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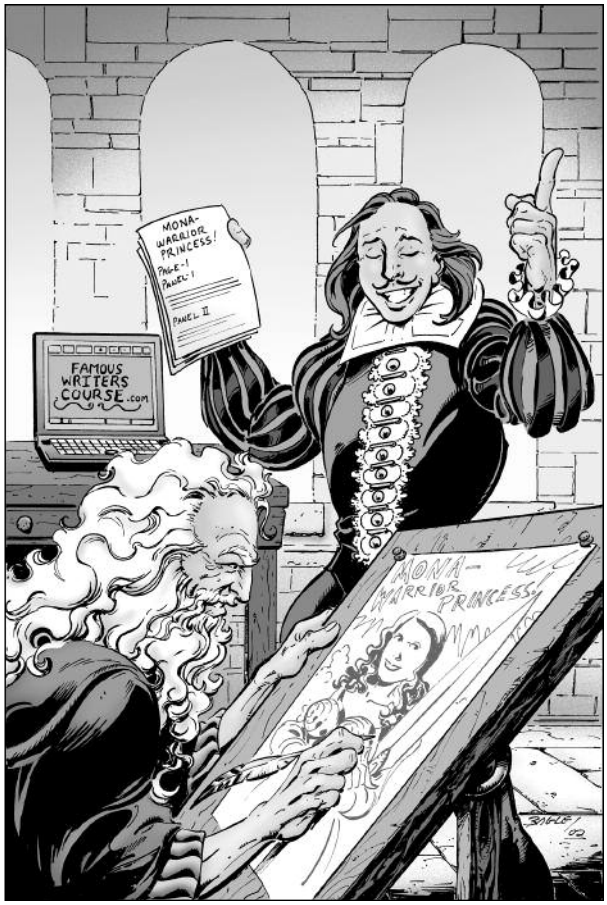
THE MAGAZINE ABOUT WRITING FOR COMICS, ANIMATION, AND SCIENCE-FICTION

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE Now! MAGAZINE

Issue #1 ***August 2002***



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READ Now!

Message from ***Danny Fingeroth***, editor

Welcome to the premiere edition of ***Write Now! Magazine.*** Before we begin, go get the latest draft of your screenplay.

Gotcha!

Admit it. You've got a screenplay. Or a comics script. Or a novel in progress.

Everybody wants to be a writer. It's an American national obsession. But it's so hard to tell what it takes to be a professional (that is, a paid) writer. And even if you're a genius, how do you get anyone to recognize your talent?

You can look at an artist's work and pretty much get a gut feeling if it's compelling and exciting, even if you can't say exactly why. Drawing can be full of mistakes, yet still be moving. It's a combination of factors that make art or craft good or bad. Same with writing—it's just that the factors are more subtle.

We all write *something* every day. Birthday cards. Shopping lists. E-mails. Love letters. Complaints to a manufacturer. Most of us can express an idea well enough on paper to be at least somewhat understood. But how do you judge writing for artistic or commercial merit? More specifically, how do you evaluate how well a writer tells a coherent story that establishes beginning, middle, and end, introduces characters and conflicts, resolves everything, and—oh, yeah—tells us something about the human condition? And how do you get someone in a decision-making position to take the time and effort to evaluate your work and give it a yes, no, or even (most maddening of all) a maybe?

There's no single answer to these questions. But clearly, many people *do* write stories professionally, with varying levels of success (however you define success). ***Write Now!***'s role is to shed some light on the mysterious process of getting to be a professional, or just getting to be as good as you can be, even if you never want to show your work to anybody outside of the proverbial small circle of friends.

Through interviews with people who write for a living, we hope to show what it takes to be a professional. The people you think of as "overnight sensations" all started like you. Hopeful, talented, driven. Many of the interviews have a similar format: What's your background? Why did you decide to become a writer? How'd you make your first sale? Questions like that. The difference in how the subjects *answer* is what makes each of their stories unique.

Even if you have no desire to be a writer, but just want some insight into the thought processes of people whose work you admire (or despise), ***Write Now!*** is full of choice tidbits. We focus on craft and on strategies for developing talent and getting exposure, so we're not treading the same territory as, say, our TwoMorrows sister publications ***Alter Ego*** or ***Comic Book Artist***. By the same token, ***WN***'s interviewees are *storytellers*, so there are plenty of anecdotes about their lives and experiences, too. After all, you're not going to sit in a room with Stan Lee and *not* ask him about his life.

Write Now! will also be a place for "how-to's" by such greats as Dennis O'Neil, and a place to read opinions by different writers, such as my own "Movies vs. Comics" essay in this issue. And it will be a place where we discuss different books, movies and other works in ways that we hope will inspire, anger, and teach you about writing—and perhaps about life, too.

WN will also have interviews with, and articles by and about, people who are not primarily known as writers. Editors, publishers, executives, agents, and others are intimately involved with deciding who gets to talk to the public through mass media and who gets to send out e-mails from their basement (not that there's anything wrong with that).

We'll also talk with artists (like Mark Bagley in this issue), directors, producers, and other visual artists. Except in the case of prose stories and novels, these visual interpreters are key to a writer's ideas literally seeing the light of day. Anyone who disregards how they think does so at his or her own peril.

There probably won't be a lot of discussion of formats and writing software here. There's no one comics format. Some of the other disciplines do have pretty rigid formats that you can find out about online or at the library. There are several leading screenplay software programs, and they're all pretty good. As opposed to the playing field of my colleague, former ***Darkhawk*** cohort, and ***Draw! Magazine*** editor, Mike Manley, there's not a lot of technical stuff you need to be a writer. An artist can tell you about pencil lead density and pen nibs and brush-hairs. To write, type your stuff neatly, and if there's no strict format, just make sure what you write is clean and clear and easy to follow. [I repeat, *type everything* on a computer or word processor or even (gasp) a typewriter. Only submit handwritten samples if you are already accepted as an eccentric genius in some other field.] Put the pages in order. A staple or clip would also be a good idea. (And, believe it or not, movies and TV scripts have specific ways they're supposed to be clipped or stapled.) Oh, and putting your NAME and contact info somewhere on your writing would be a good idea, too, so they know where to send the checks. (***Write Now!*** isn't taking any unsolicited submissions, um, right now, however.)

Read Now! *continues on page 37*

Alias: Spider-Man

Interview with

Brian Michael Bendis

Interview by ***Danny Fingeroth*** on 03/14/02
Copy-edited by ***Brian Michael Bendis***
Transcription by ***Andrew Simpson, Deanne Waltz, and The LongBox.com Staff***

*Brian Michael Bendis is, to use an unoriginal but accurate phrase, the hottest writer in comics today. This "overnight sensation" put in close to a decade of hard work before fame and fortune (or **Fortune and Glory**, as it were) hit. Starting out with his creator-owned work such as **Goldfish**, **Jinx**, and **Torso** (all of which he both wrote and drew), he developed a strong personal style that ably translated Film Noir to the comics pages. With artist Michael Avon Oeming, Bendis then created the acclaimed super-hero-noir series **Powers**. The quality of his work and his tenacious dedication to his craft brought him to the attention of Marvel Comics. There, in just a few years, Bendis has spearheaded the successful Ultimate Marvel line, creating and writing comics that reimagine Spider-Man and other classic characters in Marvel's pantheon for modern audiences, and he's also used his skills on the adult-oriented Marvel MAX line. Now, besides all that, he's a producer and writer for the upcoming Sony **Spider-Man** animated series, which will appear on MTV. Brian took a significant portion of his valuable time to talk to **Write Now!** about the art, craft and business of writing for comics, film and television.*

DANNY FINGEROTH: *Let's start off with your background. I know you had the yeshiva [Jewish day school] background.*

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS: Well, not yeshiva, but I did go to a Hebrew school. I went to the Hebrew Academy in Cleveland for ten years. I went to a private school for Jewish boys, but it wasn't very orthodox. They wanted us to be but if you weren't, you didn't get kicked out or anything. So, we were really rebellious. Me and my best friend would sneak off at lunch time and go and eat barbecued pork at the supermarket. That was our big rebellion. And I was by far the greatest artist anyone in my peer group had ever met.

DF: *You were?*

BMB: Oh, yeah. Of course I was the *only* one…

DF: *Did you have a bunch of comics-loving friends?*

BMB: I was the guy into comics. One thing I am proud of, I didn't pretend I wasn't into comics. I was very proudly in comics. I still had a girlfriend. But my comic fixation made me unique in my peer group. Then I would proudly announce that I would be writing ***Spider-Man*** any day. As soon as Marvel sobered up and figured out the genius that is me, sitting in my bedroom at age fifteen.

DF: *Did you ever bother to actually send anything to Marvel?*

BMB: I sent stuff all the time and I was like, "Can't they see? Don't they know?" Meanwhile, I sucked. It was terrible. It wasn't writing submissions, it was drawing.

DF: *What year would that have been?*

BMB: 1984, 1985 or so.

