INSIDE: HOW TO WRITE A COMICS STORY!

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE Now! MAGAZINE

$5.95
In the USA

#10
JULY
2005

DAN
JURGENS

DWAYNE
McDUFFIE

PETER
BAGGE

GERRY
CONWAY

PITCHING
SECRETS

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT WRITING FOR COMICS, ANIMATION, AND SCI-FI
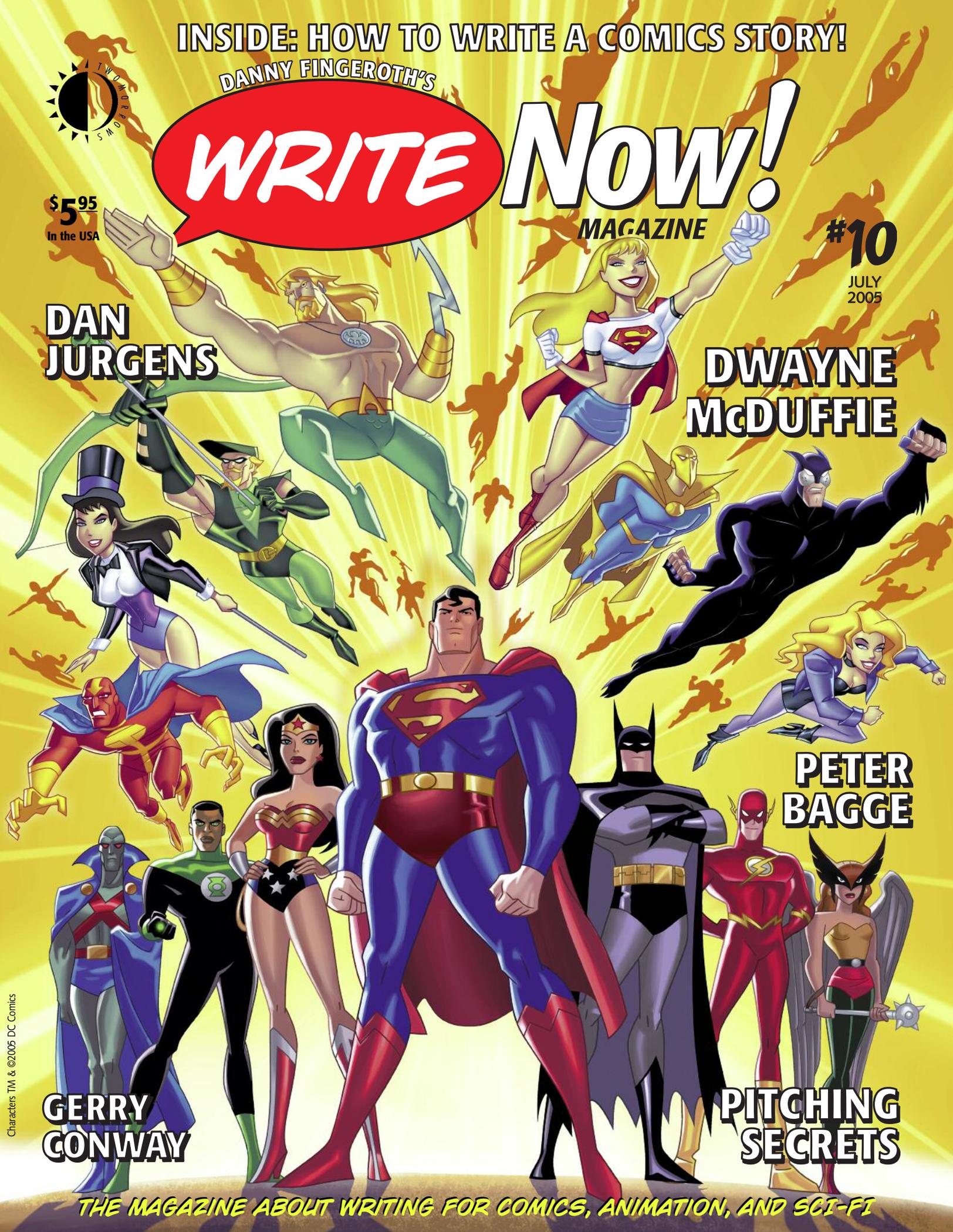
DANNY FINGEROTH'S WRITE Now! MAGAZINE

Issue #10   **August 2005**

READ Now!

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

So, we meet again. This issue we've got some truly amazing material.

For starters, there's the awesome interview with **Dwayne McDuffie**. Many of you may know Dwayne's name from the credits boxes of Marvel, DC and Valiant Comics where he wrote such comics as *Deathlok*, *X-O Manowar*, *Avengers Spotlight*, and *Legends of the Dark Knight*. And, of course, as co-founder and editor-in-chief of the Milestone line, Dwayne co-created *Static*, *Icon*, *Xombi*, and *Hardware*, the latter of which he also wrote. These days, Dwayne finds himself writing and executive producing the red-hot *Justice League Unlimited* animated series for Warner Bros. Animation. There, he supervises stories of a wide range of DC Comics characters for a venue that, for better or worse, is far more widely seen than the comics from which the characters emerge.

In this interview, Dwayne talks about the path that led him from the printed to the animated medium and what it's like to work on a big time animated series. It's a fascinating story, told by an insightful—and hilarious—guy. You'll learn a lot about the twists and turns a creative road can take.

Then, we take a look back and forward with the legendary **Gerry Conway**. Gerry started writing comics as a teenager and has written memorable stints on just about every top character at Marvel and DC, including *Spider-Man*, *Daredevil*, *Superman*, *Batman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Justice League*—you get the idea. These days, Gerry is writing and producing for a little TV series phenomenon called *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*. Along the way, he's also written and/or produced for series such as *Murder She Wrote*, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, and *The Father Dowling Mysteries*. Again, here's a guy who used his comics skills to work in another medium. What are the similarities and the differences? Gerry tells all—or at least, a heckuva lot! Don't miss this interview!

We also have an awesome interview with **Dan Jurgens**, who talks about what it's like to write and draw your own stories. Dan's the Man on such series as *Superman*, *Thor*, *Captain America*, and *Spider-Man*. In this interview, he talks about what it takes to come up with the goods month after month.

Then, for a change of pace, there's DC editor-supreme **Joey Cavalieri's** interview with **Peter Bagge**, auteur of *Hate*, among many other underground classics. It's filled with important information any comics creator or person interested in comics creation has got to have!

Then, **Paul Benjamin**—former editor at Humanoids and development exec at Platinum Studios—tells about the chain of events that led to his decision to become a fulltime freelance writer. Why would someone trade in a secure day job for the unknown frontier of the freelance life? Paul gives you some insights as to why and how he did it.

You want more? Here's more: **Ben Raab**, who's written tales *of Green Lantern*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Vampirella*, tells us about how he came up with—and sold—the pitch for his new miniseries, *Living In Infamy*.

Then, in the *Nuts & Bolts* how-to sections of the magazine, we're once again bursting at the seams with cool, information-packed material.

John Ostrander, writer of *Grimjack*, *Firestorm*, *The Spectre*, and *Star Wars* comics tells you, step by step, how to structure a story. This is it. From the brain of one of the top guys who does it: *how to write a story*. This is information you want, information you need. Plus, John provides us with some script and art from his new *GrimJack* project!

Dwayne McDuffie provides us with samples of his scripts for comics and animation, including samples of Milestone pencil art and animation scripts and story-boards for *Static Shock* and *Justice League Unlimited*. Amazing stuff.

Paul Benjamin shows us script and art from his upcoming *The Believers* project.

Ben Raab shows us the pitch that got greenlit for *Living in Infamy*, as well as the first batch of script and pencil art (by **Greg Kirkpatrick**) for the premiere issue.

But what's going on in the next *Write Now!*, you ask? Only our special *PROFESSIONAL SECRETS issue!* In it, *25 top comics and animation writing and editing pros tell you the most important things you need to know—creatively and businesswise—to get in the door—and to survive and thrive—as a professional writer.*

Some of the folks sharing their *secrets* will be: **Brian Michael Bendis**, **Mark Waid**, **Peter David**, **J.M. DeMatteis**, **Tom DeFalco**, **Dennis O'Neil**, **Chuck Dixon**, and **Dan Jurgens**.

