

the Fine Print

Cliff Hicks

Artwork hits mark in comics

With the hype of comic book writers (Neil Gaiman, Alan Moore, Frank Miller, Grant Morrison, J.M. DeMatteis, etc.), it seems the comics industry is starting to overlook the other important half of any comic team — the artist.

Granted, today's comics artists are a far cry from the Golden and Silver Age artists in the vein of Jack Kirby, but there's nothing wrong with either the Classics Age or the Modern Age.

Some of the Modern Age artists grab with their plush styles, and others use stark bareness to emphasize their points.

A modern-day Leonardo da Vinci, Dave McKean is the visual genius in comics today. McKean has done covers for every issue of "Sandman," "Cages" (which he also wrote), "Batman: Arkham Asylum" and "Mr. Punch," among other things.

McKean blends both intensely fine detail in painting and sketching with photography, giving him a very distinct style. Sometimes it's a photo collage, sometimes it's all painting, but mostly it's somewhere in between. McKean stands as the next step in the evolution of art.

Joseph Michael-Linsner uses an entirely different style, one of well-defined lines and strong colors. His work is just short of being painted (or maybe it is painted) and looks spectacular. His series, "Dawn," has been worth every penny. And he wrote it himself.

Miller also writes his "Sin City" series, but the art is every bit as mentionable and memorable as the story itself.

What stands out is that instead of using black lines on a white background, for the most part, Miller reverses that and does white on black. The end effect is something very noir, with heavy shadows everywhere.

But when you want color, and you want it dark and moody, the best choice of artists is John Bolton, whose painted work is perhaps some of the finest work in comics today.

His credits include the first book of the original "Books of Magic" miniseries and the three-issue "Batman: Manbat" (which was well-drawn, but not all that well-written).

All of the artists on the original "Books of Magic" miniseries did excellent jobs. It really is one of the best-told stories (Gaiman, natch) and one of the best-illustrated in comics in the last 10 years. It's all painted artwork.

One of those other artists also has a very distinct style, with tall, willowy characters and soft, pastel-like colors. That's Charles Vess. He's another to watch.

Some of the other great artists in comics who haven't been landmark artists, but have drawn good and interesting art include Dave Sim ("Cerberus"), Jeff Smith ("Bone"), Chris Bachalo ("Death: The Time of Your Life"), Marc Hempel ("Sandman" — "The Kindly Ones"), Michael Zulli ("Sandman" — "The Wake" — a pencilling masterpiece) and Jon J. Muth ("Moonshadow").

Remember, as much as a good story will hold you, excellent art will take you to the next level.

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Risk-free rock



Bret Gottschall/DN

Club offers bands for everyone

By Brooks Hitt
Staff Reporter

For most bands, finding a place to play all-ages shows in Omaha never has been easy — or economically viable.

Rob Rathe and the Cog Factory are out to change that.

Founded by Rathe, the Cog Factory is an all-ages club in Omaha. Its first show was held in June 1993.

Previously, Rathe booked shows and held them in rented halls, which was rarely a profitable enterprise.

"It wasn't uncommon to lose \$100 to \$200," Rathe said.

This is where the Cog Factory differs.

"We never lose money; we can't. We never set up a show that has the possibility to lose money," Rathe said.

The Cog Factory has remained up front and honest with the bands who play there. Bands aren't promised the moon — or any money at all, in fact — and the Cog Factory has

gained notoriety with agents for crossing out just about all of the guarantees on the contracts.

So if no money is lost, who is cleaning up?

No one. The Cog Factory is a nonprofit organization and intends on staying that way. Rathe is stretching the money just far enough to cover the bills. But when he begins to see a profit, Rathe plans on taking the money and investing it in the local music scene.

Rathe knows what he is not going to do with the money. He said he didn't want to "start a label, but help local bands put their stuff out."

Another reason why the Cog Factory is gaining popularity is their low cover charges. A show never costs more than \$7, and a price that high is rare.

Rathe said the Cog Factory's all-ages status helped to keep ticket prices below the norm.

"In general, bands like all-ages clubs, and understand that we're not making tons of money off drinks,"

he said.