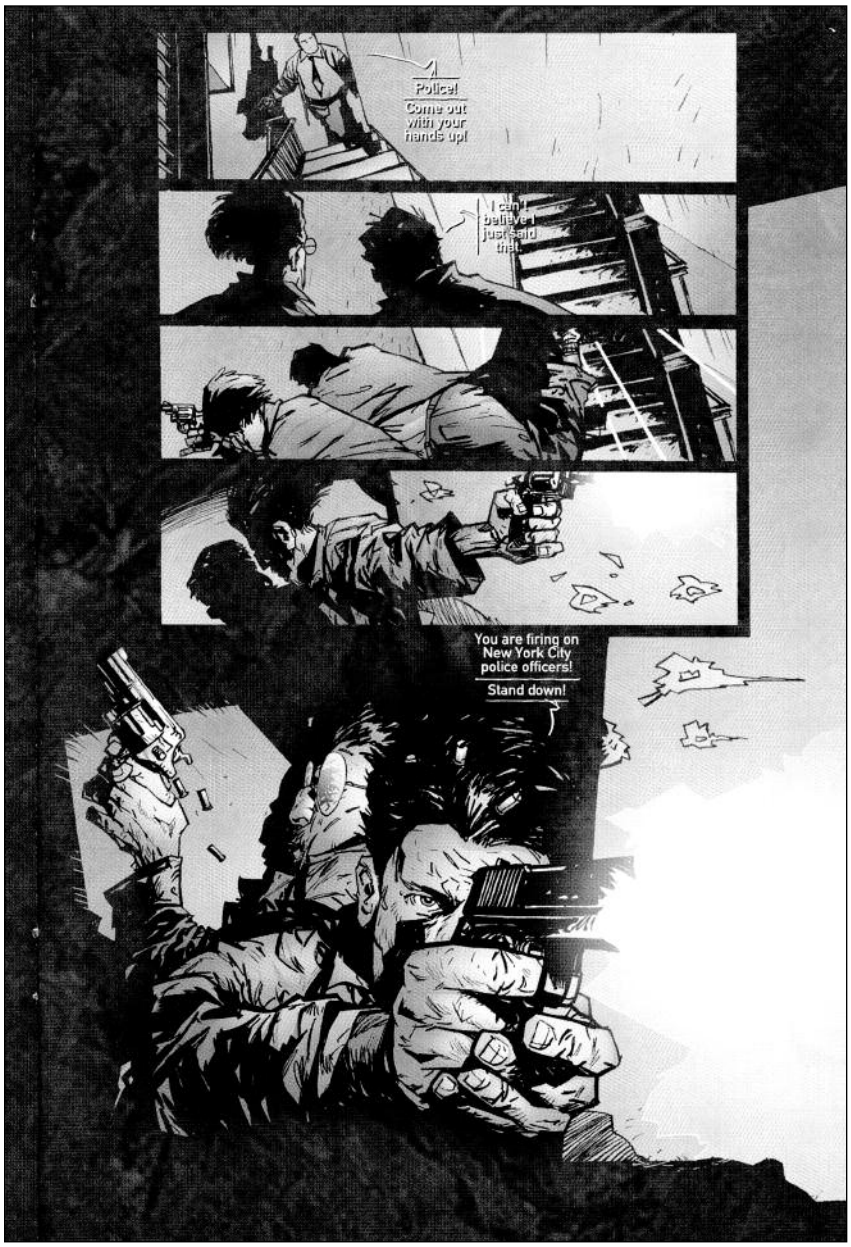
DF: *Those were some of my years.*

BMB: Why wouldn't you hire me? I was the guy who was filling up your desk full of crap and you couldn't even get to the good stuff because you couldn't get through the crap.

DF: *You were the second choice. After John Romita, Jr. it was going to be you.*

BMB: If my name was John Romita Jr-Jr, you would have.

From ***Ultimate Spider-Man*** #17. Script by Bendis, pencils by Mark Bagley, inks by Art Thibert. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]



From ***Sam & Twitch*** #17. Written by Bendis, art by Alex Maleev. [©2002 Todd McFarlane Productions, Inc..]

DF: *That's right, John Romita III.*

BMB: I was doing this with no training, because it was a Hebrew school that went from 7:30 in the morning to 6:30 at night. There was no chance for art classes while I was there, so I was self-taught.

DF: *There were no art classes?*

BMB: No art classes. I thought I was the best artist that ever lived and I had no knowledge of anatomy or perspective. So I was quite ready to go. I applied to art school and didn't get in and was shocked. It was a big eye-opener and over that summer and my junior year I took a lot of art classes at the institute.

DF: *In Cleveland?*

BMB: Cleveland Institute of Art. I took all kinds of classes and I got my sh*t together pretty quickly. I got into art school and I went to the Institute of Art for five years. All five years. Time well needed.

DF: *So you have a master's?*

BMB: It's an MFA; but it's not really. I didn't get it because I am short one history class and I had already gotten in comics and the school situation was making me irritable so I just got on with my life. No one has asked to see my diploma so…

DF: *Any inspirational teachers there?*

BMB: No. All of 'em had a very skewed, horrible view of comics. There was me and a couple of other people in or around my class that wanted to get into comics. Dave McKean and guys like that were just breaking out on the scene. And our teachers did not see any difference between Bill Sienkiewicz and the guy who draws ***Andy Capp***. I'd become such a pain in the ass about it because it was getting to the point where I was getting better with my comics, but when the semester started, no matter what, I'd have to put all my comic book stuff away. I had no problem learning, I just wanted to apply it to something I wanted to do. It was driving me nuts, so finally I got an independent study, where they go, "Here, just go away. Yeah, it looks great, leave us alone." So I got independent study around the same time that I started working in a comic book store—which I think every comic book writer or artist should have to do, like a tour of duty. That's the way to sober you up for the reality of the business.

DF: *Can you go into a little more detail on that?*

BMB: You get to see the *distribution* of comics. I don't think a lot of people understand it and I do know that it certainly helped me when I was starting. Right now, I publish ***Powers*** through Image. The knowledge that I had of all this stuff—going to Capital [distributors], putting the boxes in my boss's car. You get to now how it's being done on every level and you really get a clear idea of how your book's marketed to a retailer. People always like talking to the fans. You gotta talk to the *retailers*, man. They've got a lot of information they've got to disseminate.

DF: *And they're the ones who actually order.*

BMB: The buck stops there. So just knowing all that stuff, and I know it sounds like, "yeah, duh," but a lot of my friends who are very successful always come up against the wall when they try to publish their own material and they don't know why. There is just the basic truth of the business you just gotta feel. You've got to be in there to feel it.

While I was in independent study I created a comic book as my thesis. I sold it in the stores and it was the first time, outside of my friends and family, I had gotten the work into people's hands. I created an anthology of material that was anything but super-heroes 'cause the super-hero stuff was going to get sh*t on at school. I just knew it was. So I did an alternative comic book, not even really knowing what one was. I wasn't reading black-&-white comics but I made one. And I actually thought I had invented something.

DF: *That's the best way.*

BMB: Someone goes, "You ever read ***Cerebus***?" "No, what's that?" So I did my comic and I showed it to people. I got a lot of feedback as part of my thesis and in the feedback, a lot of people said, "You know, Caliber publishes material like this and Fantagraphics publishes material like this," and I said, "what's that?" I sent the book out to Fantagraphics and Caliber and a few other places and seven months later to the day, I heard

from Fantagraphics and Caliber. Long story short, I went with Caliber. I liked the feel of it better and I started writing and drawing my own stuff.

DF: *You started out as an artist. What made you decide you wanted to write your own stuff?*

BMB: It's funny, I don't see a distinction as a storyteller. It's kind of frustrating or invigorating for some of my collaborators. But like, in ***Alias***, I do all the layouts. I don't know where the writing stops. I was constantly sending submissions in to editors, and it became clear that I wasn't drawing the way that the books were being done. I didn't know how to do it. Instead, I really got into the independent thing. My voice. Instead of waiting around for someone to make me, I'll just do it myself. It's the way my brain works.

DF: *Is that something to do with your family, your schooling or just some innate thing?*

BMB: I don't know. I have a lot of friends waiting around for someone to bequeath them. I'm not that guy. I just want to tell stories; so I'll just tell stories. And I started writing out of necessity.

My mom instilled in us a pretty heavy sense of self-reliance. I don't mean she abandoned us. She said, "Listen, do it, just do it smart." She saw just how crazy in love I was with comics. She was happy for me. I'd be freaking out over ***Judge Dredd*** and the rest of it. And I wanted to do it. I just wanted to publish stories. When I was a kid, I thought George Pérez was a rock star. There was no difference between George Pérez and Bruce Springsteen to me. I was like, I wanna be a rock star.

What it is, is that feeling you get from reading a comic and I wanted to give that feeling. There's that tactile sensation. Waiting around for other people to let you do it is a weird thought. Then I started meeting other people at conventions who were doing the same thing and who felt the same way. And those people are still my friends today. I think the Caliber experience of creating every single part of a comic book made me the writer I am today.

DF: *Now, in telling the story it sounds like this was "the Brian Bendis master plan"? Was it?*

BMB: Oh, no.

DF: *How did that evolve? I think that's the thing that would be interesting to people reading a magazine like this.*

BMB: It's funny. I don't know how things evolved, but I knew I wanted to be a mainstream comic book artist. And in the college years, you kind of grow up. There are certain fantasies you have for a story you think you're going to tell. I had this Punisher story that I would write and draw like fifty times. I must have rewritten and redrawn it fifty times. As soon as it's ready, I'll give it to Marvel and they'll just publish it. And then, over time, you kind of grow up and realize, that's not how it works.

DF: *The fact that you had that one story you wanted to tell fifty times is very interesting. A lot of people would say they have fifty stories they want to tell.*

BMB: There were a bunch of stories like that I wanted to tell. What's funny is that I remember drawing that Punisher story until I got it right. It was never right. Okay, I'll do it again. This time it will be right. I think a lot of famous comic artists do that, don't they? What's funny is, your sensibility of the kind of stories you wanna tell changes. I saw my passion for true crime stories and crime reporting invigorating me, as much if not more so, than super-hero fantasy. And comedy writing, and other kinds of writing instilled in me a sense of great satisfaction. Then all of the sudden you realize you're creating an alternative comic book, though only in comics is a crime novel "alternative."

