



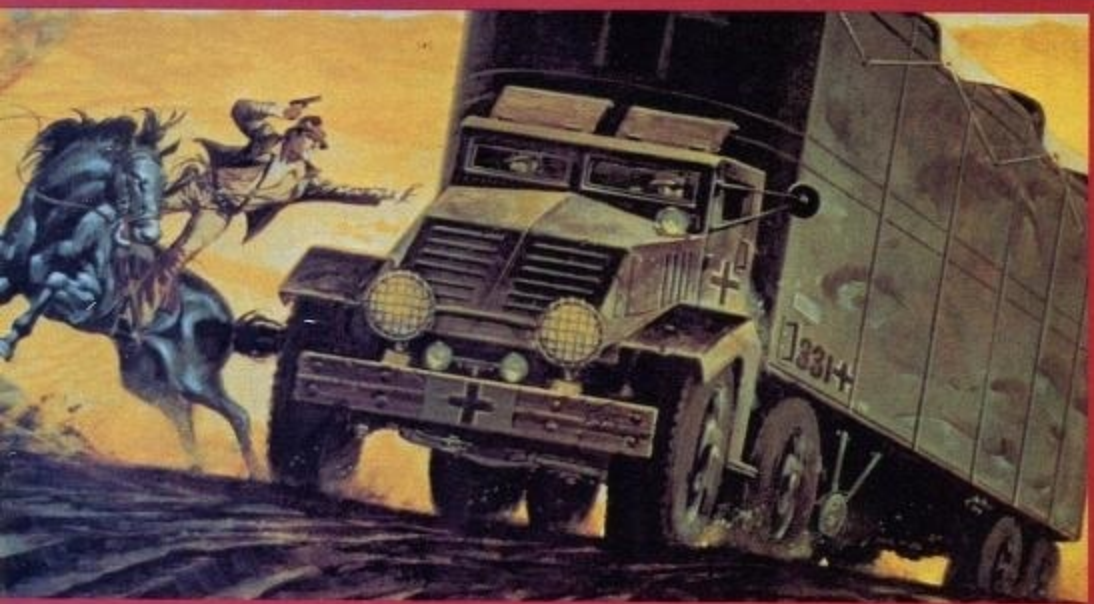
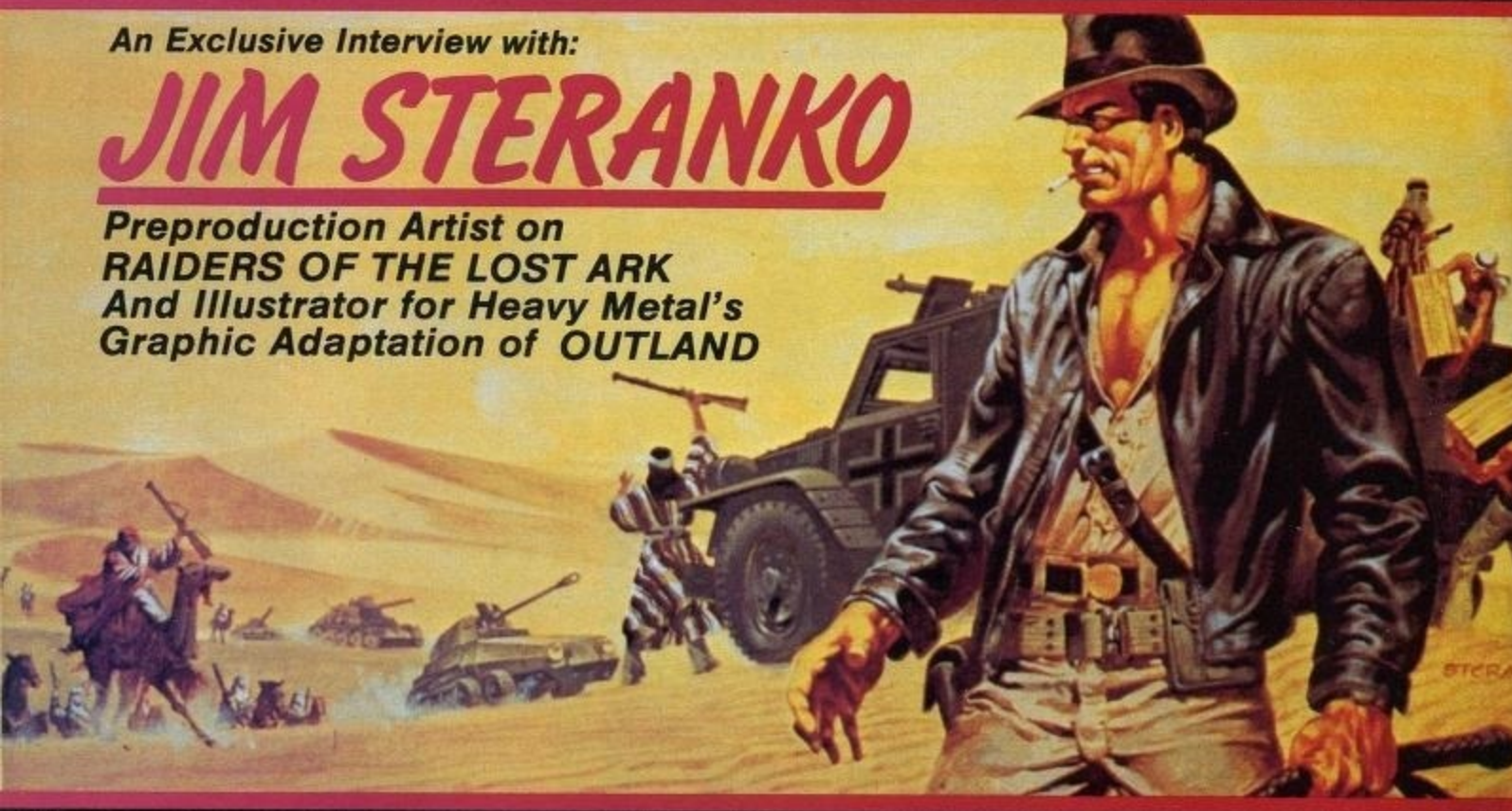
Within the past few years, graphic novelizations of major genre movies have become popular with "comic art" oriented publications. In this exclusive interview, multi-talented Jim Steranko talks about his return to the comics field with HEAVY METAL's graphic adaptation of OUTLAND, his preproduction work for Lucas/Spielberg's RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, creative experiences past and present, and his philosophies of life in general.



