

HELLION FOR HIRE #4: MAKING ME LOOK GOOD

by Billy Tucci

06-29-2006

Newsarama Note: more art to come later today

Hello All,

Because I'm in the home stretch of finishing a book, this column might seem a bit rushed, so please forgive any grammatical mistakes you will most certainly observe.

In this week's column we will explore the third creative stage in the making of a "Big Two" comic book - the inking process and one of the greatest inkers ever to put brush to board, Mr. Tom Palmer.

If there were a Sequential Art Hall of Fame (and there should be!), Tom Palmer, would most definitely be among its hallowed ranks. For years, Tom has penciled and inked what must be thousands of pages (he won't tell me how many) working with such legends as Neil Adams and John Buscema.

A legend himself who has partnered with the biggest names in the industry and bringing all sorts of wonderfully heroic adventures to millions

Now he's stuck with me.

Seriously, Tom has acted as more than an art partner on my first Marvel book -- He's been a mentor and an inspiration. Let me explain:

Aside from the Wolverine and Daredevil crossovers, I haven't used an inker sequentially for almost a decade. I've become accustomed to using various pencil leads (2H, HB, H, B and EBONY) implementing tiny lines of shading. With **Heroes For Hire**, this process, if sent to an inker, would simply turn to hideous black globs. So in order to achieve the desired look of a "real comic book", I've had to adjust and overcome. Like a film director adapting from the Japanese to American cinema, I've had to rework a subtle process that has worked for **Shi** but not quite for the hard-hitting, no-holds-barred action of **Heroes For Hire**.

Enter Mr. Palmer and his relentless pursuit of perfection and the constant act of saving my hide. For Tom has not only figured out how to make sense of my smudged-mess of graphite and palm prints he's also corrected a hodgepodge of drafting mistakes I've made. He suggested I use a softer pencil that wouldn't chew up the pages so much. Switching to an H lead for roughs and finishes with the HB seems to have solved the problem. For a more obvious example, please take a look at my original pencils for page 2. You'll notice that Misty Night is out of proportion compared to the other characters. She was the first figure I penciled on the page, but after the FBI agents and team members were added, I noticed that Misty (who's a big girl to begin with) was about 10% too small. Mr. Palmer agreed, and after inking scanned in the page and rising above the call of duty, spent his own time and talent cutting, enlarging and pasting the bionic beauty to her proper funkiness. Which worked out much better than my 10% guess.



I also like to draw "big", meaning I like to use the entire art board. Now the Marvel art board differs from my Crusade boards (which are based on those used by Image comics) and I can honestly say I had no idea just what the hell I'm doing. You'll notice with the original pencils on page two that I went all the way out to the trim lines. It shouldn't, because that means full bleed and some of the image would be cropped out. Tom suggested that for safety sake keep all boxes within the "copy" line. So I do, now.

But getting back to page two, there's also an indicia line (totally forgot about that one too) that I gaffed. But Tom saved my ass again, by scanning and saving this (and many other pages) at various sizes so they'll fit the Marvel page layout. Side note, today, most inkers scan in the completed pages and load them onto Marvel's FTP site. Of which we all get secret codes for our own personal folders. Groovy Baby!

Well enough of my babbling, let's hear from the man himself!

Billy Tucci: Tom, tell us about your illustration background. Did you go to art school? A university? Study under a master? Self taught?

Tom Palmer: I went to a fantastic one teacher school run by Frank J. Reilly, he had small classes in the Steinway Building on West 57th Street in NYC. This was right out of high school and I was immediately exposed to the world of illustration. Unfortunately, Frank Reilly died a few years later, the school disbanded and I was thrown into the real world.



BT: How did you break into the industry and what was your first comic book "gig"?

TP: I was freelancing at an advertising studio on 40th and Madison Ave. while I took classes with Reilly, and the illustrator there, Jack Kamen, (the same Jack Kamen from the EC days) called Wally Wood to see if he would look at my work. One thing led to another and I was at Marvel's door shortly later looking for work. I pencilled a Doctor Strange story, (my first comic book work outside of small stuff I did for Woody) and it was clear I wasn't ready to carry a whole book. The next issue of **Doctor Strange** had Gene Colan as the penciller and they asked me if I would like to ink him. That was my first inking assignment and it went well, I stayed with Gene and the book for some time, eventually worked with him on **Tomb of Dracula**.

BT: Side note, first one to bring Tom's first **Doctor Strange** to me at a con gets a free sketch!

What work, (general illustration, comics etc.) that you're most proud of?

TP: I've had dual careers in advertising/publishing illustration and comics, and I feel very fulfilled by it all, I don't know if "pride" enters in at any point, maybe fortunate, I really enjoy my life doing what I love.

BT: What was the worst comic book gig you ever got?

TP: Doing comic book work has never been boring and constantly changing, I honestly can't recall a "worst" moment or gig, some were different, but always interesting.

BT: What's the craziest experience you've had working in comics?

TP: You have to be a little crazy working in this business, but that's what makes comics a unique experience, so one moment doesn't stand out as the craziest.