DF: *How does writing comedy keep you satisfied?*

BMB: I'm fascinated by it. It's such an ethereal thing. It's such a thing in the air, like, how do you tell a joke? Studying that is fascinating to me. So there's all kinds of stuff like that. That it was interesting to me as much as comics but I wanted to make those jokes in comics.

DF: *You used the word "reporting." There's definitely a journalistic sense in your work, an attempt at gritty realism, as opposed to guys coming down in spaceships or boring into the center of the earth.*

BMB: Exactly. I fell in love with the idea. There's a certain kind of storytelling that people like because it's so real that people know that it's right outside their door. And they want to feel it without having to be *involved* in it. And I like that. That's what writing crime fiction is.

DF: *Like a dark side of the everyday world?*

BMB: The knowledge that, if you make the wrong turn on the highway, something bad might happen. It's a little different than fantasizing being on board a spaceship. You really know that if you make the wrong turn on your way to work, something freaky could happen. I know what that rush is. It's double that when you're writing that as opposed to reading it. And there's nothing like finding a true story and adapting it into comic book form,

Peter Parker meets the Fantastic Four in ***Ultimate Marvel Team-Up*** #9. Story by Bendis. Art by Jim Mahfood. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

POWERS

WHO KILLED RETRO GIRL?

ISSUE ONE

BY BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS FOR MIKE AVON OEMING

PAGE 1PG & 1-

THREE EQUAL SIZED PAGE LONG PANELS.

PANEL 1- THE SKY LINE OF OUR NAMELESS CITY. SILHOUETTE TOWERS PIERCE A GRAY BLUE NIGHT SKY.

MIKE: THIS IS OUR WORLD AND WE MAKE THE RULES , BUT WHATEVER RULES WE MAKE HERE WE HAVE TO STICK TO.

THIS CITY IS AN EQUAL CHARACTER TO EVERY LEAD IN THE BOOK. IT HAS TO SMELL AND BREATHE AND TASTE LIKE IT.

2- TIGHTER ON A INDISCRIMINATE BLOCK OF BUILDINGS. EACH HAS ITS OWN DISTINCT CHARACTERS.

3- A SLIGHT WORM'S EYE OF A CITY STREET CORNER BELOW. IT'S A HOSTAGE CRIME SCENE OUTSIDE A SEMI- RUNDOWN APARTMENT BUILDING. GO AHEAD AND FIND PHOTO REFERENCE FOR IT.

POLICE CARS, EMERGENCY VEHICLES. YELLOW POLICE TAPE IS UP KEEPING THE CASUAL SMATTERING OF A CROWD AT BAY.

A COUPLE OF NEWS VANS ARE PARKED AS CLOSE AS THEY CAN GET.

COPS MILL ABOUT. THIS HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR QUITE A WHILE.

A NONDESCRIPT WHITE CAR HAS MADE ITS WAY TO THE FRONT OF THE SCENE.

PAGE 2-

FIVE EQUAL SIZED PAGE LONG PANELS.

EACH PANEL IS THE SAME SHOT- ITS THE SAME CRIME SCENE THE SAME MOMENT AS THE LAST PANEL, BUT FROM THE TOP OF THE STAIRS OF THE APARTMENT BUILDING LOOKING DOWN ONTO THE STREET.

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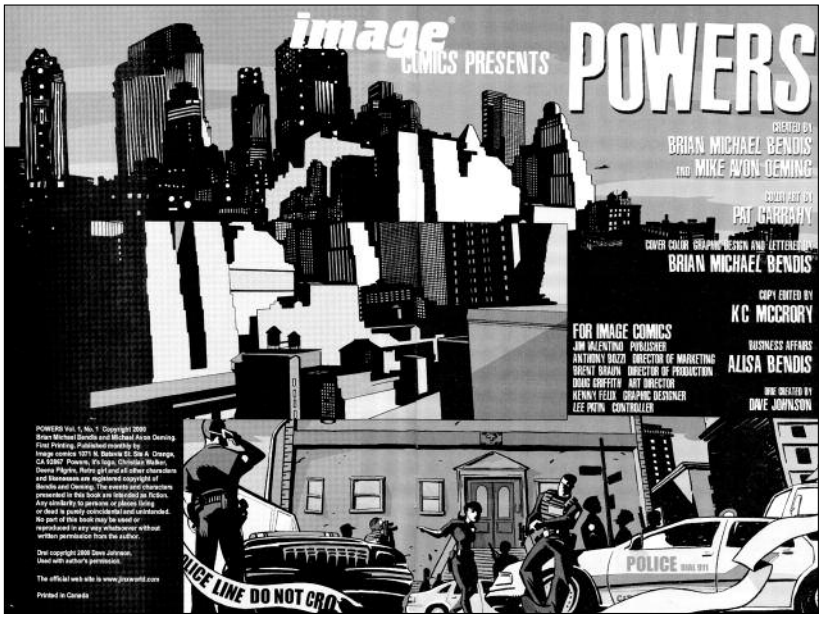


2.

CONTINUED:

1- THE WHITE CAR HAS STOPPED DEAD-CENTER OF THE PANEL. GETTING OUT OF THE CAR IS DETECTIVE CHRISTIAN WALKER WHO IS IMMEDIATELY SURROUNDED BY THE TOP COPS WHO WERE ALREADY ON THE SCENE.

THEY FOLLOW HIM AS THEY TALK.

CAPTAIN
WALKER.

WALKER
CAPTAIN...

CAPTAIN
WE BEEN CALLING...

WALKER
I WAS AT THE MOVIES.

CAPTAIN
WE BEEN CALLING IS ALL...

WALKER
YEAH, WELL--
WHAT IS THIS?
I'M HOMICIDE.

CAPTAIN
YOU'RE A COP,
AND THE GUY INSIDE WANTS YOU.

WALKER
WHO? WILLIAMS?

WILLIAMS
(THE NEGOTIATOR)
NO- HEY WALKER- NO, I SCREWED THE POOCH.

CAPTAIN
YOU COULDN'T NEGOTIATE SUPER-SIZING A HAPPY MEAL, YOU PIECE OF--!!!

WILLIAMS
COME ON...

CAPTAIN
I'M GOING TO DEAL WITH YOUR INCOMPETENT ASS LATER.

NO, THE GUY HOLDING THE PLACE, HE ASKED FOR YOU.

(CO

Michael Avon Oeming's translation of three pages of Brian's script for ***Powers: Who Killed Retro Girl*** #1. [©2002 Brian Michael Bendis & Michael Avon Oeming.]

CONTINUED: (3)

WALKER
VANISHED?

CAPTAIN
NO ONE SAW, NO ONE KNOWS.

THE GUY INSIDE- THE GUYS GOT ONE OF THOSE BACK PACK THINGS. GOT PINCHED ON A COUPLE OF DEPARTMENT STORE HOLD UPS...

WALKER
DOESN'T HELP ME...

CAPTAIN
WELL, HE KNOWS YOU AND HE'S GOT A GOD DAMN SEVEN YEAR OLD GIRL IN THERE.

GUYS BEEN CRYING LIKE A BABY FOR OVER AND HOUR.

WALKER
THE GIRL OR THE GUY?

CAPTAIN
THE GUY.

AND I'M NOT GOING TO HAVE THIS LOSER PSYCHO POP A GIRL ON THE SIX O CLOCK!! NOT TODAY. NOT ANY DAY.

WALKER
YEAH...WELL, COULD YA-

LET'S TRY TO MODULATE THE VOLUME, OK?

PAGE 3-

1-WALKER IS AT THE DOOR TO THE APARTMENT WITH HIS GUN OUT OF THE HOLSTER. THERE ARE SWAT GUYS ALL AROUND. ONE IN PARTICULAR IS HUGGING THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR.

VARIANTS OF THIS SHOT IS REPEATED OVER AND OVER UNTIL THE SCENE IS OVER.

SETZER
HEY WALKER...

(CONTINUED

WRITE Now! NUTS & BOLTS

Interview with
Mark Bagley

Interview by ***Danny Fingeroth*** on 3/21/01
Edited by ***Danny Fingeroth***
Copy-edited by ***Mark Bagley***

Mark Bagley has drawn comics written by four of the writers profiled in this issue: Stan Lee, Brian Bendis, J.M. DeMatteis, and Tom DeFalco. Heck, he's even drawn a few stories I wrote. He won the Marvel Tryout Contest, drew most of the first 25 issues of ***The New Warriors*** *(with writer Fabian Nicieza), and many issues of* ***Amazing Spider-Man*** *(with David Michelinie, DeMatteis and DeFalco). From there, Mark went on to* ***Thunderbolts*** *(with Kurt Busiek and then with Fabian), and today is riding the crest of popularity and hipness as the artist of the Brian Bendis written* ***Ultimate Spider-Man****. With a dance card like that, we figured Mark would be a perfect guy to talk about what it's like to be on the receiving end of a writer's plot and script. What does he look for in a plot, in a writer, and in comics in general? His insights will be an eye-opener for writers and fellow artists alike.*

DANNY FINGEROTH: *I'm here with Mark Bagley, the world famous artist on* ***Ultimate Spider-Man*** *as well as, of course,* ***Amazing Spider-Man****,* ***New Warriors*** *and* ***Thunderbolts****, and the unforgettable, "What if Spider-Man Had Been Possessed by His Alien Costume"?*

MARK BAGLEY: Which was written by Danny Fingeroth.

DF: *Well, yeah, I didn't want to mention that.*

MB: Yeah, you wanted me to. *[laughter]*

DF: *Let me start off the official interview here to get some idea of your background. What did your folks do Mark?*

MB: My mother was a housewife with seven kids, you know, a good Catholic family. My dad was in the Army Corps of Engineers. He was an officer. I'm officially an Army brat. I was born in Frankfort, Germany and lived in Hawaii, Japan, Florida a couple of times, Ohio a couple of times. You know, just staying one step ahead of the mortgage guy.

