

INSIDE: HOW TO CREATE GREAT CHARACTERS!

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE

Now!

MAGAZINE

#11

January
2006



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**27
PROS
REVEAL
THEIR
WRITING
SECRETS!**

**DeFALCO
& FRENZ
ON MAKING
COMICS**



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

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

Issue #11

January 2006

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READ Now!

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

Ready to be amazed? Then you've come to the right place!

You hold in your hands the hard-earned advice—"Professional Secrets," if you will—of 27 top comics and animation writers and editors. They developed this wisdom the old-fashioned way. They or someone they knew had to make mistakes somewhere along the way and figure out what to do—and what *not* to do—in given situations. Now, they're passing the insight gained from all that experience on to you.

I asked them to give the most important piece of **creative advice** and the most important piece of **business-related advice** they had for aspiring writers. The 27 didn't hold back. **Stan Lee, Neil Gaiman, Tom DeFalco, Trina Robbins, J.M. DeMatteis, Mark Waid** and 21 other folks were generous enough to share what they've learned with the **Write Now!** audience. Individually, their opinions are impressive. Collectively, they're an education in life and art. I can't thank the contributors to the section enough.

But that's just part of what we've got for you this issue.

Tom DeFalco and **Ron Frenz** are an amazing pair of comics creators. They've worked together on **Spider-Man, Thor, Thunderstrike**, and **Spider-Girl**.

While they've both done terrific work with other creative partners, whenever given the chance, they always come back to working together. In their joint interview in this issue, they talk about why they always look forward to collaborating and what makes the relationship so special. What they have to say, not just about teamwork and chemistry, but about the state of the art, craft, and business of comics as it has evolved over the past 20 years is something no serious comics creator should miss.

For good measure, Tom and Ron have provided us with the plot from which Ron drew the first adventure of **Spider-Girl**, as well as pages from the finished comic story. Yes, the *plot*. They work Marvel style. And they're not shy about telling you why.

Also this issue, Papercutz editor-in-chief **Jim Salicrup** tells how kids' adventure perennial **Nancy Drew** has made the leap from prose to comics form. Jim then narrates a *Nuts & Bolts* section that shows how a **Nancy Drew** story is created by the writer-artist team of **Stefan Petrucha** and **Sho Murase**.

And if you thought **John Ostrander's** article last issue about how to structure a story was informative and inspiring, wait'll you read his piece about *creating characters*! Talk about a revelation!

Plus, **Robert Tinnell** talks about writing comics and movies—both of which he does! He's brought along samples of his work to show you, too.

And what about next issue?

Well, in **Write Now! #12**, we've got my in-depth interview with DC Comics President and Publisher **Paul Levitz**. Paul talks about how he got to where he is, and about controversial issues confronting the comics industry today.

Then there's **Bob Brodsky's** interview with **Steve Englehart** about his past and present writing career on comics such as **Batman, Captain America, Coyote...** and **Batman** again! And that's not to mention his TV and videogame career!

We've also got an amazing **Survey of Comics Editors** who tell you (via **Paul Benjamin**, himself the former editor of **Metal Hurlant** comics), what they look for in submissions. You don't want to miss that, do you?

Speaking of editors, Marvel's **Andy Schmidt** will tell you how to break in—and, just as important—how to stay in comics as a writer.

And the amazing **Ostrander** will give you more writing lessons. This time, John will be giving us the lowdown on **theme**—also known "moral," or "controlling idea." You know—what a story's *really* about.

And, of course, we'll have a passel of inspiring and instructive *Nuts & Bolts* material that will show you how various aspects of comics writing are done!

Write Now! #12 and you—perfect together!



SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT:

The **How To Draw Comics From Script to Print** DVD is still available at comics shops or from the TwoMorrows website. (www.twomorrows.com) While it focuses mostly on art, coloring, and lettering, a large section of it is devoted to teaching the tricks of the comics writer's trade. We've had nothing but enthusiastic feedback on the disc from folks who have bought it.

And my book **Superman On the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society** (from Continuum) is in its third printing! Join the cool kids—check out a copy!

Before I let you go, I want to welcome some folks who have joined the **Write Now!** team. **Bob Brodsky** (creator of the **O'Neil Observer** and the upcoming **Yancy Street Gazette**) is Associate Editor, and **Liz Gehrlein** (sparkplug of **MoCCA—The Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art**) is Assistant Editor. Welcome aboard, folks. (And Fowlks—**Rich Fowlks**, that is, who's been doing such a terrific job as new designer for **WN!**)

Now... secrets await you. Go forth and unleash them...

Write Away!

DANNY
Danny Fingeroth

P.S. Want to know what my Professional Secrets are? Drop me an e-mail (WriteNowDF@aol.com) or a snail mail message (c/o TwoMorrows, 10407 Bedfordtown Drive, Raleigh, NC 27614) and I'll tell you!

PROFESSIONAL

WRITE Now!

SECRETS

Everybody loves secrets. Secrets are information and—today more than ever—information is power.

If you're trying to get into or move ahead in any field, you might at some point figure there are secrets that people on the inside know that you don't. People certainly think this about comics. "Why do those names always turn up in the credits?" "Why did that character get her own series?" "Why did they cancel my favorite title?"

I figured that everyone who's on the inside as a comics (or animation) writer or editor must have some important lessons they've learned over the course of their careers. These are things that may seem like secrets to an outsider, but are really information obtained through experience and reflection. So I asked 27 comics and animation professionals to tell the most important *creative* advice and the most important *business-related* advice they'd give to someone looking to break into or move ahead in comics.