But that's not all. **Tom DeFalco** and **Ron Frenz**—longtime collaborators on such series as *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Thor*, and now *Spider-Girl*—will tell you what it's like to work so closely with someone that you almost become one creator! Tom and Ron will share insights they've gathered from their many high-profile successes—as a team and on their own—that can help you figure out what to look for in a creative partner!

And **Ron** and **Sal Buscema's** all-new *Spider-Girl* cover for the issue is worth the cover price all by itself!

All in all, *Write Now!* #11 will be a magazine you won't want to be without.

SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT:

The *How to Draw Comics From Script to Print* DVD that *DRAW!* Editor-in-Chief Mike Manley and I did (based on the *Write Now!*–*DRAW!* crossover)—it covers writing, too, although its emphasis is art—is still available at comics shops, from the TwoMorrows website, and from amazon.com. While it focuses on art, there's a section devoted to writing. We've had nothing but great feedback on it!

My book *Superman On the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us about Ourselves and Our Society* (Continuum) is still exciting a lot of attention. You might want to check it out.

There are a bunch of other Danny-centric projects on the horizon, including a new book and a couple of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* cartoon episodes I've scripted, that will be airing in the near future. More details next issue!

Now it's time to really have fun: read this issue before someone else does and uses the info to get that writing gig before you do!

Write Away!

DANNY

Danny Fingeroth

Creative Milestones:

The Dwayne McDuffie Interview

Conducted March 2005 by *Danny Fingeroth* via e-mail and phone
Phone segments transcribed by *Steven Tice*
Copy-edited by *Dwayne McDuffie* and *Danny Fingeroth*
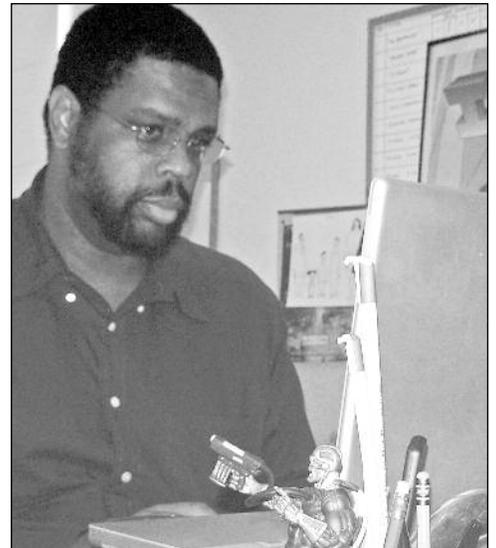
D*wayne McDuffie is best known as the co-founder and creator of Milestone Media. He is a Story Editor on the Kids WB's Emmy Award-nominated animated series **Static Shock**, which he co-created. He is also a Producer and Story Editor on Cartoon Network's **Justice League**. He was Editor-In-Chief of Milestone Media's award-winning line of comic books, managing an editorial operation which boasted the best on-time delivery record in the industry for nearly four years running. He has also worked as an editor for Marvel Comics and Harvey Entertainment. As a writer, Dwayne has created or co-created more than a dozen series, including **Damage Control, Deathlok II, Icon, Static, Xombi, The Road to Hell**, and **Hardware**. He has also written stories for dozens of other comics, including, **Spider-Man, Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight, The Tick, Captain Marvel, Avengers Spotlight, Back to the Future, Hellraiser, Ultraman, (The Artist Formerly Known As) Prince**, and **X-O Manowar**.*

*Dwayne won the 2003 Humanitas Prize for "Jimmy," a **Static Shock** script about gun violence in schools. He has also been nominated for two Emmy Awards for the TV series **Static Shock**, a Writers Guild Award for the **Justice League** episode "Starcrossed," and three Eisner Awards for his work in comic books. His comic book work has won eleven Parents' Choice Awards, six "Best Editor" awards, and a Golden Apple Award for his "use of popular art to promote and enhance human dignity."*

*Dwayne was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan and attended The Roeper School. Before entering comics, he studied in undergraduate and graduate programs at The University of Michigan, then attended film school at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. He also co-hosted a radio comedy program, while moonlighting pseudonymously as a freelance writer for stand-up comedians and late-night television comedy programs. He has written scripts for an animated feature, episodes of **Static Shock!; Justice League; What's New, Scooby-Doo?** and **Teen Titans**.*

I did a "hybrid" interview with Dwayne, the first half done via e-mail, the second over the phone. But whether in written or spoken form, Dwayne's got a lot of intriguing thoughts on the comics and animation industries. Read on and see for yourself…
—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: Let's start with some background, Dwayne. Where'd you grow up, go to school? Were there any creative influences in your childhood? Family? Friends? Teachers?
DWAYNE McDUFFIE: I was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. I went to The Roeper School, a very strange and wonderful private

school, then attended college at The University of Michigan and New York University. Thinking back on it, my father was an extraordinarily creative man, although he worked for the Federal Reserve. He was a gifted storyteller and I have to assume I picked up a lot from him, but it wasn't conscious. As far as teachers go, I was a handful-and-a-half, absolutely bored in classes and generally making life difficult for whoever was trying to teach them. Both Mrs. Timar in fifth grade and Dick Tobin in, what, 10th grade encouraged me to write and kindly indulged me in pursuing whatever interested me at any given moment. Both of them allowed me to turn in work that often didn't have a lot to do with what they assigned.

DF: Did anybody try to actively encourage—or discourage—you from pursuing a creative career?
DM: Not friends, teachers or family. My mother was an incredible trouper when I announced I was leaving a post-graduate physics program to go to film school. Her poker face was perfect, I wouldn't have suspected a thing if her fingers hadn't left indentations in the marble coffee table she was gripping. I did get some discouragement, however, notably a dramatic-writing teacher at NYU who told me I was "terrible, not a writer" and a couple of years later a Marvel Comics editor who told me I was illiterate, and refused to even read pitches from me (this was after I'd made several sales to Marvel, but before anything saw print).

DF: Did you know or hang out with other Detroit comics people? (Keith Pollard, Al Milgrom, Jim Starlin, others?) Was there a Detroit comics "scene"? Were you a part of it?
DM: I wish. I'm a bit younger than those guys, but when I was growing up I bought work by all of them. It was a real thrill to meet them years later after I broke in. I was a pretty serious comic book reader as a child, second in my crowd only to my best friend Alan Thompkins, but working in comics never occurred to me; I was only dimly aware that real people actually made that stuff.

DF: What have been influential books, movies, TV shows in your life, past and present?
DM: This is one of those awful questions where I just know I'm

going to forget something important. I was a voracious reader from a frighteningly early age. I still read five or six books a week. The mother lode for me was a science fiction collection of a couple thousand books passed on to me by a family friend. I had pretty much everything that had been done in the field going back to the beginning and I read it all indiscriminately. Over time, I leaned to discriminate, and I was particularly fond of Heinlein, Asimov, and especially Robert Sheckley. When I was around 12, I read **Dune**, which was good enough to make me crave real novels, although I didn't realize that yet. In my teen years, I discovered Robert Silverberg and Harlan Ellison. I kept reading them, particularly Ellison, even as my interest in science fiction waned. By then I'd moved on to Fitzgerald (I re-read **Tender Is The Night** almost every year), Faulkner, and a brief but intense flirtation with Sherwood Anderson. Ralph Ellison's **Invisible Man** blew my head off, influencing my work perhaps more that any other single thing I've ever read. I was beginning to realize the possibilities of metaphor and metatext. I spent a lot of time thinking about Lajos Egri's books, **The Art of Dramatic Writing** and **The Art of Creative Writing**. I pretty much formulated my own theories on dramatic structure by arguing with his. **The Signifying Monkey** by Henry Louis Gates was very important to me. I'd been working in a vacuum until I read this book and was totally unaware that I had been working with ideas that were firmly rooted in the traditions of African American literature.

A page from Milestone's **Blood Syndicate** #1. Written by Dwayne McDuffie. Art by Trevor Von Eeden. Inks by Andrew Pepoy. [©2005 Milestone Media]

DF: Who were your favorite comics characters and creators as a kid?

DM: I read almost everything, but **The Fantastic Four** was my favorite comic, hands down. The Thing probably tied with Spider-Man as my favorite character, both sharing an intensely human quality that I try to give to all my characters. Their influence is pretty explicit in some of my work. Deathlok was my take on the Thing, and Static was my take on early Spider-Man. I came late to the game on **Little Lulu**, which I worshiped from that day in college I read a reprint in the Smithsonian Comic Book collection. I've been trying to collect them all ever since. Not only is it a great comic, but it's a comic creator's handbook. **Little Lulu** is the Rosetta stone of the language of comics. It contains solutions to every comic book story-telling problem imaginable. And John Stanley makes it all seem so effortless that, unless you make a point of studying his work, you never even notice the sophistication and elegance of his use of story-telling tools.