DF: *Where did you fit in there? Oldest, youngest, middle?*

MB: I'm the second oldest. I have a twin brother, very fraternal. He doesn't draw, doesn't read much, he's never been married. I've been married 22 years.

DF: *Did your parents, your family, encourage your work, your art or discourage it?*

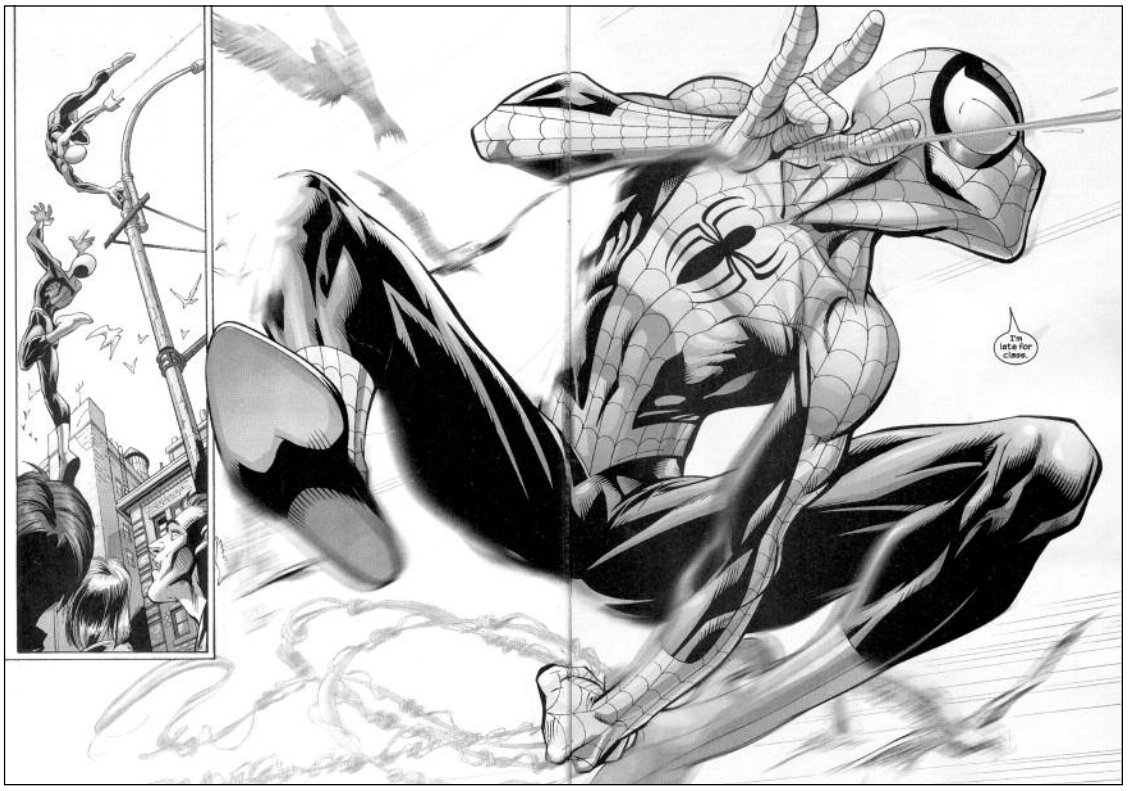
MB: They were concerned about it because I was so focused on it. I had wanted to do comics since I was a little, little kid. I was so focused on it that I let a lot of things go by the wayside. They were worried about my development.

DF: *But they didn't discourage the art?*

MB: You know, they would get me some art lessons and that sort of thing. Dad was just concerned about my overall stability. I love my dad, he's a great guy, but he didn't get comics. We'd fight about how much money I'd spend on them. I would be "Hey! You play golf. How much does golf cost every year? Come on, come on!" And he didn't really have an argument from then on.

DF: *Did you have anybody, friends or family who were into drawing, who encouraged you?*

MB: I was never a member of a comics community or anything like that. Everybody knew me because I had five brothers who were all jocks and I was one of the best artists in the school and that's got its own weird little notoriety in school. If they wanted a mural painted, it was either me or a guy named Mark Chapman, who was a lot more talented than I ever thought



Ultimate Spider-Man #22 with words by Brian Bendis, pencils by Mark Bagley, and inks by Art Thibert. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

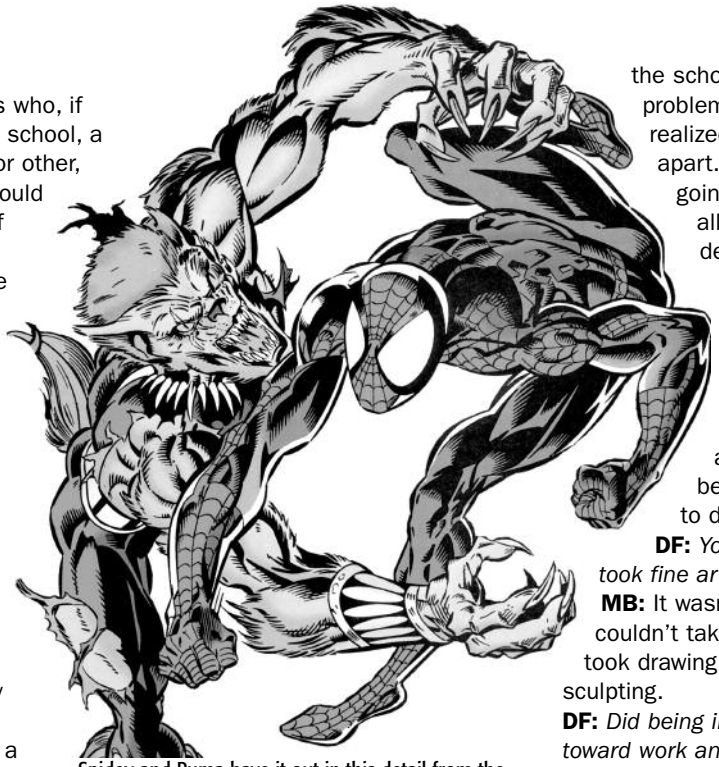
about being.

There were one or two others who, if something needed doing in the school, a banner or mural or something or other, they would come to us or we would work together on it, that sort of thing.

Mark was a heckuva lot more talented than I am. The last time I saw him, he was selling furniture. So, we can talk about discipline and sticking to it and that sort of thing.

DF: *Your parents got you some art classes, you said?*

MB: Every now and then I'd sign up for some summer art courses and I took all the art I could in school. They give us precious little art in schools these days, but back then, they were actually fairly well-funded. Especially in high school, I had a really influential teacher who was funny as hell and weird as hell. Mr. Daniels. He cared about you a lot. He was a good guy.



Spidey and Puma have it out in this detail from the cover of ***Amazing Spider-Man*** #395 by Mark and Larry Mahlstedt. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

DF: *Did he encourage your comics stuff?*

MB: He didn't quite understand it. But he encouraged drawing and encouraged art and anything that was really motivating any kid that wasn't giving him a hard time in class. If you were into art and that sort of stuff, he was there for you. You know, teachers take so much crap from students, especially those who were, you know, not interested.

DF: *Well, to have someone like you who was interested must have been great for him.*

MB: Those few, he would really enjoy and go all out for.

DF: *Now, after high school, what was your education?*

MB: I went just shy of three years to the Ringling School of Art in Sarasota, Florida. I joined the Army when I got out of high school so I could afford art school. I was in the army for three years and had top secret clearance and all that good stuff. I ended up in a top secret compound, doing slide shows and things like that for generals.

DF: *So, even in the army, you're still "the art guy"?*

MB: For graphics, yeah. My training was Cryptological Traffic Analyst, but I couldn't do that in the States, so for a year-and-a-half, at Ft. Bragg, I was basically doing slide shows and things.

DF: *What is Cryptological Traffic Analysis?*

MB: Basically I would take either voice or code intercept. And my job was to break it down for any military—

DF: *Code intercept from who? From what?*

MB: Chinese, Koreans, Russians at that time. Like I said, I had top secret clearance. When I was stationed at Ft. Bragg, they found out I was an artist, and they're like, "Okay, you can work with this one guy in this office here." And we did top secret briefings and things like that. Like I said, I did the army stint so I could afford art school. After the army, I moved to Atlanta and started at the Art Institute of Atlanta, which is part of a chain of art schools. I paid my tuition, and I never took a dime from my parents after I left the house, which was kind of nice. But the school was having some real staff problems. Within about three months I realized that the school was falling apart. It has since recovered, and it's going strong today. I basically got all my money back, including the deposit on the dorm, and went to the Ringling School of Art. The Ringling Brothers started it because they were patrons of the arts. It was a total fine arts school, at the time. Very little graphics or commercial art. So, I just took fine arts, because I really wanted to learn to draw as well as I could.

DF: *You didn't take cartooning? Just took fine art, painting and so on?*

MB: It wasn't like the Kubert School. You couldn't take comic book art courses. I just took drawing and painting and I took sculpting.

DF: *Did being in the Army affect your attitude toward work and career?*

MB: My dad, I think had more to do with us learning discipline, that when you got a job, you get it done and do it right, that sort of thing. I picked a lot of this up from comics, the whole idea of "with great power comes great responsibility," that sort of thing. The idea that, you've got a goal, you reach for it. You don't step on somebody while you're going for it and that sort of thing. I always had a plan of, "This is what I want to do and this is how I want to do it."

