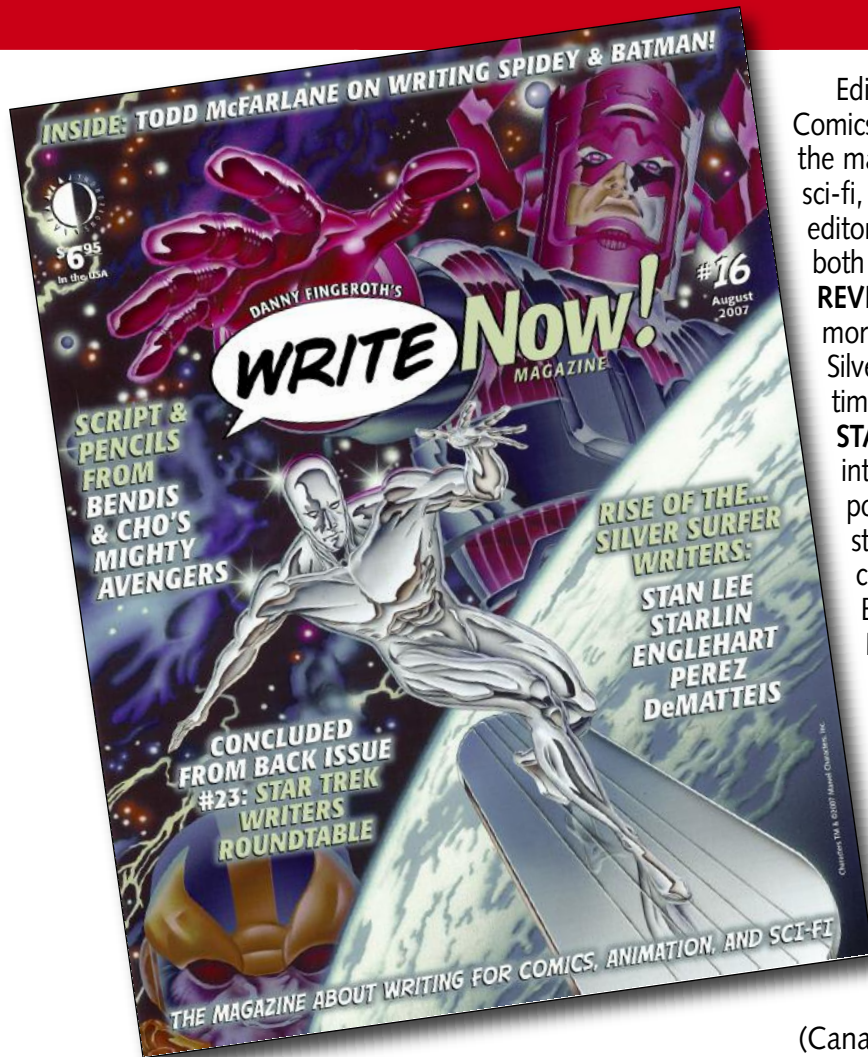


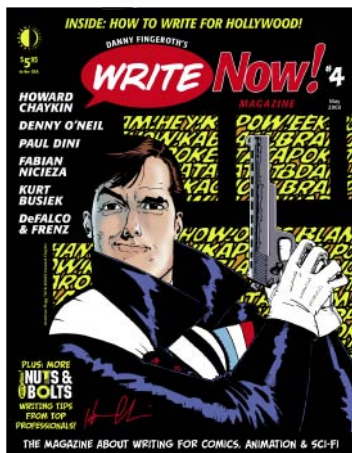
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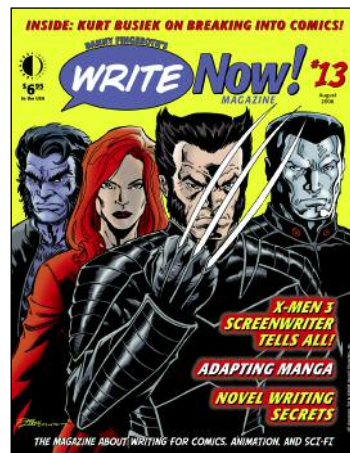
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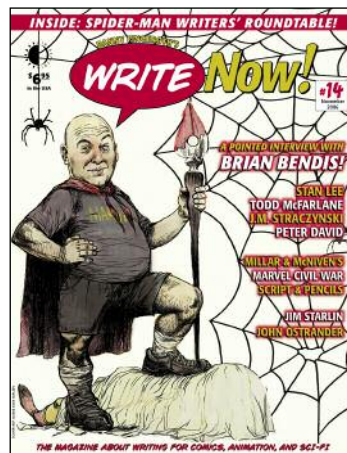
WRITE NOW #4

