



DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE

Now! #4

MAGAZINE

May
2003

HOWARD CHAYKIN

DENNY O'NEIL

PAUL DINI

**FABIAN
NICIEZA**

**KURT
BUSIEK**

**DeFALCO
& FRENZ**

American Flagg TM & ©2003 Howard Chaykin

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

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT WRITING FOR COMICS, ANIMATION & SCI-FI

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

Issue #4

May 2003

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Nuts & Bolts Department

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and text narration

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READ Now!

Message from **Danny Fingeroth**, editor



Welcome to our frenetic fourth issue. But before we begin...

Have you ever noticed how good this magazine looks? I know I have. You know why it does? It's because of the stellar work done by our ace designer: Mr. **Chris Day**.

Chris is, issue after issue, able to take the raw material that I supply him with and put it through his creative imagination so that **Write Now!** comes out looking as good as it possibly can. Chris will often find illustrations to perfectly complement the articles and interviews. He regularly makes suggestions that are incorporated into an issue and, even if I decide I want something other than what he's suggested, he always adds something to my idea that I never would have envisioned.

Chris also designs other fine TwoMorrows mags, and he runs a terrific Harlan Ellison website. It's at www.sequentiaellison.com. Putting this magazine out is a lot of work. Without Chris it'd be a hundred times harder, and nowhere near as much fun. Thanks, Mr. Day.

So, here we are at issue #4. As you've already seen, we have a sensational, new **American Flag!** cover by his creator, the inimitable **Howard Chaykin**. Thanks, Howard!

Inside, as always, we have some super-cool **Nuts & Bolts** lessons and tips on how to make your writing better.

- First, we've got TV and comics material from **Mr. Chaykin**, himself. There's some **Flash**, some **Mutant X**, and some step-by-steps on how he creates comics stories. Howard's one of the most distinctive voices to ever come down the comics and TV pikes. Observe and learn.
- **Fabian Nicieza** also has granted us a boatload of his writing. You get to peer inside his brain—as messy as that may sound—as he shows us how a story goes from premise to plot to script—and *more!*
- Longtime collaborators **Tom DeFalco** and **Ron Frenz** show how to tell a *complete comics story* in FIVE PAGES! It's got all the elements a compelling story needs—and, of course, hoo-hah action as you like it. These guys are masters of the craft, as the **Mr. Right** story they present for us will show.
- **Steven Grant** is back with another eye-opening article, this one about how to maneuver your way through the business end of Hollywood.
- Hollywood's own **Paul Dini** shares a script for one of his own groovy characters, **Jingle Belle**, daughter of Santa Claus. It's imagination unleashed for your benefit!
- And there're more of **Dennis O'Neil's** class notes, as he instructs his students in what makes a story in comics and out.

Then, sharing more wisdom, we have our “lessons disguised as interviews.” Check out this line-up:

- For starters, we have an interview with **Howard Chaykin** himself, giving his views on the ins and outs of comics and TV as only Howard can. You may not like everything he says—but it'll sure give you something to think about.
- **Fabian Nicieza** started out as a (non-editorial) staffer at Marvel, hoping for a break. With hard work and a head full of ideas, Fabe was soon the top-selling writer in the industry, writing such titles as **New Warriors**, **X-Men**, and **Thunderbolts**. Read what he has to say about those years—and how it led to what he's doing today in comics and in other media.
- Best known for his work on the **Batman** and **Batman Beyond** animated series, **Paul Dini** does distinctive comics writing, both mainstream and independent. He's passionate and articulate and has a lot to tell—and teach—about how he makes his own way in comics and in Hollywood.
- Plus, we have the conclusions to our interviews with **Dennis O'Neil** and **Kurt Busiek**. If you thought what they said last issue was intriguing, check them out this time around. They've saved the best for last—as great storytellers always do.

Next issue, we have our awe-inspiring interview with **Will Eisner**. Will talks about comics past, comics present and comics future. When he speaks, you listen. Ditto for **Spider-Man's** **J. Michael Straczynski**, who'll be interviewed by **Jim Salicrup**. Then, there's an in-depth interview with **Batman** Group Editor **Bob Schreck**, an eye-opening talk with Dark Horse's Senior Editor **Diana Schutz**, and an insightful yack-fest with **Platinum Studios'** head, **Scott Mitchell Rosenberg**.

There'll be more **Nut & Bolts** from **Fabian**, **Paul Dini**, **Joey Cavalieri** (whose excellent “Writer's Block” article in **DFWN** #3 unblocked writers all over the globe!) and **Dennis O'Neil**, and from the some surprise teachers.

And I haven't forgotten about the *new special feature* we promised, but it's gonna start in issue #6, not #5. It needed some more time to ferment, but it will be truly worth the wait.

That's it for now.

Write Away!

DANNY

Danny Fingeroth

Chaykin All Over

WRITE Now!

The HOWARD CHAYKIN Interview

Interview conducted via telephone December 23, 2002 by **Danny Fingeroth**
Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Howard Chaykin**

Howard Chaykin has been an influential figure in the world of comics and television for a good long while now. Starting with such characters as **Cody Starbuck** and **Dominic Fortune**, and illustrating the comics adaptation of an obscure science fiction film called **Star Wars** well before the movie was released, Chaykin truly found his voice with **American Flagg!** Groundbreaking in a multiplicity of ways—subject matter, page design, dialogue usage, among them—**Flagg!** established the Chaykin brand.

From there, he continued to leave his mark with such works as **Blackhawk**, **Black Kiss** and **The Shadow**, and, currently, on **American Century** and **Mighty Love**. In television, he has served on staff on **The Flash**, **Viper**,

Earth: Final Conflict and **Mutant X**, bringing his unique vision to those series.

Howard always tells it like he sees it, which generally involves stripping emperors of their clothes. In this interview, he's as frank and to the point. Read on and learn. —DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: I'm speaking with Howard Chaykin, who's out in his Los Angeles home/studio. Let's start with a little bit of history. You've always said that Gil Kane, was a great influence on you. Besides Gil, was there anybody—any teachers or family members—who were instrumental in your becoming a professional creative person?

HOWARD CHAYKIN: My mother died never having any real idea what I did for a living. And comics were never a part of anybody in my family's

lives, so, naturally, the creative impulse was never there. I wasn't actively discouraged, nor was I in any way encouraged. Comics were regarded as frivolous and stupid, and frankly, I don't think anyone in my family ever really made the leap to see the difference between reading them and doing them.

DF: What kind of work were they involved in, your family?

HC: Back then, we ran a union on my mother's side. My father was a low-life.

DF: "Ran a union" in what sense? What union?

HC: A trade and craft union.

DF: Okay. What kind of stuff did you watch or read as a kid?

HC: At which part of being a kid? Being a kid in comic books lasts an awfully long time.

DF: Give as much of a progression as you want to give. What switched that possibility on in your brain? How does it go from, "These comic books are interesting," to "this is what I want to do for a career"?

HC: I was obsessed with comic books from very early on. My vocabulary expanded exponentially with the arrival of comics in my life. I was an early reader, so I was reading on a fairly high level as a kid, and comics helped that—sort of "Dick, Jane" and the "invulnerable." I was also obsessed with television and movies. The crappier the better.

DF: Action, comedy...?

HC: Both. And war pictures. I was never a horror fan. I never much liked monster movies because I was a chickensh*t. But I loved war movies, musicals, westerns, comedies, crime.

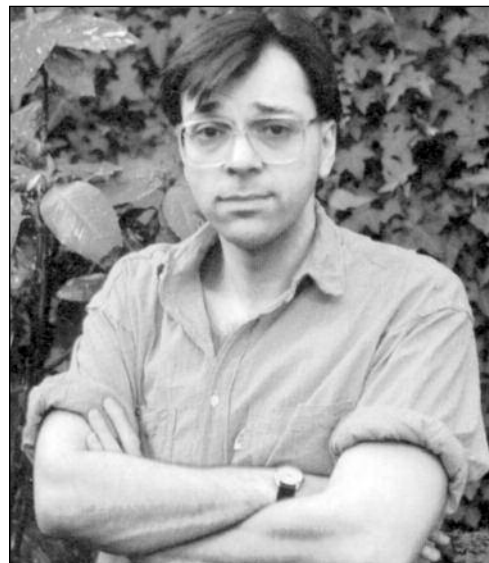
DF: And you were a big science fiction reader.

HC: Yeah, until a point in my early twenties when I realized that it had really lost its appeal to me.