An Exclusive Interview with:

JIM STERANKO

Preproduction Artist on
RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK
And Illustrator for Heavy Metal's
Graphic Adaptation of OUTLAND



Interview by DOUGLAS RICE

FF: Some years ago you dropped out of the comics field to devote full attention to your Supergraphics publishing company. What inspired you to return to the field to illustrate *Heavy Metal's* graphic adaptation of *Outland*?

STERANKO: As far as *Outland* goes, I saw the project as a worthwhile one. I liked the idea of what was essentially a western plot taking place on a planet in the very near future—even if there are a number of holes in the script. There are in almost any script. But, the idea was entertaining and the film worked visually. In terms of theme and imagery, it struck me as being the first *noir* science fiction film, somewhat in the 'Chandleresque' vein. A style/technique was so important to me that I said if I couldn't come up with one that suited me, I wouldn't take the job.

FF: The final inkings of the drawings in *Outland* are somewhat more angular than your previous renderings. Were you experimenting with new techniques?



STERANKO: *Outland* is a very dark film, in terms of characters and visuals. I tried to find a style that would compliment the story. As I was developing this idea, I remembered something that I had seen years ago on the wall of Dan Adkins' studio. It was a clipping he had cut from *Life* magazine that explored the deterioration of a man's mind. The man had drawn four portraits of a cat, done over a period of maybe twelve years. The first cat as very realistic. The second was modified. The third was modified even further, and the fourth one was completely fragmented; almost as if it were shards of a broken mirror. The last cat portrait was composed of a mass of sharp points and angles; the softness of line that appeared in the first portrait was completely gone. This hard-edged fourth drawing was the key to the *Outland* style, equating to the atmosphere on *Lo* which is very harsh and paranoid. I tried to incorporate into the style so that psychologically it would affect the reader, just as the cat picture artist was affected. I felt

it would subliminally influence the reader's perception of the strip and the story. **FF:** How did you settle on the one scene/one shot approach in your panel layouts? **STERANKO:** As for the double page concept, I had 44 pages in which to tell the story, and I thought that the device would help lock it together. I hoped to give readers the kind of familiarity that audiences have when they face the wide screen. The double-page device for the *Outland* adaptation additionally acted as what's called a 'master or 'establishing' shot. The little panels are details, or 'inserts' in film terms showing character development and dialogue advance. There isn't a need to establish a scene more than once on a page or a double page. The comics are so small that no matter where you look, the eye can peripherally perceive all panels on the page at once. **FF:** Your preproduction work for the Lucas/Spielberg film team-up of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was welcome news for your fans.