**HOWARD CHAYKIN, PAUL DINI,
KURT BUSIEK, DENNY O'NEIL**



WRITE NOW #13

**X-MEN SCREENWRITER, AGENTS,
WRITING MANGA, BREAKING IN**



WRITE NOW #14

**BRIAN BENDIS, STAN LEE,
PETER DAVID, JIM STARLIN**



WRITE NOW #15

**ABADAZAD'S DeMATTEIS/PLOOG,
"52" WRITERS, JOHN OSTRANDER**



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THE TODD McFARLANE INTERVIEW

Interview conducted by **Danny Fingerioth** via telephone 5-30-07

Transcribed by **Steven Tice**

Copy-edited by **Eric Fein, Danny Fingerioth** and **Todd McFarlane**

Todd McFarlane's comic book career spans more than twenty years and dozens of popular characters. As artist, his work has graced the pages of **The Amazing Spider-Man** (where he co-created **Venom**), **The Incredible Hulk**, and **Detective Comics**. His professional writing career kicked off with the launch of one of the bestselling series of all time, **Spider-Man**. After years as one of the industry's top creators, Todd joined several other popular comic book artists to form **Image Comics**. There, he launched his own creator-owned series, **Spawn**, which soon caught the attention of Hollywood and was the inspiration for a live action movie and an animated series. In addition to his comic book work, Todd also heads up his own toy and collectible company, **McFarlane Toys**. A busy man of many interests (including part-ownership of the **Edmonton Oilers** NHL hockey team), Todd was able to give us some time to speak about the subject of **Write Now**: writing for comics and related media.

—DF

DANNY FINGERIOTH: Did you write as a kid at all, or in school, Todd? Was that anything you were interested in then?

TODD McFARLANE: I was pretty good at sort of short story stuff, but I think that was just a byproduct of my wild imagination as a whole.

DF: What kind of short stories? What would they be about?

TM: The teacher would assign us to do a factual composition about, say World War II, I couldn't do something like that. But if they said, "Go home and come up with a made-up story and bring it in," and you could add fantasy stuff and big, dramatic melodrama to it—the equivalent of the Jack-in-the-Beanstalk stories—then I could put in a flying elephant, and purple dinosaurs a thousand feet tall, and I could do it easily.

DF: This was in elementary school?

TM: Oh, yeah. You know, the "creative writing" classes.

DF: What about in high school or college? Did you do any writing then?



TM: Not nearly as much. The writing there was more serious so a lot of it was more historical reports and dissertations in some of the classes. And you had less of a chance, or at least in the classes that I was taking, to just have fun with writing like I did when I was in high school or younger.

DF: I've read that you didn't really read comics until high school. How'd you avoid them?

TM: Umm...I played a lot of sports. You know, when we went on road trips, Mom and Dad would stop at the 7-Eleven and buy a couple of Slurpees and a couple of comics and throw them in the back to me and my two brothers, so it's not that I was devoid of comics. I'd read a handful, so I was aware of what comic books were. I never bothered collecting them, though. But at the age of about nine I started collecting baseball cards and football cards, so I was *collecting*, it just was in a different place. Later, all of a sudden I went, "Hey, you know what? Let me check out these comic books that I keep sort of walking by."

