

**INSIDE: CREATE A COMIC FROM START TO FINISH!**



**\$5<sup>95</sup>**

In the USA

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

**WRITE**

**Now!**

**MAGAZINE**

**#8**

August  
2004

**SEE A  
BOLD NEW  
CHARACTER  
CREATED BEFORE  
YOUR EYES!**

Here're some ideas for her visuals:  
I had been thinking of various devices and w  
glar might use, then I figured I'd stray from  
world, so we could get a little wild and crazy.  
Our Thief, Heather Bransome is an interna  
glar. She has always planned and executed he  
purglar. She has always thinks. On one job, she fin  
each "nano-suit." This suit w  
any doohickies but  
among its abilities are:  
vel mode, of course.  
lage mode

**PLUS:**

**STUART  
MOORE**

**DON  
McGREGOR**

**INDY  
CREATORS'  
SECRETS!**

**CROSSOVER WITH**

**DRAW!**

**THE MAGAZINE ABOUT WRITING FOR COMICS, ANIMATION, AND SCI-FI**

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

Issue #8

August 2004

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# READ Now!

Message from **Danny Fingeroth**, Editor-in-Chief

**W**ell, here's something you don't see every day. It's the **Write Now!/Draw!** Crossover.

Last year, **Draw!** Editor-in-Chief **Mike Manley** and yours truly decided to do a crossover between our magazines. Seemed like a natural. **Write Now!** is about writing, **Draw!**'s about art! Put 'em together (with lettering, coloring, and sundry other ingredients) and you've got comics!

Of course, we then had to figure out what exactly such a crossover would be. What we came up with was the idea that we would show *step-by-step* how a new character is created, and then how her origin story came to be. And that's what we did. You hold in your hands the first half of that crossover, with the second half appearing in **Draw!** #9, on sale soon.

Essentially, Mike and I decided to show you as much as we could of—to in effect map out—the creative process. Although much of anybody's process goes on inside their heads while doing things that seem totally unrelated, we tried to keep records of memos, conversations, and e-mails, and put them together to show you how we came up with **Thief of Time**. To be honest, since so much of creative work is unruly and chaotic, just ordering the process is in itself creating a simulation of the creative process. Nonetheless, I think there's much of value that we came up with to show you here. Whether or not you like our new character (and I have a feeling you're going to go nuts for her), there's much to chew on as you follow us along the creative trail.

Now, Mike and I have co-created characters before. Together, we did 25 issues and an annual of **Darkhawk** for Marvel in the 1990s. While **Tom DeFalco** came up with the initial concept for that character, I fleshed him and his universe out substantially, and Mike designed the whole shebang. Significantly as far as this crossover, Mike and I completely co-created any new villains and many of the supporting cast members of the **Darkhawk** series that appeared in those issues. So Savage Steel, Lodestone, Evilhawk, and a bunch of others were co-created by us (no doubt with input from then-editorial staffers **Howard Mackie**, **Nel Yomtov**, **Greg Wright**, **John Lewandowski** and **Richard Ashford**).

**Thief of Time**, though, is the first time we've completely created a title character together, and the first time we've worked "without a net," that is, without editorial input. Everything you see, love it or hate it, comes from me and Mike.

Aside from the roadmap of creation that we're doing, I'm initiating a formal "**Write Now Comics School**" in this issue. I figure it's a perfect companion to the process of seeing a new character created. There are five **mini-lessons** geared to give you the basics about story structure, character development and other essentials of writing. I'm not trying to make you believe I made all this up. While I've come up with what I hope

are unique insights and ways of phrasing things, the verities of storytelling have been the same for thousands of years. And I would be remiss in not acknowledging the insights about writing that I've gained over the years from folks including **Dennis O'Neil**, **Jim Shooter**, **Tom DeFalco**, **Louise Simonson**, and the late **Hank Levy**.

In any case, in this issue of **Write Now!**, I focus, naturally, on the writing aspects, while of necessity, showing a lot of the art-related aspects of story and character creation. Mike takes the baton and brings us home with more on the art, as well as coloring, lettering and other nifty features. And the big bonus in **Draw!** #9 is the pull-out comic insert of **Thief of Time** #1. (Feel free to show it to Hollywood producers with excess cash.)

But there's still more in this issue of **Write Now!** There's an incredible interview with **Stuart Moore** (who **Steven Grant** recently called "one of the best comics writers in America"), a 110 mph interview with the legendary **Don McGregor**, and an engrossing article by rising star **William Harms**, who talks about the realities of forging your way in comics with an independent vision.

Aside from the crossover, which is really all **Nuts & Bolts**, we have some awesome **Nuts & Bolts** from Stuart's and William's oeuvres. From pitch to finished pages, you'll see how these skillful gentlemen (and their artistic partners) tell their compelling stories.

Unfortunately, **Dennis O'Neil**'s comics class notes got squeezed out this issue, but will be back next. That's a promise.

Also next issue, we'll be focusing on comics legend **Neal Adams**! But the emphasis will be on Adams' *writing*! In an exclusive interview, Neal talks about his approach to comics writing! Plus, we'll have an interview with super-hot writer **Geoff Johns**! Then, switching gears, the ever-surprising **Peter Bagge** sits for an interview! And **Wolff & Byrd's Batton Lash** talks about his unorthodox approach to creating comics. And, of course, there'll be a plethora of **Nuts & Bolts** by Adams and others as **Write Now!** keeps showing you how it's done!

"Where's the hype?" you're no doubt wondering. Wonder no more. Here it is:

#### SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT:

If you like the crossover, then you won't want to miss the DVD version that will show you all the things that Mike and I talk about in the magazines—and then some! The mags and





THE

# WRITE NOW! DRAW!

## CROSSOVER Part One

From: MIKE MANLEY  
To: DANNY FINGEROTH  
Subject: WRITE NOW/DRAW CROSSOVER

Danny:

Why not combine the two ideas? In other words, a character can be a master thief who pulls heists.

How about we call her "Thief of Time"?

I'll work up some sketches and we can talk about them.

Mike

# Making Comics

## What This Crossover is All About

**By Danny Fingerroth**  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Write Now! Magazine*

"MOST OF MY 'WORK' TIME IS SPENT DAYDREAMING. I SPEND VERY LITTLE TIME AT THE KEYBOARD... DAYDREAMING IS THE JOB. MY WIFE'LL TELL YOU--I DO IT 24/7."  
--CHUCK DIXON

**A**

Dixon implies, the creative process is mysterious (though not as mysterious as some would have you believe), constant, and often unseen.

So, although the stated purpose of this issue of *Write Now!* and it's continuation in *Draw* #9 is to show you the creative process that goes into inventing a new character and her universe, as well as into telling the first story ever told featuring her, there's a lot you won't be seeing. As a matter of fact, you'll have to draw on a lot of your own creativity to fill in the gaps.

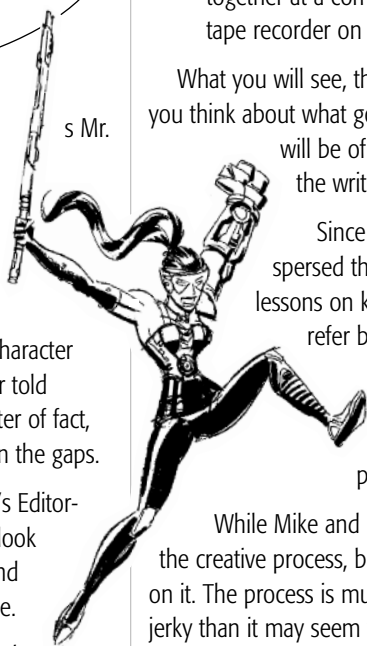
Nonetheless, I believe that what **Mike Manley** (*Draw*'s Editor-in-Chief) and I are giving you may be more of an inside look inside the creative process involved in comics universe and character development than anyone has ever done before.

