look cool, it'll have a much more visceral appeal to it. My stuff is much slicker than his, and I aspire to become more raw.

**TM:** Don't you think that's just a byproduct of you being an inker?

**SW:** Yeah, it's because I'm so comfortable with the tools that I've learned how to make the lines in such a way that it's really, really clean. Part of it too is, if he wants the stuff really raw, he'll ink it himself. He's done some books and some series and the occasional special project where he's got a very specific vision in his mind and he knows that if I do it I'll clean it up too much. Even though I don't want to, It's

just the way I...I sort of can't help it in some ways. In some ways he took a chance with me on Batman. I think if he'd have inked his own Batman, I think it would have looked kicked ass. It would have looked a little different but it would have looked really good and I think I was able to surprise him in that I was able to stay within the confines of how I approach it but still add a some grit and some texture to it and I think he was pretty happy with that.

**TM:** What do you think his best quality is as a penciler?

**SW:** His ability to draw everything. He's got so much mileage that he... He's a smart guy. If there's something he doesn't know how to draw, he knows how to find the proper reference for it but he's got such a huge visual vocabulary already built into his brain and into his base of talent that he can just draw this stuff and make It look effortless in the same way that I always talk about wanting to have my inks look effortless, he approaches drawing in an effortless way. He works at a different pace than other artists too in that he's very productive, he can work very fast and yet the quality never diminishes. It's not like if he gets rushed his stuff starts to get kind of stiff and stinky, it stays at a really high level.

**TM:** What's your best quality as an inker?

**SW:** Uh...professionalism probably. I would like to say that it's because of the actual line that I put down or the look of the stuff, I think it's o.k., but I think it's combined with the fact that I'm a very hard worker. No book has ever been late or missed shipping because of anything

I've ever done. I've never missed a deadline. I work weekends and holidays and whatever the job calls for, I do it and for the most part, keep it at...it's that thing in the back of my mind again about - "when did Terry ever take an issue off?" I've got many, many pages and pieces that I've done that I'm not happy with but I think for the most part it always stays at pretty high professional level. There are very few pieces of art where you can tell I was completely out of gas, had nothing to give and was just getting the job done. For the most part, everything is at a very professional level so that's the bare minimum and the fact that I'm professional about getting stuff done on time and keeping up with a guy that can work at Jim's pace. Jim's stuff is very complex, it's very detailed and there are certain artists who would not be willing to compromise. They'd have to spend a week on a page to make it look just right and I'm realistic enough to say I can't spend a week on a page, I can only spend a day on a page and I'll make it look as good as I can but then at the end of the day, it's a publishing venture and stuff has to come out on time and it'll be good enough.

**TM:** Are you still pushing yourself as an inker or are you comfortable enough with your style where you...

**SW:** I pushed myself on the Batman stuff very hard as an inker a lot. Very hard and tried to hit some different notes, but I had the time to do that more than I do on Superman and it...

**TM:** Why?

**SW:** Because we actually had a built in deadline. Jim, I think, had penciled damn near 7 or 8 issues before the first

issue had even come out. He was way ahead and his ability to be that far ahead meant I was way ahead as well and I was able to really experiment and take the time to try to figure some things out.

**TM:** So you do about a page a day?

**SW:** Roughly, yeah.

**TM:** And on that stuff you took...

**SW:** It depended. The speed was not the issue on Batman. It was at the end. At the end we pretty much lost all of our lead-time and by the last issue we were cranking some pages out, speed became an issue. For the most part it was about hitting the right note for the character and the storyline and trying really hard to stay within the confines in what other people wanted to see in our art but also try to hit a different note, a different beat, a different look and try to straddle that line. On the Batman stuff I was able to do that, on the Superman stuff it's been way too close to the publication date for me to try to be as creative as I would like to so I'm falling back into older ruts so I don't see Superman as creative as Batman. I think there's still some good stuff we're doing but it's not as creatively satisfying for me right now at this point.

**TM:** I think I know the answer, but is Batman your best stuff?

**SW:** Yeah. It's Jim's best stuff. Probably, it's my best stuff because it's Jim's best stuff. As an inker, I don't work in a vacuum. A lot of the stuff that I'm the most proud of, some of it is because of what I do, but a lot of it is because of what Jim gave me as the jumping off point. In my opinion,



there's no question that Batman is the best work of Jim's career. It afforded me the luxury of having the time to do my best work as well but you had to have both components. If I had been doing my best work but over some of Jim's crumbiest stuff, I don't know if I would have been as happy with it, so it was the combination of the two things but there's no question in my mind that it's the best stuff.