DF: *You must have been drawing as a kid.*

TM: Oh, yeah. I was the proverbial “best-artist-in-the-class” kid from Day One. It really goes back to the first Major League Baseball game I went to in the Anaheim area in California which I got to attend because, as a kid in kindergarten, I won an art contest. I drew a pitcher throwing a ball, and it got hung up in the stadium. My dad said, “I’ll take you to the ball game and you can see your artwork and you can watch the game.” So we went. Maybe around then I would have started collecting comic books or done something different, but Dad took me to a ball game that day, and I got to see art, and at the same time became mesmerized by sports. And that was after watching sports on a black-and-white TV my whole life, then walking into a stadium. That was a big moment for a kid back then. In person, you see the bright green grass, and the reds were fire truck red, and it was like walking into the Land of Oz. You went from the black-and-white into the color. You just went, “Wow.”

DF: *With your love of sports combined with your artistic talent, you could have gone on to paint sports portraits or do sports magazine illustration. What was it about comics that made you at some point realize that the storytelling in them appealed to you?*

TM: This is weird, Danny. I remember the day of consciously going into a store to buy my first handful of comic books. I mean, I close my eyes and recreate it. I remember the books that I bought. They were on a spinner-rack. What I don’t remember is, “why now?” I mean, why, at the age of sixteen? I’d been walking by comic books all my life. The closest I can give you is that I had been that incessant doodler for so long, but I didn’t have any focus for my art, and maybe I was just getting older, going, “Somewhere along the line I’m going to have to figure out what to do with this.” And so what happened very quickly was that when I bought those comics and fell in love with them and became a fanatic of comics, that I went, “Aha! Now I know what to do with this doodling. Train myself to draw American super-hero comics.” Because I had, like, fifty styles back then, and all of them were raw, at best. And so I thought, “Focus on this one task called ‘super-hero comics,’ see if you can teach yourself this, because it’s kind of cool.” And from there on, from the time I started collecting, I stopped drawing just willy-nilly doodle stuff and *Mad* magazine type stuff, and I just went, “Everything’s now going to be super-heroic stuff.”

DF: *Was there any friend or relative who said, “Hey, you should check these comic book things out,” or did it just sort of dawn on you?*

TM: Like I said, I’d walked by that store 500 times. And I just thought—because comic books were only 30, 35 cents back then, and I had a couple of bucks in my

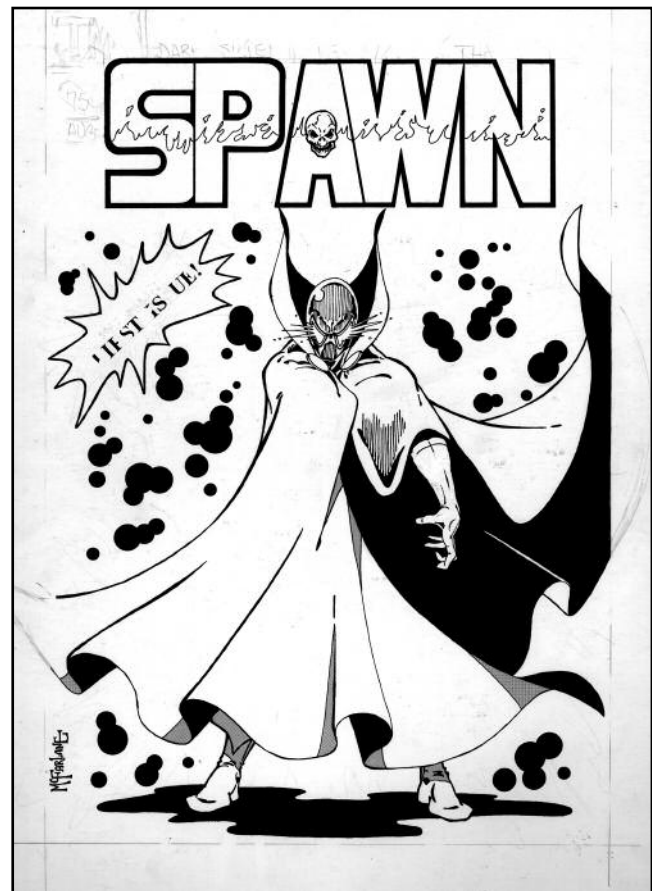
pocket—“I’m going to go buy five comic books.” Why then? I don’t know. And those five soon turned into 35,000.

