

INSIDE: WILL EISNER! J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI!



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In the USA

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE Now!

MAGAZINE

#5

August
2003

**JEPH
LOEB &
JIM LEE**

**BOB
SCHRECK**

**DIANA
SCHUTZ**

**FABIAN
NICIEZA**

**PAUL
DINI**

**DENNY
O'NEIL**

**GETTING
A NOVEL
PUBLISHED**

**THE
MAGAZINE
ABOUT
WRITING
FOR
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WRITE Now!
NUTS &
BOLTS
WRITING TIPS!**

Batman, Bruce Wayne
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DANNY FINGEROTH'S **WRITE Now!** MAGAZINE

Issue #5

August 2003

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READ Now!

Message from Danny Fingeroth, Editor in Chief



This is one rockin' issue of **Write Now!** And if you've perused the cover or the contents page, you know why.

- **Will Eisner**'s here. Will's one of the titans who invented the medium and the industry of comics. Period. No Will, no comics. He created one of the medium's most significant—and fun!—characters, The Spirit. He's pioneered comics' use as a teaching tool, and codified his principles of the craft into cogent, inspiring books and lessons. He invented the graphic novel format. And he's still writing and drawing comics today. Comics that you want to read. Comics that you *have* to read. Will took some of his valuable time to share some of his wisdom with me and with you. It's one of the best interviews we've ever had in **DFWN**. I'm proud to present it.
- We also have words of wisdom from one of the modern masters, **J. Michael Straczynski**. Joe's busy re-imagining, yet staying faithful to, Marvel's **Amazing Spider-Man** series. His **Supreme Power** is sure to be the last word on superhero team comics. And you may have heard about his non-comics work, too. Stuff like **Babylon 5** and ShowTime's **Jeremiah** series. In this issue's interview with **Jim Salicrup**, JMS gives his insights and opinions on his own work and on the state of narrative adventure fiction in general.
- Then, **Batman** Group Editor **Bob Schreck** tells you of his amazing journey from the wilds of the Indy comics world to the top of the mainstream heap. It's an inspiring look into the mind of one of the major decision-makers in comics editorial today.
- Speaking of **Jeremiah**, which we were just a little above... we also hear from one of the people who brought that property to ShowTime's—and America's—attention, **Scott Mitchell Rosenberg**. Scott was the publisher of Malibu Comics, home of the Ultraverse and the early Image Comics—and now runs **Platinum Studios**, which specializes in taking comics properties into other media. Besides **Jeremiah**, Scott also brought **Men In Black** from page to screen. He has a lot of information to share.
- **Diana Schutz**, Senior Editor at **Dark Horse Comics**, has been an influential force in comics for many years. Among the people she's edited: **Will Eisner**, **Frank Miller**, and **Harvey Pekar**. Her career is a great example of integrity mixed with eclecticism. She loves what she does, and it comes through. Diana has a rare view from both outside and inside the media mainstream.
- And, of course, we have the power-packed conclusions to the **Fabian Nicieza** and **Paul Dini** interviews. These two shy fellas both were able to think of some more things to tell us about. Pretty dang smart stuff, too.

Our **Nuts & Bolts** how-to's this issue are pretty amazing, too.

- What's the hottest comic today? **Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's Batman**. What's in **Nuts & Bolts**? **Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's Batman**.
- There's some way cool **Green Lantern** scripting from **Ben Raab**.
- **Dan Slott, Ty Templeton** and **Neil Vokes** show us some great **Superman Adventures** pages.
- Writer **Jan Strnad** (remember his **Sword of The Atom**?) is a novelist these days. His tale of how his horror novel got published will raise the hair on the back of your head. But don't worry—it has a happy ending.
- And we've got two more of **Dennis O'Neil**'s story class lesson outlines. The Dean of Comics Writers reveals more of his secrets. Read and learn.

That's *this* issue. Now, a few words about what's coming up. After talking about it for months, I'm finally ready to unleash our "mystery feature," **Write Now: In Depth!** It's a detailed study of what goes into making a comic, with articles, interviews and essays by and about an entire issue of a comic. For our premiere of this exciting feature, we'll be dissecting an issue of **Powers** by **Brian Michael Bendis** and **Michael Avon Oeming**. Nothing like this has ever been done before. We get into the creators' minds and see just how the issue came to be. I'm really excited about this feature. More importantly—so are Brian and Michael. And wait'll you see what creators we have lined up for future **In Depth** studies!

Also next issue, among other gems, will be an exciting interview with **Mark Waid**, conducted by **Jimmy Palmiotti**. And **Jim Salicrup** will be here doing an intriguing interview with **Don McGregor**.

SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT: I just wanted to mention that I'll be teaching a course in **Comics and Graphic Novel Writing** at New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies this fall. It'll be on Wednesday nights, starting September 24th. Check out NYU's website (www.nyu.edu/scps.nyu) for more details and for info on how to get a catalogue and register.

And next time, I'll tell you about the book I'm writing for Continuum Publishing: **Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society**. (Stan Lee's writing the Foreword.)

Okay, I've blabbed on enough. Start reading, and—

Write Away!

DANNY
Danny Fingeroth

The Spirit of Comics!

The WILL EISNER Interview

Conducted via telephone March 26, 2003 by **Danny Fingeroth**
Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Will Eisner**

From the dust jacket of the hardcover **The Spirit Archives**, currently being published by DC Comics:

"Will Eisner's career spans the entire history of comic books, from his formative days in the 1930s through the 1940s, when he revolutionized narrative sequential art with his internationally famed series, **The Spirit**, to the 1970s, when he created the contemporary graphic novel form. In addition to his award-winning graphic novels, he is the author of the influential study **Comics and Sequential Art**."

Or, as Dennis O'Neil says in his introduction to DC's upcoming **The Will Eisner Companion** by Chris Couch and Stephen Weiner:

"Will Eisner is an Artist.

"He has a vision of the human condition and the means to

communicate that vision to us. It is essentially a tragic vision, though not a morose one, and that may be why he no longer does melodrama; in the world that Will has been presenting for the last quarter-century, problems are not solved by violent action and big, fluffy endings are impossible. This is our world, focused and purified and magnified, displayed for our amusement...

"There aren't many analogies, either inside or outside cartooning, for what Will does. We're not discussing caricature here—rather, something like caricature's smarter older brother, a graphic strategy that not only exaggerates the exterior but uses exaggeration to suggest the interior."

To which allow me to add: Will is one of the few titans about whom it can truly be said that, without him, there would be no comics artform and no comics industry.

It was one of my life's honors to conduct this phone interview with him.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview, Will. What are you working on right now? I know you're in the middle of a project.

WILL EISNER: I just completed a book that Doubleday is publishing called **Fagin the Jew**. It will be published in September, I believe. I just sent off the final art the day before yesterday.

DF: That's not part of the DC Library?

WE: DC lost the bid on it. They wanted it, but Doubleday made me an offer I couldn't refuse. DC always gets "first look" at any graphic novel I do.

DF: And are you starting something new now?

WE: Well, I always have... I have a file here that says "do me now." [laughter] I'm just starting another book now.

DF: My understanding is that you don't like to talk about projects you're working on.

WE: I generally don't, and the reason for it is it dilutes itself if I talk about it, because while I'm working on it, I'm developing ideas and so forth. It just dilutes itself in my mind.

DF: At this point, how many hours a week do you devote to work?

WE: I work pretty steadily. When I'm not traveling, I work from nine to five.

DF: Wow.

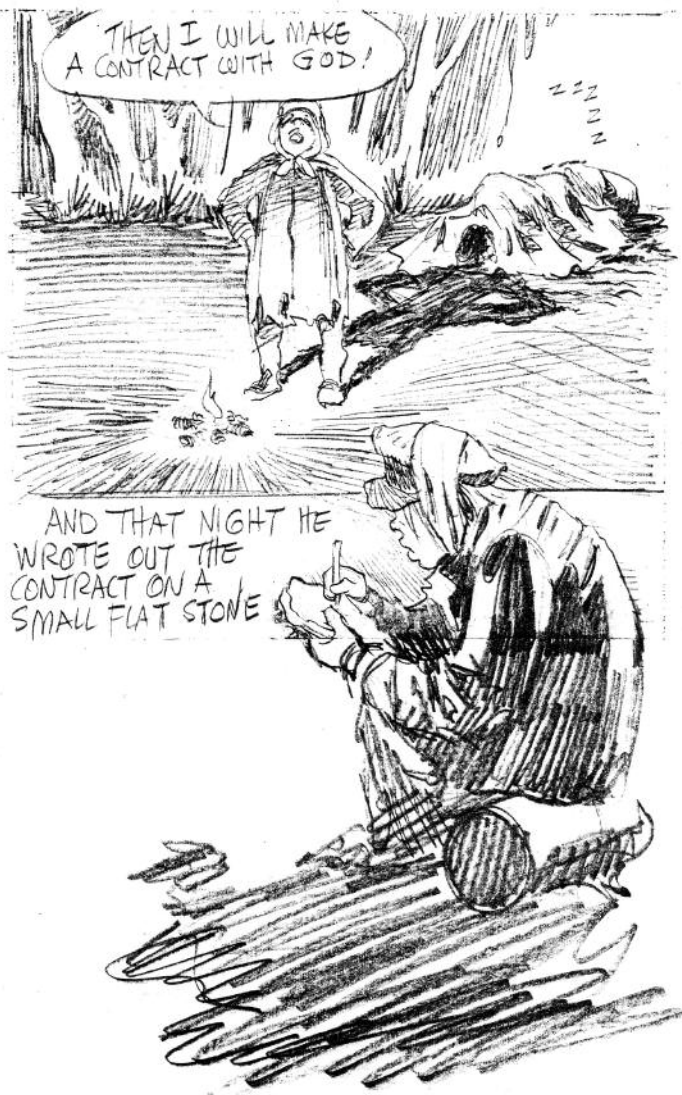
WE: Every day, five days a week.

DF: What, you take the weekends off? How dare you? [laughs]



Writer's Block in a **Spirit** splash from 1950. Story and art by Will Eisner.

[©2003 Will Eisner.]