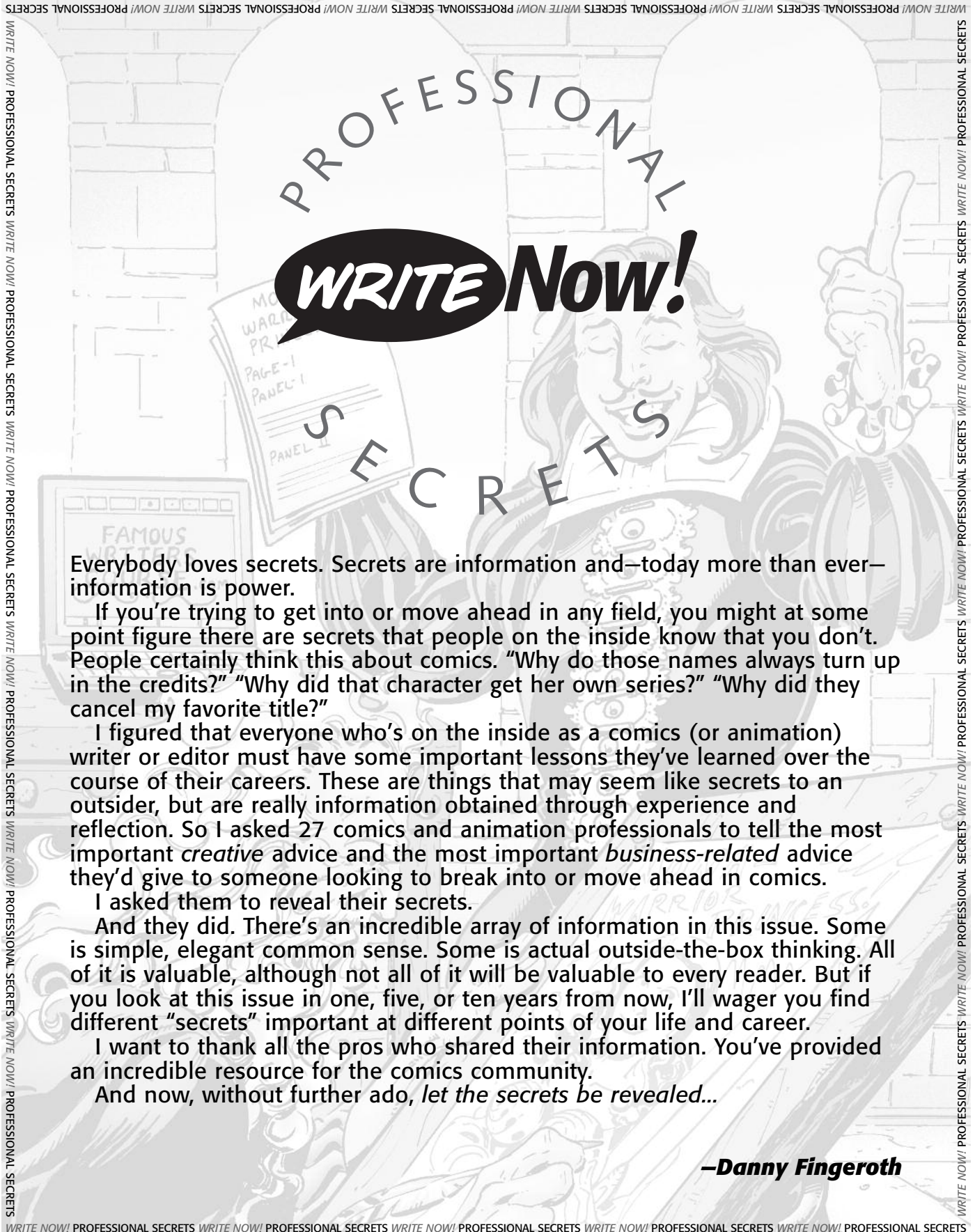
I asked them to reveal their secrets.

And they did. There's an incredible array of information in this issue. Some is simple, elegant common sense. Some is actual outside-the-box thinking. All of it is valuable, although not all of it will be valuable to every reader. But if you look at this issue in one, five, or ten years from now, I'll wager you find different "secrets" important at different points of your life and career.

I want to thank all the pros who shared their information. You've provided an incredible resource for the comics community.

And now, without further ado, *let the secrets be revealed...*

—Danny Fingeroth



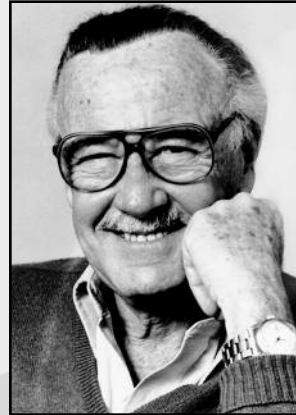
STAN LEE

The most important creative advice for an aspiring writer:

The best creative advice I can give any beginning writer is—write to please yourself! Whatever you write, ask if you yourself would wanna read it. If you had a lot of stories to read, is this the one you'd pick? If it was a movie, would you pay your own hard-earned shekels to see it? If the answer is "no," then why write it? Why try to inflict it on someone else? The theory I always used is—I'm not that much different than most other people. So, if I like something I've written, chances are other people would, too. If I don't like it, then why should I expect anyone else to like it? However, in using this advice you've got to be sure you're 100% honest with yourself when giving your opinion.

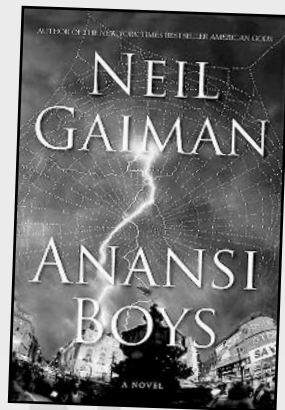
The most important business advice for an aspiring writer:

I'm a lousy businessman. The only business advice I can give is one that I wish I myself had taken years ago. Whenever you create something for someone, try to make sure that you don't sign away all your rights to your creation. Make every possible effort to end up owning a piece of it yourself.



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Voted "Favorite Editor" and "Favorite Writer" of the 20th Century by a poll of comic book fans and professionals conducted by the **Comic Buyer's Guide** in 2000, **Stan Lee** stands as one of the industry's greatest talents. The co-creator of Spider-Man, the X-Men, and the Fantastic Four continues as an active creative force into the 21st Century as Publisher Emeritus of Marvel and founder of POW! Entertainment.



© 2005 by Neil Gaiman.

NEIL GAIMAN

The most important creative advice for an aspiring writer:

Finish things. Don't push them, but make sure you finish them. It's the most important advice I can give any writer. Beyond that, there are lots of useful bits of advice (Write! Read! Go and live a bit! Write about what you've seen and thought and felt, not about other stories you've watched!), but unless and until you start finishing things once you start writing, all the rest are moot.

The most important business advice for an aspiring writer:

Everything's negotiable in a contract, up to and including the date on the top (oddly enough, this morning I would up moving the date on the top of a contract three months). Read your contracts, do not sign them blindly. Change things you aren't comfortable with, even if your lawyer or agent has already read and signed off on them. Insist on contracts, otherwise you'll find yourself having to sue crooked publishers one day, and that's less fun than a root canal, even if you win.

Best known to comics fans for his acclaimed version of DC's **The Sandman**, **Neil Gaiman** has written numerous film, television, and book projects. His **1602** series for Marvel won the Quill Award, and his 2005 novel, **Anansi Boys**, debuted at number one on the New York Times Bestseller List.

TOM DeFALCO

The most important creative advice for an aspiring writer:

Learn your craft, learn it well and learn how it applies to comics. If you're a writer, focus on the unique aspects of the medium and exploit them. Comics is a visual medium with an unlimited budget for special effects. It's also a static medium. A lot of tricks that work in film do not translate to comics. If your dialogue is more important than your visuals, you might be more suited to doing plays, prose, or even radio dramas than comics.