DF: *Now, you said somewhere that you got over 700 rejection letters? I remember seeing them at that exhibit at the MoCCA [Manhattan’s Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art] last year.*

TM: I sent off about 700 samples, and about half of them came back rejects, so about 350 out of the 700 were officially rejected. The other ones just filed it in the garbage and didn’t even bother to send a rejection letter.

DF: *What kept you going through that?*

TM: A lot of the same things that keep me going now: stubbornness and immaturity—the two things I’d rather not teach the youth of America. You know, I give seminars and discuss, how do you succeed? I hate to say it, but it’s about characteristics I’d rather not even give my own boy, let alone you good people reading this. But you’ve just got to get myopic and stubborn. Those aren’t really the best traits to have. But that was it. I was blinded by my own talent to think that I was



A treat from Todd’s archives—one of his earliest drawings of Spawn, done when Todd was in high school.

[© 2007 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc.]

better than I was.

DF: Well, that's often what it takes to get through the rough spots. When you sent in the art, was it drawing stories you had written, too, or you would take other people's stories and interpret them your own way?

TM: At first it was just pin-up shots. But then, the people who were responding, said, "Hey, you've got to give us page-by-page story stuff." So there were two ways of doing that. You could either, go and look at a comic book and then do your own re-imagining of an existing comic. I did that from time to time, and, as I've told kids, it's a good way to do it, but make sure you don't take the Byrne-Claremont X-Men at the peak, or whatever's a top ten book and try to do better than that. Go get a book that's floundering, and re-imagine *that* book, because you've got a much better chance of inspiring somebody to hire you with that than trying to draw like Neal Adams or write like Chris Claremont. But I also did, at that time, create my own characters. So in high school I created this character amongst many, called Spawn, and I actually did like a 25, 30-page comic book of that, and that was part of some of my samples when I was sixteen. And then they just went dormant until I pulled them out in the early '90s.

DF: Sort of like Erik Larsen with the *Savage Dragon*.

TM: That's it, yeah. Along those lines.

DF: So you would do some of your own stories and some adaptations of other people's stories, it sounds like.

TM: When I was re-imagining someone else's stuff, like if I were looking at a badly drawn Captain America story, then I would use that story, but draw it my own way. If it was *my* character, the true writing came then. I wasn't trying to rewrite Captain America. They've got a writer for that book. I was never, at that point, trying to take over a writer's spot. I was trying to take over an *artist's* spot. But when I did my own comic, then there was no writer, so I had to be the letterer, writer, penciler, inker, all that stuff.

DF: And would the character always be Spawn, or did you have other characters, as well?

TM: I had some other ones. I had a group called "Blood, Sweat and Tears," and then I had this other one called "the Bruise Crew."