Pencils for a page from Will Eisner's graphic novel **A Contract With God**. This art is among the unpublished pieces to be printed in Dark Horse's upcoming hardcover volume **The Will Eisner Sketchbook**. [©2003 Will Eisner.]

WE: My wife says Saturday and Sunday are her days.

DF: Well, that seems to work for you. I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions that range from the pretentious to the picayune. So if there's anything that you think is too stupid to answer—

WE: I'll give you stupid answers.

DF: Thank you. [laughs] Well, okay. You've been doing comics and graphic storytelling for an amazingly long time and your stuff is still wonderfully fresh, innovative and exciting. Would you say there is an overall theme or purpose or direction in your work, from the beginning to now? Or has it changed over the years?

WE: Well, the direction has always been to explore areas that haven't been explored before. I guess that's the way to put it. I believe that this medium is a literary form and that it has not been used as fully as it could. So all of my experience, all the things I've been involved in since 1950, certainly, have been an effort to employ this medium whose language is sequential art—that's the medium that we're talking about—in areas that it had not tried before. For example, when I was in the military between 1942 and 1946, I realized that the medium is usable as a teaching tool, very effective as a tool. So I sold the military on the use of that. It was very successful. I went back

to doing **The Spirit**, by 1950 I realized I had done all I wanted to do on **The Spirit**, and the opportunity to expand into teaching material with sequential art presented itself. So I started a company producing instructional material in sequential art, or comics, as you might call it. It lasted for about 25 years, and then in 1972, '73, I stumbled into Phil Seuling's conventions and discovered that the underground artists—I'm talking about Robert Crumb and Art Spiegelman and Spain Rodriguez and Denis Kitchen and a couple of others—were really using comics as a pure, literary form, in that they were addressing the establishment mores and morals of the time, and that encouraged me to go back to the area where I wanted to spend my life, which was producing comics or sequential art for adult readers, with grown-up subject matter.

DF: Now, the stuff you'd been doing in the interim twenty years was in comics format but in an educational milieu?

WE: Yes, what you might call the comics format. Actually, it was the sequential art format. It is the arrangement of images in a sequence to tell a story, and whether you do them on three tiers or two tiers, with nine or six panels to a page, is irrelevant. It's how you arrange the images in an intelligent and readable sequence to convey an idea or tell a story that is really the heart of the definition, if you will, of what I want to do. And in 1975—or '76, I guess, somewhere in there—I began doing what I believed was a novel form addressed to adult readers. And out of that came **A Contract with God**.

DF: You'd always aimed at adult readers, even with *The Spirit*.

WE: Yes. Writing for young readers was one of the problems that I had during the Eisner and Iger Studio years, and one of the reasons I went in for **The Spirit**—which was quite a gamble at the time, for various reasons. I wanted to talk to an adult audience. A newspaper readership would give me that. I was always very impatient talking to the very young readers. I didn't really know what to say to them. [laughs]

DF: You mean talk to them beyond just the basics of superhero action/adventure?

WE: Well, candidly, superheroes are one-dimensional characters. You can't do very much with them. And life experiences are filled with story material. Everybody's concerned with survival and the life experience is concerned with that and how to deal with it. So it's a wide-open area, there.

DF: Now, in different hands, these can be very bleak subjects, but you certainly seem to do them joyously.

WE: Well...that's an interesting point you just made, calling them "bleak." Every once in a while people do say to me, "Your stories are bleak" or "there's a *noir* quality to them." That's French, you know. [laughter] I don't see it that way. First of all, I'm not a moralist. I'm not really writing books to define human morals. I consider myself doing reportage, reporting to my fellow man the things I see. I see a man lying in the street, nobody paying attention to him is something I want to turn to my fellow man and say, "Hey, look at that, look at that. He's lying there, nobody's paying attention." The other thing is, I think it's necessary to explore the purpose of life. That's what drives us in living. In one of the books I did, there's a story called "The Big Hit." At the end of the story, I have this one guy saying to the other fellow, "Living is a risky business." Really, the whole business of living and survival is very much a part of how we think as human beings, so if you can talk about that, it has resonance, it means something. It's useful. What I want to be is useful, obviously.

DF: Do you think that focus, that direction, comes from the Depression era and World War II era experiences?

WE: Living through the Depression has made me sensitive—as it did with all the people who also lived through the Great Depression—sensitive to the human struggle for survival. This is really the heart of all living. Everybody's concerned with survival. Anytime you discuss it, it is of importance to an adult reader. Now, one of the problems with writing to young readers is that I cannot discuss heartbreak with a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old kid, because to him, heartbreak is if his father didn't give him the keys to the car or something like that. Or maybe his girlfriend decided he was a nerd.

DF: That's heartbreak for that kid.

WE: That's heartbreak, true. Youngsters are not concerned with survival.

DF: But, it's different.

WE: It's a different kind of heartbreak. But in one of my books—I think it was *A Life Force*, where this man is trying to decide what life it all about—I discuss the meaning of living, what is it, what it's all about. He compares himself to a cockroach. It gave me a chance, again, to expand the capacity of the medium.

DF: It seems that certain subject matter that, say, in *The Spirit*, you may have been addressing in a more metaphorical way, you've been getting with more directly, or at least with a different sort of metaphor system, since *A Contract with God*. In other words, it seems that you did have some of those same concerns when you were doing the *Spirit*, but your way of dealing with

...WELL, IN
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BECAUSE STAYING ALIVE
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EVERYBODY
AGREES!



Discussing the meaning of life with a cockroach in *A Life Force*. [©2003 Will Eisner.]

them changed when you “came back”—what it seemed to the public was coming back—with *A Contract with God* and so on.

WE: Well, one thing we don't realize is that the artists and writers, like everybody else, grow. They grow up. [laughter]

That's a very interesting point, however, because one of the reasons I never really wanted to do a daily strip was, I discovered that daily strips would not allow the artist to experiment and grow, necessarily. He remained pretty much the way he was when he first started. If you look at the daily strips over the years, the ones that have survived for 50 years, they're pretty much the same as they were when they started, and there's no room for experimentation. The joy, for me... the truth of the matter is, you've got to love what you're doing, you've got to enjoy what you're doing in order to do it well. If you don't like what you're doing, you don't do it well. Nothing good is ever done without enthusiasm, really. And for me, the opportunity to cut new paths is to try new things. The real excitement for me is to do something that nobody has ever done before, if I can do it. Unfortunately, it's very hard to invent the wheel, because somebody has already done that, but... [laughs]

DF: There's steel-belted radials, though.

WE: [laughs] Okay. But the point I'm trying to make is that the excitement in any medium is to explore new territory, with all the risk that's involved. And it's a great risk, because you could spend a whole year working on something only to discover that it's a bomb. [laughter]

DF: To me, looking at your work over the years, one significant change is that you yourself describe as going from a cinematic style to almost more of a theatrical awareness, where people are more “on stage.”

WE: That's an interesting point, very perceptive of you, because I have always been influenced largely by live theater. And the reason for that is that live theater is closest to reality, and all the work I do is pressing for reality. All my work starts out by saying, “Now, believe me...” Even *The Spirit* was an attempt to create a believable hero, even though he wore a mask, which was kind of an idiot thing. [Danny laughs] I tried to make him believable. Now, the cinematic stuff I did early on was really a practical approach, because while you're writing, in this medium, anyway, you've got to be aware of the fact that reading patterns are influenced by other media, and in the '30s, movies came along and began to influence reading patterns. They added to the reader's understanding a whole new visual language, influenced graphic literacy, if you will. Movies began using the camera as the reader, so to speak. Or the audience became the camera, and the camera would look through somebody's armpit, or look down from the ceiling. You had bird's-eye-views, you had worm's-eye-views, and so forth. Those



Speed versus Art in a page from Eisner's semi-autobiographical look back at the Golden Age of comics, *The Dreamer*. [©2003 Will Eisner.]

He Came From Hollywood!

The J. Michael Straczynski Interview

WRITE Now!

Conducted via e-mail by **Jim Salicrup** May 27, 2003

J M. Straczynski is the creator of the acclaimed *Babylon 5* television series and is the head writer of the current ShowTime hit series *Jeremiah*. In comics, he's in the midst of a much-talked about and admired run as writer on *Amazing Spider-Man*, and is about to launch *Supreme Power*. His *Rising Stars* and *Midnight Nation* series are also unique and acclaimed takes on superheroes.

Besides this interview, you can find JMS's thoughts on the craft and business of writing in his *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*.

Jim Salicrup has been on the comics scene for many years, including stints as editor of Marvel's Spider-Man line and Associate Publisher/Editor in Chief at Topps Comics. Jim, of course, also wrote the legendary *Sledge Hammer Limited Series*, amongst other comics, and is on the advisory board of the Museum of Comics and Cartoon Art (MoCCA).

Jim was able to corral JMS and get him to share some info with the **Write Now** readership. When a guy like JMS speaks, you'd do well to listen. Or to read, as the case may be.

—DF

JIM SALICRUP: It seems you've been involved with comics and superheroes for a long time. Were you a comicbook fan as a kid?

J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI: Absolutely. I've noted elsewhere that I learned my sense of morality, my sense of right and wrong, from comics. I learned to read from comics, more than I ever did at school. I must've been about ten when I got my first comic, and I was doomed from that point onward. I've always been a huge comics fan, and still consider myself such. Growing up, my icons were, in order, Superman, then Spider-Man. So it's nice to be now giving back on the latter.

JS: How did *Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future*, the super-hero kids TV show, come about? And were you involved with the Neal Adams drawn comic-books? What did you learn from the experience?

JMS: They called and set up a meeting. I thought it could be fun, and did it. I learned a lot about CGI in its infancy, and took my first steps in creating a very loosely constructed arc for the season, and for the whole series, with my associate Larry DiTillio. And no, no involvement with the Neal Adams books.

JS: You included a superhero, Captain Steel, on a powerful episode of *Jeremiah*. What was the inspiration for that?

JMS: It was really something of a nod to my own background as a fan, and it seemed to me that in a time where only the kids survived after the adults had been wiped out, that those raised on comics—like myself—who went a little wonky might look to superheroes to some day save them, even if that meant becoming the heroes themselves. So it seemed a logical story to write.

