

INSIDE: 14 WAYS TO BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK!

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE

Now!

#3

MAGAZINE

**March
2003**



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In the USA

**AXEL
ALONSO**

**BRUCE
JONES**

**JIMMY
PALMIOTTI**

**KURT
BUSIEK**

**WRITING
LESSONS
FROM
DENNY
O'NEIL**

**PLUS: MORE
WRITE Now! NUTS &
BOLTS
WRITING TIPS!**



**THE MAGAZINE ABOUT WRITING FOR COMICS,
ANIMATION, AND SCIENCE-FICTION**

DANNY FINGEROTH'S **WRITE Now!** MAGAZINE

Issue #3

March 2003

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Conceived & Edited by
DANNY FINGEROTH

Designer
CHRISTOPHER DAY

Transcribers
DEANNE WALTZ and the LONGBOX.COM STAFF
and **STEVEN TICE**

Publisher
JOHN MORROW

COVER
Penciled and inked by
MIKE DEODATO JR.
Colored by
HERMES T

Special Thanks To
ALISON BLAIRE
DAVE CAMPITI
APRIL CAMPBELL
AMANDA CONNER
CHRIS DAY
JOHNNY GUITAR
PATTY JERES
STEVE KANE
SCOTT KOBLISH
JOHN MIESEGAES
ERIC NOLEN-WEATHINGTON
MARIFRAN O'NEIL
CHRIS POWELL
BEN REILLY
VARDA STEINHARDT

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READ Now!

Message from **Danny Fingeroth**, editor



Welcome to our Hulkeriffic third issue. (And special thanks to **Mike Deodato** for the sensational cover!) Once again, we're bringing you more tips, insights and didactic discussions about writing comics and related forms of pop fiction.

Nuts & Bolts-wise, look who's peeling back the curtain and showing you how it's done.

- Ever have trouble starting—or *finishing*—a piece of writing? Longtime DC Comics editor and writer **Joey Cavalieri** (who at least one complete stranger on an elevator once thought was my brother) tells you how to overcome dreaded Writer's Block!
- Red-hot writer **Bruce Jones** (more on him later) shows how **The Hulk** gets scripted.
- Super-editor **Axel Alonso** explains the mechanics behind the best-selling comics he handles.
- **Marvel Knights** co-founder **Jimmy Palmiotti** shows you how he writes the surprise-and-action-filled **21 Down**.
- **Astro City's Kurt Busiek** reveals how he goes about structuring and creating a story.
- And (postponed from last issue) legendary comics master **Dennis O'Neil** shows you the notes he uses to teach his classes in comics structure. You won't get a clearer description of the process *anywhere*.

Then, in this issue's "lessons-disguised-as-interviews" we have a line-up that blows me away. Bet it does the same for you.

- First, **Bruce Jones**. Cousin Bruce is setting the comics world on fire with his version of **The Hulk** that's earned critical and commercial success. Bruce is the "overnight sensation" who's been in the business since the 1970s. Did he reinvent himself? Or was he always the same and the times just caught up with him? Read the interview and see.
- And as far as voucher-signing superstars—AKA editors—**Axel Alonso** is on board. Axel is Bruce's editor on **Hulk** as well as **J. Michael Straczynski's** on **Amazing Spider-Man** and **Robert Morales's** on **The Truth**. You have to know what Axel is thinking if you want to understand comics today.
- And this issue we do indeed have the **Dennis O'Neil** interview. Denny's recovered from his bypass surgery and is doing fine. Find out how the man went from young Turk of the '70s to respected master of today. Want to have a long career? Denny has some insights on how it's done.
- **Jimmy Palmiotti's** had a wild career. Started as an inker. Went off with then-partner **Joe Quesada** to co-create **Event Comics** and **Ash**. Optioned **Ash** to **DreamWorks**. Co-created, co-edited and co-packaged

the **Marvel Knights** line. Then went off to co-create

GateCrasher for **Wizard's Black Bull Comics**. Jimmy's

now doing a wide range of creator-owned comics material as well as tons o' Hollywood stuff. He's done it *his* way—and keeps doing it *his* way. You'll learn a lot reading what he has to say.

- And **Kurt Busiek**. Hey—he's **Kurt Busiek**. **Marvels**. **Astro City**. **Avengers**. The freakin' **Thunderbolts**. One day he was a writer in the trenches, the next day **Marvels** hit—and his whole life changed! From there it was one triumph after another. How'd he do it? Check out the interview, conducted by Peter Sanderson, comics scholar extraordinaire.

We were supposed to have **Fabian Nicieza's** interview this issue, but that'll be here next time. It'll be worth the wait. Fabian's never been one to be lacking in passion or opinions. Our lawyers are going over this one with an *extra-fine* tooth comb.

Next issue, there's an outspoken interview with the, well, outspoken **Howard Chaykin**. Howard's done an all-new **American Flagg** cover for the issue. **Steven Grant**'ll be back with tips on how to navigate the Hollywood maze. **Batman Beyond's Paul Dini** talks to us from inside that very maze. **Jimmy Palmiotti** conducts a no-holds-barred interview with **Warren Ellis**. **Batman** Group Editor **Bob Schreck** will give his unique point of view on comics writing. **Dark Horse** Senior Editor **Diana Schutz** will tell us what she looks for in a comics script. And **Platinum Studios** founder **Scott Mitchell Rosenberg** will talk about making comics into hit film and TV projects. Plus, there'll be more *Nuts & Bolts* lessons and pointers from **Denny O'Neil** and other smart people.

Then there's that **special new feature** we'll be starting in issue #5. You know—the issue that's going to have **Will Eisner** and **J. Michael Straczynski** interviewed in it. The special feature? Here's another hint: **it's the most intensive teaching tool for comics writing ever attempted in a magazine**.

Intrigued? I am—and I *know* what it is!

Write Away!

DANNY
Danny Fingeroth

Three very worthy people's names were inadvertently left out of the image credits in Lee Nordling's interview last issue. They were Fred Van Lente as the writer for "Cowboys & Aliens," Andrew Foley as the writer of "Age of Kings," and Brian Joines as the writer of "The Taking of Happyland." Sorry, guys. Now we've set the record straight.

Hulking In **The BRUCE JONES** *Interview*

Conducted via e-mail January 2, 2003

Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Bruce Jones**

Ya gotta hate Bruce Jones.
[Didactic note: A classic "what does he mean by that?" opening! You feel compelled to read on, right? Hey—come back!]

I mean, he's talented, funny, charming. And, to boot, he's just too damn good-looking.

Bruce looks like a GQ model. When I first met him, I thought some actor or model had gotten lost and come to the wrong office.

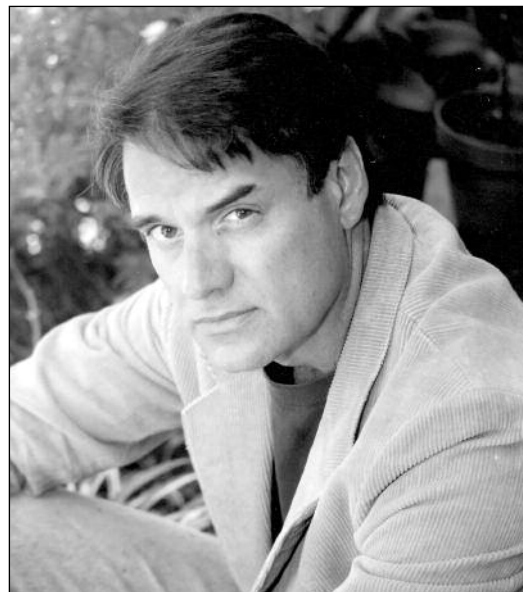
*But it was indeed Bruce. I was working as Louise Jones' (later Simonson) assistant back in the year Og. (And, no, they're not related.) Bruce was in town to discuss **Ka-Zar**, **Conan** and a few other assignments. He had worked with Louise on the classic Warren line of horror comics, including **Eerie** and **Creepy**. Bruce often drew the stories he wrote there. Louise brought him over to Marvel when she became an editor there, and Bruce had some daunting jobs to do. He was one of the first writers (along with Michael Fleisher) after Roy Thomas to handle **Conan the Barbarian**.*

*Bruce was also given the task of reviving **Ka-Zar the Savage**. Bruce brought Kevin Plunder into the '80s. He made him into a sort of modern guy who happened to be living in the hidden jungle of the Savage Land. It was, especially for the time, a radical re-imagining of characters—Ka-Zar and Shanna the She-Devil, his significant other—that could only have come from a writer and an editor who had come up outside the cloistered super-hero environment of Marvel and DC. It was a breath of fresh air, and of course, considered controversial. People who didn't even remember*

there was a Ka-Zar were suddenly outraged by what Bruce was doing with him. That it was great writing (and great art—by Brent Anderson) seemed to not matter. Eventually, most of the nay-sayers came around.