I was a pretty odd comic book reader, in that I followed writers as ardently as I followed characters. Steve Gerber's work on the **Defenders**, **Man-Thing** and **Howard the Duck**, Steve Engelhart's runs on **Avengers** and **Dr. Strange**. Oh, I remember really liking Gerry Conway's **Spider-Man**, and I've read the **Essentials** reprints recently, and they hold up. I've spoken at length about the powerful impact Don McGregor's **Black Panther** had on me and the formation of the ideas that led to my approach to my own Milestone comics line. Who else? Geez, Stan, obviously. Shooter's **Legion of Superheroes**. I remember running to the comic store to buy

THE MAN IN THE MACHINE

Chapter One

"Angry Black Man"

Page 1

Pages one and two are a FLASHBACK. Please give these pages some sort of signature border to indicate this. Close on a small PARAKEET in a bird cage. A LITTLE BOY (Curt Metcalf, at about eight years old) is opening the cage. "When I was a kid, I used to have this <u>parakeet</u>."

The Boy reacts as the parakeet flies out of the cage. "Sometimes, when I'd open his cage to clean it..."

The bird swerves wildly, just out of reach of the boy's waving arms, "...he'd <u>escape</u>."

Wide to show CURT'S ROOM (A working class child's bedroom. Light on decoration, except for a poster of the Milky Way on one wall.) Curt reacts, the bird flies away from the cage and towards the WINDOW. "The little bird would see the backyard and make his move."

Tight on the bird, flying hard and fast. The background is a blur. "Invariably, he'd head straight for the window, fast as he could."

Wider as the bird bounces painfully off of the windowpane. "And inevitably, crack his head on the windowpane..."

Page 2

The Denys Cowan and Jimmy Palmotti cover to *Hardware* #1. [©2005 Milestone Media]

Here's the first part of Dwayne's plot for the premiere issue of Milestone's *Hardware*. Dwayne here works "Marvel style" (plot first). [©2005 Milestone Media]
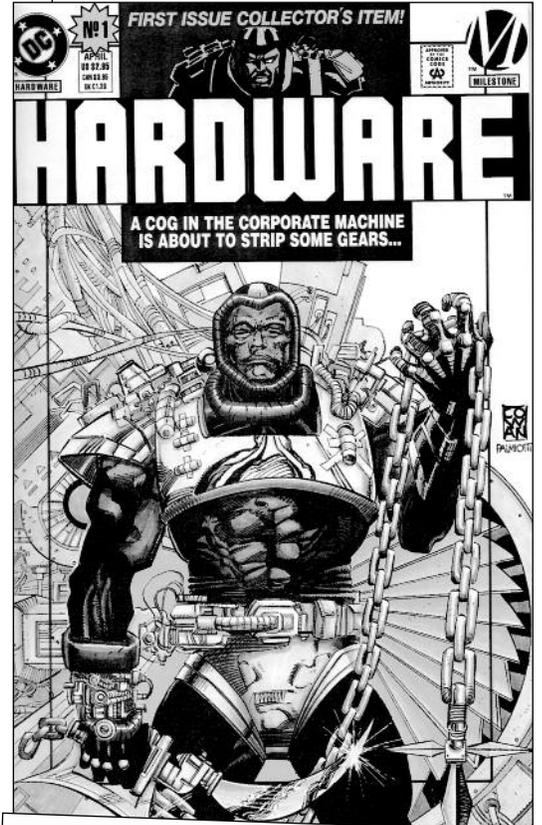
WRITE NOW! NUTS & BOLTS

Creative Intent:
The Gerry Conway Interview

Conducted April 2004 and March 2005 by **Bob Brodsky**
Copy-edited by **Bob Brodsky**, **Gerry Conway** and **Danny Fingeroth**
Transcribed by **Steven Tice**. With thanks to **Lou Mougin**, **John Wells**,
and **Marifran O'Neil** for their much appreciated assistance.
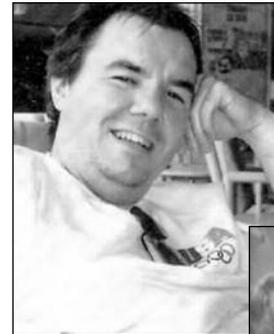
Gerry Conway in the 1970s...

...and today.
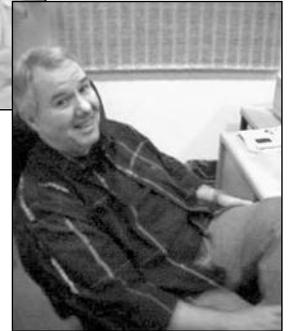
W hile **USA Today** and **The New York Times** eagerly await the next Kevin Smith, J. Michael Straczynski, Joss Whedon, Brad Meltzer, or any number of mass media big shots taking creative respite in the lowly funny book, it's comforting for comic fans to know that Gerry Conway made the journey in reverse.

After selling his first script to DC Comics at the age of 15 in 1968, Conway went on to write for DC horror line editor Joe Orlando before making the jump to Marvel Comics in 1970. Conway began at Marvel with the company's second tier titles, **Daredevil** and **Iron Man,** and by 1972 was scripting **Amazing Spider-Man**. While scripting that title, he co-created the Punisher.

Conway soon progressed to writing much of the early '70s Marvel line, an eclectic mix ranging from stalwarts **Fantastic Four** and **The Mighty Thor** to the more obscure **Man-Thing** and **Ka-Zar**.

In the mid-'70s, Conway jumped back to DC where he oversaw a fresh line of books ranging from a revival of **All-Star Comics** to new characters **Steel** and **Firestorm**. In an echo of his Marvel career, he was soon writing **Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman,** and **Justice League of America**. Conway was also the writer of the 1976 S**uperman vs. Spider-Man**, the first inter-company superhero crossover.

Conway's solid writing, prolific output, and dependability made him a favorite of fans and editors alike. Using comics as a stepping-stone, in the '80s he moved into movie and television writing. Starting with co-scripting the films **Fire and Ice** and **Conan the Destroyer**, Conway soon found his niche in TV mystery writing. His scripts graced the series **Murder She Wrote**, **The Father Dowling Mysteries,** and **Diagnosis: Murder**.

Now co-executive producer and writer for **Law & Order: Criminal Intent**, Conway continues to cement his credentials in the TV industry. Recently, he graciously sat down to tell **Write Now!** just how he did it.

—Bob Brodsky

BOB BRODSKY: Gerry, I'd like to begin by reading you an item from yesterday's **USA Today:**

"Rare Comic Revived to Promote Punisher. Lion Gate Films and Marvel Enterprises will commemorate the release of the Punisher on April 16 [2004] by giving away a special reprint edition of **Amazing Spider-Man** #129. The 1974 comic book, copies of which are sold for upward of $900, was the first to feature the Punisher as a mortal superhero who hunts Spider-Man. The comic freebies will be given out at each theater while supplies last."

GERRY CONWAY: Well, I'm wondering whether I'm going to get any royalties. *[laughter]* I'm amused and flattered. I'm amused because, as far as I know, that's the only acknowledgment, officially, that I created the Punisher, because the comic will come out with my name on it, and I'll be associated with the film in that way. But there's no other acknowledgment of my contribution, other than after the fact. I'm being interviewed next week for the DVD, which presumes, I guess, that they're going to want to do a special edition DVD.

But it's flattering, and I do find it amusing. I've often thought about the fact that the comic now sells for upwards of three times what I was paid to write it. So it's kind of bizarre. It's a bizarre alternate universe.

BB: Did you ever in your wildest dreams think when you were creating this character as a sort of dark, gritty opponent for Spider-Man, that he would turn into a franchise?
GC: God, no. I don't think any of us had a notion, back in the early '70s, of the potential for these characters beyond comics. And even in comics, I don't think we had a sense we were creating long-term franchises. We were just trying to tell a good story that particular month, respond to our own interests and our own internal demons, I guess. *[laughs]*

BB: You broke into comics in 1968, at age 16, initially working at DC, and soon after writing stories for Marvel. How did you break in at such a young age?
GC: I actually broke in, in 1968, at the age of 15. I sold my first story to Murray Boltinoff the summer before I turned 16.