BT: Any weird fan experience?

TP: No, the fans are great, I'm a fan, so I relate in some way and have always been treated well.

BT: True. Do you have a running tally of how many comic book pages have you worked on/created in your career? How many issues?

TP: You have to be kidding! I have no clue. I don't look back and have more interest in what I'll be doing tomorrow.

BT: Anyone out there want to take a stab at that? When inking, which "tools of the trade" are you most comfortable using? For instance, do you have a favorite brush? Does the tool change with each penciller?

TP: Maybe doing illustration work has afforded me more tools and techniques, but I don't have a favorite anything, just what works the best. And yes, my tools or approach changes with each penciller, whatever complements the style.

BT: Can you describe the types of penciller's you encountered? Levels of detail/skill in draftsmanship and story telling?

TP: I have never encountered anyone as "green" as I was when I started in the business, so everyone is a professional in my eyes, or they wouldn't be working for some editor. No one is perfect, but I've seen some beautiful work along the way, very gifted artists and storytellers, hope I absorbed a little bit working with them.

BT: I there anyone you'd really like to work with, but haven't thus far? Writers/pencillers?

TP: I spent years working with one or two people, but in recent years I have been bouncing around with different talent, and who knows when it may click teaming with someone new. I would like to work with a few people but they will remain anonymous, they are doing well without me.

BT: What artists/illustrators do you admire? (In both comics and out) Who are your main influences?

TP: When I was young, Wally Wood and Al Williamson were my favorites in comics, Norman Rockwell and Bob Peak in illustration, but when I got to art school and Frank Reilly, my eyes were opened to the world of art and all the great illustrators. To this day I am still impressed by Dean Cornwell and J.C. Leyendecker, but have not lost my love for the earlier favorites.

BT: When was the last time you had a "real" vacation? Do you think it's healthy to get away from it all to stir the creative juices?

TP: Only another freelancer would ask that question, trying to find the perfect blend of life and career. You can never get away from it all as a freelance artist, even on a vacation, that part of your brain is always on other things, but that may be the healthiest part of all this, it keeps your mind alive and stimulated and you're never bored. When my kids were young I would rent a house down the shore during the summer but I always had work to do, usually at night, but it was a change of pace and scenery, a very relaxing vacation. I would still love to go to Europe on vacation and visit all the great art museums - that can stir the creative juices.

BT: Word. How did you come to work on **Heroes for Hire**?

TP: Like it usually happens, an editor asked.

BT: Do you like it so far?

TP: Yes, very much so. You have a different approach and I enjoy the challenge to blend with your style. I had to find the right tools, pen points and brushes, but it usually takes an issue to find your way. The book is different in story and style, and that has to be the most enjoyable part of being on the project, finding what approach works best.

BT: I haven't worked with an inker in ten years, what I really want to know - and please be honest - do you mind working with me? Is it difficult following my lines? Do I over render?

TP: I can honestly say, once I got what a penciller was trying to do I found the relationship rewarding and enjoyable, never difficult. Since the ink art is what is printed, I always wonder what the penciller thinks of the team up, it is a blend of two styles really, some work, some do not, I personally like the results on **Heroes For Hire**, but I am prejudiced. You may think you over render, Billy, but you're barely in the running. You do what you're comfortable with and never second guess, you enjoy all the detail so go with it. Probably why the fans follow your work over the years, don't disappoint them.

BT: Thank you Tom! Who's your favorite superhero and why?

TP: Somebody not in comics, won't mention so I don't embarrass him.

BT: In terms of beauty, which celebrity comes closes to the "ideal" you hold as an illustrator?

TP: Too many beautiful women to choose from with that span of time, but I think currently Jessica Alba is fresh and new, worth watching as she matures.

BT: Oh, I must agree! So, my friend, Beau Smith asked me this question in his column about a year ago: Which celebrity/politician would you most like to bust over the head with a shovel? (I said Barbara Streisand)

BT: I'm staying away from that one. Tell Beau I would enjoy having a beer with him someday and we can compare lists.

BT: Understood! Maybe, when I take you out for drinks at the St. Regis, you'll tell me! Are there any world figures you detest? Admire? Why?

TP: Probably the same list as the general population for all the usual reasons.

BT: Again, understood, but I'd like to see if I can get specifics out of you on that too. You know, just between us!

<http://www.newsarama.com/general/Hellion/04/Hellion04.html>

Thank you Tom, it is truly an honor to work with you and I appreciate all your professionalism and guidance through this wonderful adventure of ours!

P.S. I'd really like to thank Tom for because of me, he's under more deadline duress than I am and appreciate him taking the time out of his busy schedule to participate.

Now, being half English and half Italian, who do I root for in the World Cup?

Until Next Week, Ciao and Tally Ho!

About Billy Tucci and Crusade Fine Arts, Ltd.

