

SAM KIETH

The other day I got to interview

An interview with Sam Kieth - Oct 2000

If you had've asked me who I would most like to interview, towards the top of the list on any day would be Sam Kieth. His comic, *The Maxx*, was one of those right time, right place events that could so easily have been missed. I'd only been into comics for a couple of months when this upstart company, Image Comics started on the scene. Here was a whole bunch of talented artists, tired of the studio game, going off to set up an artists utopia. One day I spied issue one of the *Maxx*, an unusual cover and severe title graphic made me buy it, but it was the style of the art and the humour of the text that drew me in. Over the coming years, the *Maxx* developed. It's letters page, *Maxx Traxx* became this community of people, not obsessed with comics but trying to understand life, people and emotions.

If you *got* the *Maxx*, you'll know what I mean. If you didn't, find someone with a few issues and spend a day or two to discover for yourself what exactly it was all about. It's one of those rare works, one that strikes you from so many different angles in incredibly different ways.



Thanks for your consent on this Sam. I'd like to ask you a few questions about *The Maxx*, current projects, a bit of your history and a couple of general ones. I'm curious as to how you got started with Image comics?

I was working at marvel, doing covers and hoping

who ever was drawing wolverine would have a heart attack and I'd get the gig, but no luck. I got to know Jim Lee from marvel, and when he left, he called me and that's how that started. Most of the Image guys came from Marvel or DC.

As part of the second wave of talent, you and *The Maxx* were the only project that really lasted. Why do you think this was the case?

Luck. And stupidity. < grin > I was stupid enough to keep going and drawing it, I suppose. Larson's is still going though, but I see what you mean. The "second wave" of Image was like me, Dale Keown, Larry Stroman and maybe Jay Lee. Who else. Don Simpson? Man, does anybody under 25 even remember who these guys are anymore? It's been, what, 5 years? The truth is, I have no Idea how or why *Maxx* lasted 26 Issues....

Do you get any satisfaction knowing that your issue of the Incredible Hulk is really, really hard to find?

Well, I have trouble finding my remote control, but that doesn't make it valuable! < laughter > Sorry, bad joke. < ahem > Well, Kelly Jones is ONE of

the reasons that issue looks good to be bluntly honest. I took the credit, but HE did a lot of it too. It's hard to find? really?

The Maxx seemed to have it's own special community, which came through in Maxx Traxx. What kind of outlet was the Maxx for people?

Disenfranchised. Lonely.

Imaginative. Dreamers.

Outsiders. The girl who slits her wrists or the guy who hates himself cause he wears glasses and was too fat, or skinny, you name it. Kids who were too smart to be nerds, but didn't fit (or want to fit) in with the hip & trendy kids. All these people just came to me and created their OWN community. Maxx Traxx (the letters page) was just the place where they gathered, that's all.

People don't even have letters pages now. Too expensive, sadly. I mock myself, and the book, but the fans were the only real part of it, and talking to them was a truly humbling experience.



What kind of an outlet was it for you?

It was a creative dumping ground, and everything grew from my sketch books. Drawings of that purple guy came from sketches that were over five years old. I miss having a monthly place to dump Ideas, but I was all taped out creatively when I quit Maxx, so that was that. Plus I was starting to ramble a lot and not finish the story arch. Blessed relief I quit, huh? (laughter)



"Legs" was the last comic by you that I've been able to source. What are you up to now?

Well, I've dropped off the face of the earth, which was pretty much my plan after Maxx. My fifteen minutes are gone, and now I'm just screwing around. I've been fooling around with film. I've made several live action shorts and directed a low budget movie for Roger Corman, which was a story in it's self. But I have no Illusions about being some movie guy. I'm quite lucky to have made what I have in Comics & Animation really.

Would you ever consider working for either of the machines (marvel/dc) again?

Sure. I never left them in a snit. I didn't do the Maxx as a statement against marvel or DC, I just wanted to do a book. And, at its peak, Image was a machine. Some of the larger guys, like Todd, Jim, Mark, they are machines. They might not like to think of themselves that way, but with that much money involved, It just happens. You have to fight NOT to. Eric opted out, so did I. Dale did. Allen more is a good example of doing BOTH. He works at big houses, and works on his own personal stuff too. So does Eric Larson.

You have a fairly impressive cover gallery in your CV. I'm wondering how you got involved with the Knightfall/Batman saga?

Through Kelly, I guess. We did some Batman covers together, but I kept crapping out on him, and they're some of the worst I've ever done. Not all, but some! I'm talking about my part too, not his! I just wasn't able to draw Batman like I wanted, and kept freezing up, which sucked. I guess my work with Kelly went from the highs (hulk & a few bat covers) to the lows of some pretty piss poor bat covers I'll NEVER live down!

Do you now, or did you ever have much to do with the Image founders?

Nope. They held their own meetings and, as long as I produced (that's the magic little egg EVERYONE expects in this business) then they just left folks like me pretty much alone.



MTV Oddities cartoon version of The Maxx was really faithful to the look of the book. What sort of input did you get with that programme?

Total. Too much. If we would hadn't followed my random plots a little LESS, maybe the sucker would still be on the air! (smile) It was a

small company that produced the cartoons for MTV. No one was fucking with us, or the people who were gave us complete control. Something like this will NEVER happen again in my career, either in comics, animation, OR movies. It was a once in a lifetime thing, and I still am stunned by it.

Were you happy with the end product?

Yeah, warts and all.

In a completely different tangent, is the internet still in its childhood or going through its teen years?

I'd say people are still in their childhood in digesting the net. I think the net's already in collage. Remember the industrial revolution. It wasn't the technology that took time, it was people's fears and patience with it. It took 2 generations to catch up. What my generations scratches their heads about, the next takes for granted. It's like the Matrix movie was what Easy Rider was in the sixties. If you're under 30, you get it. If not, you'll probably just scratch your head a lot! (unless you're a weirdo, like me)

What was the last book you didn't finish and why?

"How to fix your toilet", and I'm serious. It just couldn't hold my interest. (shrug)

And finally... hypothetically you're offered, with complete artistic control, Superman or Spiderman. Which would you do?

I can't choose the hulk? shit. (pout)

Thanks once again Sam. If it's ok, I'd like to use a couple of images from The Maxx, FOM and Legs to go with the article.

Sure, and I'd like to post this to the mailing list, a group of maxx heads that all hang out together. Is that cool with you?

Hell yeah.

All images used in this article are owned by Sam Kieth.

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