JS: Do you feel there's a legitimate place for superheroes in pop culture? What's your reaction to those that dismiss superheroes as nothing more than perverts in tights?

JMS: I absolutely feel there's a place, but my



A portrait of the writer by Michael Zulli, done for the author's bio on their graphic novel *Delicate Creatures*. [Art ©2003 Michael Zulli.]



Spidey & Captain America in need of a good battle cry. Panels from the JMS-written *Amazing Spider-Man* Vol. 2 #50 with art by John Romita, Jr. & Scott Hanna. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

feelings on the matter don't enter into it. Whatever the literati might want to believe, superheroes are and have long been a part of our pop culture. We can't just decide one day to expunge them or pretend they're not there. The term pop culture means popular culture, the culture of the mass audience, and that's comics as much as anything else.

As for those who see only "perverts in tights," there's an old saying... a book is like a mirror, if an ass peers in, you can't expect an apostle to peer out.

JS: Your book, *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, offers the most common sense and practical advice for writers I've ever seen, while still remaining inspirational. Do you encounter would-be writers who are frustrated that your book doesn't offer any "secret formula" for writers to follow? Do you plan to add a chapter on comicbook scripting in future editions?

JMS: No, I think they understand what the purpose of the book is, and it says right up front that no formula is offered. If they want formulas, there are plenty of other books out there that offer such things. They don't work, but if it comforts people to think they do, who am I to gainsay them?

As for a future chapter on comics writing... it's something I've considered, and the publisher has asked about it a few times, but I don't feel I've been doing this long enough to be able to hold or offer an opinion. It would be presumptuous in the extreme. When I've been doing this for a few more years,

and can put two cogent thoughts together on the subject that can help other people, I'll consider it, not before.

JS: Many comicbook writers dream of breaking into TV and film writing, yet you're part of a new wave that are getting into comics after having considerable success in TV or film. What's the appeal to you personally of writing and/or creating comics?

JMS: It's pretty much the same appeal of anything I do: I do stuff I like to do. I'm a comics fan, so for me, the idea of doing a comic is just nifty-keen. I'm a big believer in the notion of "find what interests you, what moves you to passion, and do it." Because if you're sufficiently motivated, and have any ability at it, sonuvagun, nine times out of ten you can make a living at it. Just follow your passion. The rest will attend to itself. I love comics. Always have. So for me, this is a dream gig. Especially to be doing Spidey.

JS: When I was Editor and Chief at Topps Comics, Arne Starr pitched *Babylon 5* to me as a potential comicbook series we could publish. I think this was back before the show was on the air, and based on what he told me and the few clips he had, I was very interested. Warner Bros., however, had a deal with its sister company DC Comics which gave them first shot at it, so they got to publish *Babylon 5*. What was that experience like, seeing your creation turned into a comic book series?

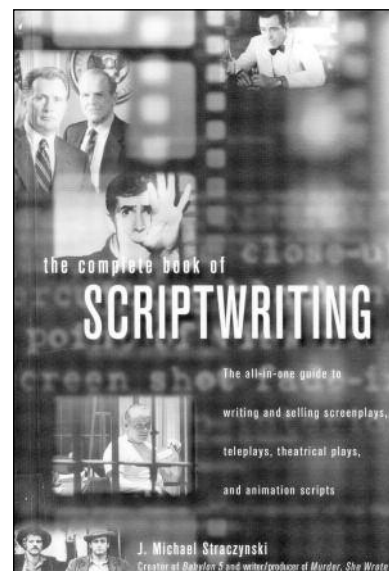
JMS: It was a great opportunity which destructed and became a fairly wretched experience. They (DC) treated it as just a toss-off licensing thing and never gave it the support or sophistication that the series merited. When they began rewriting me—because when someone else was writing, I had my contractual approval, but when I was writing, I couldn't have approval over my own material because that wasn't allowed at DC by policy—I drew a line in the sand, Paul Levitz drew his line, and somewhere between those two lines we said, "Screw it." I'd rather have it not done than done poorly.

JS: How did your relationship with Top Cow begin? How is it different creating series for comics as opposed to TV? What are your current plans for *Midnight Nation* and *Rising Stars*?

JMS: I went to Top Cow with the idea for *Rising Stars*, which did very well for them. Creatively, they left me alone and let me do whatever I wanted, which was refreshing and fun. Ditto for *Midnight Nation*, which—until *Supreme Power* came along—I considered the best thing I'd done in comics to this point. (It helps enormously that Gary Frank was/is involved in both projects.)

Midnight Nation is done, and published in TPB form, so that's over, and there's discussion about a film, but we'll see. The fate of *Rising Stars* currently is pending, given some issues between myself and Top Cow that have to be resolved before I can finish that series.

JS: After reading *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*, it's impossible not to be aware of all the behind-the-scenes technical



Straczynski's book *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting*. [©2003 Synthetic Worlds, Ltd. and J. Michael Straczynski.]



A page from *Rising Stars* #0, written by JMS, with art by Keu Cha & Jason Gorder. [©2003 J. Michael Straczynski & Top Cow Productions, Inc.]

BATMAN: HUSH chapter nine

Schreck:

Final dialogue and placements for #616.

3 to go.

Enjoy.

Loeb

P.S. As usual, I've sent a copy to Richard simultaneously, but will address your notes before he begins!

PAGE 14 - GOTHAM CITY - SELINA'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT

Panel one

BATMAN
NARRATION BOX #1
Selina...
Back in Gotham City.

CATWOMAN (THRU GLASS)
DIALOGUE BALLOON #2
I know you're awake.

CATWOMAN (THRU GLASS)
DIALOGUE BALLOON #3
Cats can sense that sort of thing.

Panel two

TALIA
DIALOGUE BALLOON #4
I can smell him on you.

Panel three

TALIA
DIALOGUE BALLOON #5
Lovers can sense that sort of thing.

TALIA
DIALOGUE BALLOON #6
You can never have him, you know.

Panel four

CATWOMAN
DIALOGUE BALLOON #7
I've made it this far in life without having to "have" someone.

CATWOMAN
DIALOGUE BALLOON #8
So, whatever information you think you're trading on --

TALIA
DIALOGUE BALLOON #9
(off panel - balloon overlap #8)
-- Then, you haven't made love with him yet.

Panel five

NOTE: PLEASE TRY AND COVER AS LITTLE OF THE WINDOW IN THE CEILING AS POSSIBLE.

CATWOMAN
DIALOGUE BALLOON #10
I offered to babysit you.

CATWOMAN
DIALOGUE BALLOON #11
Hide you where Daddy can't find you.

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WRITE NOW!
NUTS & BOLTS

Pages from Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee's acclaimed *Batman: Hush* storyline. Shown are Jeph's script for Jim's pencils, which were drawn from art descriptions by Jeph. The finished pages are inked by Scott Williams and lettered by Comicraft. [©2003 DC Comics.]

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TALIA
DIALOGUE BALLOON #12
Then you both have foolishly underestimated my father.

CATWOMAN
DIALOGUE BALLOON #13
There weren't any specific instructions that said I couldn't gag you.

CAT
SOUND F/X
MRRROW

BATMAN #616 PG 14

BATMAN #616
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The BOB SCHRECK Interview

Bob Schreck brings an eclectic set of interests and experience to his current role as Group Editor of DC's Batman line. Printer, musician, actor, promotional guru, indie comics editor and co-founder of indie trailblazer Oni Press, Bob is now tasked by DC with overseeing the ongoing mythology of one of its top properties, which is also one of comics' icons, and a pop cultural institution. In this interview, Bob tells us how his experiences formed the editor and leader he is today, and in so doing shows how the comics industry has morphed in recent times—and what that means for aspiring and active comics creators.

—DF

Danny Fingeroth: We're here with Bob Schreck, Group Editor of DC Comics' legendary Batman line, at DC's New York offices. It's in the aftermath of the blizzard of '03. The city streets are just coming to life, but here at DC Comics, life goes on.

Bob Schreck: I think June is about when we'll finally be rid of the snow, if we're lucky.

DF: Probably. So I want to talk a little bit about Bob Schreck, who he is, and how he came to me. Just curious about your background. You're Long Island born and raised?

BS: Born in Glen Cove, lived in Levittown for almost thirty years. I look back at a kind of Dennis the Menace childhood with the normal kind of insane family wacko Simpsons kind of life.

DF: Is there anybody in the creative fields in your family, or did they encourage you in any way in those directions?

BS: My mother was always very encouraging of anything that I wanted to do with my life, with my energies. Dad was more concerned with making sure that I always had a trade to fall back on, which I had, until that trade revolutionized itself so many times that I couldn't get a job in it now, even if I tried.

DF: What trade was that?

BS: The printing trade. When I graduated from high school, I was already running a Heidelberg press and shooting my own four-color separations. If I were to walk in somewhere now and say, "I can run a Heidelberg," they'd look at me and say, "What's a Heidelberg?" [laughter]

It's completely bizarre. But Dad isn't so upset with me now. After not listening to him for thirty years, he's finally realized that I might just know what I'm doing.

DF: That's good, good that he's come around. You were a comics fan as a kid, I would imagine?

BS: I actually didn't read comics until I was thirteen or fourteen. I read a lot of novels. I was a movie freak first and foremost. Loved film, loved stop-motion animation—Ray Harryhausen, all that stuff. Willis O'Brien, King Kong, loved the genre films and silents. And then, at the age of ten or eleven, my brother handed me the John Christopher trilogy of books for younger readers.

Conducted by Danny Fingeroth February 19, 2003
at the DC Comics offices. Edited by **Danny Fingeroth**
Copy-edited by **Bob Schreck**

DF: Who is John Christopher?