The most important business advice for an aspiring writer:

Always remember that this is a business and never let your ego get in the way of your craft or wallet. In terms of the craft: your job is to tell your story as well as you can. You are not being hired to impress the critics with esoteric techniques or a flashy style. In terms of the wallet: if you want to be treated like a professional, you must act like one. Always be honest with your editor and keep him/her informed if the story takes an unexpected turn or you need extra time or pages to complete it. The editor hires you to do a job and should be treated with the same respect you'd offer any employer. Some editors are wonderful. Others are creeps. But you should always act like a responsible adult and leave the temper tantrums to the amateurs.



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Editor-in-chief of Marvel from 1987 to 1994, **Tom DeFalco** has consistently produced top-notch work during his many years as a comics writer and editor. His current monthly title, **Spider-Girl**, is a fan favorite that has found runaway success in bookstores, as have his books about comics, including **Comics Writers on Spider-Man** (Titan) and **The Ultimate Guide to the Fantastic Four** (DK).



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J.M. DeMatteis has written hundreds of scripts for comics including **Spider-Man** and **The Spectre**, and his own **Brooklyn Dreams**. His current projects include **Hero Squared** for Boom! Studios and **Abadazad** for Hyperion.

J.M. DeMATTEIS

The most important creative advice for an aspiring writer:

The best advice I could give to any writer—aspiring or otherwise—is simple: follow your bliss. Yeah, yeah, we've all heard that old Joseph Campbell line a thousand times... but we've heard it a thousand times because it's true. Let your passion guide you and you can never go wrong. It may not lead you exactly where you want to go, but it will always lead you someplace good; and sometimes your final destination will be better than the one you originally had in mind.

Don't get sidetracked by practicality. You're a writer. If you were practical you'd be doing something else. Let your passions carry you forward and don't listen to the Naysayers and the Practical People who are always around to tell you exactly why your dreams can never be realized. I'm here to tell you that your dreams can be realized, if you pursue them with all your heart and soul. *Follow your bliss.*

The most important business advice for an aspiring writer:

As for business advice... well, here's something it took me years to figure out: Always remember that you're a freelancer. Work for as many different companies as you can. You're out there on the front lines chasing your dreams and trying to make a living and your loyalty should always be to the work and to your collaborators—the artists, writers and editors who are an intimate part of your creative process. *Don't fool yourself into being loyal to a company.* Companies aren't people, they're entities.

I'm not saying that you can't have a terrific relationship with Marvel or DC or Dark Horse or Whoever. I'm just saying that you have to remember that the relationship isn't with a name or a brand... it's with people. And people come and go. The company you *think* you work for on Monday can be a completely different place on Tuesday: That editor-in-chief who thought you were a genius? Fired. The publisher who understood your creative vision? Gone. And the next editor-in-chief, the next publisher, could very well decide that you're a talentless neophyte or a tired old hack and toss you right out the door.

CREATIVE CHEMISTRY:

THE TOM DEFALCO AND RON FRENZ INTERVIEW

Conducted via telephone October 6, 2005 by **Danny Fingeroth**

Transcribed by **Steven Tice**

Copy-edited by **Liz Gehrlein, Danny Fingeroth, Tom DeFalco, and Ron Frenz**

How many creative teams, in any field, work together for more than two decades? How many creative teams, in any field, work together that long and are still close friends as well as co-workers who bring out the best in each other?

To tell you the truth, I can't think of any. Except Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz.

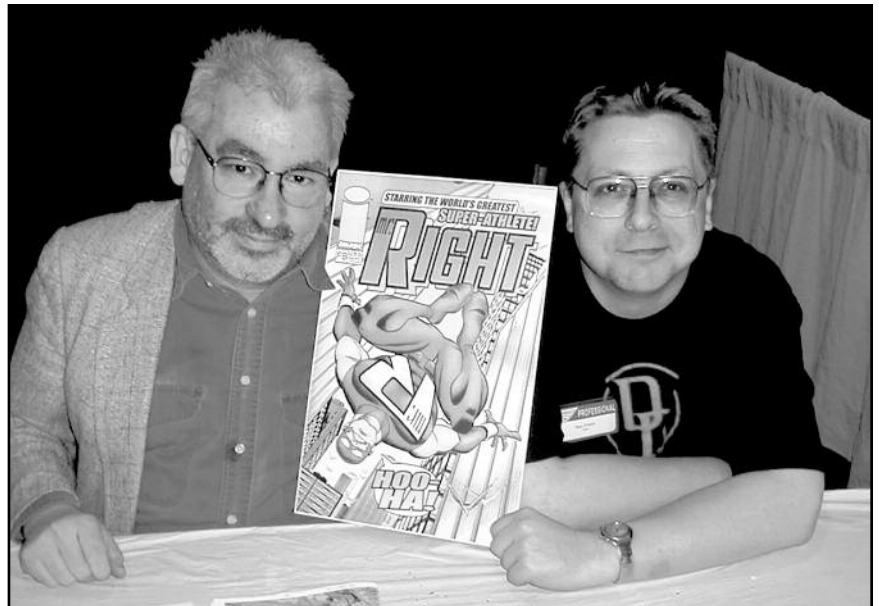
These two guys first worked together when Tom was editing the Spider-Man titles for Marvel. Tom was looking for an artist for **Marvel Team-Up** (which featured Spider-Man) and hired Ron, maybe because he liked what Ron did with Spidey as a guest-star in **Ka-Zar the Savage**, which Louise Simonson and I were editing.

Then Tom got booted upstairs and I took over as editor of the Spider-Man books. And it came to pass that I needed a new writer and artist team for

Amazing Spider-Man. I put Tom and Ron together and they clicked like crazy. Together they did some of the most memorable Spider-Man stories of the '80s.

After that, they did a long, well-remembered run on **Thor** together. From there, they created **Thunderstrike**. When Ron went off to DC to do **Superman**, Tom had become editor-in-chief at Marvel, so they took a hiatus from working with each other. But in 1997, they were brought together again in a **What If?** story that introduced Spider-Girl (Spider-Man's daughter May "Mayday" Parker) and her universe. Eventually, they became, and (with legendary inker Sal Buscema) still are, the regular creative team on **Spider-Girl**, the series that not only refuses to die, but is headed toward—and beyond—a landmark 100th issue! On top of that, the **Spider-Girl** paperback collections are runaway best-sellers!

I thought it would be interesting, informative, instructive—and fun!—for **Write Now!**'s readers to hear how and why Tom and Ron have kept their partnership alive and cooking for so many years. They've seen and done a lot, together and individually, and aren't shy about sharing their memories, predictions and opinions. And as you'll see in this interview, their enthusiasm for their work has, if anything, grown stronger over the years.



Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz at the April, 2001 Pittsburgh Comicon. (Photo by Augie DeBlieck, Jr. from his *Pipeline* column at www.cbr.cc.)

DANNY FINGEROTH: Obviously, you two enjoy working as a team. Has that always been true of each of you individually, as opposed to being sullen loner types? Did you always enjoy working in collaboration?