Knowing this would be recorded for posterity, Mike and I saved notes, memos, and sketches. We recorded conversations. We saved versions of plots and scripts and character sketches. There's a lot of stuff here, stuff you should be able to learn a lot from, even if what you learn is "I'd never do it *that* way."

But bear in mind the things you won't be seeing, things such as:

- The time banging our heads against a wall when no ideas came.
- Time at the keyboard or drawing board where what's arrived at are dead ends. (Or what seem like dead ends. Those seemingly false starts and wrong turns often lead to ideas that do work, whether in the current project or in something that won't be created for another five years.)
- What Chuck Dixon refers to as "daydreaming"—the disjointed, impressionistic process of idea formation that comes while waiting on line at the supermarket or plunging a stuffed drain—or when you're nodding to your spouse as if you're actually listening to what s/he's saying.

s Mr.



- Conversations Mike and I didn't record—say, when sitting together at a comics convention, or when we didn't have the tape recorder on when we were on the phone.

What you will see, though, is pretty cool. Hopefully, it will make you think about what goes into creating characters and stories and will be of use in your own writing, and in appreciating the writing of others.

Since this magazine focuses on writing, I've interspersed the Thief development pieces with one-page lessons on key elements of writing. You might want to refer back and forth between the Thief creative steps and the points made in the lessons.

See if you can identify the parts of the Thief material that correspond to the points made in the lessons.

While Mike and I have tried to make a coherent narrative of the creative process, bear in mind that we *have* imposed structure on it. The process is much more disjointed, stop-and-start, herky-jerky than it may seem when it's organized, after the fact, on paper. Don't feel badly if your own process seems less structured. Most people's are—including mine and Mike's. The idea is to take what you've come up with in the throes of creative inspiration and impose logic and order on it—without draining out the juice that made the idea exciting to you in the first place.

Once again, here at *Write Now!* (and at *Draw!*, too), we're venturing into uncharted waters to show you ways of looking at the creative process maybe just a little different than ways you've looked at it before. I've no doubt that, as always, the readers of both magazines will let us know how they feel about the results of our efforts. And as always, I can't wait to hear your thoughts.

Creatively yours,

*DANNY*

Danny Fingerroth

# Thief of Time: Beginnings

## Memos Between Fingerroth & Manley

**H**

ere's a selection of the correspondence between Mike and Danny that got the ball rolling on *Thief of Time*. The e-mails pretty much tell their own story.

### How It All Started

10/1/02

Mike:

Not sure how... but there's got to be a way to do a "crossover" between *Draw!* and *Write Now!*, don't ya think? Any interest?

—Danny

11/22/02

Mike:

As I mentioned in an e-mail last month: Any interest in doing a *Draw-Write Now* "crossover"? What would that mean? Maybe we could print a script in *WN* and then have it drawn in *Draw*? Or an interview with a writer/artist or writer-artist team that starts in one mag and ends in the other. Or something actually clever!

—Danny

### The Ground Rules

6/3/03

Mike:

Here's my understanding of our conversation about the *Write Now/Draw* crossover that we had today:

We do a 6- or 7-page story, with cover a total of 8 pages.

- Premise, character and setting descriptions, character sketches and setting sketches in *Write Now!*
- Then we have a taped conversation about the characters and story, which we transcribe and put part in *Write Now*, part in *Draw*.

- We have a short plot outline in *WN*.
- Also in *WN*, we have some of the Plot & Script, and maybe some thumbnails of the story.
- In *Draw*, we'd show some of the plot and script. (Maybe we do the first few pages in "Marvel style," the last few as "full script.")
- In *WN* we'd have some of the lettered, uninked pages and some inked pages.
- In *Draw*, we'd have more of the lettered, uninked pages, and the rest of the inked pages.
- And then... the *Draw* color section could be the complete story, with a cover!

And we can then, hopefully, take whatever character(s) we come up with—which we'd share copyright on—and pitch them to publishers, using the 8 page insert as our sample. (So we should have a bunch more printed than we need for the insert in *Draw*.)

Let me know what you think. Once we get a basic format we're happy with, we can present it to John and see what he thinks.



From an earlier Danny Fingerroth/Mike Manley collaboration: *Darkhawk*! This confrontation from *Darkhawk* #5, featuring the character Portal, has words by Fingerroth, pencils by Manley, and inks by Ricardo Villagran. [©2004 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

## Brainstorming

6/10/03

Mike:

Here are a couple of ideas I've been toying with for a while. Maybe one could be the crossover/pitch comic we do for *Write Now & Draw*:

One's about a master cat burglar who, when caught by the feds, becomes an agent on their behalf. It's called "License to Steal." I'd be open to the lead being female, too, or having a female partner. It would be a sort of Modesty Blaise thing, but we'd give him/her/them some cool super-gizmos.

Also was thinking of something about a time-travelling private eye, whose cases would take him back and forth in time. Working title: "Time Detective."

Either one sound interesting?

—Danny

1/14/04

Danny:

Why not combine them! What would every jewel thief really love to be able to do? Time travel and steal the great

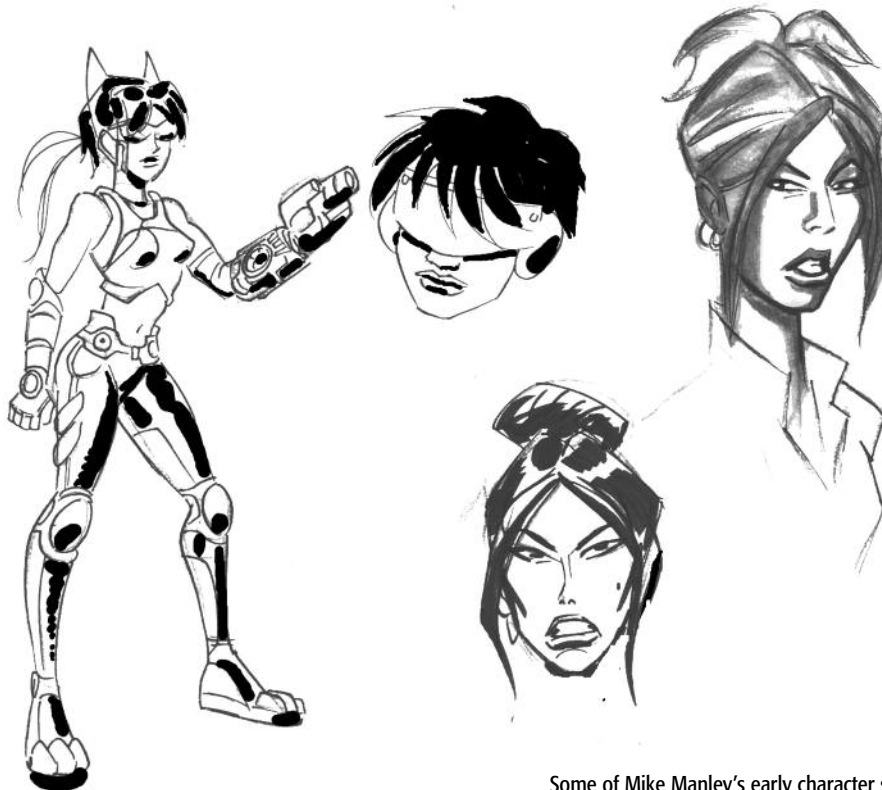
treasures of history. To be able to raid King Tut's tomb, the treasures of the rich and great kings of history, the zillions of great treasures lost to the past.

(I think it should be a gal character. She's gonna be more popular with the fans.)

Now to put some spin on the character interesting, maybe she isn't all bad. Maybe she helps solve crimes, but feels her compensation is heisting the treasures. Sorta' Indian Jen/crossed with Catwoman.