BS: John Christopher wrote **The City of Gold and Lead**, **The White Mountains**, and **The Pool of Fire**. They were kind of "War of the Worlds Lite," for younger readers. They were wonderful books, I read all three of them in a day, a day-and-a-half. I kept looking up, "Is there another?" "Yes." And from that point on just started reading everything. H.G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe and Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein**, all of that genre stuff. And probably because of school and because of my getting a little older, by the time I was fifteen I was already now reading comic books, but I was moving away from the genre works and



Back from the dead and on the hunt. A page from the Bob Schreck edited **Green Arrow** #11. Written by Kevin Smith with art by Phil Hester & Ande Parks. [©2003 DC Comics.]

reading biographies and historical pieces and such.

DF: Prose-wise.

BS: Yeah, prose-wise. Comics, though, I *hated* them. I didn't want to be caught dead with one in my hand, because that would immediately make me a kid. And I did want to be a kid, I wanted to be a grown-up when I was a little kid.

DF: You read comics in secret?

BS: No, I didn't. I just didn't really pay attention to them. And then I met my paperboy, who made horror movies—which is what I was doing, I was making movies since I was nine. And we got together to make a movie one weekend. Actually, we wrote three, made one, and then he just blurted out, “Do you read comics?” And I was like, “Nah, I don't read those, they're stupid.” And then the next week he brought me over, I think it was **Fantastic Four** or something.

DF: That would be a good one to start with.

BS: Yeah! I went, [*begrudging tone*] “All right, I'll read it.” I read it and it was, “Wow!” It was a whole new world for me. It was the world between film and books, this weird thing that made your brain do something different that neither did for your imagination. So that was it, I immediately became a voracious reader of comics.

DF: You were thirteen at this point?

BS: Oh, yeah, about thirteen. It was fun stuff, and I immediately became a Marvel fanatic. And then, probably within eight months to a year, I burnt out on Marvel. I was like, “If I see a ‘Lo, Behold! The Giant Thing!’ I'm going to go crazy!” But as all that was coming down, slowly but surely, I also went so much deeper into the medium. I was collecting Bernie Wrightson's work way before **Swamp Thing**. And I knew that he was ripping-off. I mean, paying tribute to. Frank Frazetta. [*laughs*] I think I also got super-into Frazetta through Larry, my paperboy, as I was immediately in the Doubleday Book Club. All these great books with Frazetta painted covers were available through them. I treasure those books to this day, **The Warlord of Mars**, **The Gods of Mars**, all those great [Edgar Rice] Burroughs books with the Frazetta black-and-white illos in them. So, within two years, I knew all the up-and-comers...

DF: Knew them personally, or knew their work?

BS: Both. Very quickly. I've been telling this story for a hundred years, but it was nice to hear Bernie say it, and I never prompted him on it, but I was basically the unofficial member of The Studio at age fourteen or fifteen.

DF: What was the name of the studio?

BS: Well, it was “The Studio.” It was Wrightson, Kaluta, Barry Windsor-Smith, and Jeff Jones. They shared a big studio up on, I think it was the west side of New York. I never got to actually go into The Studio, but every convention, they would see me and say, “This kid is the least creepy kid of the bunch.”

DF: Talk about damning with faint praise! [*laughs*]

BS: I know! I became a Vaughn Bode fan very early on. It appealed to everything in my sick little mind as a kid. I said, “Everything's here! This is so cool!” And Bernie made sure that I didn't miss the cartoon slide show that Vaughn would perform. Vaughn would do all the voices of all of his characters. So here I am, hanging out with The Studio. I'm, like, fifteen, watching Vaughn Bode perform his characters on stage. And there's this old guy sitting next to me with giant muttonchops, hitting my leg saying, “This guy's great! Who is he?” And I tell him, “That's Vaughn Bode, he's also the cartoonist, he's really good, eh?” “Oh, he's great!” I lean over to Bernie Wrightson and I ask, “Who's the old guy, and is he



Dave Johnson's cover art for the **Batman 10 Cent Adventure**, as used for the **Batman: Murderer** tradepaperback collection. Edited by Bob Schreck.

[©2003 DC Comics.]

hitting on me?” And he replied, “Oh, no, no. That's Isaac Asimov. Don't worry about him.” [*Danny laughs*] So, I was really very lucky. I was in an amazing place at an amazing time.

DF: Were you a fan of the undergrounds, in general? Robert Crumb and Kim Deitch and Spain [Rodriguez]?

BS: I wasn't a devotee, but I knew what they were up to. I appreciated what they were doing, but I didn't have everything they put out. But Vaughn Bode and Crumb were about as weird as I got back then—and that's pretty weird! And then I immediately became a DC fan. And when I saw these coming attraction ads, I think after I'd read the one **House of Secrets** with Len Wein and Bernie Wrightson, and then I saw these really beautiful ads announcing this new **Swamp Thing** title, that was it. That and Kaluta's **Shadow** were the two highlights for that time period for me.

DF: You and I are from approximately the same generation, but whereas someone like me and a lot of people in and around the business were reading them from, like, age six, you came to it from a somewhat different perspective. Did you write or draw? Sounds like you made films...

BS: I made films, I drew, I was constantly begging my dad to let me draw Skippy the Turtle and take art classes by mail. His answer was, “Seven hundred dollars? I'm not spending seven hundred dollars for you to draw a turtle!” And I'd beg, “Yeah, but I really want to draw!” I had a pretty good facility with it.



Schreck becomes trivia in Kevin's Smith's "Clerks" short story from the first issue of *Oni Double-Shot*. Art by Matt Wagner. [©2003 View Askew Productions, Inc.]

But I was making movies, too, I was reading. I was really heavily into playing sports. I played a lot of volleyball, a lot of football, a lot of basketball.

DF: You were a busy kid!

BS: You know, I look back now, I think every adult looks back, especially if you've read that much when you were younger, and you look back now and wonder, "How did I do all that?" I had an incredible social life. I was always playing sports, I was always reading books, I was always reading comic books, I was making movies, seeing movies, I mean, you just look back and you say, "God, how come I can barely get out of bed nowadays?"

I started playing music when I was nineteen, but still read comics, and actually hired Adam Malin to be our keyboard player. Adam Malin was the guy who was running Creation Conventions, the conventions I was going to since I was thirteen, never knowing who he was. I hired him when I was nineteen or twenty. I went, "Oh, my God! You're him! I thought you were 35 when I was just a kid!"

DF: 35! So old! Oh, my God! How can anybody be so old! [laughs]

BS: Exactly. You look at it now, I wish I was 35. So yeah, this whole serendipitous trip, that was part of it.

DF: And then from there, you got involved with the fandom/convention world?

BS: Yeah. When I started running the conventions with Gary [Berman] and Adam, I got to know everybody behind the scenes. I got to know Jim Shooter and Carol Kalish and everyone at all the companies. And I think, eventually, people came to understand that I was mostly a man of my word. I rarely said something I couldn't deliver on.

DF: "Mostly" is about as good as any of us can hope for.

BS: Yeah, you can never be 100%. So the people at Marvel and DC began to rely on me and to be able to trust me. Two of the best things that came out of that many-year experience was getting to know Archie Goodwin, who taught me more than he would ever know, just by my sitting next to him and just listening to him. And Diana Schutz. I met both of them through



those conventions. And Diana the same thing, I learned so much from her, just watching her handle situations. Both, on the technical side of the job, as well as the editorial aesthetic and people-skills aspects of the work. So everything wound up begetting everything else. Diana, Archie and my brother, Dean really were the most influential people at molding me, and giving me what I needed to get to where I am today. Well, except for my folks!

DF: And you and Diana, of course, ended up dating, and then married.

BS: Bi-coastal dating, living together in Pennsylvania for five years, moving to California, living there for almost a year, moving on to Oregon and getting married, and then getting divorced. But we're still the absolute best of friends. There is a bond between us that will never be broken.

DF: She asserts that, also, in her interview. As you know, the readers will be cross-checking the two interviews to make sure there're no inconsistencies. It seems like your aesthetic sensibilities interact and interweave so much, to this day.

BS: Diana certainly re-focused me on the "Vaughn Bode side" of the comics world. And there was a lot more of it at that point in time, so I was getting more entrenched in people's work, like that of Dan Clowes and the Hernandez Brothers and all that. So she kind of re-booted my education on that. And I would always be trying to open her eyes with, "I know that's all great stuff, but then there's all this other really great stuff, too."

DF: Such as the superhero stuff, or more the Wrightson-type horror material?

BS: Everything, everything beyond the kind of indie autobiographical, self-deprecating Joe Matt nightmares. And I love all that stuff, but there's the entertainment side to comics, where you get away from your own problems and say, "Wow, there's a great story in there."

DF: "Wow, Bruce Wayne has problems, too!"

BS: Yeah! Or there's a big monster, and I would rather have to deal with a big monster than my own day-to-day nightmare problems.

DF: You were involved in theater, also, right?

BS: I worked on a few plays in Westbury, Long Island. It was like '79-'81, somewhere around there. I played the Ghost of Christmas Present in a re-written, modernized Christmas Carol, where I ad-libbed lines like, "Cram it, bozo!"

DF: I meant to ask you, what happened to the paperboy? Did he go on to a film career?

BS: No, Larry didn't go on to a film career. I just saw Larry last Saturday.

DF: Boy, you keep relationships a long time, don't you? [laughs]

BS: Yes, I do. I don't believe in disposable friendships. Larry and I are still the best of friends. His younger brother is a very big player at the Independent Film Channel. The funny thing is, I went and got a trade, which was printing. And Larry didn't. He went off to college, and he did a comic strip called Action Man in his college newspaper, and as Larry's hair just got bigger and bigger, so did his bar bill. (which is what I know I would have done had I gone to college, too!) And now Larry's a printer. If you know what a stripper is in printing terms, well, he strips films. He keeps his clothes on, but he strips film. And he's had a long standing career since almost in his mid-to-late twenties,

The SCOTT MITCHELL ROSENBERG Interview

Conducted by **Danny Fingeroth** via telephone February 4, 2003

Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Scott Mitchell Rosenberg**

From the early days at Malibu Comics to his current status as head of Platinum Studios, Scott Mitchell Rosenberg has always had a clear vision of what he want to do. That vision has always included comics. From the Ultraverse to *Men In Black* to *Jeremiah*, Scott has always seen a clear link between comics and screened media. Here, he speaks about how that vision came to be, and about what sort of properties and creators Platinum is on the lookout for.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: Since it's so California, please tell us where you are right now, Scott.