*After a couple of years at Marvel, Bruce branched out into independent work, creating magazines he both wrote and drew for **Pacific Comics**, and launching **Somerset Holmes**, a neo-noir comic about a two-fisted female private eye. On **Somerset** he was teamed again with the brilliant Brent Anderson.*

*From there, it was on to Hollywood to the world of prose publishing for Bruce and his sometime writing partner and full-time wife, April Campbell. Somewhere in there, Bruce did a **Venom Limited Series** for me in the 1990s. But for the most part,*



A double-page spread from **The Incredible Hulk** V. 2 #38 (regular series) written by Bruce Jones with art by John Romita, Jr. and Tom Palmer. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

WRITE Now!

Bruce seemed to have left comics behind. Maybe he was scouted to be a movie star after all?

*After the ups and downs that seem to go with Hollywood writing careers, including making lots of money for scripts that were never produced, Bruce has reappeared, Phoenix-like (or Kansas City like, anyway), in the world of comics. Starting with anthology work with Axel Alonso at DC, then coming (back) to Marvel, Bruce has become one of the “hot new writers” in comics. His run on **Incredible Hulk** is already—and continues to be—legendary. He brings his unique mark to lots of other projects, too, including **The Call of Duty** and **Hulk/Wolverine: 6 Hours**. It’s always a kick to see someone who leaves comics in one era come back and triumph in a new one. Of course, it helps if you’re as talented and driven as Bruce is.*

Come to think of it, ya can’t really hate a guy like that. I take it back.

Now, if only he wasn’t so damn good-looking...

[Didactic note 2: Note how suavely I brought my little gag from the opening of this intro back at the end. Ah, the human need for unity, satisfied once again... —DF]

In this interview done via e-mail, Bruce talks about the evolution of his career and about what it takes to lead a writer’s life.

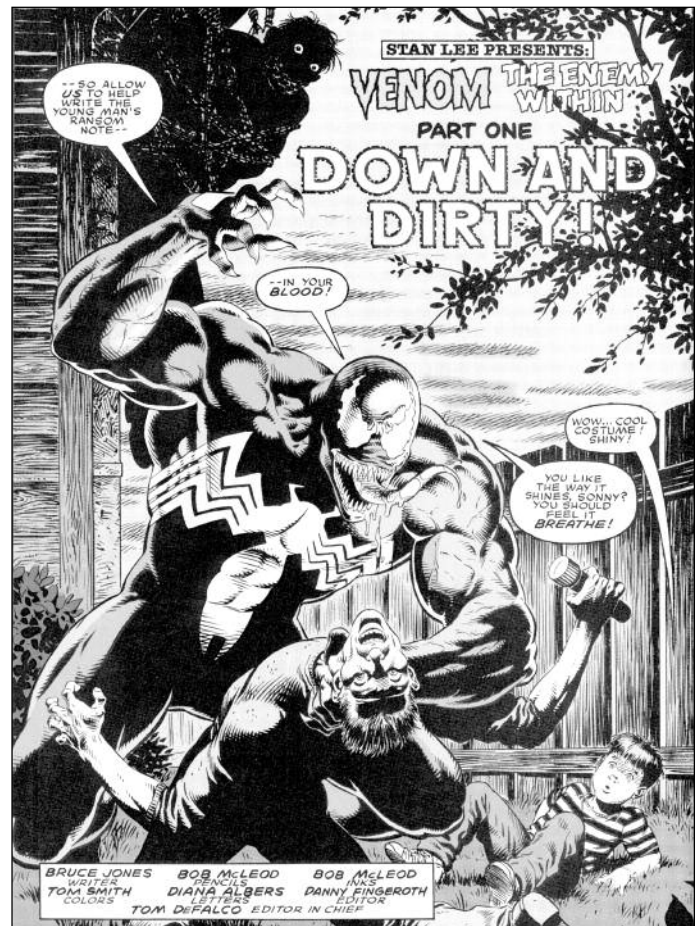
DANNY FINGEROTH: *What in your background do you think led you to become a writer? (Did your parents value “creativity”? Were there any special relatives, teachers or peers who inspired you?)*

BRUCE JONES: My father was a big influence in terms of film, music and writing. He loved movies as a kid and always drove me to the first new show in the neighborhood. He used to tell me tales of his childhood in Kansas City, and a high school pal of his who was an electronics genius. They built this incredible tree house with hidden electric doors and other cool, forward-thinking gadgets. He and my father wrote a novel up there among the leaves. It was called **The Red Hemp**—a mystery thriller. I thought that was so great. Dad was always very animated when talking about it, very excited, and the excitement was contagious to a kid of eight. I think that was the first time I realized somebody actually sat down and composed things like novels and stories, that they didn’t just appear unbidden from the ethers. I used to sit in his lap in front of his old black Royal typewriter and we’d create stories together, long before I had the necessary spelling and syntax. Something about setting down thoughts in type, putting one word after another and creating a whole, fascinated me. I was entranced by the permanency of it, the ability to go back and reread what you’d created days or weeks later—something about capturing little blocks of memory and holding them forever struck a deep chord. I had little interest in sharing this stuff; I was doing it chiefly to entertain myself. I think I must have had a strong sense of self, something every writer probably has, or at least needs. You are the center of the Universe—that kind of nonsense. Later I had a couple of English teachers who were very encouraging about my writing, reading my class themes aloud to the other students, hearing them laugh—it was my first experience in affecting the emotions of others through an extension of myself; sharing something I’d made of whole cloth. A psychiatrist would probably say I had an enormous need to feel loved, but the idea of entertaining people was very seductive to me early on.

When I wasn’t writing and drawing I was the class clown. But I had this very private, introspective side as well. Strange.

DF: *Did you take courses in writing or art in college? If so, were they helpful? Harmful?*

BJ: I majored in Drawing and Painting at Kansas University but I took no writing courses other than the requisite English I. I was a lousy student—not necessarily from the standpoint of grades—but I was terribly rebellious, and hated being taught in general unless the teacher was particularly engaging—and most weren’t. I took art because I could always outdraw everybody in grade school and high school and figured it would be easy. Path of least resistance, you know? And also because I feared being taught “how to write” would ruin it for me. True to form, I loathed the art classes, which dealt mainly in art history and the non-commercial aspects of the form. Later I realized it was the best thing I could have done, studying the masters like that, and more importantly, learning to appreciate and understand fine art, guys who were painting because they were driven and couldn’t do otherwise as opposed to guys just trying to make a living. It didn’t help me in the least in getting a job later, but it opened up a whole new department of my brain. I could actually go to a museum and understand a Monet. It was also depressing, because like all kids, up to that time I thought I was pretty hot stuff. What I discovered was that all the great arts are interrelated, and to understand one on a fundamental level is to understand the underpinnings of them all. I doubt I’d have ever known that without college. Looking back, I wish I’d paid more attention to class and less chasing chicks.



From **Venom: The Enemy Within** #1. Written by Bruce Jones and drawn by Bob McLeod. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

DF: Were you a TV kid? If not, what fed your story jones, Jones? Did you read comics? Which ones? What's stuck with you?