Either idea on its own has been really played out. But maybe we need to complicate the time travel. Make it conditional. The time-jump device might only be used at certain times of day—it could be her father's device. Maybe he is kidnapped and she must steal to keep him alive. Maybe she was a spoiled daughter who must learn to put others first. Could she have a kid sister? You get mobsters, cops, all chasing her.

Involve the cops, or government, who are also interested in the device for obvious reasons. The "man servant"—or Race Bannon, Willie Garvin character—could help her, but if he's the cop who falls in love with her, who maybe originally wanted to capture her, we get some romance too. Make it a cat-and-mouse through time.



Some of Mike Manley's early character sketches for the Thief of Time.  
[©2004 Danny Fingerroth & Mike Manley]

# Thief of Time: Plot

**W**hat follows is the “final” plot that Danny sent to Mike to draw. There were several versions leading up to this, as Mike and Danny discussed the story, leading to this plot, which Mike would do the art from. It was understood by both creators that Mike would be free to modify the story as he drew it.

The story is done “Marvel style” (see Scripting Styles lesson elsewhere in the crossover), which means that the artist works from plot instead of from a script that is broken down into panels with dialogue pre-written.

## “A GLITCH IN TIME”

### PAGE ONE:

- FULL PAGE SPLASH. Ancient Japan. (Is there a famous building associated with Japanese history? Something out of Shogun or something like that? Something we can do the same trick with—where we’re not sure at first if she’s in the past or present?)
- If we’re using a mask, THAT should be the focus of the splash: A big, impressive mask being reached for by a gloved hand.
- (MIKE: What era is your mask ref from? Where would such a mask be? A temple? A palace?)

### PAGE TWO:

- **Heather Branscome**, dressed in her adventure duds, reaches for a beautiful (JADE?) **Japanese mask** on a pedestal. From the décor, it’s unclear if she’s in the past or in present. HB is clearly a 2004 woman. She makes some wisecrack about the internet or Tivo to make that point. Heather smiles expectantly. She’s been after this thing for, oh, it seems like centuries.
- Note to Mike re her wisecracks: One of the reasons Spider-Man wisecracks is to relieve the tension of death-defying moments. Same with her. I’m modeling her on Jennifer Garner in *Alias*. Not a comedian, but never without a wry quip, either.
- As she’s about to grasp the mask, she is ordered to stop—
- —and whirls to find herself surrounded by a dozen ancient Japanese soldiers. (Mike: Samurai? Ninjas? My Japanese history sucks.) She laughs at them—she’s not here to fight, she’s here to steal!—and reaches for a dial on her suit to make a quick getaway.



An early pencil rough of the first page of the *Thief of Time* story. Notice how it differs from the plot and from what the actual page (seen elsewhere in the crossover) turned out to be.  
[©2004 Danny Fingerroth & Mike Manley]

- But the guards attack, and she is dodging arrows and throwing stars, one of which hits the control and the time-dial is knocked off its setting.
- She grabs the mask and, clutching it to her bosom, she turns the switch on her costume anyway, and is gone in a flash (or into the time whirlpool you established on the cover). She has no idea when she’s going, but it’s got to be better than this!

### PAGE THREE:

- In another flash (or time-whirlpool effect), she’s still in the temple or palace, but suddenly **bullets** whiz by her. She’s in the middle of a pitched WWII battle.
- (Or she could end up chased by dinosaurs in a prehistoric setting.) (MIKE: I like both of these. What do you prefer drawing?) (Both are okay with me if you can fit them in.)
- As Japanese soldiers (or dinosaurs) advance on her, she sets the dial again, and disappears—still holding the mask—as a grenade



# Thief of Time: Pencil Roughs

**H**

ere are Mike's early-stage pencil layouts for "A Glitch in Time." Each story page is accompanied by comments about it from Mike and Danny.

**DANNY:** Strong opening. This page one art is different from the plot description and, after Mike and I discussed the first version of the layouts for the page (seen on page 15), it morphed into this layout. Since Mike is also inking the story, all he needed to draw, in this stage, was something I could make out clearly enough to write dialogue from.

**MIKE:** Ah, back in the saddle. A basic opening shot, establishing place and time, and a nice shot establishing our heroine and what she's after.



**DANNY:** A lot of story to get in here. The last panel especially ended up looking different. I think we get the feel of the spirit of Heather Branscome, the Thief of Time, here.

**MIKE:** This page gave me fits and in a way I'm still not happy with it. I think I was still really feeling my way here and trying to get to into the story. Sometimes it takes a while to get to know the characters. I feel it took five issues of *Darkhawk* to get to know the character back in the day.



# Thief of Time: Script and Balloon Placement

**B**ecause “Glitch in Time” is a plot-first job, Danny had to write the dialogue, captions and sound effects after the pencils were done. With this method, it’s also the writer’s responsibility to indicate for the letterer (in this case, Mike) where the copy will go.

Balloon placement is an art in itself, since the word units become design elements that can affect how a reader responds to a page. The placement directs a reader’s eyes to experience the story elements of a page in a certain order and rhythm.

Balloon placement is indicated on a photocopy, usually reduced to print size, of the art. Each unit of the script is numbered, and that number indicates where the script unit with the matching number is to be lettered.

Thief of Time 7-pager/script/Fingerroth/6-12-04/page 1

**THIEF OF TIME**  
**PREMIERE STORY**  
**“A GLITCH IN TIME”**  
**SCRIPT FOR 7 PAGES**  
**DANNY FINGEROTH**  
**6-12-04**

1 LOGO:

**THIEF OF TIME**

Created by **Danny Fingerroth** and **Mike Manley**

2 TITLE:

**A GLITCH IN TIME**

3 CREDITS:

**DANNY FINGEROTH**  
writer

**MIKE MANLEY**  
artist/letterer/colorist

4 HEATHER-CAP (from here on HC):

**History’s** a funny thing.

5 HC:

We read about it in books and figure it’s cold, hard **fact**. But that’s not always true.

6 HC:

Case in point: nobody knows for sure where **Ninja** come from.

7 HC:

(small letters) Except maybe from mommy and daddy **Ninja**.

8 HC:

Some say they got their start here in **Ueno**. Could be.

9 HC:

If I had the time, maybe I’d ask around. After all, how often does a gal get to the **11<sup>th</sup> century**?

10 HC:

But I’m not sightseeing. I’ve come to Ueno-jo castle to **steal**.

11 HEATHER:

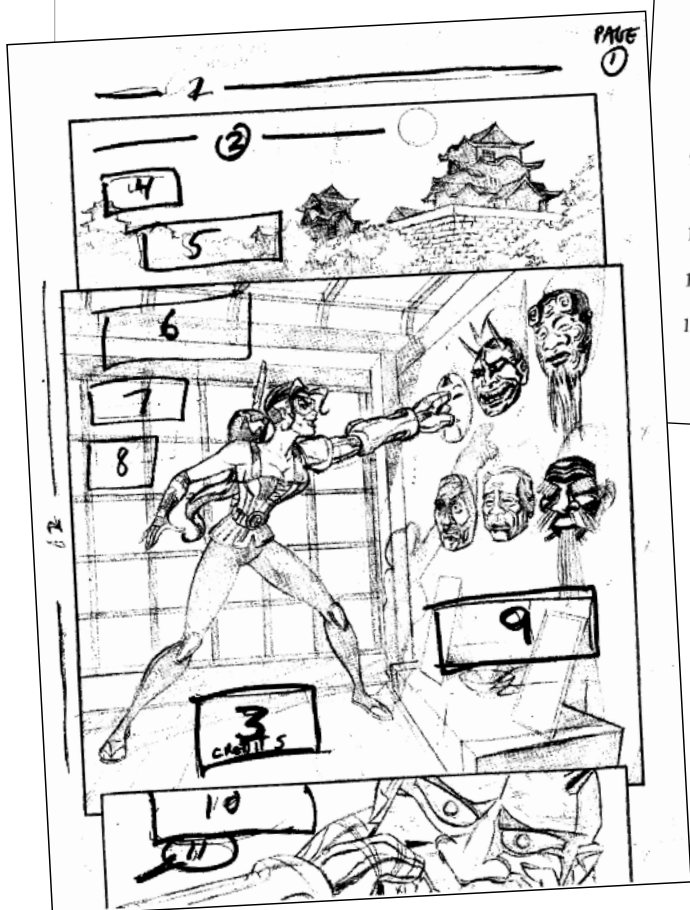
Come to momma, cutie.