SCOTT ROSENBERG: I am on the 101 highway, headed from my home in Calabasas to my office in Beverly Hills. And talking on the phone at the same time.

DF: It doesn't get more Hollywood than that!

SMR: And I've this new kind of cool phone where this gel thing goes in my ear, so there's no mouthpiece. It just records the

vibrations from my jaw. In theory, you can hear what I'm saying.

DF: In practice, as well! So we're speaking with Scott Mitchell Rosenberg, the founder and chairman of Platinum Studio. It says here they're "Hollywood's premiere company for comic book to film adaptations." This is the interview for **Write Now!** Magazine. What's your basic background, Scott? Were you born in L.A.?

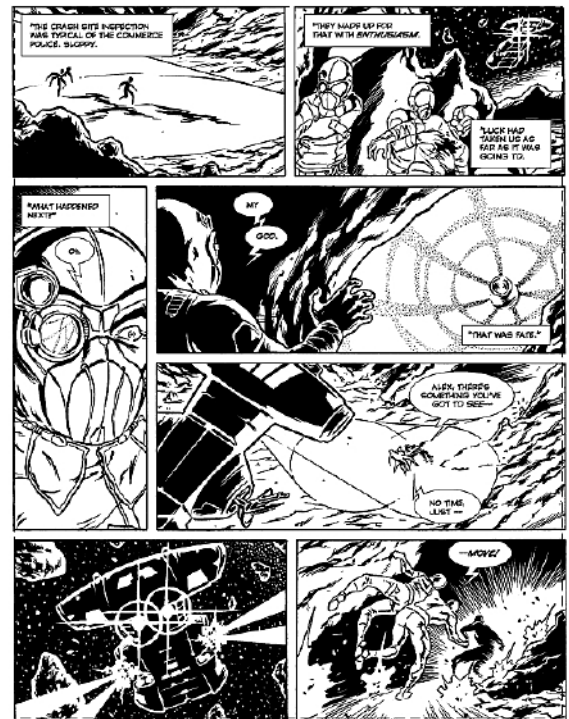
SMR: Born and bred in L.A. Threw a dart, which landed in Denver, and that's where I went to college. [laughter]

DF: Literally throwing a dart?

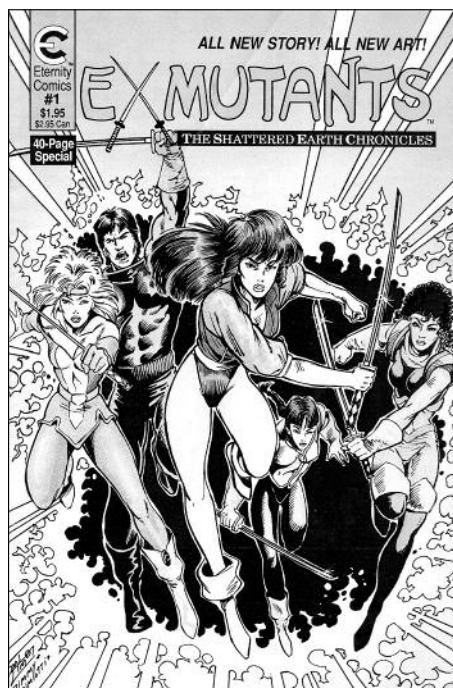
SMR: Pretty much. Landed in Denver, not Boulder, so Denver it was. I wanted to get out of L.A. and see what life's like elsewhere. And I loved it, but it was cold, and I just came back.

DF: I think it's like growing up in New York. When you grow up in a place that everybody wants to come to, it's still your hometown, and you still want to go somewhere, at least for a while.

SMR: I like the fact that a couple days ago it was 88, 89 degrees, and we're wearing shorts. Took the kids out for fun. I



Two pages from the upcoming Platinum Studios graphic novel *Age of Kings*. Story by Andrew Foley, art by Russell Hossain.
[*Age of Kings* TM & ©2003 Platinum Studios, LLC.]



Ron Lim & Jimmy Palmiotti's cover art for the 1988 *Ex-Mutants: The Shattered Earth Chronicles* #1. [©2003 Respective Copyright Holders.]

that related to what you're doing now?

SMR: Not whatsoever, nothing. [Danny laughs] I majored in marketing and management.

DF: Well, that relates...

SMR: A lot of it related to Malibu Comics. We were always known as being able to market right up there with Marvel and DC, but at ten cents on the dollar. I probably learned some of that there, but nothing directly related to entertainment. Except they had movie theaters in Denver.

DF: Now what school was that in Denver?

SMR: The University of Denver.

DF: Did you ever write or draw, have any kind of creative interest?

SMR: I always kind of just created comics since I was a little tyke. Never did anything with any of them.

DF: "Created them," like drew and wrote your own on lined paper or whatever?

SMR: Yeah, exactly. Whole little universes and all that kind of stuff. And once it got too big and too many heroes and too many powers and whatever, then I would have to go to an alternate Earth and start over.

DF: I think they do that in the real companies, too! [laughs] Before Malibu, what kind of job did you have? Or was that your first thing?

SMR: Starting at about thirteen, I didn't have any more money to buy comics, and the only way to keep buying them was to start selling them. So I started taking out tables at the local L.A. conventions. Which, of course, my mom or dad had to schlep me to, with boxes stacked up in the back of their car.

DF: And they did that gladly?

SMR: Oh, yeah, they were just *thrilled*. In particular, they were thrilled when I was sixteen and could drive myself. [laughter] Believe me, dropping me off at 6:45 in the morning and then fighting to get me out of there a little after it closed, when I wasn't ready to go yet... [laughter] They did it, they were very supportive. And then I also started taking ads out in the

think at our house it actually hit the nineties. I had to actually turn the air conditioning on.

DF: We had about twelve degrees here last week. [Scott laughs] And we appreciated every one of them! Did you have any family in the entertainment business? What did your folks do?

SMR: No family in the entertainment business. My dad was a building contractor, my mom raised us. My brother's in real estate and my sister's done assorted things and is now married.

DF: So you went to college in Denver. Did you major in anything

Comic's Buyer's Guide.

DF: And this was in your teens?

SMR: Yeah, thirteen.

DF: So you were pretty entrepreneurial, even at a young age.

SMR: Yeah. I had mail order and everything from thirteen on.

DF: You just sort of thought, "Oh, I could do this," and just did it?

SMR: Yeah.

DF: That's pretty cool.

SMR: No one told me I couldn't. [laughter]

DF: So went from doing that kind of thing, from buying and selling comics, directly into publishing at Malibu?

SMR: Yeah, basically. When I was in college, to get the money to help make my way through, I did some buying and selling of comics, but it was a little different. I couldn't take my collection out and go out in the winter weather, because I was in a different state and it was cold. And our storage area was cold.

DF: I get it—you like warm weather. [laughs]

SMR: I like warm. So I started, with my roommate, to speculate on comics. I would buy them from the distributors, buy a few hundred of this or five hundred of that, trying to figure out what would go up in value enough that I could sell them post-sale to stores.

DF: This was about what year? What period are we talking about?

SMR: It was '85, '86. So I started to become really well known at picking hits. Because I used to always go for writers and stories and characters, and I really didn't go for #1's. If I thought it would go up, terrific, I'd buy first issues. But that's not what I was generally known for. I was known for picking the issues that I thought would matter, and hopefully I would be right.

DF: And what about artists, did artists determine what you would buy?

SMR: Yeah, absolutely! If I thought it was a particular new direction or an artist that I thought was going to get hot, absolutely. It was basically creator-driven. And story-driven, if someone was going to die or be introduced. And new directions for characters. Stores always blew it on those.

DF: Well, of course. [laughs]

SMR: So I did that quite a bit, and I did that after college, too. I then started getting approached by comic creators saying, "Hey, will you publish my comic?"

DF: Huh? Now, why did they think you would publish, if you had just been speculating at that point?



Rob Liefeld's cover art for *Ex-Mutants: TSEC* #3. [©2003 Respective Copyright Holders.]

The DIANA SCHUTZ Interview

Conducted via telephone by Danny Fingerth January 15, 2003
Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Diana Schutz**

Diana Schutz has been employed in the comic book industry in one form or another since 1978, when she took her first job selling comics retail, in Vancouver, British Columbia. A lifelong reader of comic books, Schutz quickly developed an interest in other aspects of the business and took her first editing job as an assistant at Marvel Comics in 1984. That lasted all of four days, after Schutz realized her desire to be part of a smaller, more personal company. Schutz took her vision to then-upstart Comico and became one of a rare handful of high-profile female editors in the comics industry.

In 1990, Schutz moved to Portland, Oregon to accept an editorial position at Dark Horse Comics, where she has held various titles including Managing Editor and Editor in Chief. Schutz is widely regarded as one of the industry's top editors. Among the writers and artists she has worked with are Frank Miller, Matt Wagner, Neil Gaiman, Will Eisner, Stan Sakai, and Harvey Pekar.

In 2002, Schutz became a part-time instructor at Portland Community College, where she teaches a course entitled "Introduction to the Art of Comic Books."

DANNY FINGEROTH: We are talking with Diana Schutz, a senior editor at Dark Horse Comics. I believe that's the correct title these days. I want to talk about the evolution of Diana Schutz, what Dark Horse is, and, as an editor, what you look for and that sort of stuff. So first, a little background info. You're from Canada originally?

DIANA SCHUTZ: Yes, born and raised in Montreal. I haven't lived in Canada for some twenty years now. In fact, I'm thinking about taking out American citizenship.

DF: Well, you should, we can use you. [laughter]

DS: Finally, after all these years in this country! [laughter]

DF: Anything in your background, family, friends, etc. that contributed to your current career?

DS: Let's see... I've been reading comic books all my life.

DF: How did that start?

DS: That started at age five. My mother was a comic book reader as a girl. I was kind of a voracious reader in any case. Mum used to buy me comics. I think I first encountered the medium, though, at my dad's dental office, because one of the dentists there used to bring in his kids' comics to put in the waiting room for the younger patients. So I was reading all the Mort Weisinger-edited comics.