BJ: Again, my father was a major influence there. He was way into sound and vision gadgets of any kind, the next invention to come along. As a boy, he always had the first crystal set on his block, then the first radio, the first transistors—so when I was a kid, we had the first TVs available, the first stereo system—and lots of music always playing around the house, much of it classical or those great Big Band sounds. I was very lucky in that way. I'd come home from school and turn on the B&W Philco—wait an hour for the test pattern to disappear—and watch Howdy Doody start the day's programming. That was when there were only two channels to watch. ABC came along later. There was the Dumont Network, but I don't seem to recall much about it or *Captain Video*. We lived in St. Louis and got *Tom Corbett*, *Space Cadet*, but not *Space Patrol*, a constant lament of mine. I devoured the George Reeves *Superman* show—thought it was just great—especially that first season, which was so film noir, so downright creepy with that scalp-crawling music. My formative years were during the lingering guilt of post-WWII America. It was the pulps' last hurrah. The air was rife with paranoia about Communists. Most theatrical movies were in black-and-white, which has a built-in, dream-like quality to it. Horror comics abounded and I was drawn to them like a magnet. Forbidden fruit. They were so disturbing... I never quite got over them. Some of those Atlas covers, I think, were really works of great psychological art, just completely depraved, with no apologies, no heroes, no overtly redeeming quality—just art existing for its own sake, which was to shock and disturb. I don't think there's been an era like that since. Much of the writing and art was awful—it was the *attitude* behind it that mattered. My own theory is it had something to do with our own guilt about bombing Japan. To my mind, all those EC walking corpses are metaphors for the Nazi death camps, something else we felt guilty about. We knew the concentration camps existed and didn't get into the war until our hand was forced. Add the level of sexual suppression of the day, the outright repression of blacks, the after-work cocktails and smoking which were almost obligatory, and you had some pretty strange stuff influencing the mind of a young boy. But you also had George Pal's *War of the Worlds*, the '57 T-Bird, and Elvis. It could be argued—and with some merit—that that movie, car and singer have never been surpassed, only emulated. Every era has its tradeoffs.

DF: You came to New York to be an artist. What gave you the courage to do that in the first place? Did your family support the idea? Were you part of a group that came to or arrived in NY together?

BJ: I was born in Kansas City, Missouri and raised in the St. Louis suburbs. Strictly a suburban kid from almost the get go. Probably because of that I've always had trouble living in the urban areas of any town, even LA which is kind of one big suburb to begin with. My parents were very encouraging of my drawing and writing when I was a child. Then as adulthood approached and they began to realize I was serious about making a living at it I think they worried about me. It was easy to find the courage to leave the Midwest where I'd been a shoe salesman or a construction worker or a dishwasher, and head for New York where something I did creatively might actually get noticed. But anything's easier when you're young and stupid. I



"Head of the Class," from Pacific Comics' *Alien Worlds* #1. Story by Bruce Jones and art by Nestor Redondo. [©2003 Bruce Jones & Nestor Redondo.]

was part of the Jeff Jones/Berni Wrightson/Mike Kaluta New York gang of rebels of the early '70s. We were all hellbent on being the new Frank Frazetta or Hal Foster or N.C. Wyeth. We all grew up reading and loving comics, the problem was everything in New York was super-heroes then, making it kind of tough to get work when you had the kind of illustrative style we all shared. But it was great to have buddies to hang out with and drive upstate to visit Frazetta and Al Williamson and the Brandywine School, a blend of rural New England and classic style that Howard Pyle is credited with starting and teaching. These guys were our heroes. Williamson was particularly ingratiating, just another member of the gang. He had this huge collection of 16mm movies at a time when there were no VCRs—we'd stay up all night watching *Flash Gordon* serials and *King Kong*, Al pointing out stuntman Dave Sharpe during those great Republic Serials. It was Al who introduced us to a lot of the great old illustrators like Flagg, Cole Phillips, Leyendecker, Christy, John Held, Gibson, Howard Pyle, Remington, Schoonover, Cornwell—guys our art professors in college turned their noses up at. Visiting Al was like spending the weekend at a library. And he'd sit down with us, go over our art, show us where we were screwing up. We were all just very lucky to have him as a friend. Frazetta was a nice guy too, if less accessible.

DF: How did you transition to writing? Still do any artwork?

BJ: It was easier to get work as an artist than a writer because it's easier to "get" a drawing at one glance than wade through a stack of prose. But I kept getting these scripts where the writer wanted me to draw a race track or something, some incredibly difficult time-consuming thing I'd get thirty-five dollars a page for. That and the fact that I felt I could write better scripts than most of the stuff being handed to me led to the

1. Midnight. East St. Louis. Wet streets. The desperate side of town. A group of young men (early 20s, Black, dressed in baggy jeans, hoodies, high-top kicks) stand on a street corner, beneath them a discarded newspaper. We can read the headlines of the St. Louis Post Dispatch: "ONE KNOWN FATALITY IN CHICAGO RAMPAGE." The scene is bathed in the reflective neon glow of the HOTEL ST. LOUIS sign buzzing above. In the far background, down the cracked sidewalk, a lone figure approaches, lugging a suitcase. Roll title and credits:

The Morning After
Bruce Jones – Writer
John Romita Jr. – Pencils
Tom Palmer – Inks
Studio F – Colors
Comicraft – Letters
John Miesegaes – Asst. Editor
Axel Alonso – Editor
Joe Quesada – Chief
Bill Jemas – Pres.

2. Hold this angle. The figure draws closer to us, face shadowed beneath a wide-brimmed hat. He is wearing purple pants.

3. He draws closer, getting the attention of the toughs as he walks by. The leader, puffing weed, wearing a striped shirt, gives him the up-and-down.

Thug Yo, those're some ill pants.

(His buddies laugh.)

4. The man, BRUCE BANNER, does not laugh. His eyes meet the thug's as he goes inside.

¹ Artist, take your time with these guys. We're going to come back to them a couple more times in the story.

1. Close on a cheap black and white TV atop a cluttered counter. A news anchor's image fills the little screen, behind him is the rubble that was once a building:

TV --reports so far confirm one official death, that of nine year old Ricky Myers. Miraculously, no one else was hurt in this brutal, deliberate attack on downtown Chicago by the--"

2. Pull back to show a beefy, shirt-stained clerk leaning on the counter, watching the TV. He turns his jaded eyes to the shabby hotel's latest guest.

Clerk Twenty bucks a night. No TV. Bath down the hall.

3. Close now on the customer, his eyes shaded by the wide-brimmed hat he took from the rummy. This is BRUCE BANNER, with a week's growth of beard: not the Banner we're used to. He hands the clerk a fifty.

Banner One night.

4. The clerk shakes his head.

Clerk Can't change that.

5. Banner nods.

Banner Two nights.

Here is the script for the first four pages of Bruce Jones' first issue of *Incredible Hulk*, #34. They're done in the "full script" manner. The artist gets the panel breakdowns and dialogue before he begins to draw. As Bruce says in his interview in this issue of *DFWN*, though, the artist knows he can make changes if the writer and editor agree they will improve the story. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

6. Banner climbs the hotel stairs. The clerk, clutching Banner's cash, goes back to his TV.

TV --now have some tape from CNN showing the child's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Travis Myers at the hospital Mt. Prospect where their son Ricky was pronounced dea--



“Can’t Think, Brain Numb, Inspiration Won’t Come”

Writer’s Block Without Panic

by JOEY CAVALIERI

When you look up “comics professional” in the dictionary, you’ll find Joey Cavalieri’s picture. From *Bugs Bunny* to *Superman*, the guy has indeed done it all. He started and ran Marvel’s acclaimed 2099 line, was longtime group editor of DC’s *Superman* books, and today edits a distinguished line that include the Geoff Johns/Scott Kolins *Flash* that has everybody talking, as well as a terrific line of graphic novels by the top creators in the business. Mr. C. has also been known to wear the writer’s hat now and again. So he knows the terror of the blank page—or screen—from both sides: as the editor waiting for the writer to hand in that job—and as the writer, struggling to find the words to finish the assignment and not have the editor hate him. Herewith, Joey gives you the benefit of his struggles with the big B.

—DF

Remember that rhyme at the top of the page? Somebody wrote it in my “slambook” at grammar school graduation. I didn’t realize it might turn out to be a curse.

Writer’s block’s no fun. You may not even be aware of its worst effect: when it undermines your confidence long after you’ve blown deadlines and aggravated editors.

Some people don’t believe “writer’s block” exists. Brother, a week with me and you won’t believe in the existence of **writing**. I believe in writer’s block with the fervor of a religious fanatic. Would you believe I got writer’s block on the first paragraph of this article?