Some of the quality national bands that will be playing at the Cog in the next month include: Gas Huffer, Man or Astroman?, Season to Risk and Seven Year Bitch. The Cog Factory always has shows on Fridays and Saturdays, as well as throughout the week. Besides the national bands, the shows feature a nice cross-section of the Lincoln and Omaha music scene.

Bands interested in playing at the Cog Factory don't need to follow the usual booking route of making phone calls and sending out tapes, Rathe said. Instead, the Cog Factory encourages bands of any musical style to set up their own shows with other acts and, in most cases, Rathe will provide the venue.

It's not arena rock, that's for sure. If Rathe and the Cog Factory have anything to prove, it's that T-shirts can be sold for less than \$25 and tickets can still be bought for less than \$20.

Lame film best left in oblivion

By Mark Baldridge
Film Critic

Life in Lincoln got you down? Try living in "Oblivion." You'll never be sorry you're not a struggling young filmmaker trying to make it in Tinseltown again.

Movie Preview



Would-be struggling young actors, cinematographers, gaffers (whatever they are) and sundry wannabe-in-film-credits types also would be well advised to sit through "Living in Oblivion." Tom DiCillo's hip wannabe indie take on Francois Truffaut's "Day for Night."

This film (which opens tonight at the Sheldon) should relieve even the most star-eyed of the desire to drop it all and run off to wait tables in Hollywood.

A little film about making little films and, more insidiously, the anxiety dreams of little filmmakers,

Poetry slam allows everyone to indulge

By Patrick Hambrecht
Senior Reporter

Unlike a typical poetry reading, audience members are encouraged to scream, boo and giggle aloud at performers in the Angrian Revolution's Poetry Slam on Thursday night.

"It's not a setting where the audience has to be quiet," Angrian president Steven Sparling said. "You can laugh. You can be totally raucous."

Loud crowd participation and a competitive spirit is what makes a Poetry Slam unique, he said. Thursday's poetry slam will take place in the Crib at the Nebraska Union.

Five judges will be chosen randomly out of the audience to rate poets on an Olympic scale of one to 10. Poets will be judged on literary quality and how well they read their poems, with prizes of \$25, \$15 and \$10 gift certificates for the top three winners.

Private poets and diary scribblers shouldn't be embarrassed to perform, Sparling said. At last semester's competition, many of the performers never had attended a slam before, he said.

"The whole event itself was

great," he said. "Just about everyone had one piece that really shone out."

Poets who haven't performed publicly before should try reading for a few friends, or recording their written material onto a cassette tape, he said.

It also might be a good idea for beginning performers to make sure their material is easy to understand, Sparling said.

"In general, it's probably a good idea not to include a lot of outside references that people are going to have to already know about, just to understand what you're saying," Sparling said.

Sparling said he started the Angrian Revolution to create a family-styled group of writers, modeled after Charlotte and Branwell Bronte.

"They wrote about this imaginary place called Angria," he said. "I like the whole idea of a brother and sister working together. That's what I wanted my club to do, helping each other and improving our writing."

Poets who would like to perform should show up at 7:45 p.m. to sign up. The Poetry Slam will begin at 8 p.m. There is no sign-up fee, and admission is free.

Breakup leads to Ravine

By Brooks Hitt
Staff Reporter

Following the demise of

Omaha's Ritual Device, former members Mike Saklar, Eric Ebers and Randy Cotton are ready to begin a new project. The name of that

Concert Preview



project is Ravine.

It was at a show last September, playing under the name "Rich Will Wear Levis," when the band first realized it could continue without vocalist Tim Moss.

Vocal responsibilities are now shared among all three members. Trying to replace Moss is not their goal, but neither is forgetting about their years in Ritual Device.

"Ritual Device is definitely a big part of the band, even though we're not totally carrying on with the music," said Saklar, Ravine's guitarist.

Similarities exist between Ritual Device and Ravine, but there are definite differences.

"It's a much deeper and darker sound," said Cotton, the band's bassist.

Ravine's members also realize that the band will have to make some adjustments.

"Tim's stage antics helped bring the crowd to the band, but now the music will have to do it," Saklar said.

Some of the ties made during the tenure in Ritual Device have helped the band to get a quick start. One such tie has been Frank Kozik.

In July 1995, Ritual Device released a 10-inch record on Kozik's label, Man's Ruin Re-

See RAVINE on 13

See OBLIVION on 13