INTERVIEWS

# 7 Questions With Award-Winning Illustration Legend William Stout (Part I or II)

December 17, 2018

by Esther Rabbit

***William Stout*** *is an award-winning artist of international renown in many fields: themed entertainment and motion picture design (specializing in science fiction/fantasy/horror effects films), comic book art, book illustration, poster*

*design, CD covers, public murals, and dynamic yet accurate reconstructions of prehistoric life.*

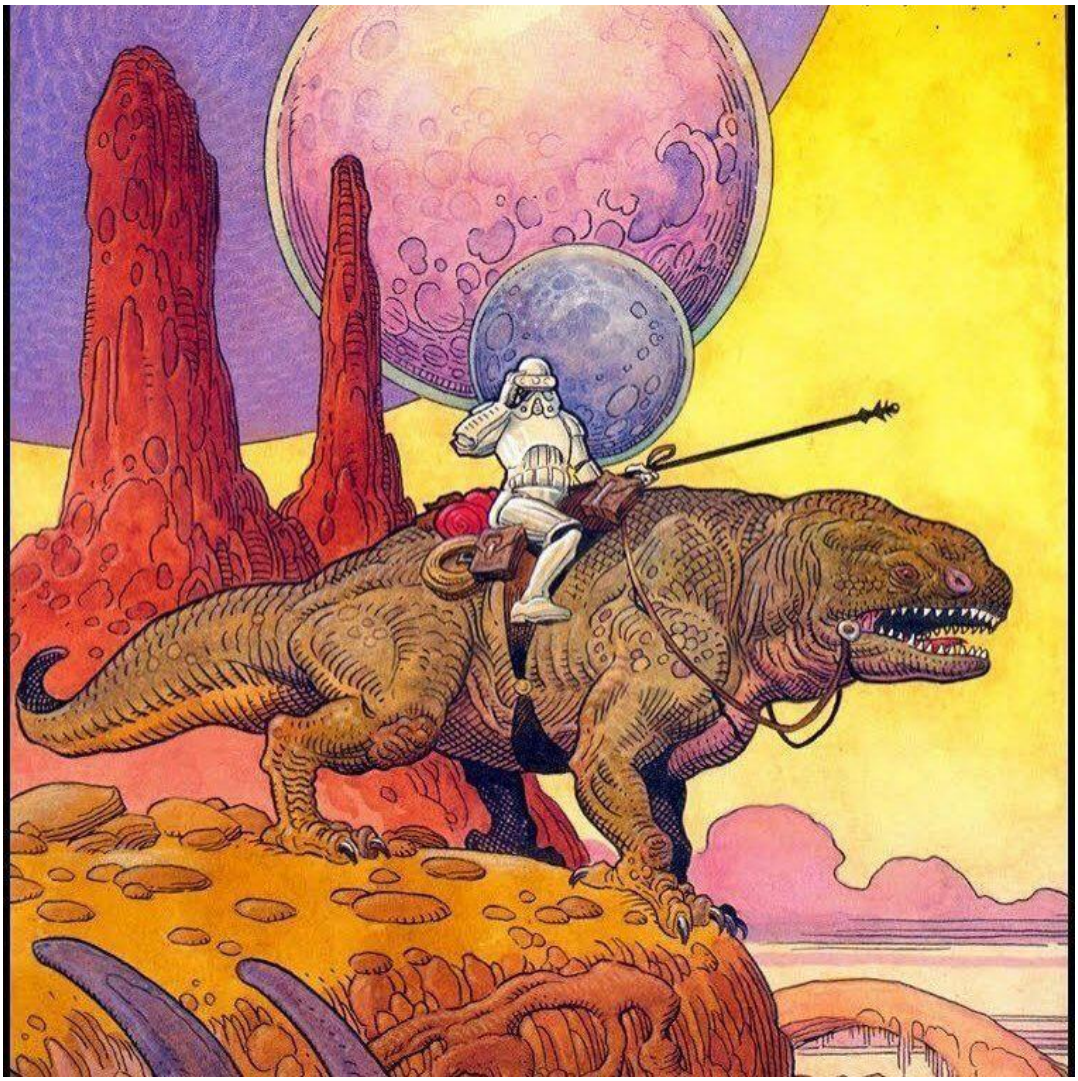
*His endeavors in the field of motion pictures and comic book art have gained him a loyal following, making him a popular guest at comic book, science fiction and horror movie conventions around the world.*

*His huge, new book from Insight Editions, Fantastic Worlds – The Art of William Stout, thoroughly covers his fifty-year career as a working artist.*

*In today's interview, William Stout – one of the most complete artists in the ink world, speaks about his latest release, trends in the illustration industry and gives advice to the young generation of illustrators.*