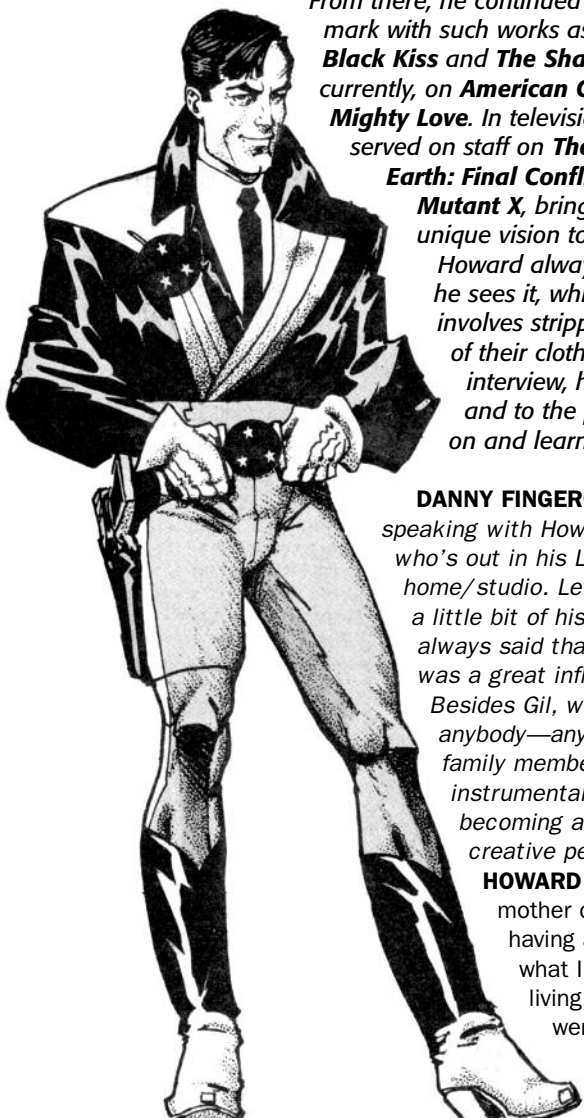
DF: Because...?

HC: Mostly because I felt that it wasn't really about much other than itself. I still write it, because there is a market for it and because I do this for a living. But I don't much read it. I will occasionally dip my toe in, but I am woefully undereducated in terms of the guys who came into the field in the past thirty years.

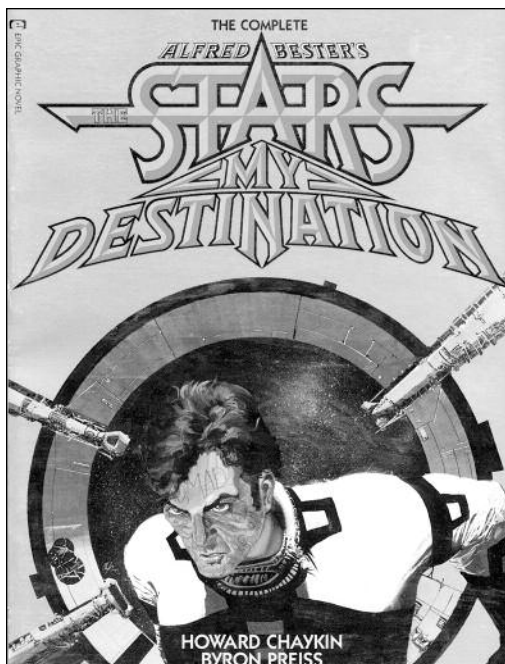
DF: Who would you name as your big science fiction influences?



Howard Chaykin in 1986.



Ruben Flagg, star of Chaykin's **American Flagg!**
[©2003 Howard Chaykin, Inc. & First Comics, Inc.]



The cover to the Howard Chaykin/Byron Preiss adaptation of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*. The first part was originally published in 1979 and it was reprinted, along with the never printed second half, by Epic Comics in 1992. [©2003 Byron Preiss Visual Publications, Inc.]

real DC fan. I became a big Marvel fan, I loved the stuff, I loved what Stan was doing, I really dug it. I collected everything. But at a certain point, I lost my interest in that stuff, too. And Marvel's not very interested in me.

DF: Well, you've done most of your work at DC, I guess. You did apprentice work as opposed to art school or college. Talk a little bit about that, why you went that road as opposed to the more traditional one.

HC: I'm a terrible student. Always have been. I'm pathetic at academic pursuits, I really suck.

DF: But it's clear you're quite intelligent.

HC: Compared to what? I'm not all that interested in academic pursuits. I was an oaf. And I regret it deeply, but it's too late now, regardless of what they tell you. So I ended up apprenticing to comics' other great autodidact, Gil Kane. He had an eighth grade education, but he was the best-read man I knew. He made a lot of excuses for himself, but that's just who he was. I learned a great deal from Gil.

DF: It's an amazing story. His assistant died and you read about it and called him.

HC: I heard that his assistant had died in his sleep. He was 21 years old.

DF: Oh my God.

HC: And I called Gil and offered my services.

DF: You were living in Brooklyn at that point?

HC: Queens.

DF: Did he live near you?

HC: No, he lived in Manhattan. He lived on 63rd and 2nd in an archetypal, grown-up guy apartment.

DF: Was he married at that point?

HC: Divorced—between engagements.

DF: From what I've read, it sounds like he was your role model. Did you learn about writing and storytelling from working with him?

HC: Alfred Bester. Chip Delany. Michael Moorcock. Robert Heinlein, just because he created every boy's dream of a perfectly ordered, fascist universe.

DF: [laughs] What more could you ask?

HC: Those were the guys. The usual suspects.

DF: And were the Marvel comics important to you? You don't seem to have much of the influence of, say, Stan Lee in your work.

HC: I was at summer camp the year the Marvel explosion happened. And I was unprepared for it. I was a

HC: No, actually, he mostly taught me about Gene Kelly and Rita Hayworth. He taught me antagonism and questioning.

DF: Can you give a little more detail on that?

HC: I've always been naturally hostile, and so was he. I got a lot out of learning to be argumentative with him—a debating club sensibility. And I got turned on to some interesting artists that I'd never heard of before. A lot of the French guys, paperback illustrators, guys who were of interest to him, and so on.

DF: Were you studying with Gil Kane, or were you just hanging out?

HC: I was his gofer—a total loser.

DF: And then you apprenticed for Neal Adams?

HC: I worked with Neal, I worked with Gray Morrow, and with Wally Wood.

DF: That must have been a trip.

HC: It was toward the end of Woody's stay on Earth. He was a curious, complex and interesting figure.

DF: Now the guys that you came up with, Walt Simonson, Mike Kaluta... thematically, I'd say, these are guys from outside New York—who were not Jews. [Howard laughs] Was the fact that you are a New York Jewish guy... how did you fit in with that crowd, what was the chemistry there?

HC: Well, there weren't a lot of New Yorkers in this group, the guys of that generation in comics. Larry Hama, Ralph Reese, Frank Brunner. Most of the guys were guys from the Southeast. Like Simonson, like Kaluta, like Bernie Wrightson. I was the Jew from New York.

DF: Were you the New York insider who showed them the ropes in town?

HC: They were all older than I was, and they were all already comfortable with the ropes in the world. I just basically hung around. I was also the least of them. My skills at the time were the most underdeveloped. I really didn't get any good until I was much older than that.

DF: Did you meet them hanging around the DC office?

HC: Yeah. I hung around at the DC office.

DF: Now, that seems to be an entirely different school than, say, the Steve Englehart/Steve Gerber school of '70s guys.

HC: Well, Gerber and Englehart were writers. And, frankly, for the most part, we weren't very interested in what they were doing. Well, I shouldn't say "we," let me personalize it. I wasn't. Steve Englehart lived I don't know where. I didn't know Gerber very well. I hung out with the artists. But even then, I believed, as I believe now, that the artist is responsible for the bulk of the writing in the book anyway.

DF: So you're hanging around with these guys, you're getting assignments. What was your first assignment, your first art assignment?

HC: Love comics. I did mostly fillers. Just stuff to get in the door.

DF: *The Scorpion*, was that further along?

HC: That was way later, when I was already getting sucked into the morass of the business.

DF: Was that your Atlas character?

HC: Yeah, it was.

DF: Now, in every interview I've read with you, you talk about what a party animal you were in the '70s, and no doubt that was true, but you also did produce an awful lot of work.

HC: I was incredibly disciplined. And I got out a lot. Unlike a lot of my peers, I never took for granted the fact that I had a career. I believed that my responsibility to my career was

important.

DF: So were you incredibly disciplined, incredibly fast?

HC: Both. And sloppy! Now, of course, I'm much more anal-retentive. I'm a great believer in polish, polish, and polish. So to a certain extent, the work I do in television and as a writer in comics is very much a reflection of that evolving ethic as a writer. Because I believe that first drafts are bullsh*t, and that after a first draft, you've got a responsibility to actually get what you *really* meant out there.

DF: In art as well as in writing?

HC: Oh, absolutely! My stuff goes through an enormous polishing process.

DF: In the '70s, how many hours were you at the board, would you estimate?

HC: I couldn't begin to tell you.

DF: I mean, were you a nine-to-five guy...?

HC: Hardly. I didn't see much of the sun at all. I would work seven days a week, six to eight hours a day. And the rest of the time, because I was single most of the '70s, I got out and drank and went to the bars. It worked for me.

DF: And you lived in Manhattan at the time?

HC: I moved to the city in the early '70s. I'd been living in Queens in a building full of other cartoonists. Wrightson was there, Al Milgrom, Simonson, Elliot Maggin. A bunch of guys. I never had a roommate. I always lived alone. I cherish my privacy, and my time.

DF: But you've been married—

HC: I married early and often.

DF: Let's talk about the archetypal Chaykin hero.

HC: The standard Chaykin hero is dark-eyed, dark-haired, and Jewish.

DF: He looks like you, basically, an idealized version of you.

HC: No. He looks like a cross between Rod Steiger and Robert Downey, Jr.

DF: Which point in Rod Steiger's career are we talking about?

HC: A young Rod Steiger! If you think of Rod Steiger playing **Marty** or Judd in **Oklahoma**, crossed with Robert Downey, Jr., you get a pretty good mix of me.

DF: As I've been reading your comics to research this interview, I kept thinking, "These guys all look very similar, and they all look like Howard."