DF: *Cool.*

MB: But when I got out of art school, I had the typical story. It's tough to find work in the art field, and I had few other skills. Most of my brothers-in-law are carpenters and that sort of thing, so I banged nails with them for two or three years. I think every art student, everybody who has a dream of doing something, should spend a year banging nails in the summertime in Georgia and thinking that's what they're going to be doing for the rest of their lives. Just to teach them, "Hey if you're lucky enough to get a job you love or even a job you like, don't pee it away."

DF: *What stands out in your memory as far as cultural influences on you?*

MB: For me, growing up, all I read was science-fiction. I illustrated the Tarzan novels and Edgar Rice Burrow ***Mars*** novels. I was always illustrating. I never really felt like an artist, I felt like I loved telling stories visually.

DF: *What do you mean "illustrated"?*

MB: I would do five or six pages of panel by panel breakdowns of stories, illustrating them. Or I would do spot illustrations like Roy Krenkel or Al Williamson used to do.

DF: *At what age were you doing this?*

MB: Twelve, fourteen years old.

DF: *Nobody suggested it, you just decided to do it out of the blue?*

MB: I was always drawing.

DF: *Any TV shows or movies influence you?*

MB: Not really. I hated the ***Batman*** TV show. I hated the ***Hulk*** TV show. I hated the ***Spider-Man*** TV show. A couple of the

cartoons were okay. The ***Spider-Man*** cartoon show with the Ralph Bakshi stuff, the first season was decent, and the second season was an acid trip nightmare and I was thirteen. It was weird. I don't think anything I watched on TV changed me as a person. Although, I did cry at the end of "Brian's Song."

I'd get up early on Saturday morning and watch cartoons, the old Gladiator movies, if they re-showed them, dubbed real badly. Those were the closest to super-hero movies that we'd ever gotten, so I thought those were kind of cool.

DF: *And did you write your own stuff then, or did you work with friends who were writers to do a complete comic?*

MB: When I was a kid, I would write my own stuff. It started off with just ten pages of fight, and then when I started finally writing my stories, it was "borrowed," shall I say, heavily, from Marvel Comics, that sort of thing.

DF: *But you did do your own writing at one point?*

MB: Yeah. I had characters with really creative names like the Defender and the Night Stalker and maybe that was when I realized, "You know, I don't think I want to write full time." I started writing them just as a way to draw, to have things to draw and to draw different things.

DF: *And this was at what age?*

MB: I started doing this when I was like probably thirteen or fourteen.

DF: *Did you ever hook up with a writer or was it always your own stuff?*

MB: It was basically just my own stuff. And like I said, in the service, I hooked up with this guy Jay King and couple of other guys and we actually wrote a Batman meets Spider-Man story. We turned out like 35 pages. Spider-Man has to fly to Gotham City because somebody's climbing walls and killing people.

DF: *So, from a very early age you knew you wanted to make a living at comics.*

MB: A little kid picks up a comic book and reads it for the first time, or he looks at the pictures and thinks, "This stuff comes out of the air." Nobody thinks of people sitting down and doing this. For whatever reason, I always did think that, "Somebody had to be doing this and, boy, I'd love to be one of those guys." From age nine, as I remember it, I wanted to do comics. The first comic book I ever remember getting was, while we were on a west coast/east coast road trip in the middle of the summertime, my dad and me and two or three of my brothers. My mother had flown with the younger kids. And we pulled into this store, it was in the southwest someplace, 100 degrees, no air conditioning in the car. We got warm Dr. Peppers, and the store had a comic book rack and Dad bought us a couple of comic books. The first one I read was a ***Superboy*** comic where there's a dragon from Krypton. I remember reading it, thinking, "This is really cool."

DF: *That's when it dawned on you that people made these things?*

MB: That's how I remember it now. Whether that's true or not, I don't know.

DF: *Your big break was the Marvel Tryout Contest?*

MB: Yeah. I was 27. I was working at Lockheed. I had a daughter and a house. I was doing technical illustration for Lockheed. At that stage, I was new at it, and was basically taking black-&-white photographs of aircraft engine parts and exploding them out. Meaning, if there was a nut that goes into a washer that goes into a into a lock spring, I would "explode out" the parts for a technical manual, so guys look and it and go, "Oh, yeah, that's how that goes together."

DF: *How did you get the Lockheed job? Did you just show them that you could draw?*

MB: My sister-in-law worked for Lockheed and said, "You ought to apply." I was banging nails for a living and my back was killing me. I had fallen a couple of times, I could barely bend over with a tool belt around me. I would come home and go, "What the hell am I gonna do?" I wasn't getting anywhere in comics. My wife swears I was working every night practicing. I don't think it was that extreme. At this point I didn't yet have a daughter. She was born the same year, or the year after, I started working at Lockheed. So, I just applied for the job and they had this little test: draw a circle, draw an ellipse, draw something very simple. I had never done anything like this before, and my sister-in-law walked me through it once and I practiced it for like ten minutes, "Oh, yeah. I'm ready." It's really an entry level draftsman-type job. Now that work's all done on computers I was working at Lockheed trying to get in, and Marvel came out with a Tryout Book.

I was 27 years old and getting kind of burnt out on trying to break into comics, and I swore that I wasn't gonna be one of these 35 year old guys with a ten-year-old portfolio, walking around conventions going, "Would you look at my stuff?" If it wasn't going to happen, it wasn't going to happen. I wanted to have a social life. There wouldn't have been any bitterness about it. The comics store I go to was owned by a friend of

Gotham's protector and Flushing's web dude, by Bagley and Mark Farmer. Story by J.M. DeMatteis. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc. and DC Comics]

Still STAN LEE After All These Years

Interview by ***Danny Fingeroth***
Edited by ***Danny Fingeroth*** / Copy-edited by ***Stan Lee***

Stan Lee started as a writer and editor at Timely/Marvel in 1939. He was editorial director of Marvel, then became the company's Publisher and is now Publisher Emeritus. As a writer, Stan created or co-created icons of Marvel—and of American pop culture—including Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four, the X-Men, the Incredible Hulk and countless others. He has represented Marvel in Hollywood for the past three decades, helping create the movie and TV versions of Marvel's characters, among many other projects. Currently, he heads up POW! Entertainment, an independent developer of entertainment properties. He is one of the handful of people in entertainment media who can truly be called a Living Legend.

Stan gave some of his valuable time to be interviewed for ***Write Now!*** *on February 21, 2002. He talks about the craft of writing for entertainment media in general, and about his own writing in particular. His answers are peppered with fascinating stories from his illustrious and ongoing career. The interview was conducted by Danny Fingeroth at Stan's Los Angeles* ***Pow! Entertainment*** *offices.*

From ***Amazing Spider-Man*** v. 1 #32, by Stan Lee & Steve Ditko. [©2002 Marvel.]

DANNY FINGEROTH: *Stan, you've been writing comics for more than sixty years. How would you say the craft has evolved over the years?*

STAN LEE: The difference between writing comics today and years ago when I was doing them, there's more competition now. I think the writer today has to be more careful what he writes, has to try to be more literary, has to try to think more cinematically. Because there are many people in the field now who are film writers and novelists and so forth who decided they'd like to do comics. So I think the quality of writing just has to be better than it was years ago. I think that, today, the people creating comics are luckier than years ago. When I was doing them, nobody ever thought, "Oh boy, if I do a good job, they'll make a movie out of this." Today, I think that's uppermost on the mind of every writer who creates a new character. The first thing he thinks of is how much will I ask for the rights when Warner Brothers decides to make this a big budget film.

DF: *Will comics themselves, not the characters, but the medium ever be as big as it was?*

SL: I'm not sure comics will ever be as really big as they were decades ago. Nothing to do with the quality of the comics, it's just that there's more competition now. When I started doing comics they didn't have video games, there wasn't television, there weren't computers. Now there are so many other things to attract a potential reader's interest. I do think, however, that there will always be comics. They'll have their highs and their lows as far as sales are concerned but I think they'll always be with us.

DF: *When you write, is there an ideal, "typical" reader you see in your mind?*

SL: In the movie and television business, I'm considered something of an oddball because all that studios talk about, and TV networks talk about, is the demographic. We need a show for this demographic and that demographic. When I wrote comics and the few times that I still write some, I never think

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of any demographic. Frankly, I would just write stories that I thought I would enjoy reading. And that's the only audience I've ever written for. I write for an audience of one, myself. That's what makes it easy. I know how to please myself.

DF: *In a lot of your writing, I notice you commenting on the work world in general, and the publishing and entertainment industries in particular, especially in the relationship between Peter Parker and J. Jonah Jameson. Their constant verbal jousting feels very real, and in ways both older and younger readers could relate to. I'd love to know if you remember what you were thinking when you wrote those types of scenes, and more generally your feeling about the relationship between creators and business people in Hollywood and in publishing.*

SL: I don't know what was in my mind when I wrote the relationship between Peter and Jonah Jameson. But I think I have always felt there is always friction between an employee and an employer. I mean, I was very close and a good buddy with my boss Martin Goodman who was the publisher when I was the editor and art director, but there was still friction between us. Also, I always tried to inject humor in the strip when I could. I couldn't think of anything funnier than to have a guy who he worked for hate Spider-Man and not know that he really was Spider-Man, and even hate Peter Parker because this guy didn't like teenagers to begin with. I think Jonah Jameson was just an amalgam of all of the narrow-minded adults that I knew, and I knew many.