RON FRENZ: Tom?

TOM DEFALCO: No, I'm a sullen loner. [laughter] Growing up, I enjoyed team sports. To me, the magic of comics is the collaborative aspect of it, because this is really the only medium where you actually do collaborate with other creative artists in a supportive way, where you're working for the story. Other media claim to be that, but it's more just a case of taking a bunch of notes.

DF: How about you, Ron? Were you a sullen loner, heading for serial killerdom?

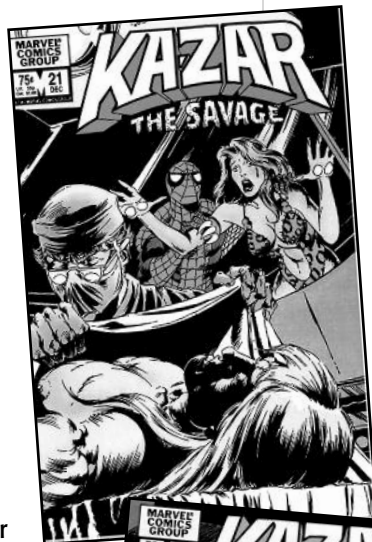
RF: I've never been a sullen loner. For one thing, I grew up with a picture of working in comics that was all about collaboration. My picture of comics was not just writer/artist collaboration, but penciler/inker collaborations. When I got into it, I never really trained myself with the inking tools. One of the things I always looked forward

—DF

to when working in comics professionally was working with different inkers, or finding that one inker who would work hand-in-glove with me. That's always how I saw—as I was growing up as a fan—that's how I saw the whole product, as this wonderful collaboration. Very early on I recognized the names and the credits and could identify the artwork, and could see "this inker works really well with that penciler," "this writer really seems to enjoy working with that penciler," that kind of thing. So it was always very broken down for me. I was always trying to look behind the curtain and see how different creative people affected other creative people. I have a brother three years older, and he actually ended up writing some stuff over at DC for me. But when we were kids and we used to do our little comic books at the table, whether I really listened to him or not, he was always the "writer," and I was the penciler.

The most important thing in any collaboration is respect. I mean, you have to respect the input of the other person. Don't work with somebody if you don't respect the input that they might have to give, or you don't respect the actual work that they're going to contribute. And I was lucky to meet Tom early in my career. I worked with other writers, and I respected them as the writer of the job. I tried to do the best job I could just serving the stories that were given to me.

DF: I don't think when you were on *Ka-Zar* with Bruce Jones you really had much interaction with him.



Ron Frenz covers to *Ka-Zar the Savage* #21 and #22, both written by Bruce Jones. Inks by Armando Gil.
[© 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

RF: No, I didn't have any interaction with Bruce, personally. I think I might have talked to him on the phone once or twice. But he would write those cool little short stories. They weren't even really in any kind of a comic form, as far as a plot or full script or anything. They were told like short stories, "he said, she said," and all that kind of stuff. And it was really a wonderful way to learn how to break down a story, because it was really left up to me. And thank God I had you and Louise.

DF: Here's where my memory is vague. Did he not even break it down into pages?

RF: Hardly at all. It read like a short story, and it was left up to me. You know what it's like when you get hired, you kind of get thrown in the deep end, and there's not really a lot of time for feedback. But I remember you and Louise would take time with me, and occasionally, like after two or three issues, we'd go over stuff and see what's working and what's not and all that kind of jazz. So I've worked with different writers, I've enjoyed the working relationship with different writers. Tom and I met before we even knew we were ever going to work together. We met at a convention in Pittsburgh, and it became very evident that we loved the same kind of comics, were both very influenced by Stan Lee's innovations, and had similar ideas about what kind of comics we wanted to do. And I remember it being a very, very fun conversation, and I'm pretty sure it predated us actually working together.

DF: I wonder if it was maybe because we had a big period of Spidey guest-starring in *Ka-Zar*, so maybe Tom saw your work a lot?



Marvel Team-Up covers penciled by Ron. [© 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

RF: The *Ka-Zar* work got me *Team-Up*. And *Team-Up* got me *Amazing Spider-Man*—which is kind of the way it's supposed to work.

DF: As far as you guys having a special connection, you think it really was as far back as that first meeting?

RF: I think it was, yeah. It was a realization that we enjoyed the same type of material. And Tom has an element of the teacher in him. He never made arbitrary decisions. He would always explain his decisions, when it came to storytelling. Like, if I were to make a suggestion, he would never dismiss it out of hand or just say, "No, that won't work." He would tell me why he didn't think it would work. And everything that I know about storytelling, which, at this point, I kind of arrogantly consider quite a bit, I learned from DeFalco, because he tends to teach almost by default along the way. He doesn't just say, "No, that wouldn't work." He'll tell you why.

DF: Well, Tom is as hard on himself as he is on anybody else. I remember, in the pre-computer days, getting scripts from Tom. They would have like a half-an-inch of whiteout on them.

RF: Oh, they looked like kidnapping notes. *[laughter]*

DF: And then, before I'd even get a chance to read it, I'd get another draft. "I rewrote it." "But, Tom, it might have been great the first—" "Nah, I had to rewrite it."

RF: What I really discovered about Tom early on, and really appreciated and always understood, and to this day, it's what makes me really appreciate working with him and keeps me at a level where I respect his decisions, whether I completely agree with him or not emotionally, is that I know he's a *craft* worker. He works from the craft. Every decision he makes about the story is serving the story through the craft. And there's nobody like that in comics anymore.

TD: Uh... Tom is still here.

RF: Yeah, it's not like he died or anything. *[laughter]*

DF: We keep trying, but... *[laughter]*

RF: Do you want to address your greatness, Tom?

TD: I have no greatness. Basically, every month I had to come up with another issue. And I had no ideas. I'd call Ron and say: "We've got to do something this month. Should we have him fight somebody?" And Ron would go, "Oh, yeah! You know what? I've got a great idea for a guy called the Puma, and he can do this, and he can do that."

RF: See, now, that's just a flat-out lie.



Ron's conceptual designs for the Puma...



...the villain who debuted in *Amazing Spider-Man* #256.

Cover pencils by Ron, inks by Josef Rubinstein. [Unless otherwise noted, Ron's shown art, from here on, is for stories written by Tom.]

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TD: What do you mean, that's a lie?

RF: Because the Puma came from the animal cards that you bought.

TD: *[half whisper]* We can't talk about the animal cards. *[Ron laughs]*

DF: The animal cards? I've never heard about the animal cards.

RF: He bought, like, in some offer on late night TV, he bought some "Animals of Nature" cards, and they only cost a little bit of money. I

guess they were a bargain price.

TD: Fifteen bucks or something.

RF: And out of that purchase came the Puma, Silver Sable, and Black Fox.

