

INSIDE: MARK WAID & MIKE WIERINGO!

DANNY FINGEROTH'S

WRITE

Now!

MAGAZINE

#6

January
2004



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In the USA

POWERS IN DEPTH

SEE HOW
**BRIAN MICHAEL
BENDIS** AND
**MICHAEL AVON
OEMING** CREATE
THE HIT SERIES!

PLUS:

**MARK
BAGLEY**

**MICHAEL
USLAN**

**BOB
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PLUS: MORE
WRITE Now!
**NUTS &
BOLTS**
WRITING TIPS!

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

DANNY FINGEROTH'S
WRITE Now!
 MAGAZINE

Issue #6

January 2004

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Conceived by
DANNY FINGEROTH
 Editor-in-Chief
 Designer
CHRISTOPHER DAY
 Transcribers
STEVEN TICE
 Publisher
JOHN MORROW

COVER
 Penciled and inked by
MICHAEL AVON OEMING
 (with an homage to *Danger Diabolik*)
 Colored by
PETER PANTAZIS

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MARK BAGLEY
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PATTY JERES
ERIC NOLEN-WEATHINGTON
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PETER PANTAZIS
ADAM PHILIPS
CHRIS POWELL
BEN REILLY
BOB SCHRECK
DIANA SCHUTZ
AARON SEVERSON
VARDA STEINHARDT
NEIL VOKES
MARK WAID
MICHAEL WRIGHT

READ Now!

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

It's here at last, our bold experiment in comics-writing investigation: **Write Now! In Depth: Powers** #19.

We present for your consideration a detailed look at a significant issue of a significant story arc by two of today's most significant comics creators, **Brian Michael Bendis** and **Michael Avon Oeming**. Significant enough for you?

From the script of the issue, to the printed comic, to commentary by the writer and artist, we bring you inside the heads of the creators, to see what they were thinking, what they intended, and how they feel about the story with the passage of time. I think it's a unique way to examine and—given the teaching aspect of this magazine—to learn about the craft of comics making. Brian and Mike were extraordinarily generous with their time and insights and with just allowing us to do this. The new cover by Mike, beautifully colored by **Powers** colorist **Peter Pantazis**, is rather amazing, too. I can't wait to hear what you think of the issue.

But since too much is never enough at **DFWN!**, we've also got the usual plethora of amazement in addition to **In Depth**.

Nuts & Bolts how-to wise, we've got more Bendis magic in the form of some **Ultimate Spider-Man** script, and pencils of those pages by the ever-incredible **Mark Bagley**. And we've got **Mike Oeming's** writing and **Neil Vokes' art** on some remarkable pages from their **Parliament of Justice** graphic novel.

Then, to accompany our information-filled interview with **Mark Waid**, we have script and art from his and **Mike Wieringo's** **Fantastic Four** (you gotta see 'em), as well as Waid script, pencils (by **Barry Kitson**) and inks (by **James Pascoe**) from Mark's own **Empire** series.

We also have a making-of article by writer and **Batman** movie producer **Michael Uslan** about the creation of his **Batman** Graphic Novel: **Detective #27**. Talk about insider views!

As for interviews that tell you gobs of important info about comics writing and the comics business, be sure to check out the above-mentioned interview with Mr. Waid, conducted by the one-and-only **Jimmy Palmiotti**. Besides that, there are the conclusions to the interviews with **Batman** Group Editor **Bob Schreck**, Dark Horse Senior Editor **Diana Schutz**, and Platinum Studios head **Scott Mitchell Rosenberg**.

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

Also next issue, we'll be doing an extensive interview with **Batman's** own **Jeph Loeb**, who brings along an awesome **Tim Sale** Catwoman painting that will be our cover! Plus: we'll be checking in with **Crimson Dynamo** and **Iron Man** writer **John Jackson Miller** and with **Pirates of Cazador's** **Chuck Dixon**.