HC: Well, they don't look like me, but there is a certain archetypal quality. Heroes for me are dark-haired, dark-eyed, snotty whippersnappers, that kind of thing.

DF: The dark-haired, dark-eyed thing worked for Superman.

HC: Batman, too.

DF: That's true. It's interesting that this is the type you keep coming back to. I can't be the first person to notice this.

HC: Comics are a visual shorthand in a lot of ways, and it's an aspect of the shorthand.

DF: At a certain point, there started being a high sexual content in your work.

HC: I was a horny guy in my early days. I was never particularly interested in power, but I certainly was interested in sex. And that was that.

DF: Did you think it would get your work noticed more? Was it a commercial decision, or just what you wanted to draw?

HC: No, I just had a fun time drawing sex. It worked, and I had a good time!

DF: It shows! But at the time, there wasn't much else like that around.

HC: It was an opportunity for me to carve a niche.

DF: I know that you write comics scripts both for other people to draw and for yourself. Do you approach those scripts the same way, or do you write differently for yourself?

HC: Pretty much the same, although there are things that I would draw that I would never ask other people to draw just because I don't believe they're as interested in those choices as I am.

DF: A comics script of yours that you sent me was formatted like a movie script. Is that how you do all your comics writing?

HC: I tend to write in screenplay format. I believe in a lot of description. Not anywhere nearly as much as Alan Moore, for example.

DF: "And the light bulb is a General Electric sixty watter."

HC: Yeah, "make sure the tungsten vibrates." I like details.

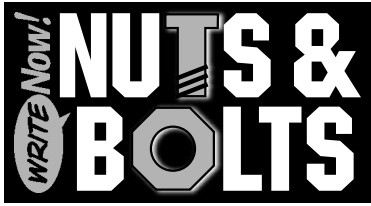
DF: And you're a full script guy, not a Marvel style [plot first] guy.

HC: Plotting then allowing the artist to dictate the storytelling tends to be sloppy and lazy. Frankly, there aren't a lot of artists now that have a strong understanding of narrative. There are rules, there's a language, and there's a vocabulary. They're not readers. They didn't grow up with the idea of reading as a primary tool. They grew up receiving as opposed to reading, and they're post-analytical—more interested in sensation than sensitivity.

DF: But you would think they would have the four-act TV structure tattooed into their brains from watching so much TV.



A Dominic Fortune splash from the Marvel **Hulk** Magazine #21. Script by Denny O'Neil with story and art by Howard Chaykin. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



Howard's script, thumbnail sketches and art from the *Mighty Love* graphic novel. We see the script for the end of page 18, then the script and art for pages 19 & 20. This is full-script method (action and dialogue written at the same time).

MIGHTY LOVE SCRIPT CHAYKIN 20

PANEL TWO

The Iron Angel and Skylark tumble backwards off the speeding armored car.

IRON ANGEL & SKYLARK
(open burst)
3 OOOONNNFFFFF--!

4 RICHARD (OFF PANEL)
Must've hit something--

PANEL THREE

Tight close on Rich Steinmetz.

5 RICHARD
--But no harm done--

PANEL FOUR

The Iron Angel and Skylark land in a heap on the tarmac, as the armored car tears away into the night.

6 RICHARD (OFF PANEL)
--I'll be home in half an hour.

7 IRON ANGEL
Nice going.

8 SKYLARK
Look who's talking.

9 CABBIE (OFF PANEL)
Too bad what happened--

PAGE NINETEEN

PANEL ONE

Iron Angel and Skylark turn to see a TAXICAB's pulled up to the curb, as the CABBIE hangs out of his window, staring at them with a look both amazed and blase.

1 CABBIE
-- You guys need a lift?

2 SKYLARK
No thanks.

3 IRON ANGEL
We're fine.

PANEL TWO

PUSH IN ON the Iron Angel and Skylark as they begin to back away from the cab and its driver.

4 CABBIE
You sure?

The numbers on the script each correspond to a number that would have been indicated on a copy of the art to tell the letterer where to put captions, balloons and sound effects.

Howard, like many people who write for comics as well as for television and movies, uses screenplay format to write the script. While this format is standard--and required--for film and TV, it's just one of many formats comics writers use.

MIGHTY LOVE SCRIPT CHAYKIN 21

5 IRON ANGEL
Absolutely.

6 SKYLARK
No question about it.

PANEL THREE

PAST the Cabbie, on the Iron Angel and Skylark, who continue to back away, toward an alley behind them.

7 CABBIE
So you two a couple?

8 IRON ANGEL
A couple?

9 SKYLARK
It's not like that--

10 CABBIE
Don't get me wrong--

PANEL FOUR

PAST the Iron Angel and Skylark, on the Cabbie, who's ducked down below the edge of his door, only the top of his head visible. They both eye each other, over,

11 CABBIE (continuing)
--I'm a big fan of the both of you--

PAGE TWENTY

PANEL ONE

AN INSET--TIGHT CLOSE ON the Cabbie--holding a PEN and his CLIPBOARD, a confused look on his face.

1 CABBIE (continuing)
--How about an auto--

2 CABBIE (continuing; open burst)
!!?!

PANEL TWO

MEDIUM TWO SHOT CLOSE ON the Iron Angel and Skylark, both in the shadows of the alley.

3 CABBIE (OFF PANEL)
Hey--where'd you go?

4 IRON ANGEL (whisper)
Who the hell do you think--

MIGHTY LOVE SCRIPT CHAYKIN 22

5 SKYLARK (whisper)
Where do you get off with--

PANEL THREE

Wider on the alley, as the Iron Angel and Skylark get into each other's face.

6 SKYLARK (continuing; whisper)
If you hadn't--

7 IRON ANGEL (whisper)
If you didn't--

8 SKYLARK (whisper)
I had him--

9 IRON ANGEL (whisper)
He was mine--

PANEL FOUR

MEDIUM TWO SHOT CLOSE ON the Iron Angel and Skylark, both stopping dead at the sound of SIRENS approaching.

SFX
SHREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

PANEL FIVE

CLOSER on the Iron Angel and Skylark.

SFX
(continuing; getting larger)

SHREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

10 IRON ANGEL
Maybe we should've taken that cab.

11 SKYLARK
It did cross my mind.

PANEL SIX

The Iron Angel and Skylark go their separate ways.

12 IRON ANGEL
Stay out of my business.

13 SKYLARK
That goes for me, too.

SFX
(larger still)

SHREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

The PAUL DINI Interview

Conducted February 24, 2003 by **Danny Fingeroth**
Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Paul Dini**

Paul Dini is an Emmy Award-winning writer and producer (*The New Batman/Superman Adventures* and *Batman Beyond*). In comics, he is the author of works such as *Batman: Mad Love*, and giant-sized painted (by Alex Ross) projects including *Superman: Peace on Earth*, *JLA: Secret Origins* and the upcoming *JLA: Liberty and Justice*, as well as the creator-owned series *Jingle Belle* and *Mutant, Texas*. Paul has also collaborated with designer Chip Kidd on *Batman Animated* for HarperCollins, documenting the creation and unique visual styling of the groundbreaking TV series. Paul lives in Los Angeles and is currently at work on a number of television, movie, and comics-related projects—many of which he talks about in this very interview.

Paul is constantly in demand, constantly productive, and has some very informative and engrossing thoughts on what he writes, and on how and why he writes what he does the way he does. I think you'll have a lot of fun reading this interview. I know I had a blast conducting it.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROOTH: I'm talking with Paul Dini, multi-talented writer, producer, and bon vivant.

PAUL DINI: Well, yes.

DF: This interview is for *Write Now!*, so the emphasis is on who Paul Dini is and how he came to be, and how you, the reader, can grow up to be Paul Dini.

PD: Oh God, no. Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be Paul Dini [Danny laughs]—to paraphrase an old country song.

DF: Those country songs seem to play a big part in your background and your work. Now, you grew up in Texas?

PD: No, I didn't.

DF: You didn't? I'm gonna fire my research staff. As soon as I get one.

PD: No, I grew up in California. But a huge chunk of my family lives in Texas.

DF: Ah, I see.

PD: I'm a native mutant Texan.

DF: So you're a native Los Angeleno?

PD: Native Californian. I grew up in sort of a weird triangle between San Francisco, Lake Tahoe, and Carmel, in places my family lived at various points, or where I lived. I spent summers at Lake Tahoe and other parts of Nevada, and I went to school near Monterey.