12 Line along side:

*Thief of Time* and all related characters copyright © 2004 Danny Fingerroth and Mike Manley

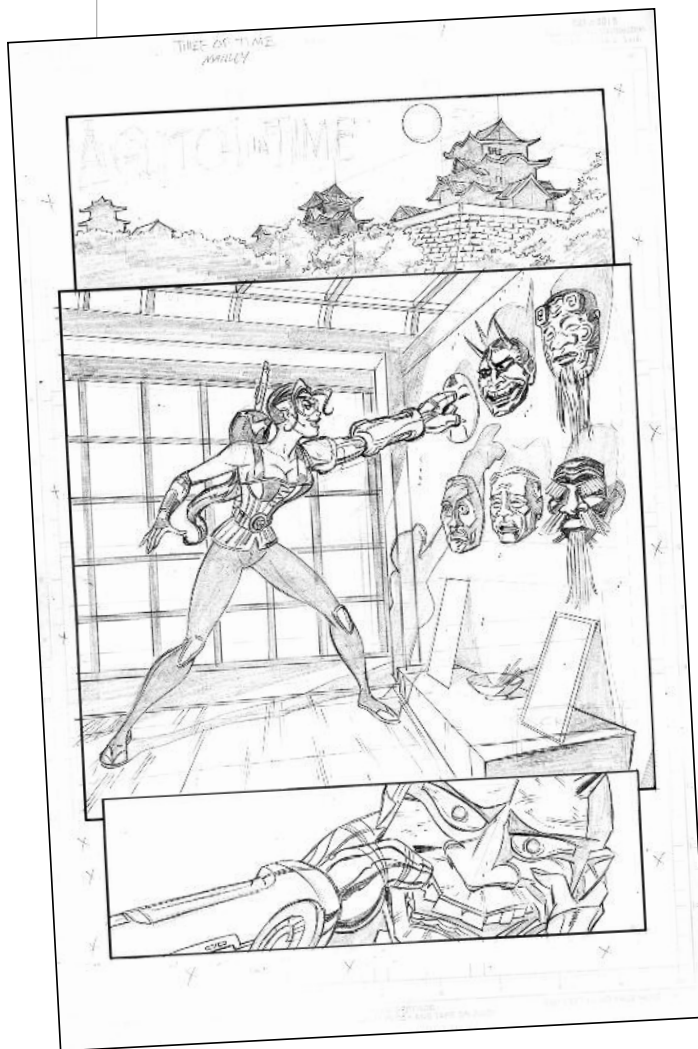
Compare this version of the pencils to the one on page 18. Mike has refined the pencil art to the point where it’s now what is called “full” or “tight” pencils.

You can see the lettering for pages 2 and 3 of “A Glitch in Time” on the pages that follow this one. To see how the lettering for the first page of the story looks, go to page 28.



# Thief of Time: Inked and Lettered Pages

Here's the finished first page of "Glitch," with Mike's inks and letters (and a black-and-white simulation of his coloring) making the whole thing come together. We have a first page that introduces our hero and our series premise, kicks off our plot and sets the tone of the whole story. It's not a novel, it's not a movie. It's comics, with the magic interaction of words and pictures unique to the medium.



Even in black-and-white, you can get an idea of how the tones of color set the mood of the scene, yet make our main character clearly visible to the reader. Ideally, the creators' skills serve the telling of the story, the creation of a credible world the reader visits for the time he or she reads the story—a world that continues to exist in the imagination long after reading the story.



# Talking Thief of Time

Danny and Mike discuss the creative process

**W**hat follows is more or less a transcript of a conversation we had on May 6th, 2004. What we tried to do was simulate a conversation about how we came up with our "Thief of Time" character. We discuss what issues we were dealing with as we tried to make something original yet not completely unfamiliar, mixing genres to come up with new takes on well-traveled archetypes. Combined with the notes and e-mails printed elsewhere in this issue and in **Draw** #9, we hope to map the creative process as well as can be done without attaching electrodes to our brains. (Gotta save something for the sequel, don't we?)

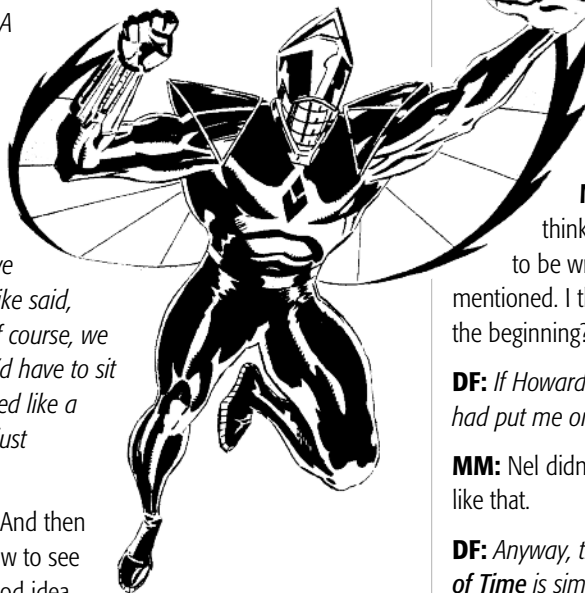
We had many such conversations, mostly on the phone, some in person at conventions we both attended, but that we didn't record. We've tried to incorporate "highlights" of those conversations here. (The transcript has been edited by us for meaning and clarity.) You might find it interesting to compare what we discussed here and how the final story came out.

—Danny Fingerroth & Mike Manley

**[SPOILER WARNING:** Details of *Thief of Time* are, of course, discussed in the course of this conversation.]

**DANNY FINGERROTH:** A little background for the folks reading this. We each have a magazine that we do for *TwoMorrows*. I think it was me who said, "Mike, why don't we do a crossover?" And Mike said, "That's a good idea." Of course, we never really thought we'd have to sit down and do it. It seemed like a great idea when it was just theory. [laughs]

**MIKE MANLEY:** Right. And then we talked to John Morrow to see if he thought it was a good idea, to see if it was feasible, because we'd have to do a lot of coordination to make sure it can come out the same month, all that kind of stuff.



Conducted May 6, 2004

Transcribed by **Steven Tice**

Copy-edited by **Danny Fingerroth and Mike Manley**

**DF:** In time for the Comic-Con in San Diego. Now, I'm going to backtrack a little, because I thought it might be of interest to folks if we dug back in our archives and found some **Darkhawk** stuff.

Tom DeFalco had come up with the very basic premise for **Darkhawk**, a three-page document, which then you and I and, I guess, Howard Mackie and Nelson Yomtov had worked out. And Greg Wright. Were you working on it when Greg Wright was editing?

**MM:** No. Initially I became involved in **Darkhawk** when Howard, who was editing *Quasar*, which I was penciling, asked me if I wanted to work on the book. Initially, Keith Pollard, I think, had done some **Darkhawk** character designs, and they weren't really happy with the way that it looked.

**DF:** I think Paul Neary was involved for five minutes.

**MM:** Right. So Howard asked me, and I said okay. I think in the beginning I wasn't really sure who was going to be writing it, because I don't think initially you were mentioned. I think maybe Tom was thinking of writing it himself in the beginning?