DF: Wow. That was money well spent.

RF: So he came up with this Puma. I remember doing a more human design, and then he said, "No, I'm thinking more of a were-puma." And we took him in the direction we took him, and the costume went through a bunch of changes. So that was all Tom. The thing that's cool

working with Tom, as you can tell from what he just said, is that there's no ego involved. And he will accept ideas from anybody, because he sees it as a collaborative effort. And I've worked with writers who are so paranoid of taking somebody else's ideas, because I guess, they see it as a sign of weakness. "If I take an idea from a penciler, or the letterer, or even (God forbid) from the editor, that it's showing weakness, it's showing that I don't have any more ideas, and they'll fire me." And I've worked with one guy who was just insane that way, to the point where, if I would liner-note dialogue, even if it was stuff that he had in his plot, he wouldn't use it! [*"Liner-noting" is when the penciler puts dialogue in the margins so the writer will have a general idea of the what the characters might be saying to each other. This is done in a Marvel-style script, where the dialogue is written after the story is drawn from a plot.—DF*] Because he forgot it was his. He would come up with something else. That, to me, is just killing yourself.

DF: I guess he was thinking about the history books in forty years, when somebody says, "Who really wrote those

stories?" Which actually brings up a question. Who really wrote those stories? I know the credits usually read "plotted, written and drawn by Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz." So, Ron, are you the co-plotter? Tom, do you do any drawing? [*laughs*]

RF: That's a pretty generous credit that Tom gives to a lot of his collaborators.

TD: Well, let's get something out here in the open. I am not allowed to hold a pencil.

RF: That's true. The only thing I've ever seen Tom draw was a little thumbnail to a full script one-pager, "What If Thor Had a Magic Bazooka?"

TD: "Instead of a Hammer?" See, we were the first guys to come up with silly "What ifs." I do not do any drawing whatsoever. What happened early on in our relationship is, we would be on the phone for hours discussing Peter Parker, and Peter Parker's world, and what's happening to him, and what's going to happen to him, what's happening to these individual members of the cast, and what twists and turns we can fold into his life. These discussions lasted for hours. We were routinely on the phone for two or three hours at a time, sometimes four or five hours. And, at the end of those discussions, a lot of times I would sit down and write a plot. And I realized that, by the time the discussion was over, I had no idea who came up with what idea. After a while I didn't even care anymore, because the final ideas that we had come up with were ideas that Ron and I both liked. Here's something that your readers have to understand. We've both been to conventions where somebody comes up and says, "Hey, I have a great idea for a story." And you go, "Oh, okay, fine." But what they don't realize is, you need a *hundred* great ideas for a story. Writing the first chapter of a novel, if you don't have fifty ideas for that chapter, even if it only runs five pages long, you're ripping off your readers. So what Ron and I established early on was, one of us would throw out an idea, and that would spark other ideas.

DF: Is there any consistent pattern as far as who throws out the idea, or just one of you has an idea and calls the other guy up?

RF: There's no pattern to who presents the initial idea, because I've been made to feel welcome to throw ideas against the wall, and when I talk about this no ego thing, that has to work both ways.

TD: Or, Ron, *you* make *me* feel welcome. The way you're talking, it's like I've got more control over this than you've got.

RF: Well, classically, the writer *should*. That's all I'm addressing. That's the paradigm that I'm working from, and why we're any different is because you're very giving as a writer. These days, most guys do full scripts.

TD: Well, that's insane.

RF: I agree. I've only worked full script a few times, and I hated every minute of it.

DF: I was going to ask you about that later, so I'll get to that. But for now, go on about your collaborative process.

RF: There's no real pattern to it. What I remember is, the first scene that I ever liner-noted, that I ever called Tom up and said, "You know what...?" after he had written a



Unused *Amazing Spider-Man* #261 cover sketch by Ron.
[© 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Here's the plot that Tom wrote for Ron to pencil for **What If?** #105, the story that would end up launching the **Spider-Girl** series, as well as Marvel's MC2 line of comics. [© 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Tom DeFalco
What If #inv
"What If SPIDER-MAN had a SPIDER-GIRL?"
Plot for 26 pages
Submitted: July 7, 1997

(Hi, Ron! Needless to say, this story is about responsibility and destiny.)

Page 1

(Indicia): We open this story with an establishing shot of Midtown High in Forest Hills, Queens. It's about eight o'clock at night. The lights are on in the school, signifying that an event is in progress.

The event is a girl's basketball game which is nearing its conclusion. The players are high school freshmen, ranging from fourteen to sixteen, and running the rainbow in regards to race. The game is in the school's gym...and the bleachers are fairly packed. As we begin this scene, the crowd is cheering fourteen-something May Parker as she steals the ball from the visiting team, and charges toward the Midtown High basket. (By the way, she's called MAYDAY by her teammates.)

Even as May races down the court, a spider-sense like glow will light half her face--allowing her to sense and avoid her opponents--as she moves toward the basket. (Ron, this glow should look somewhat different from the traditional half-spider face which we usually see on Pete.)

Instinctively allowing her spider-like sense to lead her, May heads toward the basket, and--

Page 2

(Story Title--Credits): --Performs a spectacular leap (worthy of a Daredevil or a Captain America) to sink the winning basket.

Pages 3-4

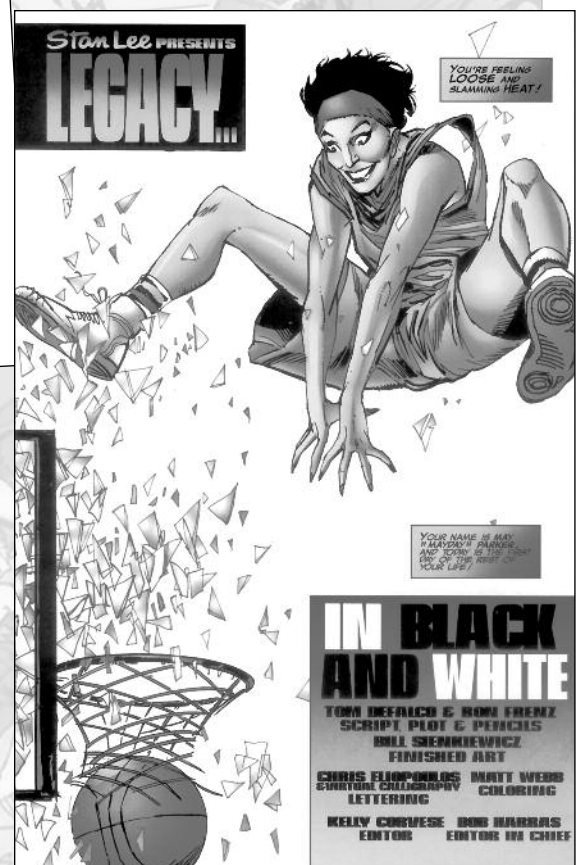
Even as the crowd goes wild and her teammates swarm around her, patting her on the back, complimenting her amazing leap--

--We cut to the bleachers where we see a thirty-ninish Peter and Mary Jane Parker. The Parkers are less than enthused by what they've just seen, glancing at each other guiltily. May

As always with plot first (aka Marvel style) comics writing, and especially with longtime collaborators like Tom and Ron, the penciler decided where he thought visual emphasis needed to be and where characters would need more or less room for dialogue.