How do you generate ideas when you don’t have any? How do you keep going when you’re stuck?

I’ll share with you the ways I try to get around my blocks. I realize that when anyone tries to codify or set into cold print his or her methods of working, it’s often unintentionally risible. Or like trying to describe your most vivid dream. What’s significant and vital to you becomes oddly dull, flat, colorless and flavorless to someone else. So for the sake of this piece, let’s say that I’m not giving advice to you—I’m giving it to me. I’m composing a list that I can later consult and refer to—I’m just doing it in public.

1) Think a little harder. If you’ve been cruising along and suddenly you’re stuck, you’re stuck for a reason. There’s no magic involved in these fits and starts, nothing mystical in either the smooth flow or the abrupt cessation of writing. There’s often an explanation. To wit:

“Writing” is a misleading verb for the creation of fiction. “Imagining” or “fantasizing” or just plain “thinking” would be more accurate. The “writing” part is about committing these fantasies to print.

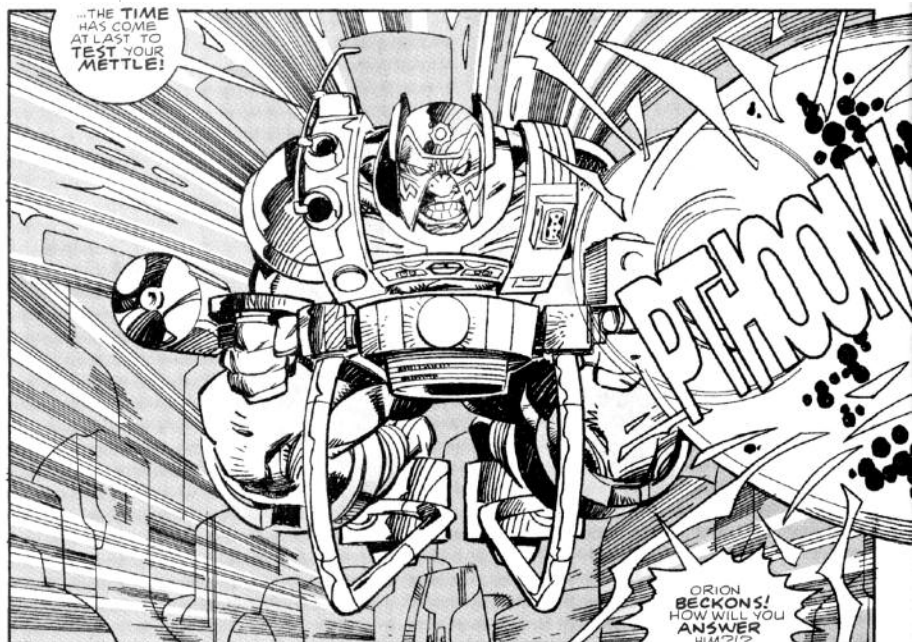
Well, what worthwhile commitment’s ever easy? Somehow, you’ve decided that you’re not ready for commitment. A frank, even brutal analysis can be your best friend here. Why? Only you know. Use your diagnostic skills on what it is you’re putting down. It’s probably going to be some problem with plot or plausibility. Going deeper, you may have issues with your method or motives for what you’re doing.

Clearly, you’re not **done** thinking it through.

No help? Nothing’s jogging the thought process? Try these:

2) Walk. Walking with no destination is liberating, freeing me from the white screen and the cursor blink.

It’s the illusion of progress. The events in the story seem to make headway just as I am. What’s going on is that the story is



From the Cavalieri edited *Orion* #25. Written & penciled by Walt Simonson; inked by Bob Wiacek. [©2003 DC Comics.]

taking and rejecting different “paths” in the back of my mind, like someone on a long amble. Writing’s often a long process of free association, so whatever you encounter along the way might well make its way into your story.

3) Take it somewhere else. My assistant editor at Marvel, Matt Morra, used to call me “the prince of distraction.” If I was writing something and had to check the spelling of a word in a dictionary, pretty soon I’d be waylaid, checking the etymology of “euthanasia,” the pronunciation of “hubristic,” the capital of Mongolia, and five other fascinating diversions that had nothing to do with the issue at hand. Or the phone would ring. Or the mail would show up. Or I’d have my nose in five other books. The only cure was to leave, and leave quickly.

Now, my way to leave as often as not is to get on the NYC subway. (Sorry, you out-of-towners.) Riding a subway car with nothing but my notebook for company ensures that something will get written. Wish I had a nickel for every script I’ve edited on the “N” Train.

4) Find a short-term goal. On the other hand, sometimes, when you’re too close to the problem, a little distraction is a *good* thing. Do the dishes. Oil the squeaky door. Cook a light meal. Build another bookshelf. Sometimes an answer will float to you as you’re solving a different problem. Again, the worst effect of writer’s block is the erosion of your confidence. These tasks, short-term jobs with a clearly defined and attainable goal, restore your self-assurance and give you a sense of accomplishment.

5) Take a power nap. What could possibly be more counter-intuitive than hitting the hay when you’re in a tight spot and trying to finish a script? But if you’re at your wit’s end anyway, you’re probably exhausted and you’ll need to start fresh. Your subconscious is working on the story as you sleep. Nice to have a partner you don’t have to split the check with, isn’t it?

When I was a kid, I read in my trusty, 69-cent copy of *The How and Why Wonder Book of Chemistry* by Freidrich Kekule. He was a chemist in Germany who was burning the midnight hydrocarbon pursuing a poser that had troubled any number of men in his field. Carbon atoms behave as if they have four hooks. Hydrocarbon compounds link six carbon atoms in a ring, and connect to hydrogen atoms. But no one could imagine the exact configuration, without a hook or two being left over, unattached. For them to form a compound, they needed to be hooked up to *something*.

Kekule had fallen asleep trying to work it out. He had a dream in which he saw those carbon atoms embraced in a dance in his hearth. He later recalled the layout from his vision, which happened to be correct. He’d worked it out in his sleep.

Sounds crazy? It’s by no means isolated. The mathematician Henri Poincare wrote an essay in which he detailed how “unconscious work,” meaning some rest or a walk, would make a strong impact on the second stretch of “conscious work.” Makes sense. So feel free to snooze, or take a bath. How many times have you heard someone say they get their best ideas in the shower? Or, er, somewhere else in the same room.

Poincare did point out, however, that no insights could be gained unless there was a long period of hard work before and



Alan Moore’s *Swamp Thing* story “Pog,” drawn by Shawn McManus, written to evoke the style of strip cartoonist Walt Kelly. From *Swamp Thing* #32. [©2003 DC Comics.]

after that respite. In other words, there’s no free ride.

6) If you’re in a box, change the box. One of the characters in a “Fritz the Cat” strip by Robert Crumb says, “Listen... ya in a bag, ya gotta bug out!” Or as my old pals at Marvel, Danny Fingeroth and Tom DeFalco, used to say, “We control the horizontal and we control the vertical.” [And we got it from the opening to the old *Outer Limits* TV show. —Set-it-straight Danny.] In other words, change the parameters of the problem.

Write backwards. Write the story in rhyme. Will Eisner did that, a lot. Or as a pop song. Eisner did that, too. Or write it in the style of someone else, as a parody of Twain or Dickens or of yesterday’s *Times*. Remember Alan Moore’s *Swamp Thing* story “Pog,” drawn by Shawn McManus, written to evoke the style of strip cartoonist Walt Kelly?

Experiment! You can break any of your “normal” modes of working, or any system you’ve previously employed, with the reasoning that, if they haven’t been working so well prior to this moment, why should they start working now? The definition of psychosis, after all, is to do the same thing over and over again and expect different results. (That’s another aphorism I learned from Tom DeFalco.)

Write out of order if you have to. If you’ve got a great ending, write that first. You can work up to it later.

Change something. Anything. Hell, delete your name from the credits and write the draft under an alias if you find that takes the pressure off. Which leads me to:

7) Redefine failure. You’ve probably heard this advice before couched in Oprah-ese as “Give yourself permission to fail.” Trust me, failure is always imminent, and nobody needs any permission to fail.