Billy Tucci is the award-winning creator, writer and publisher of the graphic series Shi. Lion Eyes Entertainment has recently optioned Shi for a major motion picture with actress Zhang Ziyi is attached to star. An award winning filmmaker in his own right, he's currently writing the screenplay with Kevin Bernhardt. June 2006 will see the debut of a new Shi Convention sketchbook and the 576 page "Definitive Shi" while Billy makes his penciling debut for Marvel with August's "Heroes For Hire" (written by Justin Gray and Jimmy Palmiotti). He's also the creator and writer of Narwain Publishing's "Zombie-sama!" and invites you all to join his message forum on www.williamtucci.com

Catch up on the latest **Hellion for Hires**:

Discussion Thread: <http://forum.newsarama.com/showthread.php?t=75360>

Matt Spatola

06-29-2006 10:19 AM

Well that was a cool interview with Tom Palmer. Always been one of my fave inkers. I love how he non-answered so many questions.

Evilomar

06-29-2006 10:47 AM

I never thought I would see the two names together Tucci and Palmer. In my opinion, Tucci needs an inker to clean up his style. Palmer is great, but he is better off working with Texeria or Epting.

Oeming

06-29-2006 11:22 AM

Bill! Your best work yet! And Tom is one of the worlds greatest inkers, its a great looing gig bro
M!

timbre68

06-29-2006 12:00 PM

Tom Palmer Jr

I'm just curious, is Tom Palmer Jr. Tom's son? The one who works at Marvel.

I have always been a big fan of Palmer's inks. His run on Tomb of Dracula is awesome. He really completes any penciller. I was on the fence with picking up this title, not anymore, I'm definitely going to buy it.

Thanks

Billy Tucci

06-29-2006 12:57 PM

Quote:

Originally Posted by **Oeming**

Bill! Your best work yet! And Tom is one of the worlds greatest inkers, its a great looing gig bro M!

Thanks Mike!

Tom has some more great pages but we had trouble loading them. I'll see if I can get them on. Working my butt off to finish this book!

Guys, thanks for the kind words. I will get Tom Palmer to tell me who he'd like to bust in the head with a shovel.

Tom Palmer Jr. Is Tom's son, Timbre--

Skinshark

06-29-2006 01:18 PM

"When I was young, Wally Wood and Al Williamson were my favorites in comics, Norman Rockwell and Bob Peak in illustration, but when I got to art school and Frank Reilly, my eyes were opened to the world of art and all the great illustrators. To this day I am still impressed by Dean Cornwell and J.C. Leyendecker, but have not lost my love for the earlier favorites."

At least he has taste in illustrators...can't be Cornwell and Leyendecker!

KyleV

06-29-2006 03:34 PM

Quote:

I never thought I would see the two names together Tucci and Palmer. In my opinion, Tucci needs an inker to clean up his style. Palmer is great, but he is better off working with Texeria or Epting.

Man, Texeira is a WAY heavier inker than Palmer. That wouldn't work at all. And I don't think I've ever seen Epting ink anything he didn't pencil.

I like Palmer over Tucci. Tom does have a pretty heavy style, but I think he maintains the quality of the penciller's work. His stuff with Buscema was just amazing, to the point where it's hard to imagine John's work with any other inker.

I think this is a great match.

RedRonin

06-29-2006 03:41 PM

It's great to see an inker get some love. They're often the unsung heroes of comics.

Great interview! Hope you get more of that artwork up.

BlackCatGuy

06-29-2006 06:01 PM

Billy, another great column! Loved the interview with Tom! He's been a favorite of mine for quite a long time! I'm really interested to see the final printed and stapled copy of HFH #1 to see how Tom interprets your detailed pencils!

Oh, and THANK YOU for wanting to hit Barbara Streisand over the head with a shovel!: D

By the way, being half Italian and half Polish, with a lovely English wife.....I'm gonna go with England! (Hint, Hint!!)

Although Germany is good. "Scary" good.:cool:

Billy Tucci

06-29-2006 09:30 PM

More of Tom's finished pages!

Guys,
I'm having trouble loading up Tom's art. I don't know what the problem is, but will try again tomorrow. So, so sorry.
B

Billy Tucci

06-29-2006 09:42 PM

One last try today!



(olsen edit – think he meant to link this picture)

BlackCatGuy

06-29-2006 10:57 PM

Billy, hopefully you'll be able to get the pics up tomorrow! Love to see em'!

Ogre U AHole

06-30-2006 07:35 AM

It's funny because I wasn't going to bother saying anything about Billy's original work for page two a couple weeks ago since it just seems like bad form to criticize in these threads (creator columns), but it's endearing to see how humble Tucci is about Palmer fixing his proportions and everything. The piece certainly looks better for it.

It seems like this will be a learning experience and help Tucci fine-tune his skills as an artist. Might be interesting to watch for that very reason.

beta-ray

07-01-2006 07:04 AM

Great interview with Palmer. Asked much of what I wanted to read about. Would have like to know, as a fan, which story(stories) he found to be his favorites/most memorable in comics.

Thanks for your openness again Mr. Tucci!

All times are GMT -4. The time now is 08:07 PM.

<http://www.newsarama.com/general/Hellion/04/Hellion04.html>

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