**TM:** Do you have specific inking goals for yourself for the future?

**SW:** Uh...no. Right now...If I had the time to sit and think about it I probably would but for now it's more of survival. What I mean by that is, because I'm older and I don't have the stamina that I used to have and I have a wife and 2 kids, part of what I do is survival. It's doing the best work that I can in the very short amount of time that I have but also being able to have some sort of a life outside of the work so it's not the goal that you're thinking of or that you would expect. Right now, especially on Superman, we got a little bit of a later start on it, my goal is just to kind of survive, do good work on it and live to fight another day. (laughter)

**TM:** Do you know what you're doing next after this?

**SW:** I know what we're going to do but we can't...

**TM:** Top secret?

**SW:** Yeah. Can't get into it.

**(Turns out it was Frank Miller's Batman run)**

**TM:** You feel pressure doing the high profile characters?

**SW:** Yeah.

**TM:** Everyone's watching kind of a thing?

**SW:** Yeah, but it's not...It's more the pressure to not feel like... Let me put it this way – because I'm a comic fan, I know that my favorite artists, even the ones that I really like, if I keep seeing the same thing from them month in and month out, year in and year out, at some point I get burned out on it. So in other words, they're still doing great work but it's like o.k., I've been there and I've seen that. I know for a fact that people were tired, burned out on what I was doing, and/or what Jim and I were doing probably up until the point of Batman. There'd been such a steady stream of stuff that, to me, looked pretty much the same. It was good, it was competent and very high level stuff but after the 12<sup>th</sup> issue or the 15<sup>th</sup> issue or the 30<sup>th</sup> issue of kind of the same looking stuff, the new fans, people who hadn't seen the stuff before, it probably looked great to them and fresh and interesting and stuff but if you've been following our career for very long, at some point you go o.k., I've kind of been there, done that. I have no doubt there's still some of that you know with Batman and moving into Superman, there's still people who follow our stuff for a while and they're going o.k. I think I've probably seen about as much of Jim and Scott's stuff as I care to. That attrition is always going to happen.

**TM:** I never got that feeling reading Batman. I really liked it a lot. It was

enjoyable to see every single issue come out. There was a lot to see.

**SW:** I felt that way too only because I really think that Jim raised his game quite a bit. It wasn't the perfect story, but it was a fun story. It was told in 12 issues, we kind of knew going in it was this 12 issue story – read it and you either have fun with it or you don't but you know you're going to get what you're going to get within those 12 issues and so I think as a kind of a chunk of work it worked pretty well. It didn't please everybody, it's not all gonna' please me, but for the most part it was a nice little chunk of work and so I think it was a plus. I guarantee that if we had approached Batman with the exact same story in the same style that we'd done up to that point, I don't think it would have had the same impact. I think we did take a little bit of a chance on a few new things and I think it helped; it kept things a little fresher.

**TM:** Do you have any interest in penciling anymore?

**SW:** Yeah.

**TM:** Will you ever?

**SW:** I keep thinking I will but I keep getting offered good inking gigs that I have a hard time turning down. You know, inking Jim on Batman is like...not bad...

**TM:** I know!

**SW:** ...or even Superman.

**TM:** So let's see, we were talking about Neal Adams... Are there any

similarities between his style of inking and yours?

**SW:** On rare occasions...and...

**TM:** What are those?

**SW:** Oh, it's little things. It's literally little technical things. Little feathering techniques...um...little...there's a way that Neal does mouths on his male figures – the upper lips that sometimes aren't in...especially like, say if I'm inking Jim – they're not in Jim's pencils and I put them in cause they make it look a little more "Neal-y"...You know, I pop that kind of stuff in...

**TM:** You talking about like when he's kinda got his head up a little bit, you can see the...

**SW:** Yeah, just kind of the...there's actually...I don't even know what it's called. There's like actual musculature that's right underneath the lips that creates a ridge and there's a job that Neal did...I think you and I talked about it once...the old Dracula Lives magazine. It's the second issue, there's about a 12 page Adams story that is penciled and inked by Neal with washes and is probably my favorite Neal job ever.