But let’s adjust our standard of failure, at least for the time being. Let’s say that writing nothing is “failing.” So writing a really rotten flurry of pages is immediately preferable to failure. A bad first draft is better than no draft. As Shakespeare wrote, “Nothing will come of nothing.”

Under the gun, some editors will appreciate getting even a

The AXEL ALONSO Interview

Conducted via e-mail December 23, 2002

Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Axel Alonso**

Axel Alonso has played a key role in Marvel's current renaissance. Tapped by incoming Marvel President Bill Jemas and Editor In Chief Joe Quesada in 2000 to direct the **Spider-Man** line, Alonso's mandate has since expanded to include **The Incredible Hulk** (just in time for the movie), **Wolverine**, and special projects that include, among other things, Max titles like **Cage** and **Fury**. He also spearheads three of Marvel's most high profile and controversial books—**X-Force** (now **X-Statix**), **Truth: Red, White & Black** and the upcoming **Rawhide Kid**—each of which has garnered international press.

Born and raised in San Francisco, CA, Alonso attended the University of California at Santa Cruz, where he earned a BA in Sociology in 1988, arranging his classes around a 5 a.m.-to-noon job as a produce truck driver. After moving to New York City in 1988, Alonso worked as a freelance journalist for several years—as an editor and reporter, reporting on arts, culture, law and politics—and eventually attended Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, where he got an MS in Journalism in 1993.

Leaving journalism, Alonso worked for DC's Vertigo imprint from mid-'94 until late 2000, where he carved his own niche for himself. Among the books he edited there: **Preacher**, **100**

Bullets, **Hellblazer**, assorted mini-series (**Unknown Soldier**, **Human Target**, etc.) and the Vertigo anthologies—**Gangland**, **Hearthrobs**, **Weird War Tales**, **Strange Adventures** and **Flinch**—which he started. Then, in 2000, Marvel Knights editor Joe Quesada was tapped to become Marvel's new Editor In Chief, Axel received the call, and the rest is history.

In the e-mail interview that follows, Axel gives us some important insights into the person and the thought processes behind the editorial decisions of some of today's most important comics. Writers, especially, should read carefully to glean ideas about what one of the industry's top editors thinks about the issues of the day.

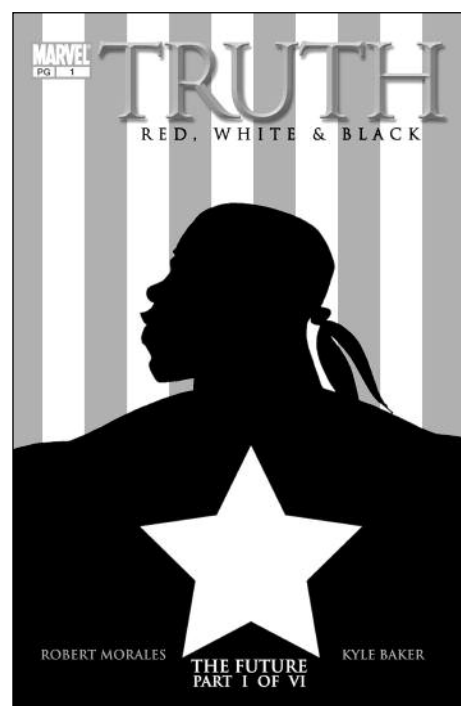
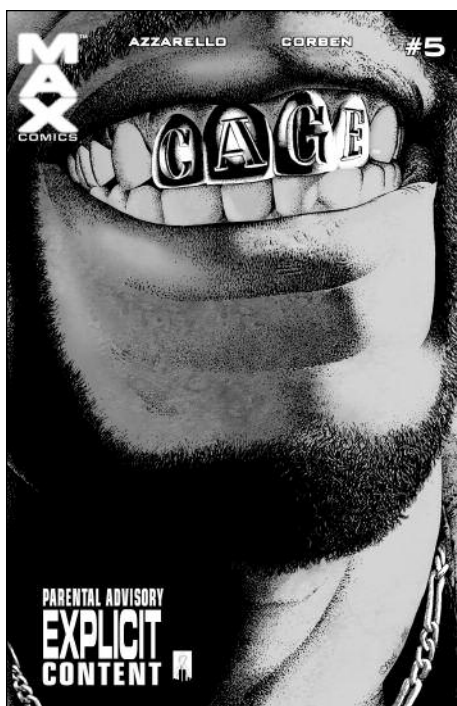
Writers, editors and rubbernecks alike should also pay close heed to Axel's **Nuts & Bolts** article, "Script Triage," elsewhere in this issue. It's a "how-to" on comics editing that contains vital information for those on both sides of the desk. —DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: What in your background do you think led you to where you are today, Axel?

AXEL ALONSO: I'd never considered a career in comics until it was offered to me. Oddly enough, everything led me to it. I grew up reading comics as a kid; I have schooling in art and writing, and professional experience in journalism.

DF: Did your parents encourage creativity? Discourage it?

AA: When I was little, my mother was a librarian, so she



A collection of Alonso-edited covers for a variety of imprints. Marvel/Max's **Cage** #5 (art by Richard Corben); DC/Vertigo's **Flinch** #1 (painted cover by Phil Hale); and Marvel Comics' **Truth: Red, White & Black** #1 (art by Kyle Baker). [**Cage & Truth** ©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.; **Flinch** ©2003 DC Comics.]



From **100 Bullets** #10. Written by Brian Azzarello. Art by Eduardo Risso. Edited—as are the sources of all the illustrations that accompany this interview—by Axel Alonso. [©2003 DC Comics.]

encouraged me to read any which way she could. She saw comics for what they were—a valuable tool through which I could learn to enjoy reading.

My father definitely encouraged my artistic side. A dental surgeon who sculpted in his spare time, he made a weekly habit of taking me to the various museums around San Francisco. He'd set me up with an easel and I'd paint and draw and look at the paintings. We'd spend entire afternoons doing this. At the end of the day, he'd go up to a stranger, wink, and ask them, "So, if you saw this fine piece of art in a gallery, what would you pay for it?" Then he'd purchase my drawing for whatever they said—a dime, a quarter, whatever—and I'd spend the money on more art supplies. It was here that my father seeded the crazy notion that I could actually get paid to do something I enjoyed.

DF: Did you grow up reading comics? If so, what were your favorites? How do they affect how you edit today? If not, how has that helped and/or hurt your editing?

AA: I sure did. On Fridays, my mother worked late, so my grandmother would pick me up after school and buy me a couple of

comics to keep me out of her hair. Smart lady. I read a little bit of everything—**Hulk**, **Spider-Man**, **Batman**—but I tended to gravitate toward offbeat characters like **Luke Cage**, **The Unknown Soldier**, **Black Panther** and **Shang-Chi**. I also loved all the Kirby books, especially **New Gods**—those characters were crazy.

DF: Who were/are your great influences as writers, directors, novelists, etc?

AA: Jack Kirby, Jim Thompson, Will Eisner, Yukio Mishima, Steranko, James Dickey, Richard Corben, David Lynch, Thom Jones, Frank Miller, Kubert & Kanigher, Kurosawa, whoever created **Speed Racer**, Dr. J.

DF: Were there any influential relatives, friends, or teachers who were instrumental in your development toward journalism and then comics?

AA: When I was a boy, my father made the single-most profound editorial comment I've ever heard. We'd just seen **Jaws**. Leaving the theater, I told him how much I dug the movie. He nodded, just shook his head, and said, "They shouldn't have shown the shark," words that have stuck with me to this day. However terrifying the shark looked when he rose up out of the water and snacked on Robert Shaw, he was far more terrifying out of sight—in the corridors of my imagination. Less is more.

But the driving force was probably my mother. When I was about 10 or 11, my class was given a book report assignment. Most of my friends did theirs on Tolkein or S.E. Hinton or whoever; I did mine on James Dickey's **Deliverance**. I loved that book, so my book report was massive and very thorough. My teacher took exception to the fact that I was reading a book that advanced, and gave me an F. My mom—a very gentle and polite woman—wasn't having it. She did something very uncharacteristic. She stormed down to my school and said,



John Constantine makes a deal. **Hellblazer** #142 by Warren Ellis & Javier Pulido. [©2003 DC Comics.]