DF: The Superman books.

DS: Yes, the Superman books. But we're talking early '60s, so I was reading **Lois Lane**. I was reading the girls, **Lois Lane** and **Lana Lang**. And most importantly, I was reading **Supergirl**. You know, the backups in **Action** and **Adventure Comics**. But, yeah,



Diana Schutz & Bob Schreck on vacation in 2002.

the Superman comics, that was what caught me—and held me. Forever and ever, as it turned out. So cut to 1978, I was a grad student at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, B.C. The direct market had begun to blossom, and I was a regular at a local comic book shop. I wound up dropping out of grad school to work at the comics shop.

DF: Would you have dropped out of grad school anyway?

DS: I don't know. I actually went back to grad school when I moved to Portland, in 1990, and got a Master's degree in Communication Studies. But at that time, in 1978, I had been in the ivory tower all my life, and I had no social skills whatsoever. I learned them really quickly working, across the counter, in the comic book shop.

DF: You might be the only person ever to have learned social skills in a comics shop.

DS: [laughs] No comment.

DF: [laughs] You have a creative writing degree, it says, in the info you sent me.

DS: Yes.

DF: What did you think you would do with that?

DS: I knew that I wanted to work in publishing somehow. The reason I studied creative writing is because, like every other adolescent, I spent a lot of time writing poetry. But I never really saw myself as the Great Canadian Writer. But books—reading had been it for me for so long that publishing was definitely where I wanted to wind up. In fact, it was publishing or teaching.



From Matt Wagner's original Grendel story, brought back into print in the Dark Horse Comics edition **Grendel: Devil By The Deed**. Story and art by Wagner.
[©2003 Matt Wagner.]

DF: Teaching at what level?

DS: At the college level.

DF: Which you're doing now. Actually, that's on one of my index cards lower down in the stack, but we have to get to these top cards. It's very exciting, I have index cards. The first index card interview I've done. I have an office a few blocks from my house and I don't have a printer here, so for a recent interview I cut-and-pasted, just like on the computer, except I did it with paper—

DS: By hand?

DF: Yes! I had strips of paper with questions, so I cut them up and pasted them! [Diana laughs] I thought, "Wow, it's just like on the computer!" But then I thought, "Maybe index cards." [laughter] It was a real discovery! But I've just closed the window, because if there's a breeze, I'm really in big trouble. [Diana laughs] Although it might be sort of a William Burroughs kind of random interview.

DS: Yeah, a **Naked Lunch** thing. [laughter]

DF: So you were reading comics all the way through, no stops?

DS: I stopped somewhat during my teenage years. Or, I should say, I winnowed down. I stopped reading superheroes in my teenage years and concentrated exclusively on romance comics, which were still being published at the time.

DF: Because the superheroes were just not appealing to what you needed at that point?

DS: Absolutely. I was interested in boys, cigarettes, and other things that I can't say in print.

DF: That whole line of cigarette comics never worked out, did it? [laughter] So you were interested in boys, and romance comics got you that fix?

DS: Yeah, absolutely. Because I sure wasn't getting them in the real world! [laughter]

DF: I find that hard to believe, but okay. You were a fan journalist in there somewhere...

DS: Well, working in comics retail, which I did for several years, starting in Vancouver, and from there I went to Comics and Comix in Berkeley, which is where you and I met.

DF: Is that where? That was when?

DS: Early eighties.

DF: Berkeley in the early eighties, was I even out there? I guess I must have been...

DS: Yeah, you were out for possibly a Creation Convention in San Francisco, and that's where we first met.

DF: Okay. I don't have this as one of my questions, but I knew I was going to get it in here somewhere. This was in the era of Chris Claremont writing all the women in **X-Men**, and everything else going on. I remember you telling me that Dazzler, which I was writing, was the best woman character in comics, and I thought, "Okay, what's she been smoking?"

DS: Well, Paul Chadwick was drawing **Dazzler**, wasn't he?

DF: No, no, no. It was me and Frank Springer. Those were the heavy cleavage days of **Dazzler**. So, if you actually meant that, cool. On the other hand, maybe I don't want to know if you

[Schutz continues on page 41.]

All He Wants To Do Is Change The World

The **FABIAN NICIEZA** Interview

Part 2

Conducted in person by **Danny Fingeroth** on December 11, 2002
Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Fabian Nicieza**

From Marvel's promotions department to prolific freelance writer to "day-jobbing" editor, Fabian Nicieza has been a forceful presence on the comics scene for a good long while now. Having served as president and publisher of Acclaim Comics, Fabian is today back in the freelancer's chair, writing for comics as well as other media.

Last time, he and I were discussing his career and had gotten to the 1990's comics boom era. Read on and see what Fabian has to say about the state of comics today, and where they're headed in the near—and distant—future.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: Now, this was an interesting period in comics, because, all of a sudden, every artist believed they were a writer. But they often needed someone to come in and put words in the characters' mouths.

FABIAN NICIEZA: I think what happened is that Rob got *New Mutants* to plot, and the reason he got the gig was because he dumped 101,000 ideas on Bob's lap, and Bob said, "Wow! This guy's got a lot of ideas." And Bob saw dollars. *Ka-Ching!* This guy can make the book sell. That's part of an editor's job, too. He saw that Rob was going to sell a truckload of copies of *New Mutants*, more copies than it was selling before. Well, every other artist who was involved in

that whole time period, whether it be Todd McFarlane or Jim Lee or any of those guys said, "Crap! If this guy can be plotting his book, then I want to be plotting my book, too."

DF: Those guys were great artists and great concept men, but they may not necessarily have been great storytellers.

FN: Absolutely. But whose fault is it that they were writing? Is that their fault, or is that the editors' fault for okaying it?

DF: Good point.

FN: I'm not going to begrudge those guys wanting to write. Jack Kirby wanted to write his own books. He *did* write his own books in the '50s, and he wanted to write his own books at Marvel and didn't get the opportunity to. Will Eisner wrote his own work all the time. Frank Miller, Walt Simonson, Jim Starlin, Howard Chaykin—all these guys were writing their own work. It's not like there was never a precedent for artists who wrote their own work and became writers *after* they were first known as artists.

DF: Right. But, in the early '90s, there seemed to be a flurry of guys who were maybe not ready.

FN: Absolutely, yeah. And part of that's hindsight. I mean, somebody decided Rob wasn't ready to script his own work. In hindsight, do I think Rob was ready to *plot* his own work? No, I don't. As the guy who *scripted* those stories, no, I don't. If I were his editor, it would have been a tough judgment call. I can't put myself in Bob's shoes. But what are you going to do?

You might forfeit the opportunity to have this guy do work that's going to sell five hundred thousand copies. What do you do?

DF: In retrospect, maybe some of the less-skilled artist/writers of that era lowered the bar for story structure.

FN: Absolutely.

DF: And I think, more than the chromium covers, it may have been that that led to the sales slump.

FN: I think it was a combination of elements.

DF: Sure.

FN: There's two ways to look at this. One way is what you just said, and I feel it's very valid. It lowered the bar on the kinds of stories and how stories were going to be told. It lowered the bar on the expectations of what work had to be in order to sell that work to an editor.

Conversely, though, *someone* had to be buying this stuff. Whether it was speculators buying five



Ready for battle. From issue #3 of *X-Force*. Plot and art by Rob Liefeld. Script by Fabian Nicieza.

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copies apiece, or whether it was one person per copy, this stuff sold a tremendous number of comics. *For years.* And not *just* by the artist-writers. And the books continued to sell after those guys left. Quite well, thank you very much. I was there!

DF: *We both have homes we bought with that royalty money.*

FN: So who was reading this “crap”? Somebody was reading this crap. Somebody was buying this crap. Somebody was *liking* this crap. So, was it crap?

DF: *It wasn't all crap.*

FN: You know what? We talked before about how quality is subjective. I *subjectively* think that the quality of the majority of that material was crap. Even the stuff that had *my* credits in it.

DF: *Do you think there was a higher percentage of crap? I mean, we were putting out hundreds of books. Was there more crap, or was it the same crap percentage?*

FN: I think that we had the same crap ratio then as we do now. Of course, the people now aren't going to say that, because they're in charge now, and they're going to say their work is great. Well, we were in charge then, and we thought the work was... selling. We were very honest with ourselves.

DF: *There were still books you wanted to read every month, though.*

FN: Absolutely! Not enough of them were the ones I was writing. [*laughs*] I mean, I made a very, very conscious decision. I both benefited from it in the short run and suffered from it in the long run. It is what it is. But what bugs me is when people rewrite history, especially when it self-servingly tries propping up their own preferences.

DF: *—It's especially annoying when people who weren't there rewrite history.*

FN: Exactly. At the end of the day, we had a mandate from the company to make a tremendous amount of money. We had pressure to perform at a certain budgetary level, far higher levels than the guys running the companies today have to deal with, I'd guess. So we did what we had to do to meet the expectations of our bosses, because that's what our jobs were.

DF: *And along with them making a sh*tload of money, we made a sh*tload of money.*

FN: We made a sh*tload of money, too. No, I agree, but it's all proportionate. The money we made was outrageous, but it was in direct proportion to the money *they* made.

DF: *There was a bigger pile of money than any creators had made in the history of comics before that. It enabled the Image guys to go start Image.*

FN: The analogy I've always used is: the biggest wave in recorded history was coming in, and a bunch of us were given surfboards and told to try to ride that wave. Some of us rode the wave and some of us didn't. And some of us rode it all the way to shore, and some of us landed bobbing in the water just outside the shoreline, and maybe one or two guys ended up with a beach house right in front of the ocean.

DF: *That might be as far as you want to drag this analogy.* [*laughs*]

FN: And then some people had really nice bathrooms, and other people didn't have really nice bathrooms. [*laughter*] So it was what it was. I look back on it a lot, I think about it a lot, because it was a very, very fascinating moral quandary to be a part of. You could call it “selling out,” but you know what? If there were people who were reading the work and enjoying it — and there certainly were — then who were you selling out to?