**TM:** Really?

**SW:** It's just gorgeous. And there's a couple of shots that to me have sort of like the iconic Neal faces and there sort of etched into my brain. Certain rendering techniques that Neal used in that, that every once in a while if I can find a little spot to use it, I'll pull it out and use it on some of that stuff. And

when I say pull it out I don't have to like pull it out, it's in my head.

**TM:** Right, right.

**SW:** So I put it in some of the jobs that I ink. And hair. You know certain ways that Neal would do flowing hair and dark hair and certain dry brush techniques. You know, some of it I get from Neal some of it I get from all kinds of other artists. Actually, the funny thing is, the one time I tried the most to ink like Neal was when I inked him on the X-men/Wildcats cover.

**TM:** That's what I was going to ask you next. Is that the only time you inked him?

**SW:** That's the only time that I inked him professionally. I tried inking him on you know, overlays and you know got some pencils and tried kinda' just messing around and stuff. It's really hard to ink Neal and do a really good job. I tried really hard to... Unfortunately, I didn't have a lot of time to ink that cover but before I did, the day before, I pulled out some of my favorite ink jobs...

**TM:** Sure.

**SW:** ...and I was trying to look at the pencils I got from Neal and looked at how he inked back in the day and tried to see if I could figure out how to approach it and I wasn't very successful. It was...a real mixed bag. There's some stuff that's o.k. and then some stuff that's really painful for me to look at on that ink job.

**TM:** I heard Neal liked it though, didn't he?

**SW:** He seemed to like it o.k. Yeah, he was very, you know... I figure, of all the people that I can think of, Neal would be one of those guys that if he didn't like it, he'd tell me, he'd let me know.

**TM:** Right, right.

**SW:** Cause it wasn't you know, it wasn't any sort of favor or cherry job that got me to ink it. It was business and if he wouldn't have liked it he would have said "thanks for the effort, it sucks, but you know at least it's professional". He would have told me. In fact I even asked him, look, would you allow me to purchase it from you and he said no, I really want to keep it, I'm going to pass it on. So I think it's staying...if it's staying within the Neal Adams estate then I think that's probably some level of praise involved there so I take comfort in that.

**TM:** Had he ever criticized your work before? Made a mention of it that you're aware of?

**SW:** Has he ever criticized my work?

**TM:** Yeah, I mean has he ever said anything good or bad?

**SW:** The only time he ever critiqued my stuff, he gave me a very backhanded compliment it was actually very odd. I was already working professionally as an inker but I was doing some penciling pinups for marvel and he saw...I showed him some of my stuff at a NY convention and he saw the inking stuff and I think he actually kinda' already knew my work from an inking standpoint. He was like "you know, it's

all right, it's all right", and then he saw my penciling stuff and he goes "you're wasting your time inking, you should be penciling."...

**TM:** Really?

**SW:**..."you're a much better penciler than you are an inker". In some ways he was actually sort of dissing or dismissing inking and I was so taken aback by the very upfront way he was saying it that I thought in some ways, he was attacking me. But later on in the day as I stopped to think about it he was actually paying me a compliment. He was saying something to the effect of "a lot of people can ink, you should be penciling" that my drawing skills were good enough that I really should be... that he liked my pencils and that I should be penciling.

**TM:** But you decided not to listen to him.

**SW:** And I decided not to listen to him. (laughter) It's true. And I'm not surprised that he liked my pencils because...they weren't Adams rip-offs...I should show them to you sometime...

**TM:** I'd love to see them.

**SW:** ...and they're flawed, I mean they're young...

**TM:** Sure

**SW:** ...but you can see... if you know that I'm a big fan of Neal Adams you look at it and you go "yeah, a little bit. There's a little Neal in there". That's probably one of the reasons he was responding to that. And actually this

was also in the early days, this was like in 87-88 so Continuity was still gearing up for it's comics and I think he was thinking in terms of artists to have at Continuity in order to... maybe in his mind he was thinking of Continuity comics and maybe kind of planting some seeds perhaps...I don't know.