STERANKO: The first *Raiders* painting I did established the character of Indiana Jones. There was really no actor discussed at this point, at least not with me. I was told to produce a rugged, pulp-type of hero who could appear to achieve the kind of heroics that Indiana Jones is involved in. As the film was being shot and as dailies were coming in, some material filtered back to America. I got a call from Carol Tittleman at Lucasfilm who said, "You wouldn't believe how close the paintings are to the material on the screen." And I didn't, until I actually saw the film. George, incidentally, was very specific about the scenes he wanted painted. I remember one amusing aside. I got a note from George's secretary describing Indiana Jones, which said that Indy should have a jacket like George wears. That was the only instruction. Fortunately, I knew what kind of jacket George wears. It all worked out very well. I perceived Indiana Jones as a cross between Doc Savage and Humphrey Bogart. I'm pleased I wasn't far

Illustrations above: Four preproduction paintings by Jim Steranko which were done as character and clothing studies for George Lucas when *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was still in the planning stages. Top right, Jim Steranko stands in front of some of his creations. Center, a panel from Steranko's *Heavy Metal Magazine* adaptation of *Outland*.



WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY STERANKO
OUTLAND



from wrong. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is definitely my kind of movie.

FF: Other people have been saying much the same thing about *Raiders*. That they didn't think that kind of film could be made anymore, because nobody would buy it; but everybody is buying it. They love it.

STERANKO: I have great faith in Steven Spielberg. I think he's one of America's finest filmmakers, certainly in the top few working in the business today. If anybody can do it, he can do it. And George Lucas is quite a visionary. He's obviously a master filmmaker who has a headful of surprises in store for us, just as he gave us *Raiders*.

FF: With the *Raiders* experience under your belt, has this in any way altered your perceptions of film-making as a career?

STERANKO: Yes, it makes me want to do film more than ever. My ultimate goal is some form of film-making, perhaps writing and directing. When I founded *Supergraphics* in the late 60s, the idea was to parlay the money that was made on a project like the *History of Comics* into a bigger package and so on until there was enough to back production of one of my own films.

Over the years, most of what I've done seems to point in that direction. *Prevue* magazine is about 75% film-oriented. It's something that all of us like; hard-core comics fans included. I believe that both Lucas and Spielberg were somewhat familiar with my comic work. Of course, they are students of the pulp era, as am I. Because I had done a number of pulp-type properties, like *The Shadow* and *G-8 and His Battle Aces*, it may have been only natural for them to call me to do the production illustrations for *Raiders*. As a matter of fact, I'm hoping that George asks me to work on the other *Raiders* films.

The reason I took the job was to

contribute anything that I had to the property. Neither of those gentlemen really need much help, and it's a pleasure working with the kind of professionals who know exactly what they're doing.

FF: Are you interested in the area of production design or art direction?

STERANKO: I could get seriously involved in production design. I can't say that I'm enthralled about straight storyboarding, but I'd do it if the project was right. I'd consider being involved in creating the tone and atmosphere of a film, doing a series of production illustrations right down to storyboarding. And I'll know it when it comes along.

FF: Though, as yet, you have received no major film screen credit, your background, abilities and creative aims make you an ideal subject for an interview in a time of transition in popular media. Anyone who has followed your career knows you are a man of many talents: artist, writer, designer, editor, publisher, historian, spokesman, magician, escape artist, musician and snappy dresser. Your range of experience and expertise in these areas (among others) at your young age seems to be leading to something on an even grander scale. Do you feel this, or are you finally finding a comfortable niche to develop fully?

STERANKO: I'm not sure anyone develops well when they're comfortable, least of all me. Development depends largely upon pressure, either external or internal, often both—like diamonds develop from coal tar. To put it simply, I am most comfortable or fulfilled when I'm experiencing the discomfort of the birth of my ideas. That sensation is ultimately the most satisfying.