**DF:** If Howard had it, then I was already the writer, because Greg had put me on it.

**MM:** Nel didn't get involved until issue six, seven, eight, something like that.

**DF:** Anyway, there are ways in which our process for creating *Thief of Time* is similar, and ways in which it is different, from what you

Two Fingerroth/Manley creations meet. **Darkhawk**, from promotional art for the series' 1990 debut, and the **Thief of Time**. Art by Mike Manley. [Darkhawk ©2004 Marvel Characters, Inc.; Thief of Time ©2004 Danny Fingerroth & Mike Manley]





Portrait of a writer. Danny Fingerroth, in the caricature of him which appeared in the Bullpen Bulletins "Pro File" in April 1990 Marvel comics, right around the time work on *Darkhawk* begun. Art by Steve Buccellato.

would do at a large comics company. What we don't have is an editor, which people reading these issues won't have, if they're coming up with a proposal for a series, either. Either you'll be writing and drawing it, or you'll be working with a buddy, and you'll sort of have to arm-wrestle the way Mike and I are doing as we create this character.

[Mike laughs] An editor would come in as a referee. The artist will want one thing, the writer will want the other thing, and the editor will go, "Here's my Solomonian decision." What we're trying to do here is more like what it would be like for

would have ever come up with or thought of doing, myself, on my own. I wasn't putting the elements into it that I wanted other than visually, maybe, and those elements are dependent upon the needs of the character.

**DF:** I think you had certain ideas of the character that were different than mine. I was leaning, because of my tastes, towards more of a "neo-Spider-Man" kind of a thing, with maybe a little bit more of an edge than Spider-Man had. And I think the various *Darkhawk* editors were in agreement. But I think you had a different idea of maybe making him more of an intergalactic



And a portrait of an artist at work. Mike Manley in a Bret Blevins sketch which appeared in 1996's *Action Planet* #3. [Art ©2004 Bret Blevins.]

you, the reader, trying to come up with a character to pitch to one of the major companies.

**MM:** I think that, today, things are a lot different. When I was working on *Darkhawk*, it was basically, you're the gunslinger. The town has a job for you—they want you to kill this deadline. "Are you interested or not?" And depending upon whether subject matter tickles your fancy or whatever, or the money's good enough, sometimes, you decide, "Okay, yeah, I'll do it." At that time, in 1990/1991 when *Darkhawk* started, there wasn't as much of the independent stuff as there is today. Now it's a lot more common, especially since Image, for people to say, "Well, I'm going to create my own idea and I'm going to go and do it." Because in the case of something like *Darkhawk*, I wasn't the first guy thought of, but I created the design and I helped shape the concept, because it wasn't my concept to begin with. It's not something that I



From *Darkhawk* #8, by Fingerroth & Manley. [©2004 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Punisher-type character or something.

**MM:** I was thinking of the fact that, since this character was created by intergalactic weapons manufacturers, the idea of making it basically *Shazam!* crossed with *Spider-Man* was, to me, just walking down the same old territory over again. That whole "at home with the mom and the brothers and they can't find out who he is," that to me had been played out so much that that element of the character never appealed to me.

**DF:** I thought of it as a chance for me to do my own *Spider-Man*, and for a kid—we still had significant numbers of children reading comics—to have his own teen super-character to identify with. It was an opportunity for me to create for readers of the '90s, kids and adults, a character that was of the '90s. "Oh, look! It's the very first issue, the

# The Science of Fiction (and the Art of it, too)

# The STUART MOORE

# Interview

Conducted via e-mail by **Danny Fingeroth** May 12, 2004  
Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Stuart Moore**

**S**tuart Moore has been a writer, a book editor, a kitchen worker, and an award-winning comics editor. At St. Martin's Press, Stuart edited a wide variety of science fiction and pop culture books, including *The Year's Best Science Fiction* series and the bestselling *Uncle John's Bathroom Reader* books. At DC Comics, Stuart was a founding editor of the acclaimed Vertigo imprint, where he initiated such comics series as *Preacher*, *The Invisibles*, and *Transmetropolitan*, and edited *Swamp Thing*, *Hellblazer*, *The Books of Magic*, and many others. He won the Will Eisner award for Best Editor 1996 and the Don Thompson Award for Favorite Editor 1999. From late 2000 through mid-2002 he edited the Marvel Knights comics line and many of Marvel's new MAX titles.

Currently Stuart freelances as a writer of comic books and essays, including *Lone* from Dark Horse, *Justice League Adventures* from DC, *Zendra* and *Para* from Penny-Farthing Press, the AiT/PlanetLar graphic novel *Giant Robot Warriors* (a political satire), stories for *Vampirella* and *Metal Hurlant*, and the just-concluded column *A Thousand Flowers: Comics, Pop Culture, and the World Outside* for Newsarama.com.

## DANNY FINGEROTH:

Have you always been a comics fan? How did you spend your free time as a kid? Were you writing even then?

**STUART MOORE:** I read a lot, and yes, comics were always a part of that. I got into them right when DC had its real renaissance in the early '70s, with the Kirby Fourth World stuff, the Julie Schwartz/Denny O'Neil *Superman*, *Green Lantern/Green Arrow*, the Neal Adams Batman stories... all that.

As a kid, I wrote stories myself, and "drew" (note the quotation marks) comic books. They were about eight pages long and featured characters like "Stretch Boy." You know the drill.

**DF:** Your father was a nuclear physicist. How did/does he feel about you going the science fiction route?

**SM:** My parents were always very supportive of whatever I wanted to do. It was my father's collection of *Analog* magazines that got me reading science fiction in the first place.

**DF:** Were you ever planning to go into the sciences as a career?

**SM:** Yes... I considered both biology and physics. But I was never good enough at them to find them fun, if that makes any sense. I still like to bang my head up against quantum physics every now and then.

**DF:** What was your college major?

**SM:** Politics. American politics, specifically. That's come in handy lately.

**DF:** What jobs outside comics have you had?

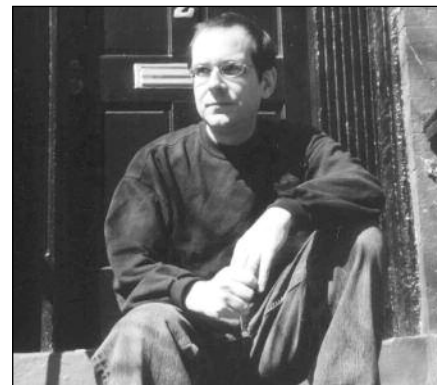
**SM:** Let's see. Kitchen worker at a retirement home; recreation counselor; nighttime curtain department manager of the Lawrence, N.J. Woolworth's; and book editor. And I did under-the-table work at a bookstore when I was in high school; they paid me mostly in science-fiction paperbacks.

**DF:** Were you active in fandom?

**SM:** Not organized fandom, no. I was fascinated with it, particularly through sf fanzines like *Science Fiction Review*, and I went to a few conventions... but I never really got involved. There are no filksinging skeletons in my closet.

**DF:** What are your favorite (past and present) films, books, TV shows? Who are your favorite writers, artists, and directors?

**SM:** In prose, I'm most attracted to writers who work in genre but transcend those genres. In science fiction: Philip K. Dick, Robert Anton Wilson,



Preparing for the final battle in *Lone* #6, written by Stuart Moore with art by Jerome Opeña. [©2004 Dark Horse Comics, Inc.]

Cordwainer Smith, R.A. Lafferty, more recently William Gibson and Ian McLeod. In crime fiction: Charles Willeford, Joe R. Lansdale, David Goodis. I also like a variety of quirky writers, including Charles Bukowski, Sparkle Hayter, Clyde Edgerton, Rick Moody... people with a distinct voice, who create a whole world around their characters, whether that's a bar full of broken souls, a galactic empire 30,000 years in the future, or a small town in North Carolina.