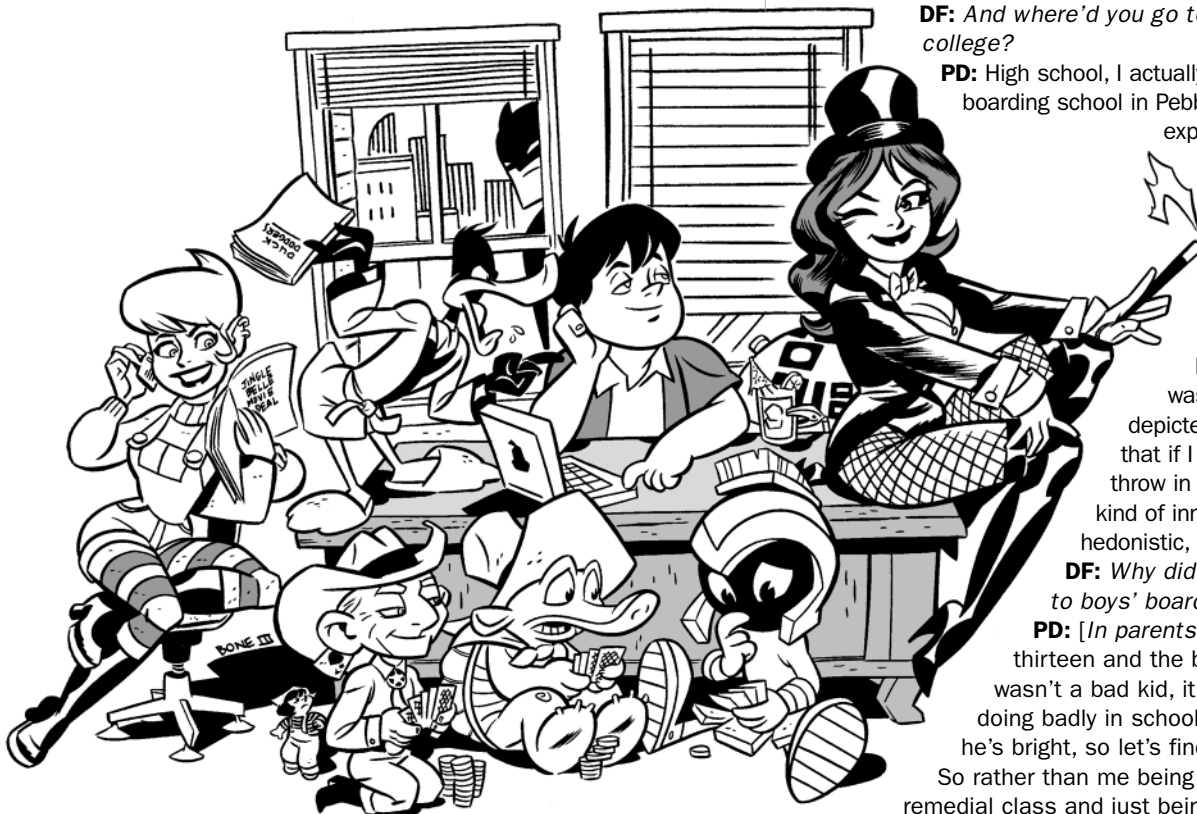
DF: And where'd you go to high school, to college?

PD: High school, I actually went to a boys' boarding school in Pebble Beach, California. The experience there I used in my very first job for Oni as a two-part story called "The Honor Rollers," which was about these jaded, rich, spoiled brats at a prep school very much like the one I attended. I wasn't one of the kids depicted, but I always thought that if I continued the series, I'd throw in a version of myself. This kind of innocent, mystified by these hedonistic, little bastards.

DF: Why did your parents send you to boys' boarding school?

PD: [In parents' voice] "He turned thirteen and the boy went bad." No, I wasn't a bad kid, it's just like, "Oh, he's doing badly in school, but the teachers say he's bright, so let's find a place for him to be."

So rather than me being held back and going to remedial class and just being frustrated, they sent me there. I would pass all these intelligence tests and creativity tests, yet I was doing math at a chimpanzee



Paul Dini, surrounded by some of the characters he's worked on. Art by J. Bone.
[Art ©2003 J. Bone; Zatanna, Batman TM & ©2003 DC Comics; Daffy Duck, Marvin Martin ©2003 Warner Bros.; Jingle Belle and Mutant, Texas characters TM & ©2003 Paul Dini.]

level. And my teachers said, "Well, he needs to be somewhere, but obviously not in the public school system, where he's a danger to himself and others." So the folks shipped me off south to Old Bob Louie, AKA The Robert Louis Stevenson School. The first year was absolute hell, but after that I enjoyed it very much. It was just weird being away from home and being with all these strange characters. I was going on an art scholarship, which is odd, because I draw so rarely now.

DF: From immersing myself in "Dini-ania," or however one would refer to the works and times of Paul Dini, I really thought, "Oh, this guy's from Texas," because everything in the material refers to Texas. So somewhere that Texas thing—at least in the mythology as projected into the world of Paul Dini—really is strong.

PD: I grew up on a weird diet of '50s lounge/bachelor pad music, because my dad was a singer and that was his music. He was the opening act for Tony Bennett at the end of the '50s and early '60s. So I grew up listening to a lot of Frank Sinatra, big bands, some jazz and the crooners, like Eddie Fisher and Bing Crosby. And my mother just listened to country music. So musically I'm equally at home in the ultra-lounge as I am in the bunkhouse. We grew up, my brothers and sister and I, in a kind of rural pocket of Northern California, not far from San Francisco, but there were a lot of good country stations on the radio then. I started off listening to a lot of country music and I really loved it. I love the old performers, beginning of course with Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, Spade Cooley, Milton Brown, and vocal groups like the Sons of the Pioneers, and then Johnny Cash, Buck Owens and Willie Nelson, and then stretching up into some of the classic and modern-day rockabilly stuff. And it just is a big part of my work and my writing and my mindset. I'm listening to a great band even as we speak called The Hot Club of Cowtown, a latter-day Western swing band, that does a lot of bluegrass and old Texas Playboys numbers.

DF: And the Hot Club, of course, is a reference to the classic 1920s and 1930s Django Reinhardt and Stephan Grappelli jazz band of The Hot Club of Paris.

PD: Yup!

DF: That's very funny.

PD: We would spend every summer at a friend's ranch in Nevada, and I had a lot of family down in Texas, so we were always going down there to visit and just ramble around. So all that Western imagery just got naturally stuck in my mindset.

DF: I'll tell you, it got so much on my mindset that my first few questions are: "What was it like growing up in Texas and how did it affect your work?"

PD: Well, I don't know about growing up in Texas, but going there now is pretty good. I was just on the phone with my cousin David. He's in town visiting. I'm going to go down there in a few months, probably for Easter, and we were making plans: "Oh, yeah, we're gonna drive around, get barbecue, listen to music and drink tequila." Boy I'll tell ya, the fun never ends with the Dini clan. It's sort of the place I run to to take my mind off of things, whereas my understanding is that everybody in Texas is trying to get out of there. But I kind of like it.

DF: Well, wherever you're from, usually you want to get out of it at least for some period of time.

PD: Yeah, that's true.

DF: So your dad opened for Tony Bennett. What is your dad's name?

PD: Bob Dini.

DF: Did he put any albums out?

PD: No, but he did a bunch of singles. You can sometimes find them on eBay or in old record stores. He was a singer in the '50s until, I don't know, his last record came out in the late '60s, a Christmas song which I will probably work into one of the Jingle Belle stories some day. The more kids showed up in the family, the more he decided he was going to get out of the recording thing. So he got into advertising and things like that, other ways that he could use his creativity. He's a very creative man.

DF: He was in advertising as a copywriter?

PD: As a writer, sort of an idea man, and he had his own agency for a while.

DF: Did your mom do anything like that?

PD: No, she basically ran the house for a number of years. Later on she would work part-time in dad's company, and after that she got a job managing a series of bookstores and gift



From Paul Dini's "The Honor Rollers" in *Oni Double Feature* #12. Art by Tom Fowler. [©2003 Paul Dini.]



JINGLE (CONT): You become the most important thing a child sees! You are the one that turns their wishes into reality. You are the one they write to and dream about all through the year.

Panel Nine

Closer on Streetcorner Santa, who gags a bit as Jing presses her foot harder.

JINGLE (Off): And more than that, you are one of the few adults they know they can trust. Any of this sinking in, meatbag?

STREETCORNER SANTA: Gurrk!

Panel Ten

Jing stands in silhouette with her foot still pinning the streetcorner Santa in place. Jing gives the guy his marching orders.

JINGLE: Good. Now we're going to have us a little refresher course. Repeat after me: "Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas!"

STREETCORNER SANTA (Strained): Hur, hur, hur! Murry Kussmus!

JINGLE (Second balloon): I want jolly, dammit! Again!

Panel Eleven

We are in the mall at the Santaland display. A number of kids are lined up to see Santa (the real one, Jing's dad) and one is seated on his lap. A sign near the Santaland display reads: Meet the real Santa Claus, here today! Santa glares at Jing, who has entered, casually sipping coffee from a take-out cup. Even though she's done a very nice thing as far as preserving Santa's rep, the last thing she wan is for him to know about it. *

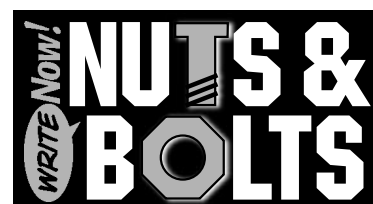
SANTA: You're late.

JINGLE: I was just getting a Starbucks. *

JING SFX: Slurp!



Notice how Paul "tells" a lot more of the story to the artist and editor than we see or read explicitly in the finished story. Many writers do this to convey to the other members of the creative team the *sense* of what they want the art and other visual elements to express, as much as the specific action that needs to be depicted to tell the story.



[©2003 Paul Dini.]

STILL Not The Last...

WRITE Now!

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**

Part 2

As we said last issue: "For over 20 years, writer and editor Dennis O'Neil put the 'dark' in 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.'"

We said a lot of other cool stuff about Denny then, too, but you'll just have to dig out your copy of **DFWN** #3 (or buy a copy!) to see it. The above gives you the basic idea.

Only one thing: If Denny is the Dean of American comics writers... who's the Jerry?