Since Tom and Ron generally discuss stories before they get to plot stage, it's likely that they had agreed on many such decisions before the plot was even typed up. Of course, the editor (in this case, Kelly Corvese) would also be involved in decisions about the story. [© 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

WRITE NOW!
NUTS & BOLTS



CREATING CHARACTERS

BY JOHN OSTRANDER

John Ostrander has been a comic book writer for over 20 years. A Chicago native, John broke into comics from professional theater, where he spent several years as an actor, playwright, director, and producer. John's numerous published comic book credits include **JLA: Incarnations**, **The Kents**, **GrimJack**, **Blaze of Glory**, **Star Wars**, and many others. John has also taught comics writing at the Joe Kubert School and, with Dennis O'Neil, at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Last issue, John shared his thoughts on story structure. This time around, we're lucky enough to have him tell us his ideas on creating characters—turning names and images on a page into real people.

—DF



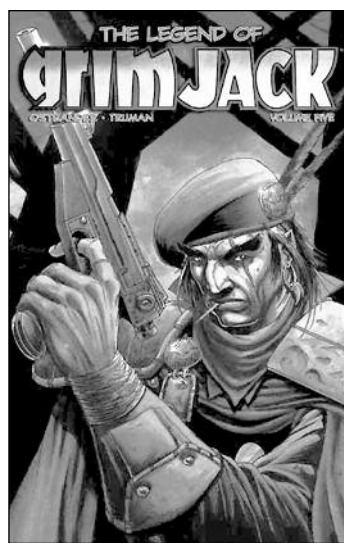
the line is true about the character, then somewhere in that character's life the opposite will *also* be true in some way. Let me explain. For example: Superman is the Big Blue Boy Scout, according to some. Given that's he is honest, how is he then deceitful? Well, his Clark Kent identity is a deceit. Its purpose is to make you think he's *not* Superman. (Or you could look at it the other way around—Superman is the deceit, designed to hide the fact that our man is Clark Kent.)

My late wife Kimberly Yale had a lot of friends and they still remember all her wonderful traits. So do I. But I also remember all her foibles, all the little things that she did that made her so human, so real and alive to me still. I've reflected often that I value her faults

more than some other person's virtues. It's the contradictions, therefore, that fascinate me most. I think it's the *contradictions* that make all of us human, and that is what I value most in real *and* fictional characters.

Don't try to reconcile or explain away the contradictions. We may be honest one moment and then lie the next. We just switch, often without thinking about it. The change may be brought on by a change in circumstance or by who we're with. This is one of the big purposes of a story's *supporting cast*—to bring out different facets of a central character.

We all have different sides; we're like diamonds. Turn the stone around and a different facet may reveal



Tim Truman's cover to his and John's *Legend of GrimJack* #5. [© and TM Nightsky GrimJack Rights And Production Vehicle (Four Wheel Drive Model) LLC.]

Once upon a time, I let a fan at a convention tell me about this great new character he had dreamed up, after which I felt constrained to point out that Marvel had this book called **The X-Men** and the fan's character was almost identical to an X-Man called Cyclops. "No, they're entirely different," the fan angrily told me. "Cyclops shoots red eyebeams; my character shoots *green* ones!"

Friends and neighbors, different colored eyebeams do not an original character make.

Nor for that matter does a flashy name, skintight costume, or a cool superpower. Powers in themselves don't define a character. Foibles, tics, mannerisms, and catch phrases do not make a character either.

When we talk about a *character*, just what *are* we talking about? Simple definition: it's a person in a story or play. We also talk about people "having character," by which we usually mean they have an individual or unique set of traits. For me, it's that combination of positive *and* negative traits that defines any individual, real or literary.

I'd go so far as to say that *contradictions* define a character. Let's play a game. Make a list of positive traits in a character. List the following: friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, honest, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. A real boy scout. Now, next to them, list the *opposite* of each of those traits. One rule: you can't use words starting with "dis-" or "un-". In other words, the opposite of honest, in this case, is *not* dishonest. It could, however, be *deceitful*. Make the words *your* choices.

Done? Okay. Here's my point: if what you say on one side of

something new of the fire within it. We similarly change according to who we're with. Do you act the same around cops as you do around your friends? Are you the same around males as you are around females? The purpose of everyone in a story, including, and *especially*, the antagonist/villain, is to bring out different

sides of the protagonist/hero. Each character besides the protagonist/hero should have his or her own background, wants, needs, and story. But their main purpose is to let us see the protagonist in different lights.

Characters are also defined by what they *do*. Think of your own experience. What is more important to you—what a person says or what a person *does*? In most cases, it's what a person *does* that defines them, and the same therefore must be true of fictional characters. What they *say* may be justification, rationalization, or outright lies. We judge a person by how they *act*. From those actions we may see patterns of behavior that will allow us to deduce *motivation*.

When we create a character, we're allowed to decide what their motivation is. But we must be certain that their pattern of behavior fits what we have decided.

So how do we build a character? Let's start with some basic writing tips. One of the most oft-given pieces of writing advice: "*Write what you know*." But what *do* you know? Usually, a lot more than you might think. What's important is not just the experiences you've had, but what you've learned from those experiences.

You meet a lot of people in your life. Which ones did you want to get to know better and why? The same rule holds true for fictional characters. You get an idea for a character to want to

write about. Then you must decide what traits would make us a readers want to know *more* about your character? What you know to be true from real life should also hold true in your fiction.

That creates a corollary to the first rule of writing what you know: *Write what is true*. Write what you have *experienced* to be true as opposed to what you have been *taught* is true. No matter how fantastic the setting or the premise, you're still looking for something *real* to anchor it. The best fantasy is that which has one foot firmly set in reality. This is absolutely true for your characters.

Which leads me to my third rule of thumb: *Nothing that is human is alien to me*. I am capable of finding something in the character that I can find in myself. This must especially be true of the "villains."

Of course, this doesn't mean that you have to have had literally had the same experiences as your characters. For example, I don't have to kill someone to know how a killer might feel. Not all killers react the same way to their actions. Have you ever killed a mosquito? What did you feel about it? Any remorse or guilt? Maybe your killer character feels that way.