In film, there are quirky writers/directors like Alex Cox, Richard Linklater, Charlie Kaufman—I'll seek out anything they do, just because I know that even if it's a mess, it's going to be a unique experience. I also greatly admire directors like John Sayles and Steven Soderbergh who do great work in very different genres at different times; they're career inspirations to me.

I tend not to see genre movies unless I hear they're really good, or unless I'm invited to a screening. I'm years behind on the recent super-hero adaptations.

**DF:** How did you get your first break as a comics writer? As an editor?

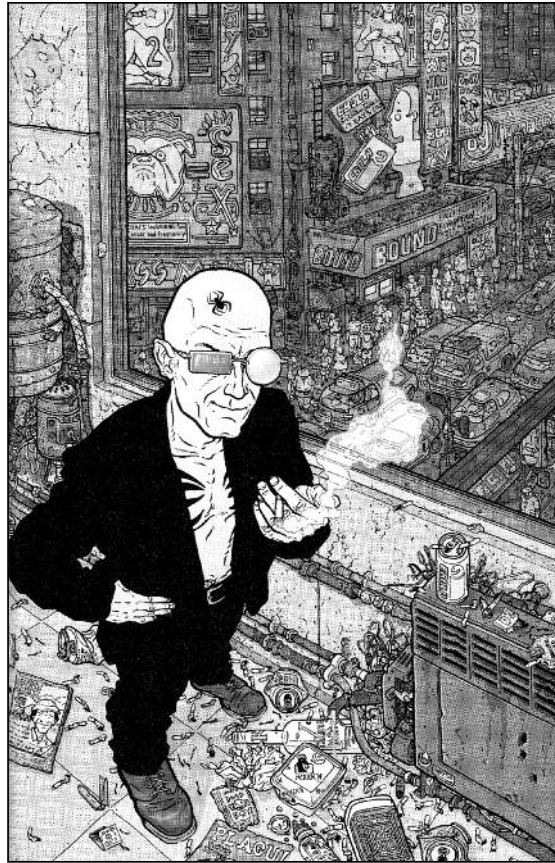
*Which came first? Can you give a brief description of your career path? Were you always writing even when you had staff jobs?*

**SM:** After I got out of college, I had the vague idea of getting into publishing... my school (Princeton) posted job listings from book publishers, so I interviewed at St. Martin's Press. I haven't used my degree much as an adult, but it did help me get that job—St. Martin's was somewhat partial to Ivy League grads. The company was expanding at the time, and I was kind of an expert in various fields that weren't being covered very well there—science fiction, pop culture, TV, comics; youth culture, basically—so I became a full editor at a pretty young age. DC Comics wanted to bring in an editor from outside comics to expand the department that, a few years later, became Vertigo, so they advertised in *Publishers Weekly*, and I answered it. It was a very exciting time at DC—the entire field was expanding—and the job was a good fit.

I didn't do any comics writing while I was on staff at DC. They discouraged it pretty strongly, and I could see the logic: There's a tremendous potential for conflicts of interest in those situations. I also believe in concentrating on something and doing it well, and editorial work really was my focus during those years. I did write a crime novel, which made the rounds to a few book houses but was never published. At the time I wasn't confident enough to pursue that very hard.

**DF:** In the '90s, you edited DC's *Helix* line. What was it? Why were you entrusted to run a whole line for DC? Why didn't *Helix* last? What were its successes and failures? What is its legacy?

**SM:** DC had been trying to get a science fiction line going for some time, and I made a pitch... I'd been involved with the sf



Geoff Darrow's cover art for the first issue of the Stuart Moore edited *Transmetropolitan*, without logo or cover text.  
[©2004 Warren Ellis & Darick Robertson.]

world when I was in book publishing, and I had some ideas. I made a thousand mistakes with the line, but the upshot was that (1) the market took its big, sharp decline right before we launched and (2) some of the early books just didn't come together creatively. *Helix*'s best legacy was probably Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson's

*Transmetropolitan*, which switched over to Vertigo and ran for five years.

**DF:** Who were some of the people who did work for *Helix*?

**SM:** I brought in a few prose sf/fantasy writers, like Lucius Shepard and Michael Moorcock. Howard Chaykin, Tim Truman, Garth Ennis, Dave Gibbons, and some other top-notch people were involved, too. It was a valiant try and we published some good work.

**DF:** You had what to some people was a dream job, *Marvel Knights* editor. How did that come about? Why did you leave it? Were you writing during that time?

**SM:** This is a big question. Let's see...

I had left DC and was pursuing a variety of side projects when the big changeover in administration

happened at Marvel. I knew Joe Quesada very slightly, and I knew they were talking to my friend Axel Alonso about coming over to Marvel. Joe was becoming editor-in-chief, so he needed someone to replace himself as editor at Marvel Knights. Several creative people recommended me. Axel and I compared notes... it was a weird time.

Once we got there, things happened dizzyingly fast. Joe and Nanci Quesada, who actually ran Marvel Knights, were always very generous and great to work with. Bill Jemas... god knows he's a f\*cking character, but it was very exciting to work with somebody like that who so seriously wanted to make long-needed changes.

I was at Marvel Knights for about a year and nine months. In that time, I edited a huge number of books, worked with a lot of old friends and made great new ones, and helped set the tone for what the company is now. As for why I left, that plays into your next question...

**DF:** If Marvel policy had allowed you to edit and to write on the side, would you have?

**SM:** Here's a strange thing—I never worked for Marvel per se. I was employed by Marvel Knights, a separate company that shared office space with Marvel and had a packaging agreement with them. That's one reason the job was so great—I wasn't bound by any conflict of interest rules.

So I actually was writing for Penny-Farthing while I worked with Marvel. This seemed like a very natural situation for me; remember, I started in book publishing, where it's generally considered less of a conflict of interest, not more, to write for

[STUART MOORE continues on page 45.]

# The DON MCGREGOR Interview

Conducted by **Jim Salicrup** in June 2003 / Transcribed by **Steven Tice**  
 Edited by **Danny Fingeroth**

**D**on McGregor has written comics, prose, screenplays and teleplays. As part of the legendary generation of Marvel Comics writers of the 1970s, his contemporaries are folks like Steve Gerber, Steve Englehart and Marshall Rodgers. Among Don's comics writing is **Black Panther**, **Sabre**, and **Detectives, Inc.** Known as a distinctive stylist, Don is a man of many passions, and it shows in his acclaimed work.

In this interview, Jim Salicrup—who was Don's editor at Marvel and at Topps Comics—probes the McGregor mind and evokes reflections and lessons from Don that are a mini-course in comics all by themselves. So hold on to your seats—the interview starts at 100 mph and only gets wilder from there. Enjoy!

—DF

**JIM SALICRUP:** Okay, Don. Way back when, when you were writing **Zorro**, the comic book, for me at Topps, it was a great experience for me.

**DON MCGREGOR:** Me, too! It was the best experience I've ever had at a major company. I felt welcomed there, wanted there,

like there was somebody who would listen to what I felt about the projects, and support it and books. And I've said this many times to people, oftentimes books need an advocate. And you were always there, and I thank you for that.

**JS:** You're too kind. You're welcome. What I wanted to talk about was, if you could, from a writing point of view, describe the difference between writing **Zorro** as a comic book and then as

a comic strip?