**TM:** Who's your favorite penciler to ink?

**SW:** Jim.

**TM:** What artist would you have liked to have been able to ink?

**SW:** Frank Miller. No question.

**TM:** You could still do him potentially right?

**SW:** Nah. He doesn't have secondary inkers. There was a time where I kept thinking, you know, I just need stuff to fall into place and I'd get a chance. But it just never...my timing was good in some respects as far as comics go, but as far as lining up with certain creators, like being able to ink Neal in his prime or Jack Kirby or John Buscema. I'd love to ink all those guys but you know...

**TM:** You couldn't have done it in their prime.

**SW:** I couldn't have done it in their prime. Actually, I had an opportunity to ink Jack Kirby a couple of times on some minor things but it wasn't Jack in his prime. I inked John Buscema on a couple of things, but again, they were cool, but not in their prime. I got to ink Gil Kane. You know I got to ink almost everybody. I got to ink Barry Smith a couple of times on a couple of jobs and

they were a lot of fun to do. I think the only guy who was sorta' like my idol artistically that I never inked was Wrightson but I would be really intimidated inking him. A lot of Wrightson is about the inks you know he's just such a great technician ink-wise. I wouldn't have been able to do with it...Um, you know Frazetta, nobody inks Frazetta. Only Frazetta inks Frazetta.

**TM:** So back to Frank Miller. Have you ever mentioned to him that you wanted to ink him on something?

**SW:** I've never talked to him, never talked to Frank. When he was doing his second DK book here...that was for computer coloring discussions...

**TM:** (laughs)

**SW:** ...and some of the guys went out to dinner with him and I didn't get a chance to go so I haven't talked to him.

**TM:** Why did he ink that? Why not use Janson again?

**SW:** I think he just inks all his own stuff now. I know he and Janson had some kind of a falling out.

**TM:** Yeah, I'd heard something like that.

**SW:** The style that he's comfortable...I think the Janson stuff is was just kind of a holdover from the process of monthly comics that he'd gotten used to and the DK stuff was, the first DK was just a carry over from you know everybody liking the Miller/Janson stuff. But that was the last thing that anybody inked over Miller.

**TM:** Really?

**SW:** Yeah. The Dark Knight. You're talking like damn near 20 years ago.

**TM:** Yeah, I've never thought of that.

**SW:** So Miller's virtually inked everything that he's done since that DK. And even a lot of the Dark Knight stuff, Miller re-inked over Janson. He was unhappy with it so...

**TM:** Yeah, I'd heard that too. There was a page that showed up that he re-did.

**SW:** Yeah.

**TM:** Is there anyone left that you want to ink still?

**SW:** There probably is, I'm trying to think who... Who would I want to ink now? The list is shorter than it used to be. Um...I'm sure there is...

**TM:** You don't read enough comics, man!

**SW:** That is the downside of turning your hobby into your profession. I have as big a passion for comics that I ever had but it's channeled differently. I basically do comics it seems like 24/7. The last thing I want to do going home from my office is go home and read comics. It's part of the reason...I channel my fanboy tendencies, my collecting tendencies into artwork, into collecting original art. The actual reading and accumulating comic books, it's just not there for me any more. It's amazing how many different comic book artists I know who read very few comics now. You want some kind of a life

outside of what you do all day long. So I miss out on a lot of good comics because of that, and I know for a fact how many good comics are being published right now.

**TM:** Yeah, we're in like a little golden age here.

**SW:** I know. I know that, and it's too bad.

**TM:** What do you think of the industry? Like we just said, it's like a golden age right now, but it's also petering out isn't it?

**SW:** Well in some ways it's a much more healthy industry now than it was say 5, 7, 8 years ago in that I think all the books that are being bought now are being read. The numbers are smaller, so that's troubling but there seems to be a far bigger ratio of good comics to crummy comics. There seems to be a better sense of professionalism in the industry about getting books out on time. There seems to still be a huge interest in the comic book genre as far as popular culture goes. All the big movies are all sort of comic book related. Other than the fact that the actual sheer numbers of comics being sold on a monthly basis are down, and the disturbing fact that not that many people read comics or read in general for entertainment purposes is depressing. I don't see any sort of imminent demise of comics. I don't think it'll ever become sort of a right of passage type of entertainment form. It used to be, not everyone read comics but I would say a larger percentage of people did read comics than didn't read comics as just basically part of growing up. Going to their 7-11's and picking up some comics, whether it's Archie's or

Spiderman's or whatever. I think there's huge numbers of people, kids now, who don't even know comics exist, and that's too bad.

