

the **HALL**  
of  
**BOB**

Comic artist searches for his past

BY **BRET SCHULTE**  
Senior Reporter

Comic artist Bob Hall recently discovered he shares a lot more with Bruce Wayne than a working relationship.

Moving back to Lincoln in April after 20 years drawing comics in New York, England and Ireland, Hall is trying to unearth a past that has been kept from him for 53 years — his true family.

"I found out I was adopted through my Aunt Ethel," Hall said. "I think she sort of felt a responsibility to tell me, since she is the last living member of that generation of my family."

It is an eerie comic book-type tale for this man who has drawn and written such legendary heroes as "The Avengers," "Spiderman," "The Fantastic Four" and now, appropriately enough, "Batman."

Like the Batman character he is now drawing for D.C. Comics on assignment, Hall grew up without his true parents and is now trying to set right a past he could not control.

He returned to Lincoln shortly after his Aunt Ethel's confession, hoping he will find his biological mother and that she will want to meet him.

Because of the legalities of a closed adoption, Hall's biological mother must give her permission to have her name released. If she consents, it would allow Hall to draw the ending to a mystery more dear and suspenseful than any he has created on paper.

As he waits for the final word from the Department of Records, Hall continues drawing a new "Batman" comic,

one of a series of "Elseworld" comics, which he describes as "what-if" adventures for traditional superheroes.

Still in progress, Hall's comic book "I, Joker-2083"

began as the winning entry of a contest held by D.C. Comics for the "Elseworld" series, a concept exploring the infinite but plausible possibilities of superheroes placed in different eras, worlds and dimensions.

Set in the year 2083, "I, Joker-2083" is, in some ways, typical of "Batman" comics. It takes place in a dark world corrupt with evil and paralyzed with fear, where villains abound and citizens are victims. But something has changed: Batman is a bad man.

"Batman is a cult leader," Hall said. "It's as if he's the pope and a series of people assume the head of this cult, and their title is the Batman."

The United States has dissolved into a chaotic feudal system consisting of independent city-states; and in Gotham City, the person-

ification of Batman has been perverted into a tool of a fascist government, which controls its citizens through fear of the Dark Knight and his followers.

The mock religion revolves around a ceremony where the traditional "Batman" villains are hunted down in a blood ritual.

"In actuality (the villains) are enemies of the state," Hall said. "They are surgically altered to look like them. Our hero is one guy who is made to look like Joker who thwarted his programming."

The man sets about destroying Batman, which will, by the laws of the time, make him the next Batman and grant him the power to return Gotham City to its previous (if relative) health.

This is Hall's first experience with D.C. Comics, having been employed primarily by Marvel for most of his 20 years in the business.

Originally a theater director, he received his Master of Fine Arts from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and worked on several productions locally before pursuing his dream to New York, where so many artists hope to find success.

Hall found it, but not where he expected.

"Going to New York, you realize pretty quickly you need some sort of marketable skill to be able to make it," he said. "Usually it is a waiter or temp work of some type. A friend suggested I go into comics."

The '70s was an era of burgeoning popularity for comics, but Hall entered the field with no expectations of great success.

Hoping for a life in the theater, (he directed a successful off-Broadway production

of "Dracula" for several years) he supported these efforts through his drawings.

He still does, and now that Hall is back in Lincoln he plans to produce for the Futz Theatre when his work on "I, Joker-2083" is finished.

"I juggled a career for years in theater and comic books," he said. "Theater was what is difficult."

Hall hopes to produce a version of "Frankenstein" in the tiny Futz theater, which would require a lot of imagination both on his behalf and the audience's.

But Hall has plenty of imagination; and if he finds his mother, maybe he'll learn where he got it from.



ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF BOB HALL

(ABOVE) BOB HALL has been a comic book artist for the past 20 years.

(RIGHT) HALL'S lesser-known work and experience led him to an opportunity to work for D.C. Comics.



Classical pianist to perform at Lied

BY **SARAH BAKER**  
Senior Reporter

Lied Center

Nineteenth-century composer Frederic Chopin played his first public concert at age 7. Garrick Ohlsson heard Chopin's music for the first time in concert at when he was 9.

After that experience, Ohlsson decided he wanted to be a concert pianist.

Ohlsson, who is considered by many to be the foremost interpreter of the works of Chopin, will perform tonight at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

"Chopin is the litmus test," Ohlsson told the New York Times in 1995. "He's kind of the Rosetta stone for pianists."

Ohlsson's gold medal win in 1970 of the Chopin Competition brought him worldwide recognition as one of the premier pianists of his generation. He has been nominated for a Grammy Award twice.

Ann Chang-Barnes, assistant professor of piano at the University of Nebraska School of

Music, is giving a pre-performance speech in the Lied-Steinhart room tonight.

Chang-Barnes said Ohlsson is not only world renowned for his renditions of Chopin's music, but also for his other interpretations as well.

"He is going to be playing four Chopin pieces for us tonight, but is also including a Beethoven piece as well as a Prokofiev," she said. "Those are both huge works in themselves."

Chang-Barnes encouraged people to see Ohlsson because opportunities like this in Lincoln are rare.

"He is a world class performer, and it's something we probably won't get to hear again," she said. "It is a good chance to hear Ohlsson do what he is so well known for." Ohlsson is performing at the Lied Center for Performing Arts, 12<sup>th</sup> and R streets,

tonight at 8. Ticket prices are \$26, \$22 and \$18, half-price for students. For more information, contact the Lied box office at 472-4747.