One of Stan's first published comics scripts, from 1941's ***All Winners Comics*** #1. Art by Al Avison and Al Gabriele. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

DF: *Can you compare how Marvel's flagship characters, especially Spider-Man, have evolved over the decades compared to say, James Bond, the Hardy Boys, or other longstanding serial fictional characters?*

SL: Spider-Man and James Bond have a lot in common. There are a lot of differences, too. The James Bond movies were based on a number of novels that were written by Ian Fleming. Now I am no authority on that. I don't know how many novels he wrote but I'm sure it wasn't as many as a hundred. Probably less than fifty. Maybe less than twenty five. Whereas a character like Spider-Man, ever since 1962, I think, has needed one complete story a month and that was just the Spider-Man magazine. There were also all the spin-off Spider-Man magazines. So you really can't compare a comic book hero with any hero in literature or movies simply because of the sheer volume of the number of stories that are required. It's miraculous that a character like Spider-Man could maintain a reader's interest all this time. Because I'm guessing that, with a character like James Bond, if a movie came out once a month for so many years. eventually people might get tired of it.

DF: *If you were a writer starting out today, what media and genres would you pursue?*

SL: As a writer today, I really don't know what I'd go into. I would probably go into whatever I thought I could write the best or the quickest. I think comics might seem too difficult for me. Years ago, Mario Puzzo, who wrote ***The Godfather***, used to work at our place. Not on comics, he worked on different magazines. But before he wrote ***The Godfather*** he really needed some money and he came to me one day and he said, "Stan could you give me a few comics to write? I can use the dough." Well, he was a good writer and I said: "Sure, Mario." I gave him an assignment. He brought it back about two weeks later. He said, "Stan I can't do it. I didn't realize it was this hard. The time it would take me to write this damn comic book I could write a novel." Well sure enough, after that he wrote ***The Godfather***. So comics are not everybody's cup of tea and I think if I were starting out today, I would try to write a screenplay or maybe try to sell a TV series, because it's as hard to succeed at one as the other. But if you succeed in TV or the movies, the rewards are just greater.

DF: *You've been living in L.A. for twenty or more years now. Do you like the town, or do you just feel it's where you have to be to do TV and movies?*

SL: I'm just fine with Hollywood and I don't mind saying it. When I lived in New York all I used to read about were those wild parties with the stars and the starlets jumping naked in swimming pools and those mad, wild orgies. I've been here twenty-one years, I've been to a lot of parties, and they're more conservative then the ones we had back home. Now maybe I'm too much of a square to be invited to the good ones, I don't know, but it's been a great disappointment. For God's sake if you write this please say "He said it with a laugh."

DF: *He said it with a laugh. So, Hollywood…*

SL: You always hear that people in Hollywood are all backstabbers, they're the worst people in the world, they'd shoot their mother for a nickel and so forth. But I gotta say, I guess maybe I'm unusual or I'm lucky but I love the people I've met.

DARKHAWK #37/SCRIPT/"THE GREATER EVIL"/FINGEROTH/7

1 JOHNNY: Now--I must fulfill--

2 JOHNNY: --the **next phase--!**

3 C.A.: **No--stop--!!**

4 C.A. (tht): Can still catch him--if I leap **far** enough--

5 C.A.: uhff Gone!

6 CAPT: And as the creature who had been **St. Johnny** fades away in a nimbus iof light...

7 CAPT: ...his friend **Ned Dobbs** recovers on a Coney Island Beach.

8 NED(tht): Gotta piece this **together...**! Johnny turns into this **techno-creature...**

9 NED(tht): ...more **advanced** than the one he became once before*...

10 FOOTNOTE(small):*DH #23.--Nel

11 NED(tht): ...beats the **tar** out of me...

12 NED(tht): ...and **teleports** away--ranting about his "master."

13 NED(tht): I've got a feeling...the whole **Universe** is in trouble...

14 CAPT: "...and that Darkhawk's gonna be needed--**desperately.**"

15 CHRIS(tht): So who wrote the note? Ocsh? Someone else? A friend? An **enemy?**

16 CHRIS(tht;small): Will I **die** if I become Darkhawk again? **Can** I become Darkhawk again?!

17 CHRIS(tht): Maybe I should just forget it **all**--chuck the amulet in the **bay.**

18 CHRIS(tht): But dad...I've got to **find** him--

19 CHRIS(tht;small): --but what if I **die...?**

On this page and the next: Two consecutive pages from ***Darkhawk*** #37. **Todd Smith** drew this page from **Danny Fingeroth's** plot. Danny then wrote the text, reproduced here, with the penciled art in front of him. This is what's known as "Marvel style" (because it was popularized by **Stan Lee** and his artists at Marvel in the 1960s) or "plot first" style. The script was then lettered by **Jim Novak**, guided by Danny's balloon placement indications done on photocopies of the art. Todd's pencils were then inked by **Ian Akin**.

WRITE Now! NUTS & BOLTS

What Editors (Really) Want

Interview with

Joe Quesada

Interview by ***Danny Fingeroth*** 3/22/02
Copy-edited by ***Joe Quesada***
Transcription by ***The LongBox.com Staff***

*Joe Quesada has done it all in comics. Starting as a colorist for Valiant Comics, his estimable penciling skills were soon discovered, and Joe became the artist on DC Comics' **The Ray** and then on **Azrael**, a character he also designed. Moving to work at Marvel Comics such as **X-Factor**, Joe became one of the top pencilers in the industry. With partner Jimmy Palmiotti and few of other folks, including his now-wife Nanci Dakesian, Joe started Event Comics, whose foremost character was **Ash**, the super-powered New York City fireman, created in stories co-written by Jimmy and Joe, penciled by Joe and inked by Jimmy. **Ash** is currently in development as a feature-length animated film at DreamWorks. While still with Event, Joe and Jimmy launched the **Marvel Knights** editorial imprint for Marvel. Aside from his editorial duties, Joe was penciler on an acclaimed run of **Daredevil**, working with writer and director Kevin Smith. Joe's editorial work on that line so impressed the powers that be, that in 2000, Joe was elevated to Editor-in-Chief of the entire Marvel line. Since then, hardly a day goes by when Joe, often in tandem with his partner-in-crime, Marvel COO Bill Jemas, doesn't grab some kind of industry headline. As Editor-in-Chief, Joe sets policy about what does and doesn't get published by Marvel Comics. So he seems like a person whose inner thinking you'd better get to know if you aspire to write for the House of Ideas, or if you're just wondering about the philosophy that drives the top editorial dog at the biggest company.*

DANNY FINGEROTH: *I thought that you, for the obvious reasons, would be a good person to interview for a magazine about comics writing. You have been on both sides of the desk, and you're now involved in setting editorial policy for the number one comics company.*

JOE QUESADA: All right, man, I'm ready.

DF: *The orientation of **Write Now!** is less towards inside gossip, although I'm always happy to have as much of that as you want to provide. Think of it as **Entertainment Weekly** meets **Writer's Digest**.*

JQ: Me gossip? I never gossip.

DF: *[laughs] It's always pure fact. The basic structure will be some background on you and your work, some general questions about the business and breaking in, and some specific questions about craft, plus a few beyond that. So… to begin… what did your folks do? Did they encourage creative work? Discourage it?*

JQ: My parents were your basic nine-to-five working folk. My father was born and raised in Cuba, and he understood at a very young age that he had an aptitude for drawing, which basically had to be snuffed out because of the fact that he was one of these kids that, unfortunately, at the age of thirteen had to go work to be the sole support for a family.

Cover to ***Daredevil,*** v. 2, #8 by Joe Quesada & Jimmy Palmiotti. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Although that was taken away from him, he saw the aptitude in me and was always very encouraging. I can't remember a time when I ever lacked drawing paper.

DF: *That's cool and pencils, too, I would hope. Those would have helped. [laughs]*

JQ: I drew in blood, actually.

DF: *Well, whatever it takes. [laughs]*

JQ: There were no pencils in my day. I drew the hard way—with blood.

DF: *[laughs] Were any of your siblings or friends in school into art or comics or writing or things like that?*

JQ: I was an only child, so no siblings.

DF: *Any teachers who inspired or encouraged you?*

JQ: Sure, absolutely. Very early on in grammar school, I had a teacher who was very attuned to the arts. Mrs. Dorothy Cohen of PS 19 in Corona, Queens. We were going to Broadway plays

From ***Iron Man*** v. 3 # 28, "The Mask In The Iron Man" story arc, written by Joe, with art by Sean Chen and Rob Hunter. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

in the third grade. We were being taken to things like ***Godspell*** and to real sophisticated stuff at a very young age.

DF: *You grew up in what part of New York?*

JQ: Queens, New York, 95th Street between Roosevelt and 37th Avenues in Jackson Heights to be exact. I was really exposed to a lot of theatre and a lot of stuff very, very early on in my life.

DF: *But you always drew, and the writing and editorial part of your brain and attitude came in later? The drawing was your first love?*

JQ: The editorial part came in much, much later. Although I did write a lot of creative stuff in school, I wouldn't have called myself a skilled writer to any extent, but I did have a very, very, very active imagination and I used to put that stuff down on paper. I think, inevitably, that was one of the things that originally attracted me to comics when I was a very young child. Although I didn't necessarily focus on the writing portion of my brain, I was always putting stuff on paper.

DF: *Did you go to art school or major in it in college or anything?*

JQ: After high school, it was art school. I went to the School of Visual Arts in New York City. I received a partial scholarship and basically I went to art school because I didn't really know what else to do.

I wasn't really 100% sure that I wanted to be an artist because, for me... I know people who draw all day long and just love to draw, but drawing didn't come easy to me. I couldn't just sit there and draw a bowl of fruit. I got bored very easily and I would draw it and say "a million people have drawn bowls of fruit," and I would always try to draw something that no one had ever seen. Again, I guess that was the appeal of comics, the fact that you get to draw things, just create them from scratch, create worlds and characters and things that people have never seen. And you get to do multiple images on a page as opposed to one stagnant image that you work on for weeks and weeks. This is a lesson that I learned the hard way because I majored in illustration, and in the world of illustration, they ask you to focus on one image and draw that image and make it as fine-tuned as possible before submitting it to the client. I think that, again, one of the reasons I eventually graduated to comics was that you get to draw and also to tell the story through still images. I guess, mentally, as an artist, I was very impatient. Drawing is not as much a pleasure to me as it is to some other people. Sometimes it's a very painful act to draw for me.