BB: And Murray was the guy who supposedly never bought first scripts.
GC: I think he was under the misapprehension I had already become a selling writer. What happened was, in the mid- to late-'60s, or maybe the early '60s—I can't speak for that time—DC had a summer program in which they gave a tour of the DC offices once a week. I found out about this tour from a friend, and I started going on the tour, I think, the summer I was 14.

I went every week, along with Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, a fellow named Mark Hanerfeld, and Steve Mitchell. We all showed up pretty regularly that summer. And what we would do is, as the tour went its way, we would separate off and harangue and harass the different editors. I became friendly with a number of editors, to speak to, to say hello to, during that summer. Among them were Julie Schwartz, Bob Kanigher, and George Kashdan. I actually had my first almost-assignment then from Bob Kanigher for an issue of **Metal Men.**

BB: Wow. That's hard to believe.

GC: Yeah! Well, apparently my script was hard for him to believe, because he didn't use it! I guess, because I'd shown such interest and was always up there talking to people, talking to Mort Weisinger and all these guys, Bob thought I could write an actual script. And I was 14 years old. I didn't know you didn't do this. Anyway, Bob called my house, and my mother was completely bewildered as to why this man was calling me, and he asked me to spec out a script for **Metal Men**, because apparently he was behind or he needed some breathing space or something like that. And I think, for a 22-page comic, I wrote a 74-page script! It was horrible! Bob said, "No, thank you," and that was pretty much the end of that.

But during that period, I got into the habit—this was during my sophomore year of high school—of, after school, taking the subway from Queens into Manhattan to talk with Bob, to talk with other editors. I started pitching stories to George Kashdan, who was then very briefly the editor of *Hawkman*. And George was interested in a couple of the stories. Then I called up one day and he said, "Oh, there have been some changes here. I'm no longer going to be editing this book. It's being taken over by someone else." That was when the newcomers came in. Dick Giordano and Joe Orlando were brought in by Carmine Infantino, who'd been hired as editorial director.

So anyway, with the kind of chutzpah only a native New Yorker can have, I told Dick Giordano I had been working on Hawkman scripts with George Kashdan. Dick was polite enough not to laugh at me, and took me under his wing, in a student/mentor way, having me work on specs and helping me understand how to write a comic book. He told me in later years he didn't have much hope I'd turn out to be a writer, based on the quality of my work. But I was showing up almost every week at Dick's office, which he shared with Murray Boltinoff and Joe Orlando, and a fourth editor. I think the fourth editor was Jack Schiff, but Schiff was on his way out.

Murray saw me coming in every week, dropping off scripts with Dick, and one day he asked me if I'd be interested in writing a story for him. He assumed I had been selling scripts to Dick!

Well, I ended up spending the entire summer of, I guess, 1968, working on a three-page story for Murray. He'd give me notes, and I would go off and type them up, and he'd give me more notes, and I'd go off. Finally, after about six or eight weeks of this, I guess he got tired. *[laughs]* So he said, "Well, I guess this is fine.

The covers to two classic Gerry Conway stories. [Left] *Amazing Spider-Man* #122, the aftermath of the death of Gwen Stacy. Art by John Romita, Sr. [Below] *Amazing Spider-Man* #129, featuring the debut of the Punisher. Pencils by Gil Kane, inks by John Romita, Sr. [© 2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]
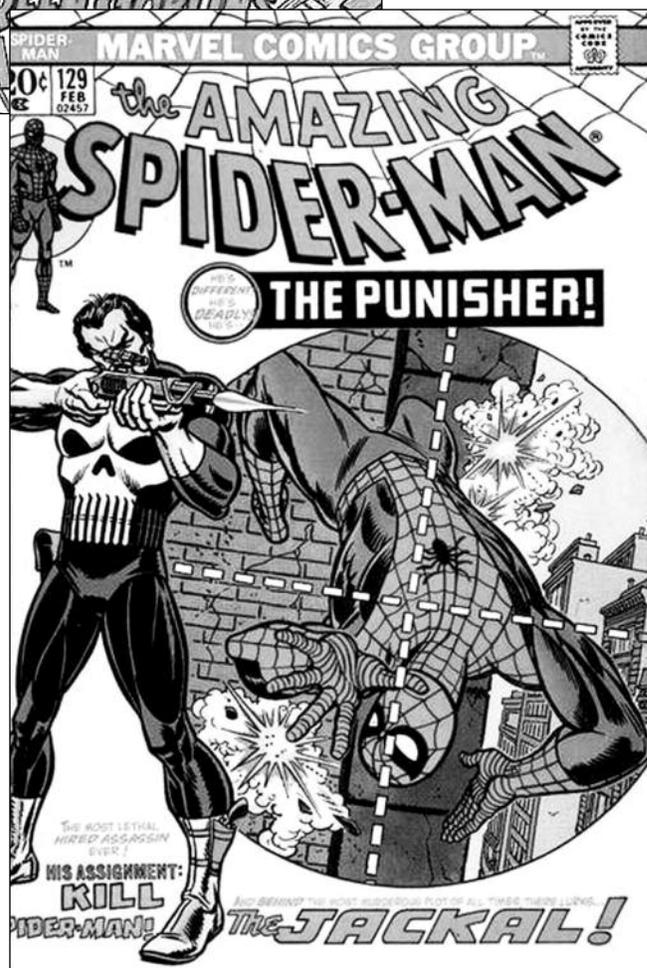
What's your page rate?"

I looked at him and said, "I don't know, I don't have one." The color went out of his face. I thought the man was going to pass out, because he realized he had just taken my cherry. *[laughter]* Professionally speaking.

I think that was the last story I wrote for Murray for about six years, seven years. I ended up finally writing some Superman/Batman stories, I think, or Superman stories, or Lois Lane stories for him, I forget what.

BB: Do you recall that original story you wrote for Boltinoff?
GC: It was a little three-page horror story. It finally was printed, years later, in the mid-'70s, in a giant-sized DC mystery magazine. Paul Levitz discovered the story in the files and decided to humiliate me. *[laughter]* It was very much a Murray Boltinoff story. It was very tight, very straightforward, kind of pulp-ish. I don't remember what the premise was. I was just so pleased I got to do it.

BB: That's wonderful. I've heard Murray was a fantastic editor.
GC: He was one of the old guard, a guy who got his training outside of comics, through pulps and through radio. He had been, I believe, a story editor for ***Gangbusters***, the radio series, and brought that kind of professionalism to the job. So when you were working for Murray, you knew exactly what the parameters were. He was easy to work with once you understood what he wanted.

BB: So where'd you go from there, Gerry?
GC: After I sold that first script to Murray, Dick Giordano was so taken aback that I'd sold a story, he decided, maybe he'd give me a shot. He started buying stories from me for the two mystery books he was editing. I guess he was pleased enough with my work to give me the job of writing what was known as the "inter-stitial material" for ***House of Secrets***. The intros and outros to the stories, that is. I wrote all the Abel material. I created Abel and did all those little interconnecting pieces.

And that was my job. Eventually, by the next summer, between my junior and senior years in high school, I was working pretty much full-time for Dick, with occasional stories for Joe Orlando. I wrote stories for both of Dick's mystery books, and for his romance comics—which is bizarre, a 17-year-old boy writing girls' romance stories.

BB: Were you a writing prodigy as a kid? You know, writing stories, books, working on the school paper?
GC: I started writing stories when I was about nine years old. I remember writing a horror story or something for my mother. She was surprised I wrote this entire thing. She made a great deal out of it. I was always writing and drawing comics, trying to do my own comics.

When I was about 11 years old, I went on a camping trip with my Boy Scout troop. Every night at the campfire our Scout leader would tell spooky stories for the kids. One night he

asked if any of us had a story. Since I was always something of a show-off, I raised my hand and said, "I do, I do!" I didn't, but I made one up on the spot, and the kids apparently liked it. Afterwards, as we were going back to our tents, the Scoutmaster told me I was a natural storyteller and should try to make that my career. That was my first indication there might be something to this ability of mine.