Dennis O'Neil Interview

Interviewed in person by **Danny Fingeroth** August 22, 2002
 Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Dennis O'Neil**
 Transcription by **the LongBox.com Staff & Danny Fingeroth**

*This interview was originally scheduled to appear in **DFWN** #2. But then, a couple of weeks after it was recorded, Denny had a major "coronary incident," leading to quadruple bypass surgery, which left him a tad preoccupied with other matters than copy editing the interview. Fortunately, the surgery went well, as is his recovery, and Denny is now able to take time for the really important things in life—like copy editing the interview.*

I'm very pleased to have The Gentleman Beatnik's views and experiences in print here in the mag. And I've especially pleased that this did not turn out to be the last Dennis O'Neil interview. —DF

For over 20 years, editor and writer Dennis O'Neil put the "dark" in the Dark Knight and was the guiding force behind the Batman mythos. He has been called a living legend, a master of the comics form and the dean of American comics writers. He prefers to think of himself as, simply, "a working professional storyteller."

Dennis, a native St. Louisan and graduate of St. Louis University, began his writing career as a newspaper reporter in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, over thirty years ago. Intrigued by the creative revival of comics in the mid-'60s, he came to New York as Stan Lee's editorial assistant at Marvel Comics. Next, he did freelance writing at Charlton Comics under editor Dick Giordano. When Giordano moved to DC Comics in 1967, he brought Dennis with him. There, Dennis scripted such titles as **Wonder Woman**, **The Justice League of America** and, notably, 13 issues of **Superman**, a run some aficionados say is a high point in the character's long history.

In 1968, following the cancellation of the **Batman** television show, editor Julius Schwartz asked Dennis to revamp DC's Dark Knight. Dennis and artist Neal Adams took the character



The cover to **Green Arrow/Green Lantern** #76. Written by O'Neil with art by Neal Adams. [©2003 DC Comics.]

back to his roots and, adding sophistication and their own unique vision, created the version of Batman which has been an inspiration for the Emmy-winning Fox cartoon series, the mega-budget Warners movies and, of course, the current comics. In 1970, Dennis again collaborated with Neal Adams and Julius Schwartz to produce the **Green Lantern-Green Arrow** series that first brought him into national prominence. This series earned praise, awards and media attention for its groundbreaking combination of flamboyant fantasy with genuine social concerns such as racism, drug addiction, environmental dangers and Native Americans' problems.

During his 30-year career, Dennis has written stories for almost all of DC and Marvel's major titles, including **Spider-Man**, **Hawkman**, **The Atom**, **Iron Man**, **Daredevil** and **The Question**, a series that combined authentic martial arts action with thoughtful plots and is credited with being a forerunner of today's "mature reader" comics.

Dennis' comics work has been only a part of his career. He has edited **Newsfront Magazine** and has written short



stories, articles and reviews for a wide variety of publications including **Gentleman's Quarterly**, **Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine**, **New York**, **The Village Voice**, **Coronet**, **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction** and **Publishers Weekly**. He has had five teleplays produced, adapted the four **Batman** movies into comic book form and is the author of several novels and nonfiction books, including a guide to writing comic book scripts published in June, 2002, by Watson-Guptil. One of his most significant achievements was converting 1,162 pages of comic book continuity into a hard cover novel, which became a national best seller: **Knightfall**, published by Bantam Books. While he was writing the novel, he was also assisting with the adaptation of the **Knightfall** storyline for England's BBC radio

An expert on comics, pop culture and folklore/mythology, Dennis is a popular guest at conventions and has been heard on literally hundreds of radio shows. He has appeared on dozens of television programs, including **The Today Show**, **Entertainment Tonight**, **Extra**, **NBC Nightly News**, **Fox News**, **Fox Morning Show**, **Real News for Kids**, **The Anti-Gravity Room** and the Disney Channel's **Audubon Show**. He has been interviewed internationally on the BBC, Australian, French, Mexican, Chilean and Canadian television.

Dennis has taught writing at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and lectured at the Open Center in New York City. He has also lectured at numerous colleges and universities including New York University, Fairleigh-Dickenson, Penn State, Tufts, St. Louis University, Indiana State University, the State University of New York at Stony Brook, City University of New York, UCLA, Atlantic College, the Philadelphia College of Art, Webster University, MIT, and The Learning Annex.

For 15 years, until his retirement in February, 2001, Dennis was a group editor at DC where, in addition to editing the **Batman** titles, he wrote (and continues to write) a monthly title he created, **Azrael** (which will bow out in a few months after its landmark 100th issue), helped make policy decisions and co-supervised a large editorial staff. He now serves DC as an editorial consultant.

In April, 1999, two Californians, Bob Brodsky and Kevin Hanley, began publishing **The O'Neil Observer**, a quarterly magazine devoted to articles about Dennis and the craft of comics writing. In November of the same year, a Midwesterner, Scott McCullar, created a website to augment the magazine.

Dennis currently lives in Nyack, New York, with his wife, Marifran.

DF: This is **Write Now!** with Dennis O'Neil, living legend. We're sitting here in his huge emeritus office at the DC Comics building, with Dennis drinking some ambrosia provided by the company.

DO: Provided by me putting it in my suitcase. This is green tea and very healthy. Comic book people generally do not eat or drink very healthy things.

DF: Let's start with some basic Dennis O'Neil background for anybody benighted enough not to know it, and then go into Denny-specific and industry-related questions. Where are you from, Dennis?

DO: St. Louis, Missouri.

DF: Any creative writers or artists in your family?

DO: Not officially. I have four brothers and one of them wrote some poetry as a kid and has been a weightlifter and a



"Night of the Reaper" by O'Neil & Adams. From **Batman** #237. [©2003 DC Comics.]

bouncer and a general all-around tough guy, truck driver kind of guy, and he recently said he still indulges in poetry. My mother told me about a dozen years ago that, every Valentine's Day, my father gave her a poem. She's never shown me any of them and I had no any idea that my father ever did that. I never saw a trace of it. He was a newspaper reader and a religious-pamphlet reader. I never saw any other kind of interest and when she told me it surprised the heck out of me. I had an uncle that loved to tell stories and take pictures, but not professionally. I think I was the first to go to college. My family was traditionally merchants and construction people. My father owned a grocery store and my brothers own four in the St. Louis area. We're a very blue-collar, Irish Catholic family. Things like writing and acting were not for real people. You were never in the same room with anybody who did things like that. Newspaper reporters, maybe. When I did that, they understood. The other stuff was not anything that was on anybody's radar. You never met in your everyday life a professional writer. You may have met a university guy who might have published something. But, basically, someone who makes his living doing something creative was non-existent. It was not in anyone's experience.

DF: Was it tough for you to break out of that expectation pattern? Since a journalist was something they could understand, is that why you went into journalism, because you wouldn't get too much opposition for it?

DO: I think I was pretty muddled coming out of college and had

Interview by **Peter Sanderson**Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Kurt Busiek**

Kurt Busiek has been in and around the comics industry for over two decades. I guess I have to stop thinking of him as "the new guy." He's been the struggling newcomer, the hotshot superstar and the accomplished professional. And he was one of the first guys to put his name above the title of a periodical—**Kurt Busiek's Astro City**—and so was no small inspiration for the name of this very magazine.

With the Alex Ross-painted **Marvels** being perhaps the highest profile triumph of his career, Kurt is now the reigning king of painless continuity. He is able to write popular characters with deep histories and not make you feel intimidated by that history. Just take a look at his run on **Thunderbolts**, which he created for Marvel. With **Kurt Busiek's Astro City**, he created his own universe of characters to play with, and has given them their their own histories that he doles out in the most dramatic way possible. With **Shockrockets**, **Superstar** and **Power Company**, Kurt's given life to some of the most innovative concepts in recent comics history.

Despite recent problematic health, Kurt still produces a quantity of quality work that would stagger nearly anybody. He recently took some time to talk to the world's foremost comics scholar, Peter Sanderson, about how he writes comics, the state of comics writing today as compared to previous eras, and about the continuing evolution of his own career. Prepare for wonders beyond imagining... or at least for an informative gabfest between two comics professionals who really love comics and talking about them.