Anyway, read and learn as we continue our interview with Mr. O.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: Tell me about the teaching you have done both as an editor and actually as a teacher. You seem to enjoy that. I can't imagine that it pays very much, so what is it that you like about that? What does it feed in your soul?

DENNY O'NEIL: Part of it is histrionics. I did a lot of acting as a kid and there is an element of that. Good teachers are good speakers, generally. I like communicating what I know. Marifran has been a teacher for over 40 years and knew she was going to be a teacher from 5th grade on. She had a hunch that I would like teaching, and by coincidence, a short time after that realization on her part, Howard Cruse was quitting his SVA gig and offered to recommend me for it. I found that I really *did* like teaching. I did it for about nine months right out of the Navy. I was a substitute teacher. At that time all you needed was a B.A. There are people that really like teaching, and I think that I am one of them. This current teaching gig here at DC expires in February, and I'm wondering what will happen next year. How do I feed my teaching jones after February?

DF: You've taught at colleges where people are aspiring to become comics pros and want to learn from your experience and knowledge. But you also teach at DC. You come in every week and teach younger editors. What's that like?

DO: It's the best teaching gig imagi-

nable. I don't have to grade. I don't have to look at papers. I don't have to take attendance. I have to prepare lectures, but I have a lot of notes from previous lectures. I'm going to teach editing in a few months.

DF: You're now teaching writing?

DO: And general story structure. And I even did three weeks on the mythological aspects of comics.

DF: I'd love to see the notes.



The cover to the final issue of **Azrael: Agent of the Bat**. Art by Mike Zeck and Jerry Ordway. [©2003 DC Comics.]

DO: I can give them to you. I'm going to teach editing next, and I've never done that before. That's *terra incognita*. This is dream gig. I spend a couple hours Wednesday afternoons assembling notes, usually from some other lectures given here and there, and come in on Thursday morning at 11 and do the class and go home. At SVA (School of Visual Arts) there was that awful process of *grading*, which all teachers have to do, and I wonder: How do you grade something like this, where talent is a part of it? I am loathe to admit it, because every semester you have kids that are conscientious, and they are paying attention, and they are taking notes and they ask good questions, but you look at their work and it's never going to happen for them.

It's pretty amazing altogether that comics skills are now—and have been for a while—taught in colleges. This is a great country because I, who got a D— in math and flunked algebra in high school, am standing in front of a class at the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology. One of the big, surprising changes is that MIT has a pop art/pop culture department and teach comic books. Mike Uslan [producer of the **Batman** movies and now licensing exec at CrossGen Comics. —DF.] taught a comic book course at Indiana 25 or 30 years ago, and that was the first. I was aware that educational institutions were paying attention a little bit. Every once in a while, someone who was writing a thesis would ask me for an interview or some advice, but I didn't know that we had gotten that respectable. When you talk about the majors, in the last 25 years that's probably the biggest one. Those older guys didn't admit that they were comic book writers. When I came into the business, a lot of them would dodge around what they did for a living if a civilian asked. It was somehow shameful, and now it's cool to be a comic book writer. When I first went out to Hollywood looking for a TV job, I was told to emphasize the science fiction stories I published and to not say much about the comics. But now, Larry tells me that, as the son of a comic book writer, people are often very interested in that.

DF: Tell me about the Hollywood thing. You've done some TV and some movie work. Would you like to have done more? Did you go out there and get a bad taste from it? Talk about that and how someone's comic skills could be applied to that world.

DO: I would not turn down any television work that was honorable. I like working in the form, I just didn't want to go after it and you have to do that. I went out to Hollywood when they were doing the **Captain Marvel** and **Isis** TV shows. I guess it was Harlan Ellison who was going to get me in to see that producer in the early to mid-'80s. The guy was polite but clearly not interested. Then I went out a few years later, again at Harlan's behest, to talk to the producers of **Logan's Run**. That

time I got lucky and I got an assignment and I did it. I know it was shot but I've never seen it. My father-in-law saw it, so we know it exists. That was really pretty good, to on your first try end up writing a network show. I was told that they could get me additional work. But it would have meant relocating to L.A., and I had a sense that it would mean five times a week going schmoozing and talking to producers and story editors and selling myself. And that's the single thing that I'm worst at. As I was talking about before, I was brought up to believe that a decent man doesn't call attention to himself.

I do like the TV script form, although I've had horrible moments when I saw what my script ended up as. But everyone who has worked in television has that story to tell in one form or another. If you're Steven Bochco, Aaron Sorkin or someone like that, David Kelley, then television is a wonderful medium. It's maybe the best medium for telling human stories.

DF: It's got much in common with comics in that it's a serial form that aggregates on itself.

DO: More than that, it's generally not about who the star is or what the special effects are. They don't have the budget for big special effects, so they have to focus on real human problems. I think the guys I mentioned do excellent work every week. Real problems which they realize in very literate and well-acted scripts. I know a woman who was a regular on the **West Wing**, and she then took a job with another show, because **West Wing** wasn't able to guarantee her that she'd be on every week, and she would be a star on the show she went to. But she would have loved to spend the rest of her life acting on the **West Wing** if she could, because it was so literate and so honest and the people making it are so good at what they do. TV's a great medium if you get to the place

where you have enough clout to get your story on the screen. Some of my experiences have been where, say, an actor wants to show that he can do accents or do schtick, so he does that. Someone who worked on a show that I brushed up against had a situation where he was instructed to open on a shot of a young woman in a bikini so that he had to set the scene at a swimming pool. In another instance, I saw a show and the same young woman removed her sweatshirt in the middle of a scene, and I asked the writer why she did that. He said that someone in a position of authority on the show thought that if you had a woman who looks like that, you have to do it. TV and film writers can really have their work murdered. If you belong to the Writer's Guild, and I do, the producers have an obligation to show you the script that they are going to shoot in time for you to take your name off it if you want to. That's a real benefit that the union has gotten. So if the fact that what has come in is so different than what I wrote, I don't have to take credit—or blame—for it.

DF: Is there anything coming out, or that you are working on, for TV?

DO: I was associated with a kid's show called **Captain Lightning** and then, because of tax and other financial considerations, it got moved to Canada, and the producer, who was a friend, was not able to use any US writers. He asked me for a recommendation for a British or Canadian writer and I was able to put him and Alan Grant together. May 3rd, the day I saw the **Spider-Man** movie, that producer and I went to it together and



From **Green Lantern/Green Arrow** #77. Written by Dennis O'Neil with art by Neal Adams. [©2003 DC Comics.]



Think a complete super-hero adventure can't be told in five pages anymore? Longtime collaborators Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz (and inker Sal Buscema) say you're wrong.

On this page we have the plot for "Mr. Right Battles the Paper Bag Bandits," which appeared as a flip feature in *The M@n* #1. The plot, written by Tom, was the result of a telephone conference between him and Ron.

Tom DeFalco
Mr. Right
"Mr. Right Battles The Paper Bag Bandits!"
Plot for 5 pages
Submitted: October 9, 2000

Page 1

(Logo/Story Title/Credits): We open our first Mr. Right story with a symbolic splash that shows **Mr. Right** smashing/clobbering the **Paper Bag Bandits**, which are a gang of thieves/burglars who disguise themselves by wearing paper bags on their heads.

Page 2

- 1) At night, **Detective Lopez** notices something suspicious at a neighborhood convenient store--*something just isn't right about the place!*
- 2) As she enters the store, she is attacked/slugged by the **Paper Bag Bandits** who were in the middle of robbing the place.
- 3) Sometime later in the Emergency Room of a nearby hospital, we find her husband and son. Wearing a serious expression on his face, **Lopez** is telling his worried son that mom will be all right, and **Jeffrey** wants to know who hurt her.
- 4) Even as he watches the doctors attend his wife, Lopez gives Jeffrey a little background on the Paper Bag Bandits--explaining that they are a local gang that's been terrorizing the neighborhood merchants.
- 5) We focus on a determined Jeffrey. He's thinking that he knows someone who can bring these bandits to justice.

"Mr. Right Battles The Paper Bag Bandits!"

Page 3

- 1) Sometime later--as captions explain that he's already been at this for a few days--a determined **Jeffrey** is in an alley with an exasperated **Carlyn Click**. (Jeff has been scouting the area, hoping to spot the bad guys. Carlyn is annoyed because she thinks he intends to use the Mr. Right program to punish the bad guys, and she doesn't think he should use Mr. Right for a personal vendetta.)
- 2) Noticing a car in front of a liquor store, Jeffrey watches as the passengers pull paper bags over his head.
- 3) Pulling out a GAMEBOY-like gizmo--which is complete with a visor that Jeff can wear over his eyes--Jeffrey prepares to activate the Mr. Right program--even as he tells Carlyn to use her cell phone to call the police. (Much to her surprise! She was wrong. This is a mission for justice and not vengeance.)
- 4) Moments later, as the crooks exit the liquor store, they're attacked by a fighting-mad **Mr. Right**.

Page 4

- 1) During the course of the fight, Mr. Right gets hit by some prop--garbage can or liquor bottle?!
- 2) Carlyn watches in horror as Jeff reacts to the pain--and her thought balloons will tell the readers about the Jeff/Right symbiosis.
- 3) Suddenly--spotting Carlyn and Jeff, a grouchy, old **tenant** from the building demands to know what they're doing back in the alley. (The tenant is coming out a door that opens into the alley to empty some trash.)
- 4) Having grabbed him by the arm, the tenant shakes Jeff--dislodging his visor.
- 5) Back at the fight, Mr. Right realizes their connection has suddenly been severed as his punches become insubstantial--his fist passing right through his surprised victims.