*Due to his kind nature and extensive experience in the field, he has agreed to a series of **7 Questions** interviews with me, Fiction writer, **Esther Rabbit**.*
*He is by far the most modest man of his caliber I've ever had the honor to interview and a true inspiration to artists all over the spectrum.*

*To find out more about Artist William Stout, his art and his humanitarian work, please visit his official website.*



**Esther Rabbit: In 1995, you became the key character designer for the Walt Disney full length computer animated feature *Dinosaur* (released in 2000), in 1996 you designed "Edgar" the big bug in *Men In Black*, and let's not forget your incredible designs for *The Muppets' Wizard of Oz*, Guillermo del Toro's horror classic *Pan's Labyrinth*, Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* and Frank Darabont's *The Mist*. If I'd be asking you all this out loud, I'd be out of breath by now…how did you manage to conquer the film industry and what other honorable mentions did I forget to add?**

William Stout: I don't believe I've conquered the film industry. Right now, after two gigantic fights with Disney and Paramount, it often feels like the Film Biz has conquered me. It's turned very, very nasty.

Most of the people who have prominent positions in the movie biz don't seem to care much for movies. They tend to be more like attorneys or accountants in their approach to making films.

It was really fun making movies when I got into the business in the late 1970s. You (or a friend) thought up a movie and then you made it. It wasn't quite that easy, but you get the idea.

It was very important to young film makers to have guys like Roger Corman or wildcat companies like Cannon Films around to give young film makers a chance to break into The Biz.

Looking back, I had enormous power in The Biz. I could get actors parts in films and hire anyone I wanted to work in the art department. I was invited to every private film screening.

If you saw the names and numbers in my old Rolodex, your jaw would drop. Back in my *Conan* days we shared offices with Steven Spielberg; Kathleen Kennedy was our receptionist; John Milius and Ron Cobb were my bosses and George Lucas was a readily accessible visitor. Those were the days!

**Esther Rabbit: You've designed album covers for the Who and the Rolling Stones, among others. How has this helped you in your career?**

William Stout: Creating those LP covers was always really fun. I love music with a great passion. I have been in bands beginning when I was fourteen years old.

In the UK I am known more for my album covers than for my dinosaur art. The Who asked permission to use one of my Who bootleg LP covers as the picture disc image on their *Odds and Sods* CD.

Cat Stevens called me out of the blue and asked me to create the cover for his 12” LP *Tell ‘Em I’m Gone* a couple of years ago because his son had shown him my book *Legends of the Blues*. Music and art related to music will always be a vital part of my life.

**Esther Rabbit: Muralist, illustrator, comics artist, poster designer, you're one of the most complete artists the ink world has been blessed with. How did you end up having your fingers in so many pies?**

William Stout: Short attention span, I think. I like doing a variety of jobs and work in a variety of styles. I let each problem dictate its own solution; I don't try to shoehorn in the same style as the solution for every job problem I receive.

I used to describe my career as "the Pinball School of Career Planning". I bounced all over the place: comics, film design album covers, theme park design…you name it, I've probably done it.

And, as soon as I had conquered a genre, I felt compelled to move on to something new, something I hadn't done. But when I got my first one-man show (*Dinosaurs, Penguins & Whales – The Wildlife of Antarctica*) at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, things changed.

When I finished the 45 paintings for the exhibition, I didn't want to stop. That had never happened before.

It felt like I had emotionally come home, so to speak, and that I had finally found the work that would sustain my interest for the rest of my career. I feel the same way about murals. I could paint murals forever.

**Esther Rabbit: *Fantastic Worlds -The Art of William Stout is* a true gift your followers can cherish. It spans your entire fifty-year career, celebrating both your life and art. Tell us a little bit more about this treasure.**

William Stout: The book is huge — over 300 pages and over 500 images. It's just the tip of the Stout iceberg, though.

The book has twelve chapters, each on a different aspect of my career: dinosaurs, comics, Antarctica, fantasy illustration, film design, etc. I plan to

eventually do entire books on each of those subjects, so *Fantastic Worlds* is the cream of the cream. It makes a helluva doorstop, too.

Robert Williams wrote a great introduction to the book and Ed Leimbacher wrote an incredibly perceptive text. The reproduction of my art throughout the book is pretty much spot-on, thanks to my assistant and Gal Friday Kris Kobziff.

## Esther Rabbit: Can you speak about the trends you've witnessed in the illustration industry and their impact on the new generation?

William Stout: I have learned to roll with the punches as the different kinds of work that have sustained my career have risen and fallen. Two of my former greatest sources of income don't exist anymore for the most part: movie poster illustration and theme park design.

The arenas in which young artists will work in the future may not even exist right now. And the genres they are working in now (or plan to work in) may suddenly disappear.

Be prepared for that, because I can guarantee you it will happen. The only constant in life is change.