—DF

PETER SANDERSON: One of the writers you admire, William Goldman, has written about how the composer John Kander says he is continually hearing snatches of music in his head. Most of this music leads nowhere, but he is able to turn some of it into his compositions. Similarly, Goldman writes that he himself continually has story ideas popping into his head; most are dead ends, but some evolve into actual stories. Is this a fair description of how the creative mind works, or, more specifically, how your mind works?

KURT BUSIEK: Yes. Some story ideas I arrive at by analysis, by figuring out that, say, I need something about this, I need something about that, and I actually look for an idea and mess around with it until something takes shape. But in many cases, I can be out at the movies or at a bookstore, or meeting a friend for lunch, and some unexpected thing triggers an idea. You never really know what stimulus is going to suggest an idea. You mess around with that idea, and sometimes it turns into a story, sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes it's promising



From the signature page of the **Marvels** limited edition hardcover. Kurt Busiek (extreme right) and Alex Ross (second from right), among others, get their copy of **Marvels** signed by their creation, Phil Sheldon. Art by Alex Ross.

enough so that you jot it down somewhere, and use it later. But sometimes—a lot of times—they just don't come to life.

I don't think it's as simple as that some people keep coming up with story ideas, some people don't. I think it's a matter of experience. When I was in high school I don't think I came up with as many story ideas as I do now. It's just that now I've been writing professionally for twenty years, so my mind works that way: it's been *trained* to do that.

PS: Can you give me an example of an idea like this that evolved into a story that we might know?

KB: This is kind of an odd example—but **Astro City** #2—**Astro City** Vol. 1 #2, that is—is all built around a young reporter who is tracking down information for an article with this big cosmic super-hero war going on. And all he has to show for it in the end, when his editor tells him to cut this down to what can be verified, is a four paragraph article about a trolley delayed by a shark.

The origin of that story is that while I was in college, my mother mailed me a clipping from **The Boston Globe** with this little article called "Trolley Delayed by Shark." She thought it was just such a bizarre and oddball little piece that she wanted to share it. And I read it, and thought, "You know, probably what happened was, some fraternity guys tried to tie a shark from a rope that was hanging in the path of a trolley to it scare the people inside, and it just fell off or something." It was just so perfect, though. The idea of a super-hero story, where there'd be some big cosmic war, and this would be the only evidence that was left.

So I carried that clipping around in my wallet for—what, fifteen years?—before I finally had the place to write that story. And, in fact, the article at the end of that story is the article



From *Astro City* Vol. 1 #2. Art by Brent Anderson. Script by Kurt Busiek. [©2003 Juke Box Productions.]

from *The Boston Globe*, with a few words changed here and there to make it happen [laughter] in *Astro City* rather than Boston. The idea, though, was in providing a completely different backstory to that article than whatever must have really happened. That's a very specific example, because I'm actually relating it to an artifact: something I was sent.

You might see two people in the street arguing, and wonder what they're arguing about, and why. An emotional conflict comes out of that, and you build a story around it. The kind of idea I'm talking about would be just a general idea. Many times a week I'll come up with a story idea that's just generally out of something I've seen, or a piece of conversation I've overheard, and it'll just sort of sit there in the back of my mind and develop into something. And the reason I'm not coming up with any specific examples is that the gestation period for these things is long enough that I don't remember where they came from unless it's very specific like the one I outlined.

One thing that's a lot of fun to do as a writer is, if I see a TV show, and it ends wrong—it's got a story and they screwed up the story—then like anybody talking over a movie, I'll go, "Boy, what should have happened is *this*." And if I like what I've come up with, I've got a new ending. So I just come up with a new *beginning* [laughter] to match the new ending, and I end up with a whole new story.

PS: When you started out did you want to be a writer, or did you specifically want to be a comics writer?

KB: Well, that depends on when you mean. I aimed myself at becoming a comic book writer starting from junior high school.

I had *always* wanted to be a writer. I had always wanted to write stories, but I found the prospect of writing an entire novel manuscript and finding out when it was done that I had no ability, that I sucked at it, was intimidating enough that I never got more than a page and a half into working on a novel idea, at least not when I was a kid.

Then, I stumbled into the idea that—hey, wait a minute, real people write comics for a living, they get paid for it, it's a job. I can pinpoint the moment I realized that. There is a letter column somewhere around *X-Men* 97, 98, 99, where Chris Claremont is answering a letter, and he tells a little anecdote about how his grandfather occasionally asks him, "So, you write funny books, Chris. So that's nice, that's fine, but what do you do for a living?" And that made me go, "Hey, wait a minute, this guy *does* do this for a living. That sounds like a good job. That sounds like a lot of fun." More importantly for me, the

prospect of writing 17 pages of comic books and finding out I sucked at it was not anywhere near as overwhelming as the prospect of writing 253 pages of a novel to find out that I'd just wasted all that time.

So that's when I started working more seriously on comic book ideas. I talked my friend Scott McCloud into collaborating—I'd write a story and he'd draw it. We planned to do a 15-page story that ultimately became 60 pages long before we stopped doing it. But over the course of doing that story, both of us discovered that we liked making comics, we liked figuring out how to tell a story visually on the page. And over the course of those sixty pages, which took three years to do, we figured out what we were doing, so that we actually had some reasonable command of our craft,

even if we weren't terribly *mature* at what we were trying to do with it yet.

So that's sort of a longwinded response that boils down to: Comics looked like fun and they looked like they would be easier to do, or easier to find out if I was any good at doing them, than other forms of storytelling. And in the course of practicing doing comics, I fell in love with the form.

PS: So today, do you see yourself as a writer who primarily works in comics or as a comics writer who sometimes works in other media?

KB: I don't know. I think probably, realistically, I'm a comics writer who sometimes works in other media, because I'm focused so strongly on the comics form. I'm always very interested in who's doing the art for a story of mine and how the lettering is going to work on the page, and even things like logo design and interior book design. I get very wrapped up in the process of making comics.

I tend to *think* of myself as a writer who happens to work largely in comics, though. I've written short stories, I would like to write some novels. I wouldn't mind doing some stuff in screenplay form if I'm ever healthy enough to have the spare time. But while that may be my general mental image, the reality of it is that I'm *not* simply writing stories that get made into comic books. I'm deeply invested in the comics form, and it would be a very different process to write for another medium. When I've done it, it always takes a lot of adjustment.

PS: You took courses in school to help learn how to become a creative writer. Was this before or after you started teaching yourself how to write comics?

KB: Mostly it was college. Scott and I did that comic, "The Battle of Lexington," in high school. We both ended up going to the same college, Syracuse University. Scott took lots of art and illustration courses, and I took creative writing, playwrighting, magazine publishing, comparative mythology, "Magic and Religion," "The Bible and Literature," anything that I thought could give me the skills that I could use to make a success in the comics business.

PS: Did these courses actually help you in comics writing?

KB: I don't know.

PS: I'm particularly interested in how the courses in mythology and religion might have helped your work in comics. Did you take them specifically to learn about the mythic aspects of super-heroes?

KB: I certainly took them because I was aiming at comics, and

WRITE NOW! NUTS & BOLTS

Before the art... before the dialogue... before the plot... there is the outline. Here, we reproduce Kurt's handwritten notes for *The Power Company* #10.



We also see the first three pages of the story—drawn by Tom Grummett and Prentis Rollins—as it appeared. [Power Company ©2003 DC Comics.]