DF: *I think the shocking thing was not that it ended, but how*



Double-page spread of Cable from *X-Force* #9 by Nicieza and Liefeld.
[©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

dramatically and how deeply it ended. We knew sales couldn't be that high forever, but I don't think anybody imagined they would so quickly go so low. We thought maybe they would go back to what they were, y'know?

FN: They didn't go that low that quickly, it was a gradual process. I mean, I left Marvel before they hit the lowest point they were at. I came back to Marvel afterwards, after the Acclaim experience, and saw what the numbers were. I said, “Holy crap! That's what books are selling nowadays?” At Acclaim we just didn't look at sales figures, because it was too depressing. [*laughter*]

DF: *So, back to the Fabian narrative, how long were you on the X-books?*

FN: A couple of years for each of them. I got fired off *X-Force* because it was a top ten selling book.

DF: *Explain that, Fabe.*

FN: You'd have to ask Bob. To this day, I was never given a real reason. The editor wanted to make a change. Wanted to go in a new direction. The usual. At the end of the day, maybe I'd worn out my welcome and maybe he had other people pulling and tugging at him to make a change. Nothing nefarious, just business as usual. And I quit *X-Men* because I was going to be fired from *X-Men* in a few months, anyway...

DF: *And meanwhile, your day job changed from promotion to editorial.*

FN: No, at the time I was leaving the X-books, I had really minimized my daily office involvement at Marvel. I'd gone into

Editorial a few years earlier. I was a staff editor, mostly on licensed books, which anybody who's edited licensed books knows is quite a picnic.

DF: You edited **Wonder Man** too, though, right?

FN: Yeah, I had a couple of non-licensed books. But I had **Ren & Stimpy**, I had **Barbie**, I had **Bill & Ted**. I did **Darkman**, a **Hook** movie adaptation, **William Shatner's TekWorld**. A pretty diverse line-up.

DF: And you were also writing three or four books a month?

FN: There was a stretch there where I took a leave of absence and I only came in two days a week because I was writing seven monthly books plus Annuals, plus the staff job. And I was starting to really lose it at that point. It wasn't conscious, actually. Writing that many books really wasn't a plan at all. It wasn't something I wanted to do. What happened is that there were demands on the budget to produce a certain amount of books, and everybody was trying to find logical spin-offs from their titles. If you've got a group book with one or two characters who might be able to support a mini-series, do a mini-series on them. And if those mini-series do well, make them monthly. There I was, am writing books that have franchise potential to them, whether it be **X-Men** or **X-Force** or **New Warriors**, you know? "Do you want to do a **Deadpool** limited series, Fabe?" "Well, yeah, I do! I co-created the character!"

DF: There was that one year where every Annual had a new character who was supposed to be spin-off material.

FN: Oh, they were? I didn't know that! I thought they were just supposed to be trading card material! [laughs]

DF: Actually, we did do a mini-series with one of the Spider-Man ones.

FN: I think they ended up being catbox-liner material. [laughs] So if someone's going to do a **Night Thrasher** mini-series, and I'm writing **New Warriors**, I wanted to be the guy to write that mini-series. If it's going to be cat-liner material, at least let me be responsible for it! But then that mini-series sold well enough to justify a monthly series and I wanted to be the guy writing that *monthly* series. I didn't write seven monthly books for all that long, because I realized my head was pretty much coming undone.

DF: Of course, you had the clout, then, to be able to if not demand, then strongly request that you wanted to be the guy to write a given spin-off.

FN: You know what? I never, ever thought I had "clout." What I thought is that I had drive and I had relationships that enabled the editors to want me to do projects.

DF: Well, as you know, editors are a cowardly, superstitious lot, so the thinking is: "Fabian's good, he does this well, I know him" etc.

FN: Yeah, it was logical for me to do them if I was capable of doing them. You know what, though, some might think, "You were writing so much, and most of it was crap." Maybe so, but to this day, I still think some of the best superhero stuff I've written were individual issues of some of those "spin-off" books. The other thing is, I *turned down* monthly books during that time period. I had at least four monthly books offered to me by other editors that I turned down because it was just ludicrous. I couldn't do it. And some things I did were favors—like **NFL Superpro**—which still dogs me to this day. It was a launch that needed some heavy reworking so that the NFL would approve it. The editor was having trouble, so I agreed to do it for him. I expected to get season tickets for the Jets and I

ended up going to one lousy game where they got creamed. Great seats, though.

DF: A lot of this does go back to your work ethic and your seemingly boundless energy. You're a guy who, as I recall, would write on the train to and from work on your laptop.

FN: Yeah. But it was other things. It was life things, too. My now-wife's mom was ill with cancer. My wife was spending a tremendous amount of time with her. I could either go home to an empty townhouse and stare at a TV set, or go out in the city after work with a bunch of guys and drink too much beer.

Those were my choices.

DF: They have museums in the city, too, you know.

FN: Are there any bars in the museums? [laughter]

DF: As a matter of fact, yes!

FN: I decided that I could go out and drink some beers with the guys one or two nights a week but not every night, and I didn't want to sit around an empty house, so I wrote. I wrote on weekends, I wrote on the way home on the train, because I had a long train ride. I wrote at home. I dislocated a finger before a softball game, and I was waiting in the emergency room in a New York hospital forever, so I wrote with my free hand while my other hand was wrapped up in an ice pack! I wrote, because it was a release for me from the stress of my job, and from the tensions of what was going on in my life. It's almost what I had to do. And it's only in hindsight that I say I should or shouldn't have done that, but in many ways, the writing was a coping mechanism for me back then.

DF: It is for a lot of people. So you did, finally, leave your staff job?

FN: Eventually. I was part-time in '94 and off-staff in '95. I never wanted to leave staff. I was such a wuss about it. It got to the point where I was earning 90% of my yearly income through writing and 10% of my yearly income through a staff job.

DF: Even with editorial royalties?

FN: Yeah. Because I was editing the books that weren't selling. Except for **Ren & Stimpy**, I barely made royalties on anything I edited. Ninety-ten, writing to staff work. But I was spending the



Rogue & Wolverine from early in Fabian's run on the **X-Men**. A panel from **X-Men** #13, featuring art by Art Thibert & Dan Panosian. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

PAGE FIFTEEN

Panel One

CUT TO INT. EVERSHAM'S OFFICE – MORNING. The office is now about set-up. Almost all the boxes have been unpacked, books stored on shelves, personal pictures put up on the desk.

RICHARD sits in the room with GERTLER seated next to him and EVERSHAM calmly dipping a tea bag in a DYKSTRA coffee mug at his desk.

1 EVERSHAM You have nothing?

2 RICHARD I was in jail for two days – I couldn't write –

Panel Two

RICHARD talks, hesitant, nervous. Bleary-eyed. He's not sleeping.

3 RICHARD -- I didn't – the explosion –

4 RICHARD I'm not sleeping – she won't let me!

5 EVERSHAM Who?

6 RICHARD(smltr) talinada

Panel Three

GERTLER and EVERSHAM exchange a glance. Neither are smiling. They don't find any humor in this.

7 RICHARD(op) She's trying to talk to me. I know this sounds – shit – she said –

8 RICHARD(op) I can see things – I can see – I don't know – the life behind the life – of everything!

Panel Four

EVERSHAM holds up the tea bag, dripping, between two thick fingertips.

9 EVERSHAM And what do the tea leaves say, Richard?

Panel Five

COPY SAME PANEL, but through RICHARD'S "Greenway Vision" – the tea bag leaves, all tiny pinpricks of crushed leaves all glow separately, heated, alive. Swirling mist spirals around it, aromas, scents spiraling around the bag, wafting into the air. RICHARD sees and smells and TASTES the air!

10 RICHARD(op) I don't – you wouldn't...

PAGE SIXTEEN

Panel One

PULL BACK THREE SHOT, GERTLER and EVERSHAM look more afraid than confused as the aroma trails and lights form the leaves spiral to form a GHOSTED IMAGE of TALINADA, beckoning to him, glowing brightly...

RICHARD begins rattling off:

1 RICHARD The tea has eleven blends – Assam, Darjeeling, Nilgiri, Banshu, Lychee, Kukeecha – should I go on?

Panel Two

EVERSHAM stands up. Angry.

2 EVERSHAM What are you talking about?

3 RICHARD I told you – I can see things – everything is wrong – different, not wrong –

Panel Three

RICHARD covers his eyes, rubbing them with his hands, trying to block it all out.

4 RICHARD I don't know what's going on – I just know that what I wrote was TRUE!

5 RICHARD -- "Wintersong" really happened – and someone wants to stop me –

6 RICHARD -- I don't know – from telling everyone that the world could have been –

7 RICHARD -- I don't know – dammit, I don't know!

Panel Four

SILENT PANEL as KAINE slumps, his hands over his face. EVERSHAM and GERTLER exchange a glance.

Panel Five

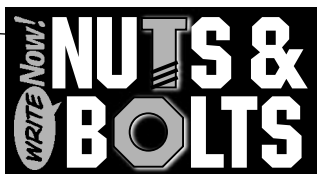
EVERSHAM picks up the phone on his desk.

8 EVERSHAM Devlin, please arrange to have my car bring Mister Kaine to my Hamptons home.

9 RICHARD What?

10 EVERSHAM You are a very valuable commodity to this company, Richard, and you are obviously...

11 EVERSHAM ... well, let's say you're in need of a good rest.



Fabian's script for *The Blackburne Covenant* #2 and printed comic pages done from that script. Art by Stefano Raffaele. [©2003 Dark Horse Comics, Inc.]



A Man for all Media

The PAUL DINI

Interview

WRITE Now!