Platinum's **Lee Nordling** will tell us about why Hollywood really wants your comic. **Mark Wheatley** (who writes the Oeming-drawn **Hammer of the Gods**) tells about the creation of his **Frankenstein Mobster** series that he both scripts and draws. And animator **Yvette Kaplan** (**Ice Age** is among her credits) will give us her insights into that industry.

And issue #8 will feature another bold TwoMorrrows experiment as **Write Now!** and **Mike Manley's** **DRAW! Magazine** do a crossover, creating a character and comic, starting in **Write Now!** and finishing in **DRAW!** #9, with **DRAW!** having a color mini-comic story insert featuring the new character.

SHAMELESS PLUG DEPARTMENT: The **Comics and Graphic Novel Writing** course that I'm teaching at NYU's School of Continuing and Professional Studies has been a blast. (**Denny O'Neil**, **Mike Mignola**, **Joey Cavalieri**, and **Axel Alonso** have guest-lectured!) I predict you'll be seeing the names of some of my students in the credits of comics in the not-too-distant future. If anybody's interested, I'm giving it again in the Spring (and you can check it out at: www.nyu.edu/scps.nyu).

Also, my book, **Superman On the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society**, published by Continuum, will be out in the Spring. It's a book in which I blab on at length about why super-heroes have been so influential in our culture. I think it'll be of interest to comics fan type readers as well as academic ones. And **Stan Lee** himself wrote the foreword.

Okay, let's get on with the issue.

Write Away!

DANNY
Danny Fingeroth





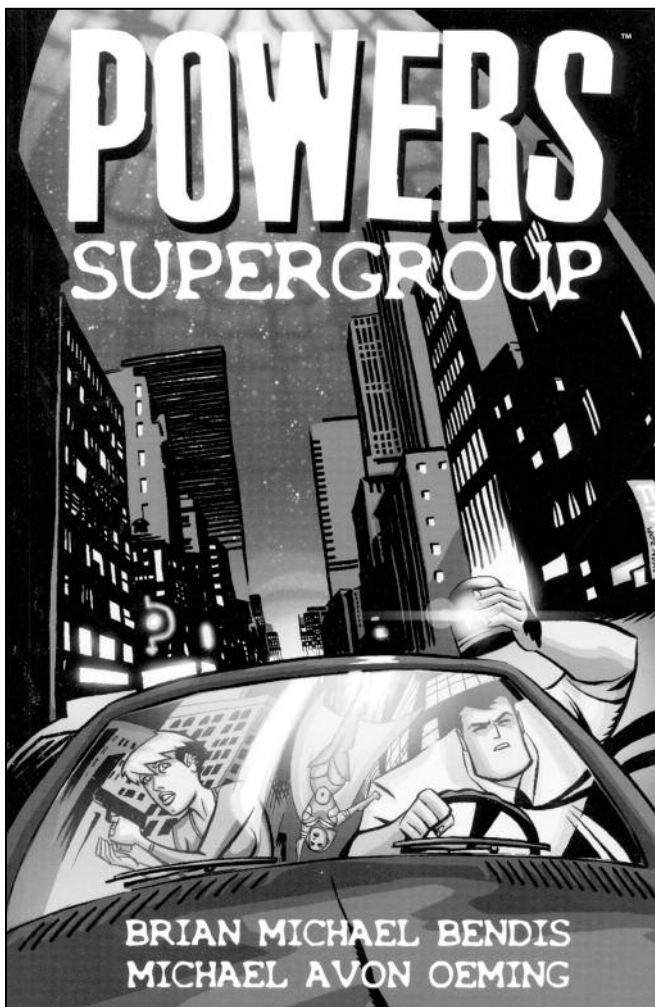
IN DEPTH

Nuts & Bolts Gone Wild!

by Danny Fingeroth

“What the heck is *Write Now! In Depth*?” you may be asking. Even if you’re not, I’m going to tell you.