- 10
 - 1 [MT workin' out
w/define comming
 - 2/3 [Skyrocket feeling dislocated
--will she stay? Hasn't even
unpacked yet. - Costume.
 - 4 [Doesn't want to go to work. - something in back of mind.
 - 5 [Visits Sesiz & Ripe in hospital.
encouraging to Ripe -- hang
in there.
 - 6/2 [Arrive at work -- associates out.
 - 7 [Meeting -- MT takes charge
- let people know we're still here
- make money
 - 10 [Doing good? A luxury.
- hire someone else. temp. just to show...
- get perzoid
 - 11 [w/ vamps MT. they leave, chatting.
SR annoyed by that game. Don't want to
won't.
 - 12 [Police HQ -- Driver gives report, how's Sesiz?
 - 13 [Ask him abt. clients. He's supportive but
she feels disapproval. Hey, you OK?
 - 14 [Fulton Controller moment.
 - 15 [Can't do this. Got people to protect, can't play games
 - 16/17 [Sec. - oh, help us!
 - 18 [tells. Uh-oh. People to protect right here.
 - 19 [into bullpen. Burgers on me? Hey, sure?
Play game. Not any good at it, not well -- but
do what I can -- (vamping associates, like trying
to get perth sleeping w/ her).
 - 20 [Leave.
Phone call for FS form.
- The Devils You Know?
Dealing w/ Devil's
- STAR Labs
off. cious goop,
resistant.
Money for science
more in back of
mind.
- Whisking Fleets?
No-nonsense trouble.
Find people out to
get potential clients
- Sad, nothing's
awakening,
everything's
falling apart...
- clients for
w/!
- It's Sesiz & Ripe
Keeps them in line.
Keeps them reined in.
Two questions:
- without ques-
tions? him, all for
Keeping in
know in
too, 5
Don't want
to be?

Here, Kurt gives himself the roughest and most general idea of what will be on each page. This gives him a "roadmap" for when he actually writes the story.

Again, here are Kurt's notes for *Avengers* Vol. 3 #40, "Thoom"—which serves as both sound effect and the title of the story—along with the printed art for the first part of the issue.

Here are the notes for these pages presented, typeset for easier reading. Of course, the originals were intended for Kurt's eyes only, so legibility was not an issue.



1 Hulk fist comes down.

2/3 They fightin'

Goliath—! Not my fault! Would'a waited. Pained. Hank!

4—take in trouble. Call for SHIELD—Leonard Samson. Len/Bruce—we hep!

5—Call Jarvis—Jarvis alarmed—fight going on. Contact She-Hulk? Nevermind, says QS. I go fast. Faster!

What we do? Keep him busy—think about what it'd do for SC!/ SC vs. Diablo. He scoffs at her. Decoyed them away...

7—she's not much trouble. She's outmatched. Gotta fight! Be an Avenger!

8— turns her to salt. Grabs up power disc. Exults.



[All art © 2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



From Inker to Editor to Writer:

WRITE Now!

The Jimmy Palmiotti Interview

Interview by **Danny Fingeroth** in person in Brooklyn, NY November 21, 2002

Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Jimmy Palmiotti**

Transcription by **The LongBox.com Staff**

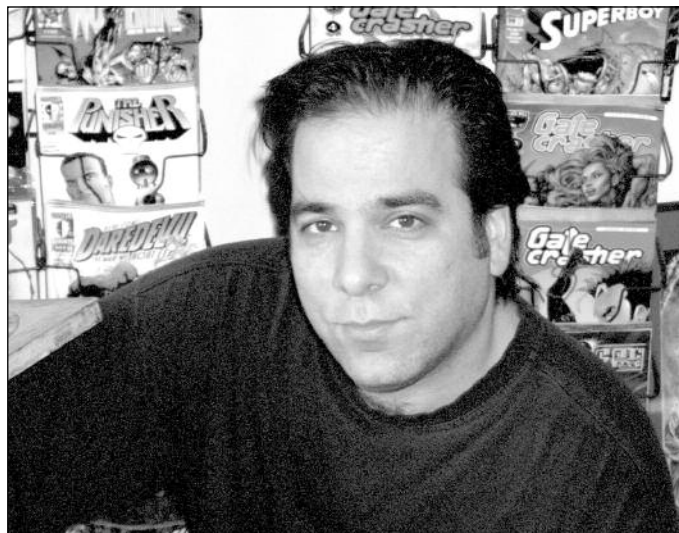
He's a writer, he's an editor, he's a packager, he's an inker, he's a Hollywood property developer. From **The Punisher** to **Marvel Knights** to **Gatecrasher** to **21 Down**, Jimmy Palmiotti delivers the goods.

You need something original, exciting, professional, and on time? This is the guy who can do it.

You need somebody to give you (good) advice on a new idea or project? Again, he's the go-to guy.

You need somebody to give you an interview that doesn't pull any punches and that tells you what you have to know to navigate the often-treacherous waters of the comics and media businesses? Then just read on...

—DF



DANNY FINGEROTH: The basic theme that I want to get to here, Jimmy, is how someone gets from being a comics reader to being a comics writer, and then to the specific twists and turns that Jimmy Palmiotti's career has taken. The thread that I thought would be interesting is you as the ultimate networker, the guy who knows everybody and is able to take the real talents that he has and is able to do something with them. Let's start with some basic biographical stuff. You were born in Brooklyn and were interested in art...?

JIMMY PALMIOTTI: Born and raised in Brooklyn and interested in art since as long as I can remember, entering art contests anywhere I could as a kid. I was always interested in comics but not obsessed with them. They were always around the house. Having two older brothers, comics and **Playboys** were common around the house, the **Playboys** having many hiding places. As I grew older, I started collecting comics, not so much the way people collect now, where they bag them and obsess over the condition, more like just trying to get complete runs and such. I would buy comics and trade them with my group of friends that were into the hobby as well. We'd have discussions of who could beat up whom, who was stronger, Superman or the Hulk, and why couldn't someone just shoot Batman in the head and so on. We didn't look at credits at the time. It really didn't matter. My friends and I would sit on a stoop with our comics and trade them like baseball cards. They were twelve cents then, and you could get eight for a dollar. God, now I feel old.

When I started collecting comics, I was in sixth or seventh grade in catholic school. Using my bus pass, I traveled 20 minutes to a bookstore on Flatbush Avenue called My Friend's Bookstore, which is no longer there. For a lot of people growing up in Brooklyn at that time, that was the best place to get your fix of comics. I know for a fact a ton of creators went there as kids, as well as Paul Levitz, who lived in the area.



From **Beautiful Killer** #1. Written by Jimmy Palmiotti with art by Phil Noto.
[©2003 Black Bull Comics.]

A block south from there was a Salvation Army store that would sell the comic books wrapped up in rope for a buck a pound. Eventually, I trained the guy at the Salvation Army not to rope up the comics, but to put them in boxes for me when I bought them. Back then I had another type of scam where I would get the comics from the Salvation Army that were in good shape that weren't my favorites, take them to all the barbershops on Flatbush Avenue and trade them. I'd take their old comics that they didn't need anymore and give them the new ones for the store. Barbershops would have these huge stacks of old comics, and for every new comic I gave them I would pick out five old ones for myself. For me it was volume, more for me to read. I had that going with ten barbershops on Flatbush and a couple on Nostrand Avenue as well. I was rich in comics for a kid my age.

DF: Where did you first get the idea that there were people who make comics, and that you could possibly be one of those people?

JP: It was when Phil Seuling ["father" of the direct market] used to have comic shows in New York. When I was a kid, my father would take me.

DF: Your father used to take you to the Seuling cons? Your father was a fan?

JP: He was a fan of anything that I was into. He was very supportive of us kids. If we were into making go-carts, he would get us parts for go-carts. If we were into drawing, he'd go down the block to get stationery from the stationery store and

so on, he was always helping us with our interests.

DF: Was he an artist or creative in any way?

JP: He owned a paint store on 82nd and Amsterdam in Manhattan. He sold house paint, hardware and also rented out sanders for people who wanted to sand their floors. During World War II he used to paint pin-up girls on airplanes, and sketch. For him, it was always just a hobby and something fun, nothing serious.

DF: How about your mother?

JP: She was an artist in dealing with four boys and not killing herself. My mom was a housewife, and she had the harder job, looking back on things. At least my dad could escape to work. But my mom was stuck with us all the time and it was not easy. We were four very hyperactive kids.

DF: A well known former comic book executive, when I told him I was having kids, said that I had to get a day job just to get out of the house.

JP: I think, to my father, when the alarm clock went off in the morning, it was like a gun being fired at the racetrack. He went right out of the gate and kept going. That said, the both of them have always been supportive of any of our hobbies. When my younger brother Peter and I started collecting, my father saw us actually sitting there, reading and being quiet, a strange

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Nick Fury in Marvel/Max Comics *Fury* #2. Written by Garth Ennis with art by Darick Robertson & Jimmy Palmiotti. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]