Mr. Right is a REGISTERED TRADEMARK of Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz and has been registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

"Mr. Right Battles The Paper Bag Bandits!"

Page 5

- 1) Realizing that she must act, a determined Carlyn stomps on the tenant's foot.
- 2) As the irate tenant chases Carlyn, Jeff readjusts his visor--
- 3) --And Mr. Right, who is glad to have Jeff back, finishes clobbering the bad guys.
- 4) Sometime later--finding Carlyn hidden behind a dumpster, Jeff gives her the all clear and tells her the police finally arrived to arrest the Paper Bag Bandits.
- 5) As they walk down the street together, she apologizes for doubting him (justice over vengeance) and he thanks her for watching his back.
- 6) The story ends with a long shot as they decided to visit his mom who is still in the hospital.

THE END...for now!

Peter Sanderson's

Kurt Busiek's

Danny Fingeroth's Write Now! Interview

Part 2

Interview by **Peter Sanderson** on December 19, 2002

Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Kurt Busiek**

Continuing (from last issue) Peter Sanderson's discussion with Kurt Busiek. If we have to remind you that Kurt is the creator of *Astro City*, *Shock rockets*, *Superstar*, *The Power Company*, and *Thunderbolts*, as well as the writer of *Marvels*—no, you're right, we don't have to. Just read on and enjoy.

—DF

[Kurt and Peter were talking about Kurt's decision to move out west, possibly jeopardizing his contacts with his East Coast editors....]

PETER SANDERSON: Networking has gotten harder now that the comics industry is spread all over the country.

KURT BUSIEK: Mmm-hmm. But luckily everything worked out. It's not as if all the projects made it into print, but I at least got paid for the *Final Fantasy* stuff, and the *Wizard's Tale* stuff that disappeared when Eclipse went bankrupt, and we were able to get the art back years later and bring it to Homage. But when I went full-time freelance in 1990, my fear was I would lie awake at night trying to figure out how to pay the mortgage. And instead, I would lie awake at night trying to figure out how I was going to meet all these damn deadlines. [laughter] So since those days—that's now twelve years ago—I have always had enough work to keep me busy. So full-time freelancing has worked out this time around.

PS: Looking back, do you feel you were naive about the comics industry when you started out?

KB: Oh, completely and utterly. I had no idea what I was doing, business-wise. Actually, it was fairly smart of me to notice that there was supposed to be a new regular writer on *Power Man/Iron Fist* and that his first issue just kept getting delayed and delayed, and to see an opportunity there and go after it. That was market analysis. Instead of trying to figure out what book I really wanted to write, I looked around for what book needed writers.

What I should have done at the point I was the regular writer on *Power/Fist* was, I should have used the fact I was there in New York and coming in to talk to Denny every couple of weeks as a starting point for talking to other writers, for pitching to other editors, pitching fill-ins for other books. Instead what I did was I said, thank God, I've got a steady income, I can move out of this expensive city. And I moved away so that I had this one assignment, this one contact with the company, and no avenue to pick up other work. When I ultimately lost the *Power/Fist* assignment I hadn't used that time and I hadn't used that work to build something that I could go on to other assignments from. I didn't really have a sense of how the office politics worked, or even whether people were reading the stories I was writing in *Power Man*. I was just kind of stumbling along as best I could, going through whatever door looked like it was

open at the moment.

Nowadays I think I've got a much better idea of how the business is working and where the opportunities are for the kind of thing I want to do. And I'm much more focused on the question of what's the best kind of job for me to pursue, what's the best kind of opportunity to look for, as opposed to, "Give me work; I'll write anything!"

With *Power/Fist* I had actually written a review of Jo Duffy's run on the book just a couple of months before I first pitched for it. What I said at the time, finishing up the review, was that Jo had a unique understanding of these characters and their relationship, and her approach to the book, combining drama and humor is so strong. She's eventually going to leave, but I sure as hell wouldn't want to be the writer who replaces her,



The splash to *Avengers* Vol. 3 #4 by Kurt Busiek with art by George Pérez & Al Vey.
©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

because I would have no idea what I was doing with the book. Naturally, that became my first regular assignment [laughter] and I was the first regular writer on the book after Jo. And it shows in the book itself. The first six or seven issues of **Power/Fist** I wrote, I'm me being Jo Duffy just as hard as I possibly can. And toward the end of my run I'm figuring out what I would do with these characters, with these theories from my own storytelling ideas as opposed to trying to figure out what Jo would have done with them next. But unfortunately I didn't last long enough on the book to really implement any of those ideas.

PS: Moving to a different topic, how has the comics audience changed over 20 years? How have writing and characterization styles changed over that time?

KB: Well, that's a couple of different questions. It's peculiar. On the one hand, the audience is a lot smaller, but on the other, the *kind* of material that's being published is a lot broader. There's a lot more variety in comics publishing today than there was in 1982. Back then, things like **Nexus** and **American Flag** were alternative books that were majorly different from the mainstream. Today either one of those books could be published by Marvel or DC. And while they were certainly very good, very well done books, they were adventure books starring [laughter] heroic lead white male characters. The idea of the kind of books that we see from Vertigo these days, or the stuff that's being published by Dark Horse, or a lot of books that are coming out of Image, these would have been complete *pipe dreams* back then, stuff that you could not imagine being out there on the stands. So it's a much smaller audience that's supporting, at least to some degree, a wider variety of material. And they want a more sophisticated approach. There're complaints on some fronts, and I can sympathize with them, that if Marvel's publishing a **Hulk** series that ten-year-olds can't enjoy, something is terribly wrong. But at the same time, you've got to face the fact that the ten-year-olds aren't coming into the comic book stores and buying the comics. And while that's a problem that certainly needs to be addressed, if you're selling these comics to 25- and 30-year-olds, you might as well make them comics that they'll enjoy.

In the twenty years that I've been in the business, we've been through a period where the fact that the Marvel Universe was a big, sprawling interrelated place was enormously important, to the point where DC did **Crisis on Infinite Earths** in order to make their line far more closely integrated, and far

more like the Marvel Universe. And it did phenomenal things for their sales.

Well, nowadays, having the books tied together in a tight universe is actually viewed as a *bad* thing, to the point that the readers that we have now are *resistant* to the idea of cross-book connections pushing them to buy books that they would be otherwise uninterested in. So they resist exactly the sort of thing that were successful editorial approaches fifteen years ago.

But at the same time, comic book fans want stories about the characters they like and they want those stories to *matter*. Over and over again when I talk about a new project, I'm asked, "Will this story have repercussions for the character?" My feeling generally is your first question should be, "Is it going to be a good story or is it going to be a bad story?" Because if it's going to be a bad story, you don't want it to have repercussions [laughter] for the characters. You want to be able to forget about it. If it's a good story, great. If it's a good story, do a sequel, do more.

But I think that a big change—and I'm being sort of negative about the industry here—but I think back in 1984, let's say, comic book fans were interested in the *universes*, were interested in the *characters*, and were looking for reasons to buy *more* books, *more* stories, *more* places they could explore. The idea was: spin *this* character off into a mini-series; let's see *that* event spill off into the other books; let's see more, wider, *bigger*. These days, I get the sense that a lot of comic book readers are looking for reasons to not buy books.

The audience today has both a lot of loyalty to the characters that they've followed over the years, but they also have a lot of *fatigue*. Instead of defining a good story as a story that excites them, they define a good story as a story that has "historical significance" to the ongoing story of this character. A story in which Peter Parker gets married, divorced, hired, fired, his powers change, his costume changes—these would be lasting changes—are more important than an exciting **Spider-Man** story that doesn't actually have repercussions. It's as if these fans are viewing themselves as scholars, observers of history, and they need to know the high points, regardless of whether or not they actually enjoy the stories.

This is certainly a sour view of it. But I'm always happiest when I can surprise the reader, when I can do something whether it's **Marvels** or **Astro City**, that people will read and they'll be surprised by it and they'll talk it up with their friends.

Or whether it's something like

Thunderbolts, where we can just pull the rug out from under their expectations and just blow their minds.

But I find that fans, at least the vocal fans, seem far more interested in the maintenance of the universe and the idea of whether the stories being told are stories they need to read, as opposed to whether they're stories they *want* to read.

PS: It bothered me that during your long "Kang War" storyline in **Avengers**, the whole world was thrown into chaos, yet it didn't affect the other Marvel titles.

KB: We heard a lot of reactions like that, and we did make reference to it



From the Busiek-scripted **Power Man and Iron Fist** #92, with art by Denys Cowan & Mel Candido.
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The FABIAN NICIEZA Interview

Interview conducted in person December 11, 2002 by ***Danny Fingeroth***

Interviewed conducted in person December 11, 2002 by **Danny Fingeroth**
Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Fabian Niecieza**

Fabian Nicieza started in comics as a staffer in Marvel's promotions department. While there, he parlayed proximity and talent into a few breaks writing comics stories. In short order, he became known as the voice of angry youth, at least in the stories he wrote. He minded a vein of teen angst to which he lent his own intensity. The **New Warriors** became his laboratory in which to try out new ideas. "All they want to do is change the world," was the Warriors' slogan. It could just as easily have been Fabian's. Always the loyal opposition, with emphasis on both words, Fabe was determined to drag comics kicking and screaming into the modern world. The critical and sales success of his work speaks to the passion and intelligence—as well as talent—that he brought to his cause.