## Esther Rabbit: What advice do you have for young illustrators trying to define their style?

Produce a concentrated amount of work in a very short time and your own style will emerge. That's what happened to me when I created *THE DINOSAURS – A Fantastic New View of a Lost Era*.

I didn't really have my own style when I began illustrating *THE DINOSAURS*. I began by mimicking the styles of my favorite artists. I soon ran out of time to do that, as my publication deadline was approaching.

Out of that last concentrated effort to finish my book, my own style emerged.

**Esther Rabbit: You have a cultivated talent and passion for your work, more awards and fans than we can count–what's the secret to creating magic for so long?**

William Stout: Perseverance, mainly. If you hang in long enough, work hard, always try to do your very best work and are kind to the people you meet, magical things will eventually happen.

# 7 Questions With Award-Winning Illustration Legend William Stout (Part 2)

March 25, 2019

by Esther Rabbit

**Esther Rabbit: You mentioned William Cameron Menzies as a role model in the industry –What do you admire about the Film Production Designer and Art Director?**

William Stout: The production designer is the eyes of the director. He (or she) is responsible for everything you see on the screen except for the performances of the actors. The Art Director is the Production Designer's right hand. The Art Director takes care of the scheduling and budgeting, allowing the Production Designer more time to design.

Menzies was the first person in film to receive the title of "Production Designer" (for *Gone with The Wind*). It was a consolation prize created by David Selznick for Menzies, who directed one third of *GWTW (*including the Burning of Atlanta sequence). The other director, Victor Fleming refused to share the directing credit, so Selznick made up a new credit for Menzies.

I admire Menzies' crystal clear visual storytelling abilities. And, he could really draw and design. He also never took himself too seriously, nor was he overly confident. Even at the peak of his career he was always worried about whether or not he'd be getting another film project.

**Esther Rabbit: Can you tell us about a teacher who has changed your world as kid?**

William Stout: Elliot Wittenberg, my 5th grade teacher, caught me drawing one day when I should have been listening. Instead of punishing me, he asked, "Do you have any more drawings like this?"

The kid next to me spoke up. "Aw, you should see them. He's got a whole book of drawings of dinosaurs and monsters." Mr. Wittenberg asked, "Would you mind bringing in that book so I could look at them?"

Relieved not to be in trouble, I agreed and brought my sketchbook in the following day. From that day on, Mr. Wittenberg began to assign me extracurricular projects that

involved drawing. He knew I wanted to be a doctor, so he'd ask, "Bill, I think the class needs a chart of the human skeleton. Do you think you could draw that for us?"

I'd immediately agree and get to work on it. I also drew the human muscular system, cross sections of the human eye and ear, etc. What I didn't realize at the time was that I was teaching myself anatomy.

I dedicated my first dinosaur book to Mr. Wittenberg. I tracked him down and presented him with a copy when it was published. I kind of got the feeling I wasn't the first of his students who had done that.

If it wasn't for Mr. Wittenberg, I don't think I would have become an artist.

**Esther Rabbit: Your impressive resumé holds endless hours of intense work. Would you call yourself a workaholic?**

No. I do enjoy my work, though, and don't usually mind working long hours. I don't do overnighters any more, though. Besides my work I also enjoy traveling, going to art museums, music and nature — and a variety of other stimulating pursuits.

**Esther Rabbit: In an interview, you called yourself "a student of the world's art". How's life as a teacher and what's the message you're hoping to get across to your students?**

I think that at a certain point in an artist's career, he or she needs to be a mentor to younger artists. I try to answer their questions, show them the ropes and pitfalls and give them what I think is valuable advice. I tell my students that they should be their own biggest fans and that they should value their work.

For their own protection, they should know the business end of what they do and be able to skillfully negotiate good deals for themselves.

I also stress the importance of life drawing. It's the quickest way to get good. I still do it for three hours every Sunday at my studio.

**Esther Rabbit: If a fan reads this and wishes to become your student, where can they find you and what will they learn?**

I am pretty accessible. They can reach me through my website (www.williamstout.com). They can ask me anything they want and I'll answer honestly (though honesty is something a lot of artists don't want to hear). I will probably try to talk them out of working in the film business.

**Esther Rabbit: What are some superhero gadgets or superpowers that even William Stout would like to have?**

Time travel, so that I could finally see for myself what dinosaurs really looked like! And so that I could meet my artistic heroes throughout history.

**Esther Rabbit: What are the things that have changed your life as an artist?**

World travel, comic books, art-related business classes, Edgar Rice Burroughs illustrations, the art and philosophies of my friend Jean Giraud, studying for twenty years with Harold Kramer, working with Dan O'Bannon, Ron Cobb, Russ Manning, Harvey Kurtzman and Will Elder, Frank Frazetta's work, being art directed by Tony Seiniger, learning design from Judy Goode, meeting and working with Tim Onosko, joining the California Art Club, my strong work ethic and my fights for artists' rights, and lots of good luck.