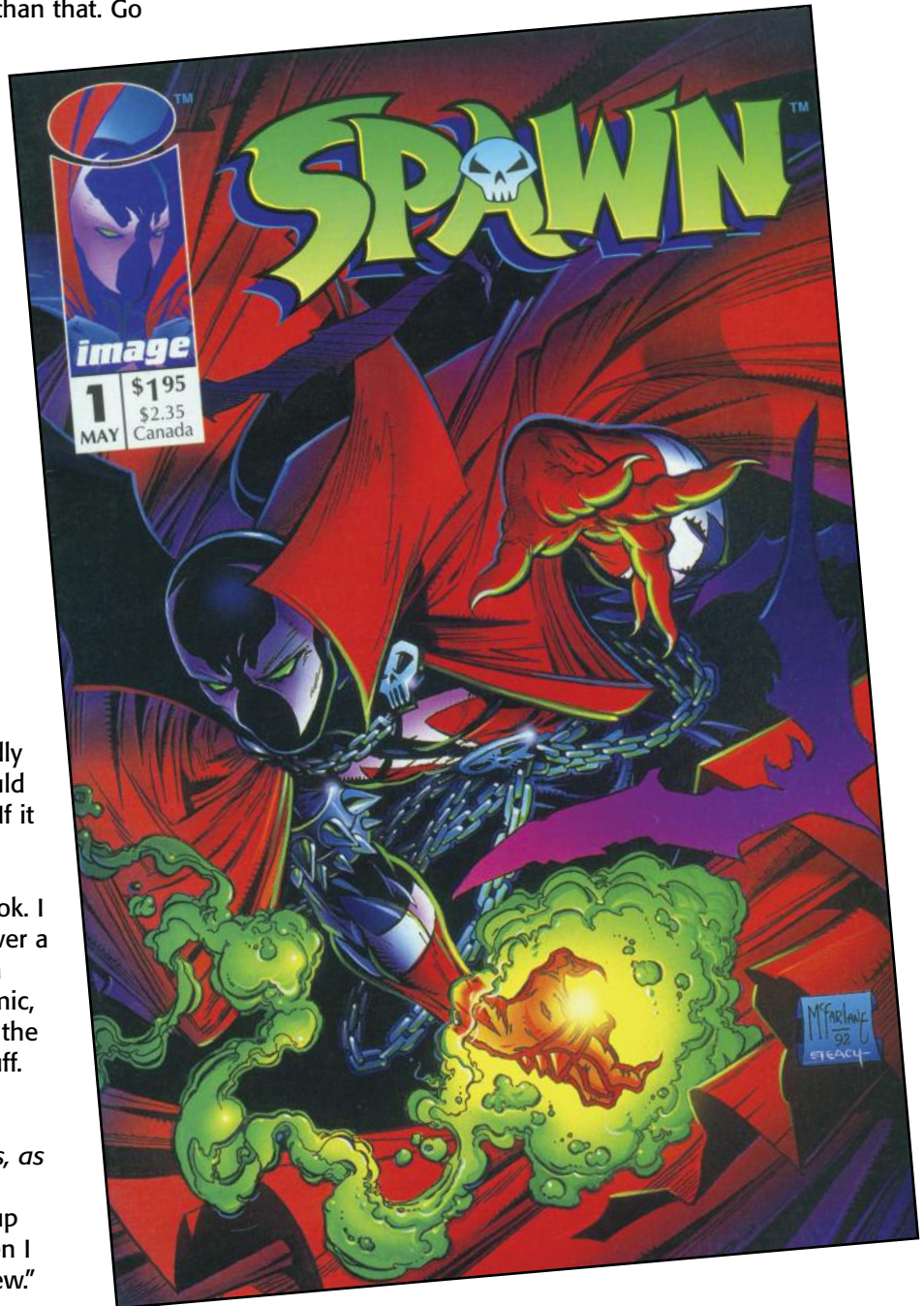
DF: So people may think, "Oh, Todd just

suddenly started writing one day, with *Spider-Man* #1, but actually you had writing experience.

TM: I was writing, but not nearly at the prolific pace that I was drawing. I was probably doing five pages of artwork for every one page I was writing, where a true writer writes all the time. But at that point, my first drive was to do artwork.

DF: I imagine you weren't doing much writing once you actually broke into Marvel and DC as an artist.

TM: When I first broke in, it was strictly as a penciler.



Spawn #1 helped launch Image comics as a major comic book publisher. Cover art by Todd McFarlane. [© 2007 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc.]