On the other hand, have you ever said or done something that has wounded or killed a relationship? Have you ever done something or said something that, as soon as you've done or said it, you wished you could take it back—but you couldn't? Did you break something beyond fixing, something that mattered to you? Everyone I've ever asked that question of has said yes. Perhaps that's how your killer feels. It's a matter of *transposing* one experience into another. The circumstances are less important than the *emotional reality* you experienced—and can use.

So let's get down to some of the nuts and bolts of creating a character. You have a vague idea for a character. What now?

You need to *define* the character. I'm talking basics and specifics here. What sex are they? How old are they? What is their height, weight, body type? (I often use famous people—actors, athletes, politicians, celebrities, whoever—as a shorthand to help me get an image of my character in my mind. The artist may change all that, but I need something I can picture to start.) Hair color, skin color, eye color?

Distinguishing marks? They got a scar? How'd they get it? What is their *name*? I try to give even henchmen a name.

Are they rich, poor, middle class? What religion are they? Even within "Christian" you have a dizzying variety of choices, from Unitarian to Fundamental Evangelicals. It doesn't matter if the

character no longer practices

that religion; if they were born and raised in it, then it still molds and affects the way that character thinks. I'm currently something of an agnostic (although I'm not dogmatic about it) but I was *raised* a Roman Catholic and I realize I am very



Interior art and cover to John's *The Kents* graphic novel. Art by Timothy Truman, Tom Mandrake and Michael Bair. [© 2006 DC Comics.]

RE-IMAGINING A CLASSIC:

NANCY DREW BY JIM SALICRUP

Papercutz, the brainchild of NBM founder and publisher Terry Nantier, is a new comics publisher creating graphic novels for tweens and teens. Terry's partner in Papercutz is Editor-in-Chief Jim Salicrup, erstwhile writer/editor for Marvel Comics, Topps Comics and Stan Lee Media, and infrequent contributor to **Danny Fingeroth's Write Now!** magazine. Jim was kind enough to tell us a little about how the **Nancy Drew** comics in general came about, and, specifically, about the story behind the **Nancy Drew** script and art pages he provided.

—DF



(Left to right:) Jim Salicrup, Marvel editor-in-chief Joe Quesada, and Danny Fingeroth in 2005 at The Museum of Comic and Cartoon Art (MoCCA).

It was my former assistant editor on the Spider-Man titles, Glen Herdling, who reminded me that I had wanted to adapt the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew to comics over a decade ago. Well, once Terry and I started Papercutz, we were lucky enough to get those rights. And frankly, the timing is better now to publish such material than it was back then. Bookstores are far more receptive to graphic novels than ever before.

With **Nancy Drew**, I was thrilled to once again work with Stefan Petrucha. If our readers enjoy Stefan's scripts as much as I do, then I'm positive we have a hit. The fact that our first **Nancy Drew** graphic novel is currently in its third printing may indicate that's exactly what's happening. Stefan is able to totally capture all the charm and personality that has made Nancy Drew an icon for 75 years. Of course, Stefan is creating all-new stories, but he has kept all the classic elements, while writing a Nancy Drew that's totally contemporary.

Unlike standard comicbooks, **Nancy Drew**, and all the other Papercutz graphic novels, are published at a 5" x 7½" size, similar to most manga books, and not unlike **The X-Files** digest comics Stefan wrote for Topps Comics. We both loved that pocket-sized format, and are thrilled to be working that way again. Because the pages are smaller than a standard comic, Stefan rarely writes a page with more than four panels, with three panels being the average. At first we were concerned about that. We were worried that we wouldn't be perceived as a good value, but the reality is that most standard-sized comics today rarely feature more panels per page than we do!

Much has been made about Papercutz trying to imitate manga. That's not entirely true. For example, Stefan is writing the stories in the traditional American style of storytelling, partly because that's how he prefers to write, and partly because we're publishing less pages per book than most manga titles. We want to get as much story in as possible, and

can't afford the leisurely pace of most manga titles. The point here is that we're not imitating or trying to fool anyone into thinking that we're "authentic manga." We certainly wouldn't be doing our books in color, if that were the case. We could do that if we wanted to, but we're choosing not to, and instead are selectively incorporating elements from both American-style comics and manga to create something new.

As to why we chose to have our titles illustrated in a manga-like style, well, to many young kids today, manga is simply the most contemporary style. This approach just seems much better suited to non-superpowered characters, such as Nancy Drew and the Hardy

Boys. Certainly it's more naturalistic, and aside from the stylized faces, less exaggerated than most super-hero drawing styles.

It's funny. It seems people are always saying there should be more comics for girls. A whole organization—Friends of Lulu—was created to help achieve that goal. But back when Stefan was writing **The X-Files**, over half our readers were female. And now, almost all our **Nancy Drew** readers are female. While certain other companies seem to continually struggle with this concept, Stefan and I keep successfully finding a way to actually pull it off. And hey, that's yet another reason why **Nancy Drew** is drawn the way it is. Manga has a mostly female following.

We're extremely lucky to have Sho Murase as our **Nancy Drew** artist, working with CG 3-D artist Rachel Ito and colorist Carlos Jose Guzman. Unfortunately, you're only able to see their work here in black-and-white. You really need to see it in full-color to fully appreciate what a great job they're doing. The finished graphic novels look as if we're publishing still from an animated **Nancy Drew** movie—but we're not. It's just that Sho is an animator and her work has that anime feeling even in print.

So, while I hope seeing **Nancy Drew** presented (in the section that follows this article) in the *Nuts & Bolts* format will be informative, I also hope that you may actually want to pick up one of our **Nancy Drew** graphic novels. While Stefan makes sure his stories appeal to our tween/teen target audience, I think their appeal extends beyond that. As I said, I really enjoy these stories as much as almost any other comic being published today. So, whether you want to pick it up for your daughter, sister, or even for yourself, I think you won't be disappointed.

THE END

ND #3: The Girl Who Wasn't There

(Note – the Hardy Boys graphic novel with this title has been changed to “Identity Theft.”)

1. While valiantly trying to fix her home computer sans George or Bess's help, Nancy meets, via phone support, Kalpana, a tech person in New Delhi, India. The two find they have much in common, including a love of mysteries. Kalpana's dad's a police officer and she fancies herself (like Nancy) a detective. She's even helping her dad on a case.

The girls decide to stay in touch, and swap emails and phone calls. But late one night, a panicked Kalpana calls and begs for her help. The line goes dead. Nancy tries to reach the police in New Delhi, but doesn't get very far.

Taking advantage of Carson's plans to meet a Bollywood client, Nancy flies to India, bringing Bess and George. When they arrive, Nancy follows a trail of clues based on her correspondence with Kalpana, but no one seems to know the girl or her father.

Finally, Nancy finds Darshan - a troubled boy Kalpana mentioned. He works for Sahadev, a local organized crime figure. Darshan's eyes go wide at Nancy's description of Kalpana, and he warns her off this “case” in no uncertain terms - then claims Kalpana doesn't exist!