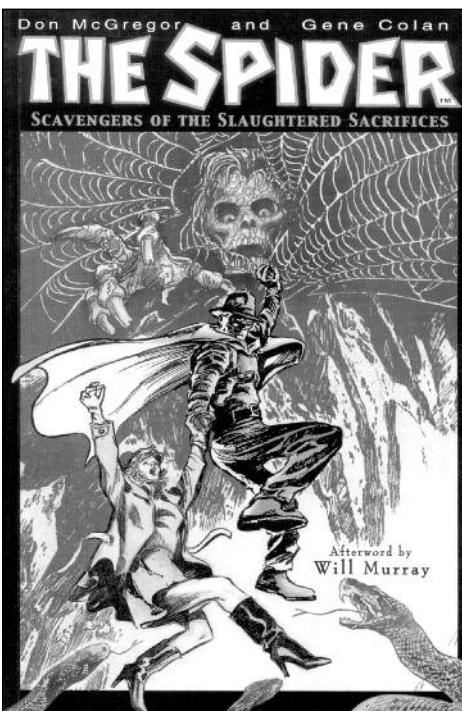
**DM:** Y'know, every project has different challenges that you have to think about as a writer before beginning. Let's step back for a moment to a couple of other books. When I was first doing continued series at Marvel, the **Black Panther** and **Killraven**, those were bimonthly books. I think we had 13-to-15 pages in the beginning, every two months, to tell a story and introduce characters. Very quickly, I was aware that if I didn't put a major character into an issue, that would mean a four-month time span that the readers would never see that character. If I left them out of two books, that was half a year, which is a long time to ask an audience to have an emotional commitment to those characters. So I was very conscious of trying to make sure that each character had a scene that was theirs in each issue.

When you go to something like **Zorro**, which was a monthly, you realize, okay, if I don't have this character in that issue, or even two issues, one month, two months, that's probably an acceptable span of time for the readers to come back to the characters and still have a connection with them. I kind of think of the way that J. Michael Straczynski did with **Babylon 5**. It was an amazing piece of work. And later, Joss Whedon and his writers with **Buffy, the Vampire Slayer**, I think they really came into the world of comics and created a sort of continuity and characters.

So I'm well aware of frequency when I'm going into a project. When the **Zorro** newspaper strip came up, it was a totally different challenge from doing the **Zorro** monthly book. Obviously, the characters, the spirit and tone of the strip would be consistent with the comic, but with the approach to the writing, there were lots of other things that had to be considered. In a newspaper strip only some people see the Sundays, while the majority of people get the dailies, especially the Monday through Friday papers, which they read on the way to work or coming back from work. Saturday's the least-read of the newspaper strips. Yet I wanted the strips, if they were ever collected into one volume, that they would flow. There's never a sense that we were repeating information, and yet I wanted to make sure that each audience, if they just saw it during the week, they could track the story, if they just saw the Sundays, they could track the story, and also that I could play with the



Don McGregor confers with Gene Colan over some art pages in this photo taken in the early 1980s.



Gene Colan's cover to Vanguard's all-new **Spider** graphic novel by McGregor & Colan. [The Spider is a trademark of and is copyright 2004 Argosy Communications Inc. All Rights Reserved.]





Touching on Zorro's origin from Topps Comics' **Zorro #2**. Written by Don McGregor with art by Mike Mayhew and Andy Mushynsky. [©2004 Zorro Productions, Inc.]

visual construction of the strip. There's a lot more you can do in terms of layouts with the Sunday strip than you can with a daily strip.

Yet at the same time, I wanted to make sure right from the get-go that I wasn't locked into any one format. In other words, it wasn't just a three-panel strip every day, and that's what would come to be expected, that every day would be a three-panel strip. So every day I was conscious of what would make that strip work as an individual strip and yet flow into the next one, and yet not lock into a concrete format that "this is what it's got to be, and this is what it's got to be every day." John Romita actually asked me at one point: "Don, how are you getting away with this?" And it was because I never told anybody ahead of time what I was going to do, and started it right in the beginning.

**JS:** You did a great job of it. You worked with Tom Yeates on one graphic novel, the *Zorro/Dracula* story at

*Topps with us, and you started the strip off with him. What was that like?*

**DM:** See, this is the fortunate part of working in comics, you can work with great people. And I've been very fortunate over the years to work with very talented artists. You know, you're thrown together in the forge of creating this thing, and I think it creates a bond, if you're lucky, between the artist and the writer. So oftentimes they take what you've written and bring it to life. And sometimes they go beyond what you were hoping for. Tom... just his finished work looks so great, and he's very conscientious about telling the story. Not too far into the strip, Tom realized he was going to have trouble making the deadlines on it and brought in Tod Smith to help him. Tod is more of a cartoonist than an illustrator, whereas Tom is very illustrative in his finishes. But it was a very, very great combination. Tod followed my layouts for the strips religiously. I had John Costanza doing the lettering. I could not have asked for better people to be working with all the way down the stream with us.

But Tom would come in, and, every once in a while, there was something I wanted to change in a panel, and Tom could do that. It was especially important in terms of continuity. There was one sequence where we had a Sunday that had a little kid stepping off of a wall, and there's a rattlesnake right

below him, and it looks like he's going to land right on top of the rattlesnake, but when the Monday daily came in, the kid was actually above where he was in the Sunday. It was the equivalent of a bad cut in a movie. Tom was able to take the kid and lower him so he was closer to the snake, because I would never give away on a Monday what was going to happen with that character. [laughs] You're certainly going to have to wait until Tuesday to find out. And I think I got more mail on that one strip, because people had become so involved with the kid and thought I was going to kill the kid. Actually, I did get death threats. [laughs] "You better not kill that kid, Don!" [laughs]

**JS:** Did you?

**DM:** Oh, you've got to read the book. [laughs]

**JS:** Okay, okay. How did you originally approach the comic strip, just as a writer, deciding what type of stories you would do, and whether to do it plot first or full script... basically, what do you do when you're starting a new series with a character that's been established before?

**DM:** Well, someone once said to me, "Don, I don't see any difference between the way you approach characters that are your own or whether they're licensed characters." I have a total commitment to doing them, and they were characters that I loved. When you came to me with **Zorro**, you knew that Zorro was a character that I really cared about. The same thing with James Bond, for instance. I was coming to those assignments with a real passion for those characters, and having lived a lifetime with them, and was totally surprised and amazed with having a chance to write them. At the same time, I know you can't totally be slavish to what has been done, because you need to come to it with something, bring something new to the table, as well as capture the essence and spirit, hopefully, and tone of the characters.

So starting the **Zorro** books, I loved this character. Nothing had to be changed about Zorro in terms of who he was as a character, the kind of character he was. I think one of the things I had many discussions with artist Mike Mayhew about in the beginning, because Mike wasn't that familiar with Zorro, was: he's not the Batman. He's not the grim night stalker. There's a real sense of energy and humor about Zorro that's not like the Batman at all. And it took a while to get that captured in the book. Tom Yeates, on the other hand, was as big a Zorro fanatic as myself, so he's well familiar with the character and knows elements of his personality. But once you've got agreement there, then it becomes, "okay, what are these stories going to be about?" For instance, I needed to do research. What do I know about 1820s Los Angeles, California? And I spent many nights Xeroxing material at the Topps offices, trying to provide stuff I thought was pertinent to the time period. You had to find the time period that was reflective of where we were placing Zorro, and I had to decide exactly what time period I was going to place the series in.

I'm always insecure as a writer at the beginning of a project, especially when I'm mapping out a big thing like Zorro's Renegades. And as part of the research, I came across stuff on Hawaii, and I thought, "Why not take Zorro to Hawaii? That would be great! We've never seen him in that kind of environment." And it happened to be in the time span of one of the most influential kings in the history of Hawaii. And I thought, "Oh, this'll be great! We'll put Zorro in this entirely different milieu and see what develops." I also had this idea about bringing him to Yellowstone Park, because I just thought

# Clawing My Way To The Top

by WILLIAM HARMS

**B**ill Harms is the author of the critically acclaimed graphic novel, *Abel*. He was an intern at Marvel in the '90s and my assistant when I was Editor-in-Chief of Byron Preiss's Virtual Comics line. Bill went on to a career as an editor in the gaming industry, but never stopped writing. I asked him to give a view from the inside of what it's like to try to break into the world of paying comics work. Bill's talent is a given. His story is about the road to making a writing career, a road which he's still on. You can find out more about him at his website: [www.williamharms.com](http://www.williamharms.com).