One of the missions of *Write Now!* is to pull the curtain back and show how comics and related media are created, usually from a writer-centric point of view. Comics being a collaborative medium, the visual is always integrally related to the ideas and words. Up until now, we’ve presented interviews with specific creators and decision makers in the comics and animation worlds. You get to read how people like J. Michael Straczynski, Anne D. Bernstein and Axel Alonso think, how they decide what projects to take on and how to approach them. In our *Nuts & Bolts* sections, we show the elements that go into the making of stories.



The cover to the collected edition of “SuperGroup” in the fourth *Powers* trade paperback. [©2003 Jinxworld, Inc.]

For this issue, I wanted to try something more, well, in depth, dealing with one specific series by one specific set of creators for a large section of the magazine. And nothing seemed more natural for the treatment than Brian Michael Bendis and Michael Avon Oeming’s *Powers* series.

The unique vision of two pros at the top of their respective games, *Powers* is an “Indy” that is fully cognizant of the “mainstream” comics heritage it draws on. Because they own *Powers*, Brian and Mike can take it in whatever direction they choose, not having to please editor, publisher or critics. A look at the close to 40 issues and the *Powers* TPBs show that they have indeed unleashed their imaginations to both pay homage to and critique the super-hero genre. The fan and media attention to the series shows that their instincts have led them to create something people across a wide spectrum respond to. Using the crime genre that Brian has perfected in comics like *Goldfish* and *Jinx*, the result is something that seems both familiar and yet radically different. Love it or hate it, *Powers* is unique in comics. It’s a series and a universe that many people are intrigued and inspired by.

What we’re doing here with *WN! In Depth*, then, is examining how this phenomenon, *Powers*, was created, how a specific story arc (“SuperGroup” from issues #15-20) came to be, and to look closely at one chapter in that arc (issue #19). Through probing the creators with detailed questions, we illuminate the creative process, showing how Brian and Mike create the stories—how they function separately and collaboratively. Seeing how they do it should, ideally, offer inspiration for a reader’s own writing and/or art. For those not interested in making stories, but in simply knowing how they’re made by these two accomplished creators, I hope this issue is an enlightening insight into how it’s done.

As always, I’m eager to know how you feel about what we’ve done this issue, devoting such a large portion of it to specific creators and their creation. As always, I’m sure you’ll let me know. In depth.

If I haven’t already done so elsewhere, let me here make sure to thank Brian and Mike for their co-operation in this *In Depth* issue, from letting us reprint the entire story from *Powers* #19 and its script, as well as for thoughtfully answering my many questions. You guys are really the best!



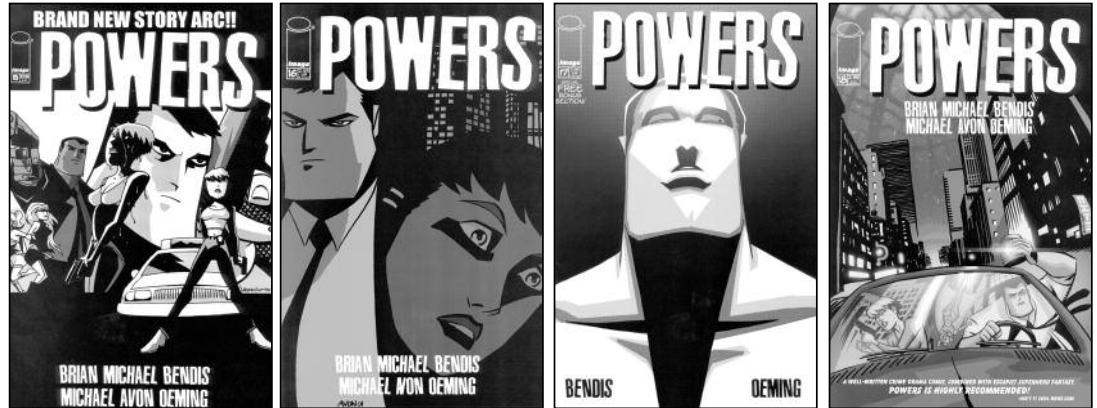
IN-DEPTH



Ground Rules and Notes

How *In Depth* works:

We have Brian's screenplay style script for the comic, which we'll be presenting side by side with the printed comics pages. We're going to break up the comic with interviews with Brian and Mike. The first two interviews will deal with the *Powers* series in general, the second two will deal with their thoughts on the "SuperGroup" storyline. We'll start off on the next page with the first section of script and story, which will be followed by the first interview with Brian.