DF: *Your drawing is very detailed and very ornate. I can see that you don't just dash off your drawings.*

JQ: I have very little tolerance for my own stuff. So I get very, very bored. I hate doing a cover layout for a project that I know I've done before and it just torments me. I feel like I'm cheating the reader, I'm cheating myself. I've always been that way. That's why comics, for me, is a painful creative process, because I work so hard at the layout stage. I do layout after layout after layout until I finally realize that I've got something that is either unique to me, or something that I figure, I can't do anything else but this derivative piece that I've already done before but I've explored every option. Mind you, the latter has rarely happened. I think that's why the writing half of it came later for me, too, because I saw so many great people writing such wonderful stuff that, damn it if I can't do anything as good as Frank Miller is doing, why bother?

DF: *Then nobody would be in the industry but Frank Miller. Was it always comics that turned you on, or was there something else? Did you know from the time you were a kid that that's what you wanted to do?*

JQ: It wasn't always comics. It was comics early on, and then it became girls and sports.

DF: *So that was the gigolo and professional baseball player period?*

JQ: Actually, I left comics almost at as early a stage as I picked them up. I read them for a few years and then I dropped them, and then actually music became my first love. I taught myself how to play a bunch of instruments and I taught myself how to write music. I performed a lot for many, many years. It was a bigger part of my life than comics. I've spent more time being a musician than I have in the comics industry.

DF: *Were you earning a living as a musician?*

Confessions of a Male Model

Interview with

Tom DeFalco

Interview by ***Adam McGovern*** in mid-2001
Updated by ***McGovern*** in late 2001 and
by ***Danny Fingeroth*** in May 2002
Edited by ***Danny Fingeroth***
Copy edited by ***Tom DeFalco*** May 2002

From Betty and Veronica to a certain well-known web-swinger, to the hybrid of all three known as Spider-Girl, Tom DeFalco is comics' jack of all trades, and master of them all, as well. Well, okay, he can't draw—but he's regularly aligned with the top artists in the business, including Ron Frenz, Pat Olliffe, Al Williamson, Ron Lim, Sal Buscema and Mark Bagley. And that's not even mentioning Tom's seven year stint as Marvel's Editor-in-Chief during the company's highest-selling period since the halcyon days of the 1940s! Today, Tom's splitting his time between ***Spider-Girl****, creator-owned projects such as* ***Randy O'Donnell is The M@n****, and his usual cryptically-alluded-to secret projects that will make the world bow before his genius… or at least enable him to finally open that pizzeria he's always talking about.*

In this interview with Adam McGovern, we focus on the writing side of Tom, especially since (a) that's how he primarily sees himself (when he's not pursuing his true vocation of male modeling, that is) and (b) that's what this blamed magazine is about! But, of course, with the unique insider's view Tom's had at Marvel, and before that, at Archie, it's impossible to have his observations of the craft and business of writing not be informed by his experience as a suit—or, at least, as a tie. (I don't think I ever remember Tom wearing a suit to the office when I worked for him as Group Editor of the Spider-Man line. But he did have the most garish collection of ties I've ever seen, which he proudly displayed for all to see.)

Best known as a writer for his distinguished stints on various Spider-Man series—and generally considered one of the finest interpreters of the webslinger since Stan Lee himself, Tom tells it like it was, is, and maybe even how it will be. A lifelong lover of the comics medium, he's trying hard, on a daily basis, to figure out how to keep the medium going and growing well into the future. If you're curious how to work both within and on the outside of "the system" to get your ideas to a mass audience, as well as how to become a professional writer and have a successful career at it, then Tom has some insights that you just may find enlightening.

ADAM McGOVERN: *You've had a Zelig-like career as the power behind a number of pop-culture phenomena that ended up being much better known than you yourself; for instance, one of Marvel's longest-running editors started at Archie Comics.*
TOM DeFALCO: I started working at Archie doing… I don't even know what! *[laughs]* Working in their editorial production department. I remember the first thing they told me to do was open up the mail for "Dear Betty and Veronica." That's how I started, opening mail, and things just got crazy from there!

AM: *And you were the architect of their digest format?*
TD: Yes. But I didn't *create* the format. I believe that Gold Key was the first publisher to do digest-sized comics. I saw the format, and proposed it to John Goldwater, the company's publisher and one of its owners. He called me an idiot, and told me not to waste his time. *[laughs]* I was convinced that the format was perfect for Archie, so I kept bugging him. He came in one day and decided to give it a shot. Since I had been pushing the idea, the very talented Victor

Tom and Ron Lim's creator owned ***Randy O'Donnell is The M@n*** #2. Inks by Robert Jones. [©2002 Tom DeFalco & Ron Lim.]

Cover to DeFalco written ***Amazing Spider-Man***, v. 1, #260. Penciled by Tom's longtime collaborator Ron Frenz. Inked by Joe Rubinstein. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Gorelick, who is still Archie's managing editor, dropped the digests in my lap—and I was in charge of them until I left the company.

AM: *And then what route did you take from Archie to Marvel?*

TD: After writing for Archie Comics for awhile, I began to freelance for Charlton Comics. I was assigned to write stories for the various ***Flintstones*** titles and books like ***Scooby-Doo***, ***Hong Kong Phooey***, and ***Wheelie and The Chopper Bunch***. Somewhere along the line, I met Paul Levitz who was an assistant editor at DC at the time and he introduced me to the legendary Joe Orlando, one of the finest editors this industry has ever seen. Joe used me for a few custom comics and recommended me to the other editors at DC.

I still remember when Denny O'Neil called out of the blue and gave me my first real DC assignment. He was editing a love comic, and told me to write a story based on the title "I Won't Kiss That Evil Way!" I think I showed up with four or five different pitches. *[laughs]* Denny okayed one, and liked my finished script enough to offer me some other assignments. I eventually showed some of my DC work to the equally-legendary Archie Goodwin who was in charge of Marvel at the time. Archie gave me an assignment, a five- or six-page story starring The Vision. Others followed. Charlton eventually stopped making new comics, and I continued working for DC until they had their implosion [after the ill-fated "DC Explosion," in late 1978].

AM: *Did you always harbor dreams of reaching certain points and working for certain companies, or did you just throw yourself into what you were doing at a given time?*

TD: I only know one way to write: I have to be 100% committed to my current project on an emotional level, or it's like pulling teeth. You're talking to a guy who can pour just as much enthusiasm into a story with Yogi Bear as one with Spider-Man. As far as my career went, I knew which companies paid the best rates, and kept hoping that I would eventually be good enough to get regular work at DC or Marvel.

AM: *How did you get into things like toy development?*

TD: It's more the editorial background of the toy development.

At one point, Marvel made a deal with Hasbro. Hasbro was going to relaunch the G.I. Joe toys. Someone realized that there were all sorts of restrictions on advertising a toy—you could only show exactly what the toy could do—but there were no restrictions on advertising a comic book. So they came up with this bright idea of getting Marvel to do a comic book: They would advertise the comic, and use animation to show all sorts of exciting things and special effects. Hopefully, people would be so intrigued by the comic book, they'd buy the toys. The plan worked. G.I. Joe became a best-selling comic book and toy line. The plan also convinced me that television advertising would *never* for be feasible for the comic book industry. Hasbro spent millions on television commercials. While ***G.I. Joe*** eventually became one of Marvel's top-selling titles, the profits never equaled the cost of the commercials. The only reason the plan worked was because Hasbro was using the commercials to support a major toy line.

AM: *That's interesting. I didn't remember that the tie-in had predated the actual toys.*

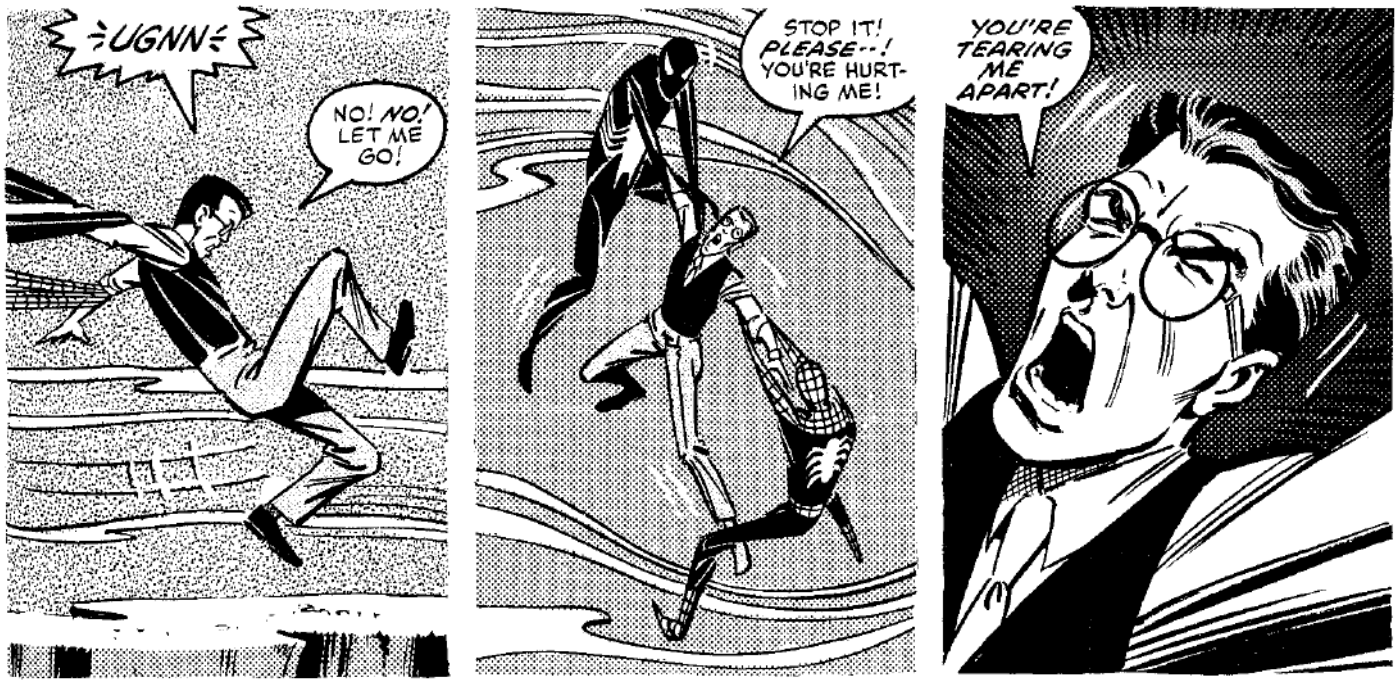
TD: Oh, yeah. Jim Shooter was Marvel's Editor-in-Chief at the time. He put me in charge of the creative team for ***G.I. Joe***. Larry Hama, who is one of the industry's most underrated writers, did all of the early character biographies, and basically set the standard for all the toy biographies that came afterwards.