BB: Who were your influences, Gerry? I know you've got a deep background in science fiction. When did you begin to plug into sci-fi? Were you reading Burroughs?
GC: I read Edgar Rice Burroughs as a kid. Robert Heinlein was my hero. I think I was 10 years old when I read ***Have Space Suit, Will Travel***, which is still one of my favorite science fiction novels. I loved science fiction. I think, as a writer, my primary influences, once I started writing seriously, in the science-fiction field, would have been Chip Delaney—Samuel R. Delaney—Roger Zelazny, and Harlan Ellison—the emotionally available science fiction writers of the middle to late '60s. Among comic book writers, the obvious influences are Stan Lee, Gardner Fox, Denny O'Neil, and to a lesser degree but still influential, Bob Kanigher. Also, Steve Skeates.

BB: Now, DC often didn't provide writer or artist credits during the early to mid-'60s. Were you able to distinguish a Kanigher script from Haney or Broome without the luxury of the writer's name on the splash page?
GC: Everybody who cared to find out knew who the writers were, because they'd be mentioned in the letters pages, and many of Julie Schwartz's books did have credits. Julie gave Gardner Fox and John Broome credit. Haney was mentioned in the letters pages, and Kanigher wrote all the scripts for the books he edited. You could also tell through style. Kanigher's material was emotional, illogical. I don't mean that in a bad way. There was a dream logic to his stories. He would find a refrain, an idea to repeat, or a phrase, or a sequence, and he would come back to it several times in the course of a story in a very unrealistic way. In real life, you wouldn't have the same sequence of events occurring the same way every time. [laughs] But in a dream, you had that sense of repetition, of familiarity. It was almost poetic in its way.

I'm thinking particularly of his Sgt. Rock stories, where he would set something up on the first page or so, for example, "Ice Cream Soldiers never melt." [laughter] Then the entire story would build around that refrain, and it would be very intense.

BB: Kanigher would build a motif.
GC: It was very poetic. You can look at Kanigher's stories as sonnets. They're structured in a non-logical way. They're emotionally structured. You know, he was for many years the highest-paid writer at DC. He had a special deal. I think it's a real

> "I DON'T THINK ANY OF US HAD A NOTION, BACK IN THE EARLY '70S, OF THE POTENTIAL FOR THESE CHARACTERS BEYOND COMICS. AND EVEN IN COMICS, I DON'T THINK WE HAD A SENSE WE WERE CREATING LONG-TERM FRANCHISES. WE WERE JUST TRYING TO TELL A GOOD STORY THAT PARTICULAR MONTH,"

Words and Pictures Man
The Dan Jurgens Interview

WRITE NOW!

Conducted via e-mail January, 2005
By *Jason Strangis*
Copy-edited by *Danny Fingeroth*

Dan Jurgens has been a mainstay at Marvel and DC Comics for many years. He's written and/or drawn the adventures of **Superman**, **Spider-Man**, **Thor**, **Captain America** and countless other characters. Dan is a pro's pro, known for high quality, innovative work, produced on time. Jason Strangis was able to electronically interview Dan about some topics of import to **Write Now!** readers.

—**DF**

JASON STRANGIS: When did the comic book bug bite you, Dan? What were your favorite titles when you were a kid?

DAN JURGENS: I started reading because of the **Batman** TV craze. That was my first exposure to the character. One night, I saw some neighbor kids sitting on their front step reading **Batman** comics and from that moment, I was hooked. I hadn't even known they existed before that, but as soon as I saw them, I was entranced.

So I started with **Batman**, moved onto **Superman** and the **JLA**, and was pretty much a DC kid until about 1969, when I discovered the **FF** and Spidey at Marvel. That's when the hobby became an obsession.

JS: Were there any teachers or or family members who were influential in your career choice? Did your family actively encourage or discourage creative pursuits?

DJ: My family was quite supportive during the early years of my interests, though

The cover to the special **New Avengers** comic done for free distribution to U.S. military personnel. Art by Dan Jurgens and Sandu Florea. [© 2005 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

there were a couple of bouts of my mom throwing away my comics (shudder—!) because they were taking up too much room, were deemed inappropriate or whatever.

Later, when I thought perhaps I could make a living at them, they generally smiled and said, "Oh, sure you can," not realizing many people actually made a living doing them.

JS: At what point did you seriously consider a career in comics? How were you able to make it happen? Was the business tough to break into?

DJ: I started considering it about the time I was wrapping up high school, in 1977. At the same time, however, the journals which covered the industry were beginning to downplay it as a possibility, pretty much saying that comics were going to disappear within a couple of years. With that in mind, I put the notion on the back burner.

But, by 1982, comics were still around, and seemed to be on a bit of an upswing, so I started to pursue it again. Walt Simonson and Mike Grell were very helpful during this time, and once I got some samples in to DC, I was given **The Warlord** to draw on a monthly basis.

JS: Did you always want to write and draw your own material?

DJ: It wasn't so much that I wanted to write as much as I wanted to control the visual pace of the story. But that desire took me more in the direction of writing. Gerry Conway was the first to give me a shot as a writer, for which I am eternally grateful. It was on DC's **Sun Devils**, and was the perfect place to make lots of mistakes because no one was looking!

JS: Did you discover a talent for drawing and/or writing at an early age or did it take time to develop?

DJ: I could draw from day one. As long as I can remember, it was a way in which I separated myself from the other kids in class.

As for writing, I was an avid reader in high school and always had that in the back of my mind as well. It's something I thought I might be able to do, but not at all with the same assurance or confidence as drawing.

But once I got in the business, I realized I wanted to give it a shot. Fortunately, a couple of editors were receptive, so I had the chance to pursue it.

JS: Did you go to art school and/or college?

DJ: I went to the Minneapolis College of Art and Design where I got my BFA.

JS: What was good—and bad—about the experience?

DJ: I'd have to say that any education is good. I mean, there's no such thing as bad in such a case, right?

The benefit is the exposure you get to a variety of different disciplines and approaches. Really, virtually anything and everything you learn can be applied to comics in one way or another.

JS: Were you an avid reader as a kid? What kind of stuff did you read? What other interests did you have as a youngster?

DJ: Yes I was, as I mentioned previously. Of course, there were the classics and some heavy doses of science fiction. Around that time, the old Doc Savage and Shadow pulps were reissued in paperback form and that was a lot of fun, too.

Beyond that, I was and continue to be a sports junkie.

JS: What other media influences were there on you growing up?

DJ: I guess the pop culture of the time was an influence, particularly TV, but I don't think of it that way because it's such a distinctly different artform. Maybe in the sense of story structure or artistic design to a certain extent, but I don't think of it as overt. Intuitive, more than anything, perhaps.

A lot of people draw a direct link between screenplays and comic writing, but I'm not one who does. To me, they are totally different animals.

JS: What were your first comic book assignments?

DJ: Mike Grell was making a personal appearance at a store in the Twin Cities area and I stopped by to meet him. This was late '81, I think. I showed him some work and we forwarded it to DC, because they needed an artist on **Warlord**, which he was then writing.

They had me draw a few test pages, and that landed me the assignment. I got the book and was in from then on.

In retrospect, it seems kind of easy, but it sure didn't seem so at

Here's the famous "Death of Superman" cover from **Superman** # 75, penciled by Dan Jurgens, inked by Brett Breeding. [© 2005 DC Comics.]

And here's the cover for the following issue, **Superman** #76, "Funeral for a Friend," also by Dan and Brett. [© 2005 DC Comics]

the time. Editors were much more reluctant to try new guys, whereas now they go out of their way to find and try new talent.

JS: How would you compare the challenges a newcomer faces trying to break in today as opposed to when you did it?

DJ: It's a piece of cake now. If you want to draw comics and can't get in it can only mean one of two things: Either you're truly not good enough or you don't have a pulse.

Every editor is looking for the Hot New Guy. There are portfolio reviews at cons and a general mentality that says, "Hey! Try a new guy!" which didn't exist earlier.

Now there are numerous visual styles and approaches accepted by DC and Marvel and that certainly wasn't the case 25 years ago. Back then, it was straight line superhero stuff that was wanted, and not much more.

Now it's a lot more wide open, and the chances for getting that first shot are much greater.

JS: If you hadn't been able to break into comics, what were your other career options?

Structure: The Skeleton of the Story

by John Ostrander

J ohn Ostrander has been writing comics for twenty years. His many published works include: **Grimjack, Legends, Firestorm, Suicide Squad** (with his late wife, Kimberly Yale), **Hawkworld, Wasteland, The Spectre, Martian Manhunter, The Kents, Blaze of Glory, Star Wars, Apache Skies, Batman: Gotham Nights, JLA Incarnations**, and many others.