*From **New Warriors**, Fabe went to the **X-Men** books, setting new sales records, even for that high-selling line, and was also a staff editor at Marvel for several years.*

After Marvel, Fabian went on to become the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of Acclaim Comics, learning yet more about the business aspects of publishing, electronic media, and doing the Hollywood thing on Acclaim's behalf.

Today, Fabian is still a prolific writer, in comics and other media. And he's no less passionate about things. Read on, and see how Fabe uses that passion to make his projects and his career move along on the fast track.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: *Maybe this will be the interview that sets Fabian's career back on the superstar track.*

FABIAN NICIEZA: No, this is a type of interview you haven't done yet. The interview with a *has-been*.

DF: But you've only been a has-been for, like, two weeks, right?

FN: Six, I think.

DF: So *Fabian* is a rookie has-been.

FN: I am. I have not been a has-been for long. I think. *[laughs]* Apparently, I'm looking forward to a long career of being a has-been! *[laughs]*

DF: *Fabian, of course, is known as the original writer of the **New Warriors**, which was a groundbreaking comic.*

FN: It broke ground?

DF: *It broke ground. It was water-breaking, also, that's why they're the **NEW Warriors**. [Fabian laughs] But there was a comic that everybody made fun of before they saw it. I believe there was even a gag ad inside Marvel that had pictures of the **New Warriors**, and the tag-line was, "Marvel Comics. If you didn't buy them, we couldn't make them." Did you write that one?*

FN: No, I didn't do that one, actually. I do remember that at a distributors' meeting Carol Kalish was calling them "Young Avengers." She actually said, "Sort of like Police Academy is, but for super-heroes." I was sitting in the room cringing. Let's

just say Marvel wasn't doing us any favors, but we always knew what we were doing.

DF: So Fabe, as far as I know about your secret origin, you came to Marvel by way of the book publishing industry, right?

FN: Yeah. Berkley Publishing.

DF: *And did you always want to write?*

FN: Since I was a kid. I would tell stories to all my friends, oral stories, when I was twelve or so—probably bored them to tears—and I would also write on my own, loose-leaf paper and pencil, longhand. I realized when I was about thirteen or fourteen that all the men or women who were on the backs of dust jackets in books were all *really* old. They all looked like they were at least *thirty!* That was when I first began to understand that you don't just become a writer when you get out of



A team is formed. From **New Warriors** #1. Written by Fabian Nicieza with art by Mark Bagley and Al Williamson. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

So I went to college to get a degree in Public Relations and Advertising, hoping to find a job that would allow me to write. It happened to be Berkley Publishing, which was a real good place with great people. But anyone who's worked in publishing in New York knows that the salaries they pay are barely enough to exist on, so there's a lot of moving around and jockeying for advancement. I was at Berkley for two years—'83 to '85—when a friend of a friend told me of a job opening at Marvel. Besides the fact I wanted to work at Marvel, the job was paying \$5,000 more than I was earning, which in entry-level publishing, is like a million real dollars. I interviewed for the job and I *got* it.

FN: Very much so, but not necessarily as a career path. My Dad's an engineer, but he's also very artistic. He's a math guy, but he also did clay sculptures and clown-face drawings. But to him, that wasn't suitable for a career. His own creative endeavor—a bone china factory had failed, so I think he wanted something more stable for me.

DF: *Your family came from Argentina, right?*

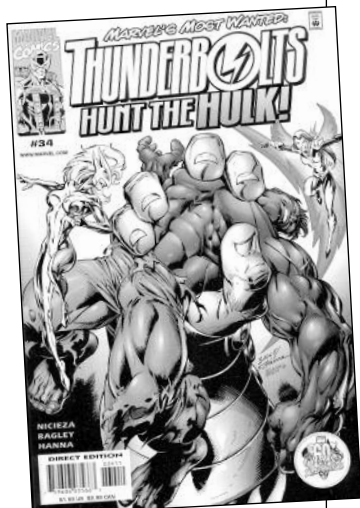
DF: Did your dad have that whole immigrant thing, come to America and strike it rich or whatever?

DF: *I have a feeling you were probably like this as a child, though. Very driven.*

FN: Exactly. I think if I'd stayed at Berkley Publishing,



WRITE NOW! NUTS & BOLTS



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Fabian Nicieza/THUNDERBOLTS #34/SYNOPSIS/1

Tom: pending changes based on Kurt's last issue, here's the preliminary working synopsis...

"MAKING YOUR MARK"

Scene One: SPLASH. HAWKEYE, battered and beaten, is partially pinned down under rubble and debris. His broken bow is still notched and a metal point arrow is drawn and ready to be fired. Narrative explains what an impossible shot it is. How if he misses, a good man dies, but if he makes it, a monster will continue to haunt the world. It is one bugfuck situation. And it's his fault it got to this point... (Page 1)

Scene Two: GAYLE ROGERS TV report recapping the history of the T-BOLTS (for Heaven forbid, any new readers, but also because it flows into the set-up nicely). People watching across the country (Man-Killer in the bar, Avengers in Mansion, some diner customers in Nebraska). By the end of the recap, she proclaims an exclusive from the mouth of HAWKEYE himself – who comes on camera and says the T-BOLTS are going to bring in the HULK!
Diner customers cheer. The HULK was recently spotted one hundred miles west of there last week. Last thing they want is their town, ABANDON, to be razed when it's so close to making a comeback (we see signs of a new factory being built). One diner customer keeps his thoughts to himself... but BRUCE BANNER has always had to keep his lips zipped, for fear of letting out one hell of a scream... (Pages 2-4)

Scene Three: CUT TO MT. CHARTERIS. T-BOLTS look at HAWK, dumbfounded. "YOU SAID WHAT?!!" Basically, there is some disagreement about HAWK's bravado. "Not even discussing our odds of surviving such a confrontation," asks MOONSTONE. "How do you expect to find him?" HAWK takes out a gamma-scanner refined for him by OGUR (spelling?). Ironically enough, it is HALLIE and CHARLIE who support the cojones their boss is showing – ironic because HAWK tells them they're not coming along! School day. JOLT brings out that HAWK said it wouldn't happen again. HAWK says he lied. They'll be safer at school. Probably. Frustrated, HALLIE and CHARLIE have to accept. Mini-vignettes with each character giving us their POV on the situation. Also flow into OGUR loading up their ship with extra help against HULK. As the CRAFT flies out of Mt. Charteris ready to rock and roll, we show readers that OGUR is secretly TECHNO.
CUT TO outskirts of school as they drop off HALLIE and CHARLIE. SONGBIRD wishes that if HAWKEYE was going to take them on a suicide run, at least she might die with Abe... (Pages 5-8)

Scene Four: CUT TO: BEETLE sub-plot (Page 9-10)

Scene Five: CUT TO: School, Continue HALLIE's anger and problems, foreshadowing this issue's end, but also very subtly set-up a CHARCOAL/school story for way down the road. (Page 11)

Scene Six: CRAFT flying into area where gamma signature has been id'ed. MOONSTONE does NOT like HAWK's plan. He says, "Two choices: talk or fight? Which would you prefer?" MOONSTONE says, "Talk, of course, but not if it means I'm at ground zero if it turns into a fight!"
CUT TO: town. Est. more people from diner scene on. Talk about the factory, the hopes, etc. Est. one man as being very vocal proponent of the new factory saving the town's

Fabian Nicieza/THUNDERBOLTS #34/SYNOPSIS/2

hopes, etc. BRUCE feels the hope and passion in these people. Dirt-under-the-nail citizens who WANT to work and contribute to society, etc.
KARLA follows BANNER back the diner. Lunchtime. She sits next to him at the counter. They talk. BRUCE feels trapped. He just wants to be left alone! And he won't turn himself in to the T-BOLTS for the sake of their public approval rating! She keeps pushing, trying to gauge how much would be too much. She doesn't want to push him over the edge – into the HULK, but a part of her is very fascinated by this Jekyll/Hyde personality.

BANNER snaps, pushing her out of the way, knocking plates over, asking to be left alone. The MAN from earlier asks BRUCE "DAVID" what the problem is. KARLA says, "Ask Bruce BANNER instead."

Everyone in the diner freezes. They know. They had taken him in. BRUCE backpedals, begging their forgiveness – and his eyes turn green...

MOONSTONE is shot out of the diner like a rock skipped across a lake!

HULK erupts.

Fight. Newscaster shows up. "That quickly?" wonders SONGBIRD. HAWK sheepishly admits he tipped them off. That's how confident he was they'd get the job done with NO violence.

The town is being decimated during the battle (mostly by ATLAS getting knocked around everytime he gets bigger).

CUT TO: HALLIE and CHARLIE with other kids going to soda shop and seeing the news reports in an electronics store window as –

The T-BOLTS begin working together and actually begin to defeat the HULK! HAWK gas arrow erupts around his face that is enclosed in a sound bubble. Everytime HULK tries to hit something/someone, MOONSTONE phases it and his arm passes through it harmlessly.

ATLAS keeps getting angrier – and STRONGER (continuing the ion-flux problem).

Dazed and staggered, HULK transforms into BRUCE right on a partially demolished overpass construction. The factory is destroyed. The town is destroyed. The T-BOLTS are in various stages of beat to crap.

