Interview
by Arlen Schumer

In the 1960s, I was a DC Comics fan. The Weisinger Superman line, Julius Schwartz's sci-fi super-heroes, and, of course, Batman (the debut of the '66 TV series was a seminal event in my childhood). Marvel didn't appeal to me; they seemed too complicated, too busy-looking (too many words!) compared to the somewhat banal simplicity of DC's line.

My brother, though, was a Marvelite and devotee of Jack Kirby. I was a fan of newcomer Neal Adams, who had every DC follower excited by his work on "Deadman." We would argue endlessly about who was "better," and daydream about company crossovers, like what if Kirby went to DC, or Adams worked at Marvel. In those days, it was unheard of for any artist to be working for more than one company at a time (we didn't know then that Marvel's new "Sub-Mariner" artist, Adam Austin, was DC's war artist Gene Colan, or that Marvel's "Mickey Demeo" was a pseudonym for DC's Mike Esposito). It was a shock when DC stalwart Gil Kane drew a few issues of "The Hulk" in 1967, but nothing prepared us for that day in 1969 when Neal Adams began drawing the X-Men!

The X-Men? According to my brother, the title had been going downhill ever since Kirby stopped drawing it years earlier, and, save for a few recent issues drawn by the great Jim Steranko and new kid on the block Barry Smith (then a Kirby clone), the title was all but forgotten and destined for discontinuation. Suffice to say, even my diehard brother became an Adams believer because of his breathtaking X-Men work.

Back then, I was too enamored by what Adams was doing at DC with Batman and Green Lantern/Green Arrow to notice what a body of incredible work—in addition to his X-Men—Adams was compiling at Marvel. Doing this interview as a follow-up to "Neal Adams: The DC Years" was an eye-opening experience for a self-styled Adams expert like myself, as revelations of the breadth of his storytelling achievements came to light.

Just as his Batman became the modern standard, influencing Frank Miller years later to do The Dark Knight Returns, which in turn influenced the movie portrayals, making Batman DC's franchise character, so too did Adams' X-Men, with far less fanfare, go on to become the new model of the characters, influencing a new generation of Marvel artists and writers to create their versions of the X-Men based on his, which became the cornerstone of Marvel's hegemony in the '80s (and "spawned" Image's super-hero line). So one might argue Adams' Batman and X-Men are the twin pillars upon which today's DC and Marvel rest.

Like his contemporary Steranko, Adams' relatively small body of Marvel work stands in direct converse proportion to its enormous influence. So I was not surprised by Neal's answer to my first question, "Why did you go to Marvel Comics?"

[The following interview was conducted in two sessions during September and October 1998 and was transcribed by John Morrow and Jon B. Cooke.]