Born and raised in Chicago, John was in professional theater for a number of years as an actor, playwright, director, and occasionally producer before becoming a full-time writer in comics. He's also been a teacher at both the Joe Kubert School and, co-teaching with Dennis O'Neil, at the School of Visual Arts in NYC.

I asked John to address an aspect of the writer's craft that was important to him and he chose to write about Plot. Of course, Plot encompasses many elements of story, so John has ended up giving a crash course in story structure here. Read on and see what this accomplished pro has to say about the basic elements of any story. You'll have learned a lot by the time you get to the last paragraph.

—DF

For years, I've heard arguments about the relative importance of art and writing in comics. I think that argument misses the point; comic books, first and foremost, are about *storytelling*. The stories tell us something about the characters and, in doing so, tell us something about ourselves.

The backbone of the story is the *plot*—how we arrange the events in the story to form a beginning, middle, and end. We look for the emotional intensity of these events to increase as the story progresses until they pay off in the story's *climax*. Personally, I probably spend more time working on the plot of a story than I do on any other story element. If I screw up the plot, there's very little else I can do to make the story work other than hope the artist draws really purty pictures so that people won't notice. By the way, that trick almost never works.

One of the questions I get most often from people is "Where

Cover to John Ostrander's **GrimJack: Killer Instinct** #1. Art by Tim Truman. [© and TM Nightsky GrimJack Rights And Production Vehicle (Four Wheel Drive Model) LLC.]

do you get your ideas?" Frankly, *getting* the idea for a story is not the difficulty; *doing* something with it is. Ideas come from everywhere—what I see, hear, what I read, a piece of music, a turn of phrase. I once jokingly told an Earnest Young Wannabe that I used a subscription service in Poughkeepsie; they sent me plot ideas once a month and I checked off the ones I wanted. Earnest Young Wannabe asked for the address of the service. I told Wannabe that you generally got it when you received your Artistic License. It went downhill from there.

The story idea is also called the *premise*, what Stan Lee refers to as *"What If."* For example, what if a nerdy high school kid had been bitten by a radioactive spider and got super-powers? I take the premise as a "given"—I treat it as a fact. I then explore the given for its implications and ramifications. What led up to this moment? What is likely to lead *out* of this moment? What is *"fair extrapolation"*? That is—given this moment, what can I fairly assume or extrapolate about the people involved, the setting, the theme, and so on. I like to start with a question rather than a statement; it's in exploring the question through the plot that I come up with the best stories. I may come up with an answer; I may come up with more than one answer; I may come up with no

answer. I think it's more interesting to pose the question through the story and let the reader answer it.

Before I can come up with a plot, there are lots of key questions I have to answer. Is this a *character-driven* story or an *event-driven* story? *Whose* story is it? Who is the *Protagonist*? Who or what is the *Antagonist*? What are they after? What is the *conflict*? How do those needs and wants and conflicts break down into *beats*, *scenes*, and *acts*? What is the *climax*? What is the *coda*? What is the *theme*? How do I handle the *exposition*? What is the *Inciting Incident*? Is there a *MacGuffin*? What is the story *really* about? And what the heck do I mean by all this jargon?

Let's see if I can explain myself. If you already know some or all of these terms, feel free to sing along.

A *character-driven* plot is where the events derive primarily from the characters' desires and needs. *Event-driven* plots generally place the characters in the middle of something and see how they handle it. One is not inherently better than the other. The purpose of either story is to place the main character into a *crisis* situation that will reveal his or her truest self. What is more important—what a person says or what a person does? It's their *actions*. The same has to be true of our fictional characters.

In every story, no matter how fantastic, we're looking for what is true, what is real. Every fantasy must have at least one foot firmly rooted in reality. What we know to be true in life needs to be true in our stories.

What we're looking for in our plots are situations that will reveal our characters as they really are—not who they think themselves to be, not who they say they are, but how they *act*. Those actions have to be true enough so that the reader will identify with the characters and become emotionally involved with them.

The two main characters are the *Protagonist* and the *Antagonist*. Please note I'm not calling them either the *Hero* or the *Villain*. The Joker can be the protagonist in a given story and the Batman can be the Antagonist. It depends on whose story this really is. I've had stories that have not worked until I correctly identified the Protagonist. Sometimes I assume it's the title character and it's not.

Robert McKee, in his

excellent book **Story**, defines the Protagonist as the central character of a given story, the one who *drives* the story. In the pursuit of some need or desire, the protagonist pursues a *goal*. That goal should be a conscious desire (although there can be subconscious desires that fight against the goal or lead to an even more important goal). The goal should be achievable, but not simple to attain and
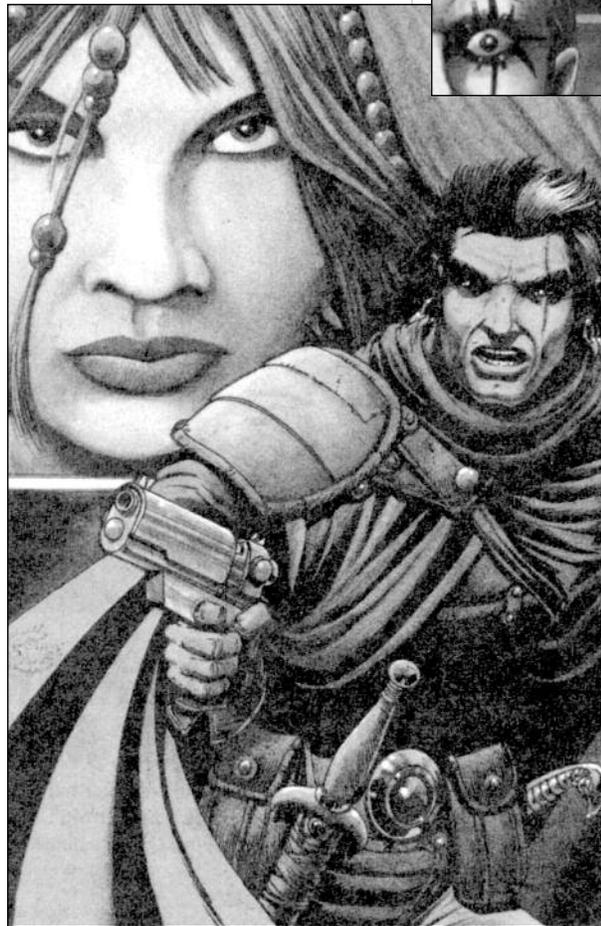
The covers to **GJ:KI** #4 (above) and #3 (below), both by Tim Truman. [© and TM Nightsky GrimJack Rights And Production Vehicle (Four Wheel Drive Model) LLC.]

the Protagonist should be willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve that goal. We need to feel *for* the Protagonist and his or her struggle, to care whether he or she achieves what they want or not, but we don't need to *like* them to do so. They also need to *change* somewhere along the way in some fashion; their quest to achieve their goal leaves them different in some great or small way than they were at the beginning.

The *Antagonist* is that which (surprise!) *opposes* the Protagonist. It can be a person but it can also be a force of nature or even an object—a fierce storm, an earthquake, the proverbial ticking bomb. If it is a person, then they should also have their own goals/needs/desires but the Antagonist does *not* need to change in the course of the plot. Everything that happens in the plot stems from the interaction of these two main characters.

The *Supporting Characters* exist to bring out aspects of the main characters. They may also have story arcs (*subplots*) of their own that reflect the main story or amplify its theme.

I'm a big believer in *primal* needs and wants and desires for characters. Not simply what someone "wants"—what do they *need*?

Here's a page from *GrimJack: Killer Instinct* #5. The story was done in a hybrid of "Marvel style" (plot first) and full script (panel descriptions and dialogue written at the same time).

John wrote panel-by-panel art descriptions for artist Tim Truman, but not the dialogue and captions.
[© and TM Nightsky GrimJack Rights And Production Vehicle (Four Wheel Drive Model) LLC.]

NUTS & BOLTS

```
PG. 10
PANEL 1
1 CAP
First, I needed to pay a visit to ROSCOE.

PANEL 2
2 ROSCOE
What the hell is THIS?

3 GJ
A kaa stone.

4 ROSCOE
I KNOW that, dipwad. What's it doin' on my DESK?

PANEL 3
5 GJ
It's called EVIDENCE. Kalter's kaa.

6 GJ
Proves that MAYFAIR is using Kalter to try to bring the TDP and the BCT
under CADRE control.

PANEL 4
7 ROSCOE
Cheezus! I come in with this and even Seffington's gonna love me again!
What do you WANT for it?!

PANEL 5
8 GJ
Nothing.

PANEL 6
9 ROSOCE
You SERIOUS?!

10 GJ
I always pay my DEBTS, Roscoe.
```

Tim penciled the page, then John wrote the dialogue and captions (or in this case, *caption*), to fit Tim's pencils. As John notes: "The plot is page 9 and the script is page 10. It's not a typo. It's how the artist was working things out." [© and TM Nightsky GrimJack Rights And Production Vehicle (Four Wheel Drive Model) LLC.]