AM: *I was kind of surprised, actually, when I realized you'd been involved with that particular project; looking back, it doesn't seem quite in line with your current characters' ideas on conflict resolution.*

TD: Well, you've got to try a bunch of different things! *[laughs]* May Parker [Spider-Girl's peacemaking alter-ego] has her ideas, but different characters have others. Part of the fun of being a writer is that you get to explore many different personas.

AM: *After that you had some connections in both industries?*

TD: For a few years, I had feet in both industries, and occasionally still do. Hasbro was a small company at the time, and now they're one of the biggest! We had a terrific relationship with them, and it lasted many years. They were



DeFalco, Frenz and Rubinstein depict a nasty Peter Parker nightmare in ***ASM***, v. 1 #258. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

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(Indicia): We open this story with an establishing shot of a **morgue**. A **medical examiner** is pulling on her rubber gloves as she glances toward a nearby examining table that contains a **corpse** within a body bag. (Pat, I'm thinking the ME should be a middle age woman of color, but draw whomever you want.)

With a casual detachment that boarders on outright boredom—*she's done this more times than she'd care to count*—she begins to unzip the body bag.

Suddenly, a puzzled expression fills her face.

Pulling back the camera, we see that the corpse is **Crazy Eight** who is still dressed in his costume and makeup.

This page and the next: Tom and penciler **Pat Olliffe** work Marvel style. In this case—in ***Spider-Girl*** #41—there are no captions or dialogue (besides title and credits and whatever in real life would have text on it—the newsman's name, for example) because this story was part of Marvel's experimental *'Nuff Said Month*, where the creators tried to tell their stories "silently."
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(Stan Lee presents—Story Title—Credits): We immediately cut to the **Web Site**, the headquarters that our hero has been sharing with Normie Osborn. Dressed in her **Spider-Girl costume**, an enraged **Mayday Parker** is viciously hurling her **mask** to the floor. (Pat, Normie and Phil are also present, but need not be shown on this page.)

The Stand-Up Philosopher

Interview with

J.M. DeMatteis

Interview by ***Danny Fingeroth*** 4/15/02
Copy-edited by ***J.M. DeMatteis***
Transcription by ***The LongBox.com Staff***

Brooklyn-born J.M. DeMatteis has been one of the top writers in comics, both critically and commercially, for twenty-five years. This combined success has given him the freedom to pursue many sides of his creative nature, writing both mainstream super-hero comics, including ***Spider-Man***, ***Superman***, ***Batman***, *and* ***The Spectre***, *and personal, idiosyncratic works including* ***Moonshadow***, ***Seekers Into the Mystery***, *and* ***Blood***. *Along the way, J.M. has also found time to write for TV series such as* ***Superboy*** *and* ***Earth: Final Conflict*** *and even to write and record his own music. Here, J.M. talks to* ***Write Now!*** *about how he has consistently pursued his creative dreams, even when it would have been easy to abandon or compromise them.*

DANNY FINGEROTH: *Let's start with a little bit of background on J.M. DeMatteis, unless it's none of my damn business.*
J.M. DeMATTEIS: I'm Brooklyn born and bred. I would say working class Brooklyn, apartment building living, a lower middle class kind of neighborhood in Brooklyn.
DF: *Did your family encourage your creative work, or discourage it? Were you doing creative stuff early on?*
JMD: My father's thing was always, "You should take the civil service test." He worked for the [New York City] Parks Department, "Good health plan." "You should be a teacher," that was his other thing. "Be a teacher and work for the city." It was always "work for the city or work for the state," because that's what my parents did. My mother was a switchboard operator. She worked for the state parole board.
DF: *The city and state were not likely to go out of business.*
JMD: They were not likely to go out of business, true. On the one hand they were totally clueless as to the type of person I was. When I was a kid, from the time I could pick up a pencil, I was drawing. Then I was drawn to music and I was playing music and got into rock-and-roll bands, and then I got into writing. That's always what I wanted to do, basically, since I was little, tiny kid. I knew that's what I wanted to do, if not specifically just one thing, I knew it was going to be one of those creative fields. I remember when I was fourteen years old, talking to a friend on the phone, and going, "I'm never going to have a nine-to-five job. I could never do that. I have to do something creative." I always knew that, and I always felt very lucky and very blessed that I knew that and God made me basically incapable of doing anything else. Because every time I'd get a real job, I couldn't bear it and I would always quit them after fifteen minutes.
DF: *What kinds of real jobs?*
JMD: Most of the time I was playing in a band, so we made enough money playing. Not a lot, but enough. Periodically, I'd have to go get some job somewhere. The longest job I ever had was, I used to work in a place called Barron's Books near Brooklyn College. Whenever we'd run out of money, some of us [in the band] would go there and get our jobs back and work there for three months or six months. I don't even know if we lasted six months. That was the longest lasting thing that I had. But a lot of the time, I would just go and get these temp jobs. They'd put these ads in the paper saying, "Get wonderful jobs in publishing. Work at Random House." Then they'd stick you at Random House with six crates of paper that you had to collate. I had one job that obviously could only have existed before computers. It was at some publishing company, and they published a lot of magazines. They had subscription lists, and you had to go through this list and look at every single name. And if I saw "Danny Fingeroth" on page twelve and I saw "Danny Fingeroth" on page 362, I'd have to go back and check and cross out the duplicate name.

From "Kraven's Last Hunt," part 3, "Descent," from ***Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man*** #131. Story by DeMatteis, art by Mike Zeck and Bob McLeod. [©2002 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

The narrator of ***Brooklyn Dreams***, from issue #1. Script by JMD. Art by Glenn Barr. [©2002 J.M. DeMatteis and Glenn Barr.]

DF: *How would you remember it?*
JMD: I really couldn't, but I got a great list of names for characters. I would go to some of these jobs and, literally, it would be a two-day temp job and it would be two o'clock on the second and I'd go, "I can't bear being here anymore." And I would go over to the boss and say, "I'm sorry but I have to leave," and I'd just leave. I just couldn't bear it. I did not function well in that world at all. Thank God that I had the talent to keep me going otherwise. But, going back to the subject of my parents, on the one hand, my father was like, "You should work for the city, you should do this, you should do that." But they were never in any shape or form negative about my creativity. They were very pleased about my creativity and perhaps not encouraging the way I'm encouraging with my kids because it's of my life and it wasn't part of their lives, but they were very supportive of it. They never understood me going into the comic book business, I'm sure. They spent so many years saying, "What are you reading that for?", and suddenly it was my career.
DF: *Any friends in school that you'd hang out with, a bunch of kids who did writing or drawing?*
JMD: When I was in grade school, I was "the drawing guy." I was the guy you went to for the picture. And actually, my best friend growing up was also an extremely creative guy. Very smart, very creative. I remember being kids and doing comics together. We wrote the script, and I did the pictures and we both colored it. We did the whole thing, and we just grew up together sharing our creativity. It was good to have a friend who was also very creative. Growing up in an apartment building, we had tons of kids in the building. You never had to worry about, like I do with my kids, play dates, because there were a million kids. You'd just go outside and there would be 40 kids there and you'd play. In the summer, I didn't go to camp or anything. It was "Camp Ocean Avenue." We'd go outside and play in front of the building or go across the street to the churchyard, or around the block. My friend Bob Izzo and I would create these scenarios, like what you'd call role-playing games now. We would create a plotline, and everyone would get a character, and we would then act it out. Sometimes we'd pick one plotline and carry it out for the entire summer.
DF: *With characters you'd invented or characters in comics?*
JMD: Characters we invented. And we would just create situations, and it would be the son of the prince versus the rebels. The son of the prince joins the rebels and they fight, and it would go on all summer long.
DF: *Did you make Super 8 movies of these things?*
JMD: No, we never did... it would be a great thing to see, but we never did. There was this creativity, and this friend of mine was a very important part of that growing up. But I was also the guy that spent a lot of time in his room, just because I used to like to be in my room and draw or read or whatever it was. I spent a lot of time in my own head, in my own imagination. I had a lot of friends, as I said. All I had to do was go