**TM:** Yeah.

**SW:** I think it's been shoved into sort of a niche market but I think there's going to still be a big enough demand for it from a niche market standpoint that it will survive. I think from now on it'll always be a commercial resource to be used for other mediums.

**TM:** I have a bunch of inking questions. The tools you use now...I think you said once you were using a lot of...

**SW:** Mostly brush.

**TM:** When you started out, you weren't using a lot of brush?

**SW:** I started off inking... I've kind of come full circle. I started off learning how to ink with a brush and then again sort of adopting and putting on the Terry Austin hat. I learned to ink with a pen and a nib, which is what Whilce inked with, and I was his assistant so I was trying to match his style.

**TM:** You still ink with a nib?

**SW:** I do, yeah, and up until Batman I inked almost exclusively with a nib.

**TM:** Don't most guys use pens now instead of a nib?

**SW:** Well, a pen and a nib is sort of the same thing.

**TM:** I'm talking about the quill, the metal...

**SW:** Yeah, that's what a pen is. (pulls out a nib) I call this my pen.

**TM:** You call this a pen?

**SW:** Yeah, it's a pen.

**TM:** I'm talking about those technical pens.

**SW:** Oh, the technical pens. Not that many people use those. I use those; I actually use those for a lot of the dead weight line type of stuff and for borders and stuff.

**TM:** So most guys use nibs.

**SW:** I would say most traditional inkers either use this...

**TM:** You call that a pen?

**SW:** I call it a pen.

**TM:** Is that what the...

**SW:** It's a crow quill pen. (hands me a brush) And that's your basic brush. There's 2 or 3 different standard brushes that people use, the Raphael's, and the Windsor Newton's and the Scharfs and stuff like that.

**TM:** I tried to ink. In the last year I bought some stuff and it's very, very hard.

**SW:** It's very hard and it's even harder if you don't have good tools and if you're not an inker it's hard to know if the tool you have is good enough.

**TM:** I bought good tools. I bought a Windsor Newton...

**SW:** It doesn't matter. I can buy 10 Windsor Newton series 7 brushes and I can only usually make one or 2 of them work.

**TM:** Really? That's funny. So I don't suck? (laughter)

**SW:** You don't suck man, it's the tools. I have my very loyal brand of pens, crow quill nibs and brushes, and a standard box of crow quill nibs – it comes 12 to a box, I can usually make 2 or 3 work for me. The other one's will make the lines but they just make shitty lines. Same thing with the brushes, they'll all make the lines, and they'll all come to a point to a certain degree or another, but the ones that make sweet lines – very far and few between. So you waste a ton of money on material that you never even end up using.

**TM:** But for a guy like me, you learn a lot...you're not going to know for a long time that your brush sucks...

**SW:** No, that's the problem. You don't know what the deal is.

**TM:** Luckily, it's not my job. (laughter) And why are you doing brushes now more? What drew you...

**SW:** Because I worked for so long with a nib line and it tends to elicit a very specific type of a look and line based on my personality and my drawing tendencies. A brush forces me to have a different look. It's the same hand and the same sensibilities making the line but the tool makes a different line for me. It enables me to diversify the style without me having to work quite as hard to make it diverse. That's one of the reasons why

the batman stuff looked different. Part of it was a frame of mind change that I was going for more texture and more of an atmospheric type of an approach with more blacks and more grit and more textures, and part of it was able to come about because I switched from using a pen to a brush.

**TM:** So does it take you longer to use a brush?

**SW:** I think it's probably close to the same. If I'm on a roll and all other things being equal it's probably a little faster with a brush cause you can sort of pop your blacks in as your moving along. When you are inking with a pen, you generally then you do create outlines put a little x in there and go back and fill in the blacks later and stuff.

**TM:** When you approach a job, do you have an inking philosophy in your head that you apply to every job evenly, or is every job different?