You've got *character*, *conflict*, *beats*, and several other elements of plotting that John talks about in his article—and some sweet *dialogue*, too—all on one page! [© and TM Nightsky GrimJack Rights And Production Vehicle (Four Wheel Drive Model) LLC.]

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Everybody's Buddy:
The Peter Bagge Interview

Conducted via e-mail February, 2005
By *Joey Cavalieri*

Roll down the freeway in Ed "Big Daddy" Roth's Beatnik Bandit with Basil Wolverton's deejay show cranked up on the radio, and once you've passed the FoneboneBurger drive-in, you're bound to hit the exit ramp for Buddy Bradley's Seattle, courtesy of Peter Bagge, the writer/artist whose works include **Neat Stuff**, **Sweatshop**, and most recently, **Apocalypse Nerd**.

Bagge's **Hate** first hit the funnybook racks in 1990, chronicling the life and loves of "Bratus Suburbicanus" Buddy Bradley, a mouthy malcontent who's as opinionated as he is misanthropic—and he's the sanest, most stable member of the cast, the hub around which the rest revolve.

A lot like **Mad**, an early inspiration, Bagge's work seems chaotic, but only on the surface. Closer inspection reveals more method than madness. His strong command of characterization derives from his acute eye for detail and ear for dialogue.

Buddy and company are often on-panel full-figure, the better to exhibit what creatures of their culture they truly are. Once Buddy appears in flannel and Converse high-tops, you already get where he's coming from on the pop spectrum. When a prim head nurse in a bow blouse and skirt suit presents him with tickets to a U2 concert during a dinner date (**Hate** #29, a personal favorite), his utter mortification sends him to the men's room (to vomit), then makes him dart from the restaurant without finishing the date.

The troupe displays their cultural affiliations proudly and loudly, their clothes expressions of their personalities and pop preferences. Lisa, Buddy's on-again, off-again, off-her-rocker, on-her-rocker girlfriend, shows up in that same issue in cut-off coveralls and short hair, the latest permutation in a career that's had more makeovers than Cher and Jane Fonda combined: bad girl, nice girl, caffeinated, medicated, nymphomaniac, and just plain maniac.

Bagge's talent for dialogue is understated as well. Buddy can demolish all comers in any argument (see **Hate** #5 for one of the prime examples, in which Buddy bats back his girlfriends' charges against him like a parlor Perry Mason), and his family and friends dish it out right back. It's a healthy throwback to the days when comic book characters talked a blue streak, especially back in the '30s. A strip like **Little Orphan Annie**, for example, was readily turned into a radio program, since it was easy to imagine what she'd "sound" like. When an attempt was made to adapt Peter's early **The Bradleys** strips into a play, the transition from page to stage

seemed natural. Current mainstream comics seem to treat tough-guy terseness as a virtue, scaling everything down to hasta-la-vista-make-my day catchphrases, and as many indie comics seem to purport that silence is golden, with soundless sequences the order of the day. Fine, but if there's a lesson for a wannabe in **Hate**, it's that if you want a cartoon character to come to life, let 'im open up!

In this interview, Peter speaks about his creative process, his early forays into the biz, and gives some advice to aspiring writers and artists.

–Joey Cavalieri
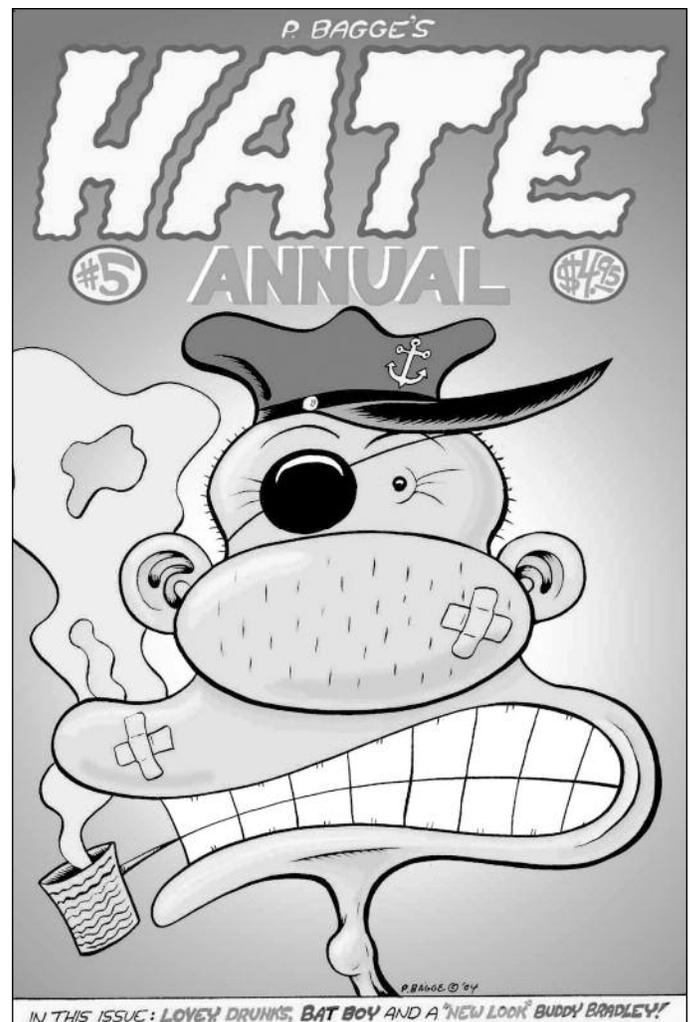
Peter's cover to *Hate Annual* #5 (2005). [©2005 Peter Bagge]

A Series is Born
The Origin of INFAMY
by BENJAMIN RAAB

From Green Lantern to Union Jack, from Wonder Woman to Vampirella, Benjamin Raab has written many of comics' greatest characters. In addition to **Living In Infamy***, his current projects include* **Vampi Vicious: Gemini Effect** *for Harris,* **The Phantom** *for Moonstone Books and* **The Human** *Race for DC Comics. Here, Ben tells us how a new project he has high hopes for came to be.*

—DF

It all started with the title, *"Living In Infamy."* There was something compelling about that phrase. Something sinister… something, I dare say, infamous (ba-dum bum!)… So much so, the implicit connotations kept me up all night. But it was worth the loss of sleep. By morning, all the necessary pieces had fallen into place:

Infamy, Arizona… Witness Protection Program town… *For reformed super-villains!*

I told my writing partner, Deric A. Hughes, about it the next day. Since striking up a friendship at a local comic book store in 2001, Deric and I had been working on original screenplays and TV pilots. Our credits included a draft of a feature script called *Jet* and a short film called *Kiss Me Dirty*. Which is why, at the time, I honestly wasn't even thinking of this as a comic book. I figured we'd write it for television or as a feature film spec. I should've known better…

Never one to let good ideas go unmentioned to someone in the entertainment industry, Deric presented it to our friend Ashley E. Miller. Ash was one of the writer/producers on the first two seasons of *Gene Roddenberry's Andromeda* and the co-writer of the film *Agent Cody Banks*. If I remember correctly, the word he used—after cursing our names for beating him to the punch with such a simple, obvious concept—was "genius"… But, anyway…

As fate would have it, Ash was working with a company called Ludovico Technique (*www.ludovicotechnique.com*) on developing original feature film and TV content. He passed the idea along to Ludovico's founder and CEO, Robert Meyer Burnett. The writer/director of the cult classic *Free Enterprise*, Rob instantly saw the series' multimedia potential and green-lit the project on the spot.