And the MAN walks on to the scene, brandishing a GUN – aimed at BRUCE BANNER. HAWK, under the debris, bow broken, can't make the shot to get the gun out of his hand. Is his ONLY option to – shoot the bullet out of the air? (which gets us back to the beginning)

Tense quick-cuts as MAN decides whether to shoot BANNER, HAWK tries to decide what to do – let a MONSTER die, even at the expense of Banner's life? Gun is fired, HAWK lets loose – the bullet is deflected – striking BANNER in the shoulder, knocking him off the overpass and on to a passing truck below – taking him away from the town... In the aftermath, the town is ruined. It's hope shattered. Newscasters have picked it all up. The T-BOLTS actually worked together smartly to defeat the HULK – but they have totally LOST this battle in the one place that matters most to them – the court of public opinion... (Pages 12-21)

Scene Seven: CUT TO HALLIE. CHARLIE and the other kids at the soda shop, as seen through a TARGET SCOPE. Narrative of SCOURGE (unrevealed as him) discusses the nature of the gun, its model, it's special bullet, as matter-of-factly as if he were talking about the weather! We are leaving it vague here as to WHO it is, WHO he wants to kill and even more importantly WHY he is doing this (let our readers think it might just be a serial killer, school revenge shooting, etc.)
Target scope flows from FRIENDS to CHARLIE to HALLIE back to CHARLIE. Who to shoot, who to shoot? LAST PANEL: KAPOW! (p22) TO BE CONTINUED

Fabian writes both full script (action and dialogue written at the same time) and Marvel style (plot first). Here, we get a look at his working method for a plot first story, in this case for *Thunderbolts* #34. For this story, a synopsis (or outline) actually came before the plot. The story synopsis will generally go back and forth between the writer and editor until they agree on the story to be told.

Fabian Nicieza/THUNDERBOLTS #34/PLOT/1

"MAKING YOUR MARK" 1st Draft Submitted 6/16/99

The Cast
HAWKEYE
MOONSTONE
SONGBIRD
ATLAS
JOLT
CHARCOAL

Supporting Cast
GAYLE ROGERS
ANGIE and the two other kids from SCHOOL whose names I can't find anywhere in print – and why is Bags drawing his daughter in mid-drift shirts!! Cut that out!
The BEETLE
OGRE (TECHNO in disguise)

Opponents (you can't really call them Villains this issue)
The INCREDIBLE HULK/BRUCE BANNER
CLAY BRICKFORD (last and only seen in HULK #179 – hey, I got Kurt's tradition of minutiae to uphold! *th*)

Cameo
Various FLASHBACK SHOTS from entire run of the series
MAN-KILLER
WANDA MAXIMOFF and SIMON WILLIAMS at Avengers Mansion
MISSING LINK (flashback panel from HULK #179)
NEW BOY in High School, who will become a problem several issues down the road

Locations
MT. CHARTERIS
BURTON CANYON (various)
Anywhere, NEW MEXICO
BEETLE SUB-PLOT, pending Kurt's last plot

And away we go...

Once the synopsis is approved, a detailed plot is written. Taking a cue from TV writers, Fabian has listed the characters and settings that will appear in the story. This makes finding reference for the artist easier.

Fabian Nicieza/THUNDERBOLTS #34/PLOT/2

SPLASH: DRAMATIC FULL PAGE SHOT of HAWKEYE, battered, bloodied, bruised and PINNED under a small mound of concrete debris from a shattered Highway overpass construction. His BOW is broken, but he still has an ARROW notched and ready to fire. The arrow is a steel tipped four-point hunting shaft – since his specialty arrows were either already used or lie scattered beyond his reach.

MARK NOTE: one of Hawk's forearms is fractured, which means a cast on his arm next issue and for [just] a couple of issues thereafter, the implementation of a spring-loaded CROSSBOW assembly OGRE/TECHNO will come up with for him.

TOM: I'm doing it for variety, but also because it will test Clint's "Mr. Perfect Avenger" adaptability, etc. in the face of increased tension within the team

Leave room for narrative captions which will explain what an impossible shot it is. How if he misses, a good man dies, but if he makes it, a monster will continue to haunt the world. It is a bad situation.
TITLE/CREDITS/INDICIA on this page.

TWO and THREE: CLOSE UP of HAWK, tense. It's an impossible shot. And it's his fault it got to this point...

FLASHBACK TV SCREEN as GAYLE ROGERS does an extended THUNDERWATCH recap of the series so far (for those 2 new readers who might be picking up the book for the first time because I'm writing it! *th*).

MARK: choose what you feel like, just please give me a clear shot of the roster doppelganger panel (i.e. GOLIATH = ATLAS, SCREAMING MIMI = SONGBIRD, etc.) and a multi-panel evolution of the book through CITIZEN VIZEMO, HAWKEYE coming aboard, female CITIZEN V, ABE JENKINS' arrest, recent issue fighting those Revolutionary War sissies...

INTERPERSE shots of who is watching the TV report to include: MANKILLER working her bartender job, WANDA and SIMON in AVENGERS MANSION and end it with a DINER CROWD in Anywhere, New Mexico. Included subtly at the diner counter is BRUCE BANNER.

FOUR: CUT ANGLE from DINER CROWD as GAYLE's exclusive announcement is next – HAWKEYE telling the viewing public that just as they were successful stopping the Masters of Evil, they are going to track down the HULK and apprehend him once and for all!

The diner crowd cheers (except for BANNER, who sort of melts a bit in his stool). CROWD discusses the airplane crash (HULK#4) and how the monster is more of a menace than ever. He was sighted no more than four hundred miles east a few weeks ago! Bad time for the HULK to show up with the new factory being built! CLAY BRICKFORD walks through the room, a family-man, devoted to saving the town, carrying some fliers. For original reference on CLAY, see HULK #179, as drawn by Herb Trimpe, he was a stereotypical Appalachian hillbilly type. Let's update him, make him look very conservative and plain, but a guy who lives in THIS century)

ANGLE FROM BANNER, thinking: "Clay Brickford? It's been years!" as BRICKFORD says, "Good news, everybody! The ROXXON facility is ready to start accepting job applications – and every town resident gets first priority! DINER PATRON says that she hopes they'll still build the factory if the HULK shows up!
CLAY BRICKFORD's face shadows, the kind, gentle exterior vanishes in a haze of hatred. "The Hulk?"
BRICKFORD storms past BANNER, who tries to hide his face behind his jacket collar. "That monster won't ruin my life again!!"

Comics Into Film: Making It Happen

Steven Grant has been a professional comics writer for 25 years. Best known for his work on the Punisher and his own *Whisper*, Steven has written *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* stories, and comics adventures of WWF wrestlers.

He's also a widely-read internet columnist, with his *Permanent Damage* column on the **Comic Book Resources** website (www.comicbookresources.com) eagerly read by fans and pros alike.

His current and upcoming projects include a western graphic novel, *Red Sunset*; a crime graphic novel, *Videoactive*, and the return of *Whisper* in *Day X* (all from AiT/Planet Lar), the mini-series *My Flesh Is Cool* and *Sacrilege* from Avatar Press, and a collection of his former internet column, *Master of the Obvious*.

As a published writer and creator of "properties," Steven has had his brushes with the Hollywood entertainment

by Steven Grant

money and promotion, why shouldn't you?

Two facts: 1) It's hard to make a lot of money doing comics. 2) It's hard to make a lot of money in Hollywood. Certainly there's money to be made in both places, but in both places you have to be both lucky and smart.

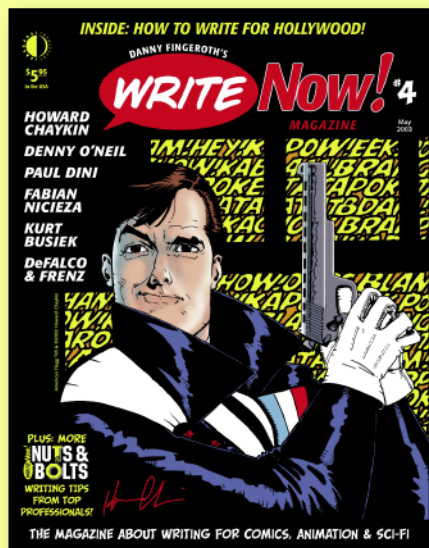
There's not a lot you can do about luck, except to be aware of opportunities and have the courage to act when they present themselves. Smart is something anyone can work on, but it starts with setting aside preconceptions of how Hollywood works and dealing with *reality*.

According to Ford Lytle Gilmore, who recently opened a management/production company, Illuminati Entertainment, following a career as both a comics writer (*Thundercats*) and in film production, the biggest misconceptions about Hollywood are "that no one reads, all they care about is the bottom line, and no one respects comics/everyone thinks it's all about spandex/everyone thinks comics are just for kids. Sure, there are people who fit the jokey stereotype, but there are also a lot of people in Hollywood who were reading comics during the boom years and are receptive to them—even some who are championing the medium."

"Hollywood's a small town," says Mason Novick of Benderspink, a management/production company that produced films like *American Pie* and *The Ring*, and is working with comics writers like Garth Ennis. "There are twelve studios and fewer than 100 good production companies."

Production companies line up what's known as "the package"—property, writer,

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WRITE NOW! #4

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The promotional poster for the upcoming *Hellboy* movie, featuring art by the character's creator Mike Mignola.
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