Nancy tails Darshan home, and finds a picture of Kalpana with an address on the back. The modest home at the address is abandoned, but Nancy recognizes Kalpana's bedroom from the description. Knowing the location of Kalpana's secret diary, Nancy manages to find it. Only, it's written in Hindi!

2. While Bess and George go crazy trying to find Nancy and translate Kalpana's diary, our heroine wakes up in what seems to be a dungeon. A threatening Sahadev demands to know why Nancy's poking around. When she explains she's looking for Kalpana, he wants to know why - Nancy tells him the truth, but he doesn't believe her.

Alone in her cell, Nancy manages to escape easily. A few cells away, she finds Kalpana - who explains she was kidnapped when Sahadev learned that her father was undercover in his crime organization. The locals won't acknowledge her because they're terrified of Sahadev, and already consider her among the dead. Sahadev is holding her in the hopes her father will give himself up - but if her father does come forward, their lives will be forfeit!



“The line referring to a **Hardy Boys** graphic novel, also titled ‘The Girl Who Wasn't There,’ was to let Simon and Schuster (the wonderful folks we license Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys from) know that we had changed the **Hardy Boys** title to ‘Identity Theft.’ (The outline is what we give to S&S for approvals. It's not what the artist will draw the story from.)

Nancy Drew editor Jim Salicrup talks about the story and art pages he sent us: “Here's the chapter-by-chapter story outline by Stefan Petrucha for **Nancy Drew** graphic novel #4 ‘The Girl Who Wasn't There.’ It's numbered #3, because that's what it was originally scheduled for. But when we realized that in order to get our special 75th Anniversary Nancy Drew story, ‘The Haunted Dollhouse,’ actually published during said anniversary (2005), we'd have to switch it with graphic novel #3, so we did.

Nancy tries to free Kalpana, but Sahadev and Variya appear. Sahadev explains he let Nancy escape so he could eavesdrop on her chat with Kalpana. He'd hoped they would discuss information about her dad.

As a final threat, Sahadev tells them he's a Kali worshipper, and that the goddess has brought him much success in life, particularly in destroying his enemies. If Kalpana does not reveal her father's identity, he will sacrifice Nancy to Kali.

Variya and his thugs take Nancy and Kalpana to an altar with an idol above it. Nancy is trussed up as a sacrifice. Kalpana refuses to betray her father. Kalpana screams as Variya brings the blade down toward Nancy.

3. A human body wrapped in a sheet is tossed at the feet of a shocked Bess and George. The body isn't dead. Though - it's Nancy, alive and bruised, but otherwise fine. Apparently, they faked the sacrifice to scare Kalpana - but Nancy, having been blindfolded, has no idea where they're holding her.

That is, until Nancy reads parts of the diary that the girls have translated and thinks back on her conversation with Kalpana. Knowing they were being listened to, the clever girl seeded her conversation with Nancy with clues about their location based on notes in the diary. Bess, George and Carson Drew deliver the information to the police, while Nancy heads back to save Kalpana.

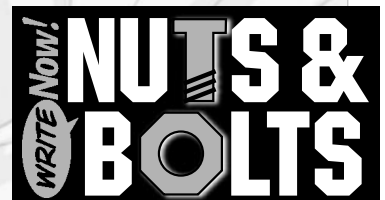
Nancy frees Kalpana (who, surprisingly realized Nancy wasn't dead), but the two are caught fleeing. Sahadev tells Variya to take them into the woods and shoot them. Nancy goes willingly because she's figured out (also from Kalpana's clues) that Variya is actually Kalpana's dad, the undercover agent.

Variya's hands were tied while his daughter was prisoner. He's thrilled to have her free, but disappointed that he didn't get the goods necessary to bring down Sahadev's entire organization.

The police arrive, with Bess and George, and the baddies are arrested for kidnapping, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. Nancy has a thought however, and pries open a gem in the Kali idol's head. Behind it is a series of CDs containing all the organization's books - this will route them easily!

How did Nancy figure it out? Listening to Kalpana talk about Kali, she realized the gem was in the wrong spot on the old idol. Sahadev wasn't even a real Kali worshipper!

Kalpana promises to return the favor one day, and in the meantime shows Nancy and her friends the sights of India.



SAME / NOT THE SAME

ONE MAN'S REFLECTIONS ON WRITING FOR FILM AND COMICS

BY ROBERT TINNELL

Robert Tinnell has worked in the film industry for 20 years as a writer, producer, and director.

Beginning his film career as production assistant for legendary cult film impresario George Romero, Bob's film credits to date include the ACE-nominated **Kids of the Roundtable**, **Airspeed**, and **Frankenstein and Me**.

Primarily a maker of "family films," Bob is one of a select few in Hollywood who truly does make films for the entire family. Forgoing fuzzy animals, Bob's films are well known for their creative overlay of stimulating concepts with true-to-life characters.

A life-long comics fan, Bob recently wrote the popular graphic novels **The Black Forest** and **The Wicked West** for Image Comics. Both books revel in Bob's love and appreciation for old-time horror stories.

Here, Bob gives those insights as to how a screenwriter's approach to his or her craft compares with that of the comic book writer. Bob should know. He's shown creative passion, and respect, for both mediums.

—DF

Hollywood runs on clichés. I don't mean that as a knock, necessarily. In his novel, **QBVII**, Leon Uris had a character say something to the effect that "the world revolves on a half-dozen clichés." A favorite cliché spouted by most everybody in Tinseltown (particularly someone's who just had a script rejected) is one from celebrated screenwriter William Goldman's book **Adventures in the Screen Trade**: "Nobody knows anything." It's a big-time cliché and a cheap pacifier. It's also the truth. I tell you this because a lot of times I'll read an essay by someone pontificating on the business of the movies or comics or both, and I end up walking away shaking my head. I find their experience is generally nothing like what I perceive as reality (Brian Bendis's **Fortune and Glory** excepted—that one gets it perfect). But now that I'm in the hot seat, pontificating away right here in public, I'm getting a little uncomfortable. Because I can guarantee you there's going to be someone out there whose experience was totally different than mine who will think I'm a lying idiot. But that's okay. After all, "nobody knows anything." Including me.



But I do have some opinions on movies, on comics, and on how they relate to each other.

I can remember hearing about guys who make a good living writing movies that never get made. I couldn't imagine such a thing. Then one day I woke up and I was that guy. I'm doing well writing screenplays that may never shoot. (Before that, I made a nice living making movies that you probably never saw.) It's a strange business. In any case, I figure this life experience, coupled with my relatively recent sojourn in comics gives me at least the patina of authority to weigh in on movies and comics and the writing business in general.

First, I want to talk about to illusions. One that was fun to buy into—or that was at least soothing—was the notion that Hollywood is filled with brilliant un-produced screenplays. It isn't. The truth is, if you have a modicum of talent,

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