— DF

**I** owe my desire to be a writer to Mike Linderman, who was my best friend when I was kid going to Paddock Elementary School in Beatrice, Nebraska. We always read horror stories and watched horror movies together, and when we were in the fourth grade, Mike had the idea of writing a horror novel.

Flush from reading Stephen King's *The Shining*, the two of us sat down and co-wrote a 100-page sequel to *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Titled *Terrors in the Rue Morgue*, our tale of horror was about two ghost-hunting detectives named Bill Thompson and Kilmic Robbins; there was nary an orangutan in sight. [In the original work, the murderer was an escaped orangutan. —DF] Our book has disappeared into the mists of time, but I'm sure that each and every line was a microcosm of literary brilliance.

I don't think Mike ever wrote anything else after that, but I was hooked and spent every free minute churning out Stephen

King-inspired short stories. Sadly, despite my best efforts, my writing career hadn't really gone anywhere by the time I left elementary school. But I kept writing, and in junior high I became a voracious reader of comic books. It was after reading Frank Miller's *Dark Knight Returns* that I decided to try my hand at writing comics.

My first real attempt to break in came in 1989, after I graduated from high school. DC had just started a new *Dr. Fate* monthly and by issue two, I knew that I was destined to write the book. So I wrote a long pitch to editor Karen Berger and mailed it off. She wrote me back, saying that she wasn't looking for a new writer, but that I should contact Joe Orlando, who was heading up DC's new talent program. Invigorated by what I saw as a personal recommendation, I sent a package to Joe and waited for him to call and welcome me to the fold.

I'm still waiting for that call.

A short time later, I went off to the University of Nebraska where I majored in English Literature. During those years, I wrote a number of small press comics for places like Boneyard Press and contributed to Caliber's *Negative Burn* anthology. That wasn't getting me anywhere with Marvel and DC, though, so between my junior and senior years (the summer of 1994), I interned at Marvel. I really had no interest in editing comics, but I knew that my best shot at getting a job writing them was to hang out with editors and get to know them.

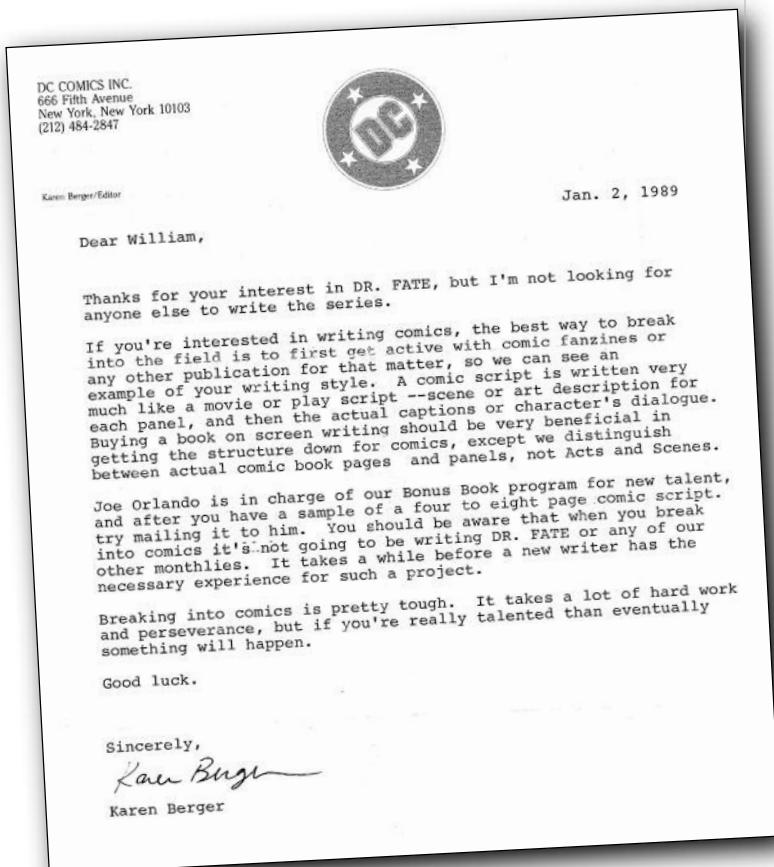
By the time my internship was over, I had sold a *Ren & Stimpy* script to editor Tim Tuohy and had two other *Ren & Stimpy* ideas in for approval. A couple weeks later I submitted a proposal for a *Werewolf by Night* series, and artist Jim Fern was hired by Marvel to do character designs. The whole package was winding its way up through Marvel's hierarchy and word was that Carl Potts, the last stop before the book was shown to then-EIC Tom DeFalco, really liked the idea. Tim told me, "You're on your way."

Then the infamous company restructuring known as "Marvelution" happened and all the editors I knew were laid off. I was back to square one.

Around this same time, I started work on a prose short story called "Abel" that was set during World War II and was about a young boy being terrorized by his older



Photo by Mark Madeo.



Karen Berger's letter to a young William Harms, in response to his pitch for the *Dr. Fate* monthly.



Art from the beginning of William Harms' *Abel*. Art by Mark Bloodworth. [©2004 William Harms & Mark Bloodworth.]

brother. For most of my writing life, I've had a weird dichotomy within me. I'm divided between my desire to write hardcore literary fiction and my desire to write more pop-oriented fiction, particularly horror. After "Abel" was published in a couple of magazines, I scrapped my plans to write it as a novel and instead decided to write it as a comic book.

Not only would this possibly assuage my conflicting desires, but I also figured that a mature, literary piece of comic work would get me noticed faster than if I kept sending out super-hero-oriented pitches. And the thing that made *Abel* so appealing was that its ending is extremely shocking. My hope was that if I delivered a great story with an unforgettable ending, people would be hard pressed to forget about it. And so I teamed with artist Mark Bloodworth and we started work on *Abel*.

By this time, I was a year and a half out of college and was working for Ford Motor Credit in Omaha, Nebraska doing customer service. I figured that I was condemned to that existence. After all, I was engaged to be married in a few months and, *Abel* notwithstanding, there was no movement on the writing front. It was getting to be time to settle down and accept my lot in life.

Then in February of 1997, I received a phone call from Danny Fingerroth asking me if I wanted to come to New York City and interview for an editorial assistant position that had just opened up at Virtual Comics. Danny had been searching through a stack of old résumés and come across mine. He was impressed enough by it to call me. (Never underestimate the power of a well-written cover letter and résumé.) Just like the internship at Marvel, I had only a nominal interest in editing comics; however, what better way to learn about writing comics than from the man who used to edit *Spider-Man*? Plus, I figured he'd introduce me to all kinds of industry folks,

William Harms' original pitch letter to Dan Vado when attempting to sell him on the *Abel* comic. The pitch was initially unsuccessful.

thus increasing my exposure.

And so I took off two days without pay from my job and hopped onto a bus at around four in the morning on a Thursday. After enduring a hellish trek across the country, I interviewed with Danny early Friday afternoon. The next night, I was on a bus heading home. Monday I was back to work at Ford at seven in the morning.

About a week later, Danny called and offered me the position, with the caveat that Virtual's future was in doubt. Undaunted, I quit my job, sold my car, and moved to NYC, leaving my fiancée back in Omaha. She'd join me after our August wedding.



A page from one of William's earlier published efforts, "King David's Skull," originally published in *Negative Burn* #45. Art by Felipe Echevarria. [©2004 William Harms.]

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