A number of years ago, I felt that I was living five separate lifetimes. I had five careers going at once under different names, and kept track of people from the name by which they called me.

FF: In your work as a paperback cover artist, you've done art for westerns, fantasy, SF, and pulp-action/horror. I think you'll agree that, to date, your most noteworthy efforts in this area are the paintings you did for *The Shadow* reprint series. In some cases you not only had to top the original pulp covers, but even yourself when the volumes were restyled. What are your impressions of the current state of paperback cover art, and can we expect to see more of your work in this field in the near future?

STERANKO: Paperback illustration is among the best art being produced today. It's the last outpost of American illustration.



As far as my own work appearing again on paperback covers, I think that may be an improbability. I retired commercially about three years ago. I no longer take assignments, except when they really appeal to me, like the *Outland* job or the *Raiders of the Lost Ark* production paintings. I am hoping, however, that if the *Shadow* paperback series is reinstated that I will be asked to participate in the covers. I believe I still have something to say along those lines. I'd like a shot at doing them again. I enjoyed those paintings immensely. It was like finding a time I had missed in the past, like living again in 1938 and doing something that I should and would have done then—a second chance at a life before this one. As a kid, I listened to *The Shadow* on radio every Sunday for as long as I can remember. I read the pulps and the comics, and had a childlike fantasy about someday adding to *The Shadow's* legend. Years later, in a completely unrelated situation, I met Bruce Elliott who wrote many *Shadow* novels. We became very close in a kind of father and son relationship. Then, I met Walter Gibson who created *The Shadow*. He was like Elliott's father, thereby making him my grandfather. So, in a way, I am the son of the son of *The Shadow*.

FF: Your first graphic novel, *Chandler: Red Tide*, was the most impressive book that Byron Preiss published. While both Preiss and Morning Star Press have made sincere efforts to sustain this storytelling form, do you feel that the graphic novel will have a chance to evolve, like comics?

STERANKO: I don't believe comics have evolved or matured, and I'm not suggesting that they should either. The form is exactly the same as it was 50 years ago. Intrinsicly, it's a perfect form, like an egg. That form can stay the way it is. It's the audience that grows up.



Illustration at right: an unpublished scene from Steranko's *Chandler*.

[Continued on page 62]



THE HALL, LIKE ALL THE ROOMS AT SHADOW HOUSE, HARBORED A PROFUSION OF ANTIQUITIES THE OLD MAN HAD SPENT A LIFETIME COLLECTING! AN ODD, ALMOST EERIE, COLLECTION OF MISCELLANEA FILLED EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY!

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STERANKO

(Continued from page 53)

and as it grows, it needs a different kind of comic book. That's where visual novels come in.

I've been disappointed that most visual novels haven't really been 'adult' in nature. They don't deal with adult themes in an adult way. I am not talking about sex, blood and violence; that's still kiddy stuff. I'm talking about perhaps adapting classic or contemporary literature into visual form, or creating material that is the equivalent of it.

Most visual novels have been science fiction, sort of super comics, although they are, in some cases, very sophisticated and beautifully done. The printing is much beyond what we get in the ordinary newsstand comic book. It's the subject matter itself that has not matured.

FF: Your publishing company *Supergraphics* was originally intended to publish your own graphic novels, but went on to produce the initial two volumes of *The History of Comics* and develop the *COMIXSCENE/MEDIASCENE/PREVUE* line of periodicals, all devoted to promoting the work of others. Has the effort in establishing a publishing concern in your own mold ultimately prevented you from benefiting from it creatively?

STERANKO: I am extremely gratified by showcasing the work of others. I have no *Steranko* art hanging in my studio and home. I prefer the work of other artists. Although much of my art was involved in various publications I've produced over the last 12 years, in many cases it was a matter of expediency.

As an editor or an artist, my sensibilities are primarily directed to the work I sense as being worthwhile and fulfilling to the contemporary audience. I try to make those judgements not only for myself but with the readers and viewers in mind. And, until they are no longer interested in that judgement, every page will continue to be made from equal parts of *Steranko* blood, sweat and tears.



STERANKO



THEN...THEY BEGAN TO SCREAM!