Part 2

Conducted via telephone by **Danny Fingeroth** February 24, 2003

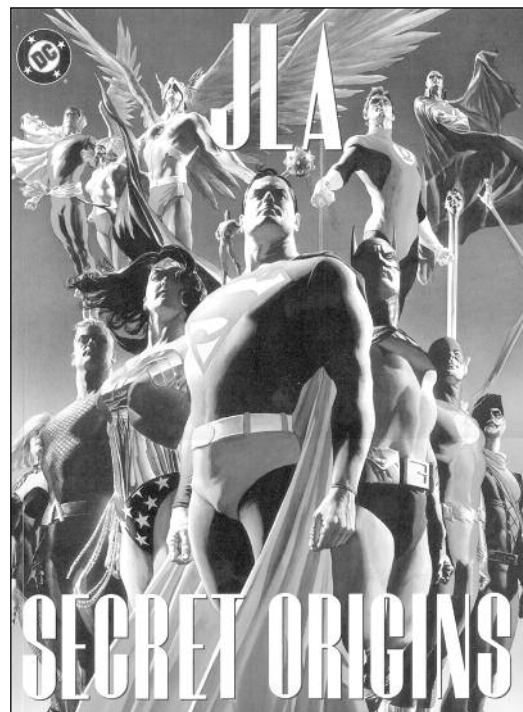
Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Paul Dini**

Paul Dini began his career in the early 1980's writing for such animation studios as Filmation and Hanna-Barbera. He moved to Marin County in 1984 where he spent five years developing and writing animation projects at Lucasfilm. Returning to Los Angeles in 1989, he joined Warner Brothers Animation as a writer on their break through series **Spielberg Presents Tiny Toon Adventures**. Dini is perhaps best known for writing and co-producing the animated **Batman/Superman Adventures**, **Batman Beyond**, and the direct to video animated feature, **Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker**. He has also written numerous comic books, including award-winning graphic novels with producer Bruce Timm (**Batman Adventures: Mad Love**) and Alex Ross (**Superman: Peace On Earth**). He created the character Jingle Belle, who has appeared in many solo books and trade paperbacks from Oni Press. Also from Oni is **Mutant, Texas: Tales of Sheriff Ida Red**, a wild neo-western comedy adventure series. This March will see the release of Dini's **Zatanna: Everyday Magic** one-shot from DC/Vertigo. Dini is currently writing and

co-producing a new series **Duck Dodgers** for Cartoon Network.

In the first part of this interview, Paul discussed much of the above in detail, and we were in the middle of talking about his amazing collaborations with painter/illustrator Alex Ross...

—DF



Cover for Dini & Ross' first **JLA** volume, **Secret Origins**.
[©2003 DC Comics.]

DF: Does Alex co-plot these?

PD: He co-plots them. We get together and we discuss where we're going with the stories and what elements we want to bring in. That process usually entails several weeks to a month of us just talking back and forth at night over where we want to take the stories and what elements we want to show in them. We're working on a Justice League story now, which will be a lot longer than any of the previous books and will have a lot more characters. This is more of an adventure-type story, but it also defines what the Justice League means to the world and how people perceive these superheroes, who are fighting with their best interests at heart, but sometimes people don't see it that way.

DF: Is the continuity from the TV show or the comics or sort of a mixture?

PD: It's sort of our own made-up continuity. It's our wish version of what the Justice League should be. Alex is very much a purist when it comes to the starting point for these characters, so he wanted the story to begin with the first grouping of the characters from **The Brave and the Bold** comic books, before they got their own **Justice League** title. So Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Martian Manhunter, Aquaman, and Flash are the ones who start off the story. But Superman and Batman come into it, because they've always been key elements of the Justice League. And from there, we bring in pretty much every other character we felt worked well with the group. Atom, the Hawks, Green Arrow, Canary, Plas, Zatanna, of course. I couldn't leave her out.

DF: When is that coming out?

PD: That'll be late this year. November or December.

DF: Just in time for your holiday purchases, folks. Now, on the



An Alex Ross preliminary sketch for the upcoming Dini/Ross book **JLA: Liberty & Justice** (although the title apparently wasn't settled on at the time the sketch was done). [©2003 DC Comics.]

other side of the Dini myth spectrum, of course, are the Texas myth and the Christmas myth. Again, of all the possible stories in the world, why focus on these subjects? And as a corollary question would be, do you think that's a good place for any writer to start, taking primal myths and doing their own take on them?

PD: Well, who's more identifiable than Superman and Santa Claus? I'd say they kind of go hand and hand as being iconic images that came along in certain eras of modern history. Superman is from just before the middle of the 20th Century. Santa Claus, or St. Nicholas, is really is from the early 19th Century up to the present day. To me, Santa Claus is a great myth. I love Christmas iconography and everything connected to the holiday season. It's my favorite season of the year, and, as any of the poor souls who work with me will attest, one that I start thinking about around the middle of September.

DF: Is it something about the mix of the sacred and the profane in the Christmas imagery that's appealing?

PD: Actually I like the whole tangle of holidays that kicks off with Halloween and ends at New Year's. Ever since I was a kid, I would watch specials like *How the Grinch Who Stole Christmas!* and listen to weird, funny Christmas songs. And I would say to myself, "I would love to make a little stamp on Christmas, something like Rudolph or Frosty." And oddly enough, *Jingle Belle* did not come out of that. It was in the back of my head to someday do a holiday story, but *Jingle Belle* came from another place. It began in Hollywood as I watched (in many cases) extremely well known creators, producers, writers, actors and how they behaved with their children. Say you have a director who everybody reveres as being a brilliant fantasy filmmaker, or an actor who has got this wonderful childlike funny way about him. They would be larger than life, magical personalities. And then you'd see them with their kids, and their kids are, like, "Shut up, Dad. God, my dad is the lamest dad in the world." Stuff like that. And I was thinking it would be fun to do a comment on that attitude, but not make it anybody I know or anybody you could draw a direct parallel to. And, somehow I just got it into my head, well, what if it's Santa Claus? What if Santa Claus gets along with every child in the world except one: *his own daughter*. And the rest just fell into place. None of the established mythology of Santa Claus has him with a child. And the more I worked on that idea, the more I liked it. I would think, "Well, of course. When Santa and the Mrs. had a daughter, they spoiled her rotten. They gave her every great present there is." But still, at some point, their kid has got to realize that she has, in effect, sibling rivalry with every other kid in the world for her pop's affection, and that's where the trouble starts.

DF: That's the brilliant part of that character.

PD: Thanks! So I would write these little bits down and I would file them away in a sketchbook, and I'd find ways of working them into different stories. And there was one that was sort of a resonant need for me, that I put into a book about a year and a half ago, where we see Jingle Belle talking about her relationship with her dad. As a little girl, she wants her dad to go ice fishing with her, and Santa says, "I can't. I have to make presents for all the other kids. Here, take this talking doll. It's the hot toy this year and every little girl wants one." And so Jing sadly takes it and goes out to the fishing pond and drowns the doll. Because it doesn't mean anything to her, and in fact, if it's what every other little girl wants, she just resents it more. It would mean more to her if Santa just put down his tools and



From "Jingle Belle Conquers The Martians," a color short story first printed in the *Jingle Belle: Naughty and Nice* collection. Words by Paul Dini. Painted art by Lawrence Marvit. [©2003 Paul Dini.]

said, "Okay, we're going ice fishing." Because that's ultimately what Jing wanted.

So Jing is an eternal 16-year-old (even though I imagine she's many hundreds of years older, being semi-immortal), and she's getting pretty darned fed up with all this Christmas stuff. And it's not that she dislikes the holiday or what it's about or the feeling of connecting with her friends around that time of the year, that's all good in her mind. It's just that her way of celebrating is not her dad's way. So when I write the stories about her, it's like her trying to forge a connection with that feeling but not having to do what her dad does.

DF: I would think that property would be a natural for live action or something else. Is there anything in development with that or any interest in it?

PD: Yes.

DF: Nothing you can talk about, though?

PD: No.

DF: From that one word answer, I had a feeling you couldn't.

PD: It's been a long time in coming. Ever since Jingle was first published, there's been nothing but very serious interest in it. I've gone back and forth with various people and production

RISEN, or The Twisted Tale of How My Horror Novel Got Published

by JAN STRNAD

It's the spring of 1996, life is good and I've had a Brilliant Idea.

I was working for Sony and CBS at the time, co-editing a cartoon series called **Project GeeKeR**. I loved the series and my collaborators and the money I was making, but some part of my soul yearned to explore new creative territory. So here was my Brilliant Idea: I was going to become an instant novelist.

A certain screenplay I'd written on spec was cluttering up my office, having failed to illuminate Hollywood with its radiance, and I figured it would be an easy enough task to novelize it. Take maybe a month. Then I'd get the novel published, my theatrical agent would send out the screenplay with the novel, Hollywood would be overwhelmed and I'd make a million bucks.

Things went "wrong" right from the start. I put "wrong" in quotes because the first thing to go wrong actually went very, very right: I fell in love.

I'd been writing in the visual media for ages. Comic books. Cartoons. Television. Film. All with degrees of success ranging from "lots" to "very little."

When I started writing my novel, a supernatural thriller that would eventually be called **Risen**, I fell in love again with the written word.

In my youth I'd harbored dreams of being a short story writer like those who filled the pages of the science fiction magazines and paperback anthologies. I studied English Literature in college and took creative writing courses from authors Jack Matthews and Richard Yates.

I started selling scripts to the comics magazines **Creepy** and **Eerie**. I branched out into underground comix, did some mainstream comic book work, wrote for small independent comic book publishers, got into the cartoon business, sweated out spec screenplays, sold a couple of options and generally played the Hollywood game. The beauty of the well-turned phrase seeped out of my work, replaced by a conversational non-style that appealed to people who read because they had to, not because they wanted to.

Twenty years after setting off down that road, I was back where I started, typing words to be read directly by an audience. No intermediaries. I was writing without a net, and I loved it.

The novelization that was going to take a month became a real novel, screenplay be damned, no matter how long it took. I woke up every morning at 6:00 a.m., thanks to a furry, sixty-pound alarm clock named "Toby," shoved the dog out the door

and took a seat at the keyboard to work on **Risen** for a couple of hours before diving back into the cartoon world of **GeeKeR**. Nine months later I had a novel.

Next came the easy part. All I had to do was place it with a publisher. But first, I needed to find a literary agent, which would be a piece of cake. I knew writers with agents to whom they would recommend me, my manuscript would be reviewed and hailed as a work of genius, and I'd be signed immediately.

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WRITE NOW! #5

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