**SW:** Every job's different. We touched on that earlier, especially on X-men. X-men always struck me as being, even with all the character development and that stuff, it always struck me as being sort of a science fiction-y, high-tech superhero job. And that's one of the reasons I think the Byrne/Austin thing worked really well, is that real kind of a high-tech look just seemed to fit with the story lines, the outer space, the Cerebro and all the techie elements, it just seemed to fit. Batman, you've got the character Batman and all that he's about living within this environment called Gotham City. Gotham City in itself is almost a character. When you think of sort of a decaying, character-riddled cityscape like Gotham, it elicits a certain

kind of visceral reaction that hopefully can come out with the ink line and that's what I tired to do on the Batman stuff. So there was a very kind of decision making process that says, all right, up to this point I've been doing a lot of science-fiction-y straight superhero high-tech stuff with this type of a line; with Batman, let's go this other route. So I changed my tools, I changed my mindset, I changed everything about it. Superman has been tougher because it's also a little bit more of a traditional tech look, but I liked a lot of the stuff I was getting from the Batman, that I'm trying to straddle the line and I'm having hit and miss luck with it.

**TM:** How many issues is this going to be?

**SW:** 12

**TM:** 12. Maybe you'll figure it out.

**SW:** Yeah, and there were certain things I was figuring out on Batman like in the 8<sup>th</sup> issue or the 10<sup>th</sup> issue. There was a constant kind of evolutionary process and I'm hoping the same thing will happen with the Superman stuff. That the process will continue to evolve and I'll figure some things out.

**TM:** What's your work schedule?

**SW:** Right now, as we speak? Starting work about 9:00 driving into work for my lunch break, working through 'til about 6:15, going home for dinner, getting back to work around 8:00 and working until about midnight, 12:30 something like that, every stinking day.

**TM:** Wow.



**SW:** Most of the time it's including weekends now too.

**TM:** When you're done with the run is there a down time where you recoup?

**SW:** Right now, it doesn't sound like it and I don't know if that's gonna' work. I'll blow my brains out. (laughter).

**TM:** You getting burned out?

**SW:** I'm getting burned. It's getting harder. Something's going to have to give. It's something that I'm thinking seriously about right now, like, how am I going to make this work?

**TM:** Have you seen your kids lately?

**SW:** Not much. I had a big chunk of time off after Batman but starting about 3 or 4 months ago I've been just sort of a hermit working and it's not healthy. I've got to figure out a way...I've got to make some choices. In fact, the thing we're doing today, right now...this is the last thing I'll be doing, period, up until about the San Diego Con. I mean straight up – no movies, no going out...

**TM:** Wow. Thanks for doing this.

**SW:** No problem.

**TM:** I was going to thank you at the end. We're getting there. Tips for hopeful inkers?

**SW:** Learn to draw.

**TM:** Learn to draw.

**SW:** Inking is a...there are techniques involved that you can glean from looking at other artists, at other ink

artists. You can look at how a line looks, especially if you can look at an original, you can just kind of see it and look at it and figure out how the groupings make a certain shape turn from the light into shadow or how to do certain types of hatching, you know, blah blah blah. It's stuff that you can actually see. But it all has to come from a foundation of good drawing. Even though we've talked about very tight pencilers, there are also times, very often, that you get abstract and un-fully realized drawings that you have to turn into something and you have to be able to fall back on your drawing skills to turn it into something. The very long-winded way of basically saying – if you want to learn how to ink, learn how to draw. All the best inkers can draw and are good enough, virtually all of them, would probably be good enough to draw comics for a living. They tend to be too slow, or they're intimidated by starting off with a completely white sheet of paper, but as far as their actual skills, all of the best inkers could probably pencil. All the crumby inkers – their pencils look like fanboy drawings. It's crappy stuff.

**TM:** Even though you say learn to draw, like when I said to you when I tried to ink for the first time, I was shocked at how different and hard it was to get it to look like... I mean I think I can draw pretty good. I would draw some stuff and say "I'm going to try and ink this", and it just looked like total crap. So it really is a separate, a completely separate...

**SW:** It is separate, but what you were battling with, I think...were you mostly using a brush?

**TM:** I tried brush, I tried quills...

**SW:** There are sort of technical barriers that are true with inking that can be overcome in a fairly short order. In other words, I think you can make semi-attractive looking lines if you work hard at it in x number of months. Not years, but probably x number of months. They may not be the best, but they'll pass. It's how you put the lines together and how it functions in the framework of a drawing that separates the men from the boys kind of a thing. But especially when you're talking about a pen and crow quill inking, there are technical barriers that are really hard to overcome but you can do it in a fairly short order.

**The End**

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