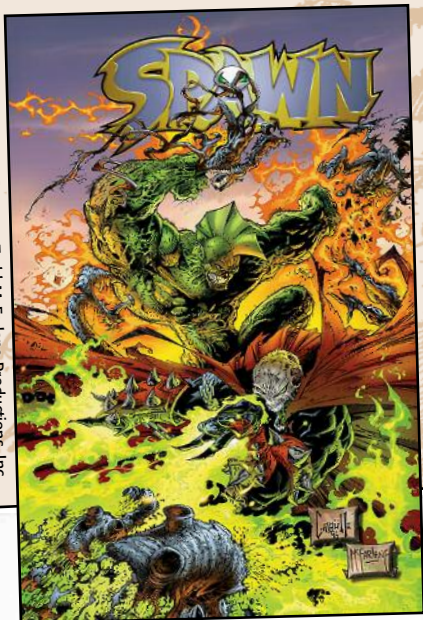
WRITE NOW! NUTS & BOLTS

Here's a rare glimpse of the creative process Todd uses to create an issue of **Spawn**, specifically 1996's #52 (cover by Greg and Todd shown at left).

Below, we see Todd's skeleton plot-outline for the issue. It's a "beat sheet" style plot, which Todd used as notes for his telephone plot conversation with penciler Greg Capullo.

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Savage Dragon © 2007 Erik Larsen]



21) CLOWN? 22) SPAWN 52 PG. PLOT

- 1 - dreams on nightmares? - SILENCE OF HOUSE COOL TREES * NON JKY EFFECT.
- 2 - Start with cyan - close to shore face * Wanda + PULL BANK - AW.
- 3 - Teony - pull back - got to white * RING FORECAST - AW.
- 4 - Wakes up startled. - Wanda wakes up some small thing rolls over. with...
- 5 - Teony - dog starts to hih. - some black boxes...
- 6 - The second coming.
- 7 - * 2 pg spread *
- 8 - conflict - stands deep pipe - capo shot sea - comes down stairs - faces - gets plunged
- 9 - conflict - guys don't believe that to go - those do believe - he throws them down by fish.
- 10 - 10 - leader - asks questions then it spread through camp fire.
- 11 - Under page -
- 12 - Tunnel party of the sea - dragons.
- 13 - Fight Dragon + him + Blood
- 14 - Fight - creates him up.
- 15 - Fight
- 16 - Fight sea dragons.
- 17 - stops - revert
- 18 - turns up.
- 19 - 20 - Confusion

FLIGHT together
Dragons in trouble
Takes perfect
Spawn does not with Dragon
Branche
Strongly ready to go

1 - GASP!

9 - THIS IS CRAZY. IT'S BEEN FIVE YEARS. I SPAN HELPED BURY HIM FOR GOD'S SAKE.

SMALL IN BIGGER BALLOON

10 - GO BACK TO SLEEP SIN I'M GOING TO GET UP FOR A FEW MINUTES.

1 - JESUS... AL??

7 - NOT REALLY.

3 - HE'S READ THE SIGNALS RIGHT.

Teony

WHAT ABOUT?

IMPOSSIBLE...

IMPOSSIBLE...

IMPOSSIBLE?

IMPOSSIBLE?

IT'S OKAY. YOU'RE HAVING A BAD DREAM. THAT'S ALL.

4 - CAN I HELP?

IMPOSSIBLE? IMPOSSIBLE?

THE WORST PART IS HE CAN'T SHARE HIS

THROW

THE WORST PART IS HE'S NOT READY TO SHARE WHAT HE THINKS.



Todd hand-wrote his script (left) for page 4 of the story on an overlay that went over a copy of Greg's pencil art (see next page). Todd and Greg are working "Marvel-style," aka plot-first style, where the dialogue is written after the pencil art is done.

Also shown is how panel one of the page came out. You can see the entire page later in this **Nuts & Bolts** section.

[© 2007 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc.]



Here's a copy of Greg's pencils for page 4 page with Todd's balloon placements indicated. This shows letterer Tom Orzechowski specifically where each copy unit should go.
[© 2007 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc.]





WRITE NOW!
NUTS & BOLTS

Here's the lettered and inked page, inking credits to Todd and Danny Miki.

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For the rest of the Todd McFarlane interview, and more great **Write Now!** insider writing tips and how-to's, be sure to pick up **WN #16**, on sale now! Look for the sensational **MIKE ZECK** cover!