First order of business was to determine the tone of the series. It was a unanimous decision to "lose the costumes"— both literally and figuratively—and focus on our *characters as people*. We wanted this book to read as much like a one-hour TV drama as a comic book. Super-powered or not, the characters in *Living In Infamy* would be ordinary people who suddenly find themselves in an extraordinary situation when one man's past comes back to haunt them all…

On the surface, *Living In*
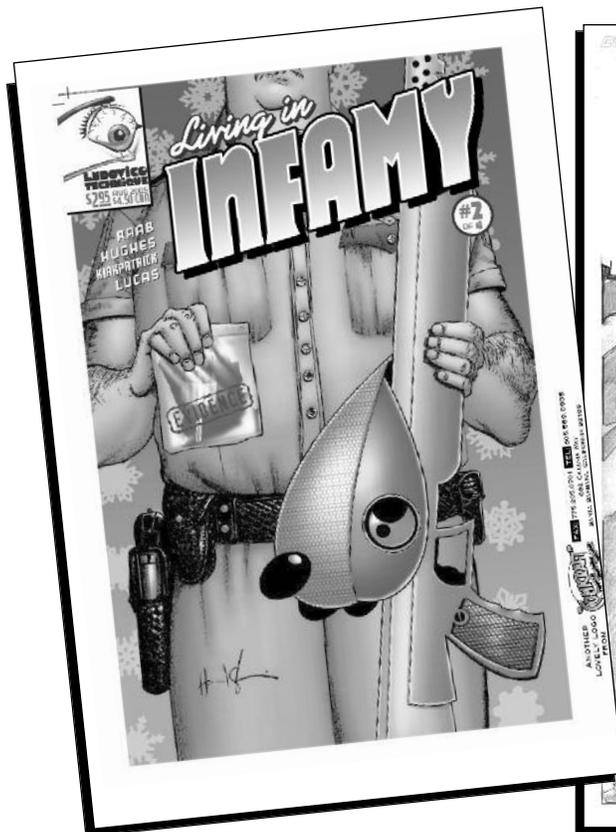
Some high-profile names are doing *Infamy's* covers. On the left, issue #2, cover by Howard Chaykin. On the right, Chris Bachalo's pencils for the cover to #3. [© 2005 Benjamin Raab & Deric A. Hughes and Ludovico technique, LLC.]

A Writer's Journey to Writing Full-Time

by Paul Benjamin

I met Paul Benjamin while I was working on projects for Platinum Studios when he was working there. We kept in touch while Paul went through various other phases of his career. I kept meaning to interview him for **Write Now!** while he was editing at Humanoids Publishing, but we never quite got around to it. When Paul decided to take the plunge and become a full-time writer, I figured it was the perfect time to have him write an overview of his career and how he came to this momentous juncture. While no two writers' journeys are exactly the same, there's always something that can be learned from someone else's experiences, so I asked Paul to tell the **Write Now!** readers how he got to where he is professionally. The article's very existence demonstrates a couple of key points about writing and editing. By having Paul write an article, I saved time I would have spent coming up with questions for him. And now, instead of talking or e-mailing answers to my questions for free, Paul gets paid for writing an article.

–DF

It's a scientific fact that breaking into comics as a writer is a gajillion times harder than breaking in as an artist. Okay, maybe the exact mathematical ratio hasn't been proven and perhaps there is no such number as a "gajillion," but it doesn't take a rocket scientist altered by cosmic rays to figure this one out.

An editor can look through an artist's portfolio in seconds and know if that artist is working at a professional level. Editors have a much more difficult time evaluating a writer. First, the editor has to take the time to actually read something. Ideally, an editor should read an entire script to see how the writer handles pacing, characterization and dialogue straight through to a (hopefully) smash-bang perfect ending.

Unfortunately, most editors have far too much on their plates just meeting their regular deadlines and simply don't have time to read every submission that comes in. So, how the heck does a person looking to break in as a writer ever get an editor's attention? It can be a longer road for some than for others. My personal road to freelance writing covers nearly ten years as a professional. I can't make any guarantees, but perhaps my story will help at least a handful of readers figure out the best way to cut a few years off of that time, or at least teach them how to make the most of all of the years they put into their journey.

I was in college during the heyday of Image, when guys not much older than me were making millions of dollars creating their own comics. So as an avid comics fan with aspirations towards writing, I tooled my degree towards something that would help me enter the comics field. Of course, there aren't a lot of colleges teaching Comics Writing 101, so I took a major in Communications and a split minor in Media Arts and Creative Writing, with a whole bunch of Sociology classes thrown in for good measure.

I figured that if I wanted to work in comics, I either needed to live in Los Angeles or New York. I wasn't a big fan of the weather and cost of living in New York, plus the only time I had ever visited was during a garbage strike when the whole city had smelled like Jabba the Hut's bedpan. In LA, Malibu Comics was going strong and Image had Rob Liefeld's Extreme Studios and what would eventually be Marc Silvestri's Top Cow. In addition, there was always the possibility of other creative work in the entertainment industry.

I moved to LA and worked at a summer camp in Malibu overlooking the Pacific, which is not a bad way to get acclimated to life on the left coast. I landed a job as a teaching assistant through one of my friends at camp, which gave me enough money to pay the rent.

Now, I need to make a brief aside here. One thing I've realized over the years is that no matter how good a writer you are or how much potential you have, honing your writing craft is only half of the work you need to do to become a full-time writer. The other part is building relationships. As in any other business, who you know can be just as important as what you know. This doesn't mean you have to schmooze everyone at all times. A good rule of thumb is simply to be yourself and treat other people the way you'd like be treated. That's a good way to live your life, but from a purely mercenary standpoint, you never know who might be in a position to help your career somewhere down the road.

I mention this now because, when I was a teaching assistant, part of my job was watching a hundred screaming sixth graders while they went completely Arkham on the playground. Some played handball, others tetherball, while others just hung out in cliques. However, one kid usually hung out with me. He was one of the brightest kids in his class and loved to talk about comics and movies. Yes, at the age of

THE BELIEVERS: SAMPLE PAGES
by Paul Benjamin

PAGE 1

Panel 1:
Establishing shot of the Hercules High School parking lot.
This is like the parking lot of any high school populated
by rich kids. There are BMW's and Mercedes, sports cars,
and SUV's. However, this is a high school for demi-gods,
so there are also winged horses, Norse chariots drawn by
goats with flaming hooves and dragons with saddles.

                    CAPTION
          Hercules High, Magnet School for
          Demi-gods.

Panel 2:
Aziza Ra has just exited her ride: a floating Egyptian
barge/gondola that hovers on clouds. Aziza is the focus
of the panel, talking on her cell phone.

                    AZIZA
          Sounds divine, I'll see you in
          class.

Panel 3:
Looking up over Aziza's shoulder, we see the silhouette of
a looming figure. His left hand is massive.

                    JAKE SMITH
          Aziza Ra.

PAGE 2

Panel 1:
This panel is a tight, claustrophobic two shot of Aziza and
Jake Smith. Jake is big for a teenager. He's not very
attractive and has a distinct Cro-Magnon look about him.
He is practically cornering Aziza, leaning over her with
his prominent left hand against her floating gondola. Now
we can see that his hand is actually a massive metal
prosthesis, a cross between highly advanced robotics and
a mystical Greek artifact. It was a gift from Jake's father,
Hephaestus.

                    JAKE SMITH
          You're looking hot today.

The first two pages of script (done full-script) and art from Paul's proposed series, *The Believers*. Art is by Steven Cummings. [True Believeres TM & © 2005 Paul Benjamin and Steven Cummings.]

                    AZIZA
          Isn't your dad, like, Zeus'
          mechanic or something?

Panel 2:
Close up on Aziza giving Jake the brush off. She's rolling
her eyes.

                    JAKE SMITH
          Hephaestus isn't a mechanic! He
          forges Zeus' lightning bolts!

                    AZIZA
          What-ever. He's totally lame.

Panel 3:
Aziza ducks out from under Jake's arm to get away from him.

                    AZIZA
          You know who my dad is. I'd be
          out of your league even if we were
          in the same pantheon.

Panel 4:
We're looking at Aziza as she walks away from Jake. She
has a look of surprise on her face. Behind her, Jake has a
lascivious look as he grabs her behind with his metal hand.
From this angle we can't see his hand actually grabbing
her, but his hand is so big it should be very clear what is
happening.

                    JAKE SMITH
          Baby, you look just as good
          walking away.

   SFX
          GRAB

Panel 5:
Close up on Jake, holding up his hand in anguish. His
metal hand is smoking and melted from grabbing Aziza's
superheated ass.

                    AZIZA (OFF PANEL)
          Maybe when your dad fixes your
          hand, he can add a "vibrate"
          setting to keep you from getting
          lonely.