The covers for *Powers* #15-18, the first four chapters of "SuperGroup." [©2003 Jinxworld, Inc.]

A note about the issue selected to focus on:

Picking the next to last (one might even say "penultimate" if one were inclined to throw big words around) chapter of a story arc to dissect may seem an odd choice. Logic might dictate taking either the first or last chapter. My reasoning was purely based on which chapter I thought would best work as the subject of an *In Depth* study. Since the issues of the "SuperGroup" arc exist as individual comics as well as chapters in a trade paperback collecting the storyline in its entirety, I thought it reasonable to showcase one issue while discussing the entire story. That is, after all, how many readers experienced the issue—reading it as a standalone entity, either having read the previous issues, or even coming to #19 cold.

The full credits for *Powers* #19 are:

Image Comics presents:

POWERS

created by

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS and
MIKE AVON OEMING

Coloring PETER PANTAZIS

Lettering KEN BRUZENAK

Copy Editor KC McCORRY

Business Affairs ALISA BENDIS

For Image Comics:

Publisher JIM VALENTINO

Director of Production BRENT BRAUN

Controller TRACI HALLE

The official *Powers* website is www.jinxworld.com

One more thing...

For the sake of those who haven't read, or who have forgotten, the details of *Powers* #15-18, I present the recap that readers of issue #19 found on the inside front cover. For those wishing to see how the arc ends in issue #20... go out and buy the issue or the TPB. You won't regret it. And neither will Brian or Mike. (And the preceding plug was my idea—don't go blaming them for it!)

—DF

PREVIOUSLY:

Detectives Christian Walker and Deena Pilgrim work out of the special homicide unit in charge of cases that involve... Powers.

One of the world's most celebrated super-teams FG-3 has broken up and one of its members, Benmarley, is found dead, having exploded from the inside. While investigating the case, Walker and Deena are faced with federal involvement, and both remaining members of FG-3, Wazz and Boogie Girl are missing.

When they finally find Boogie Girl, the chase turns into a disaster. A news helicopter crashes right in the middle of the city, killing civilians, and the fight takes the life of Walker's girlfriend, controversial Power... Zora.

Before she can answer for her crime, Boogie Girl explodes from the inside just as her teammate had.

AND NOW... **POWERS** #19... **IN DEPTH**

POWERS

POWERS

BY BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS AND MICHAEL AVON OEMING

ISSUE NINETEEN

SUPERGROUP PART 5

PAGE 1-

THIS IS TV FOOTAGE FROM THE P.O.V. OF THE NEWSCOPTER THAT GOT TAGGED BY BOOGIE GIRL AND CRASHED LAST ISSUE. ITS THE FIGHT SCENE FROM THE P.O.V. OF THE CAMERA. THE LAST FOOTAGE TAKEN OF ZORA.

1- EXT. CITY- DAY

TV SCREEN. THE CAMERA ZOOMING IN ON ZORA FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE AGAINST A WILD EYED BOOGIE GIRL. POWERS AND CUBES SHOOTING OFF OF BOTH OF THEM.

THIS FIGHT IS MID AIR.

DISPATCH
CHANNEL SEVEN, THIS IS CENTRAL POLICE
DISPATCH DO YOU READ?

DISPATCH (CONT'D)
THIS IS CHANNEL SEVEN NEWSCOPTER, OVER.

DISPATCH (CONT'D)
ADVISE, YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO LEAVE THE
AREA IMMEDIATELY.

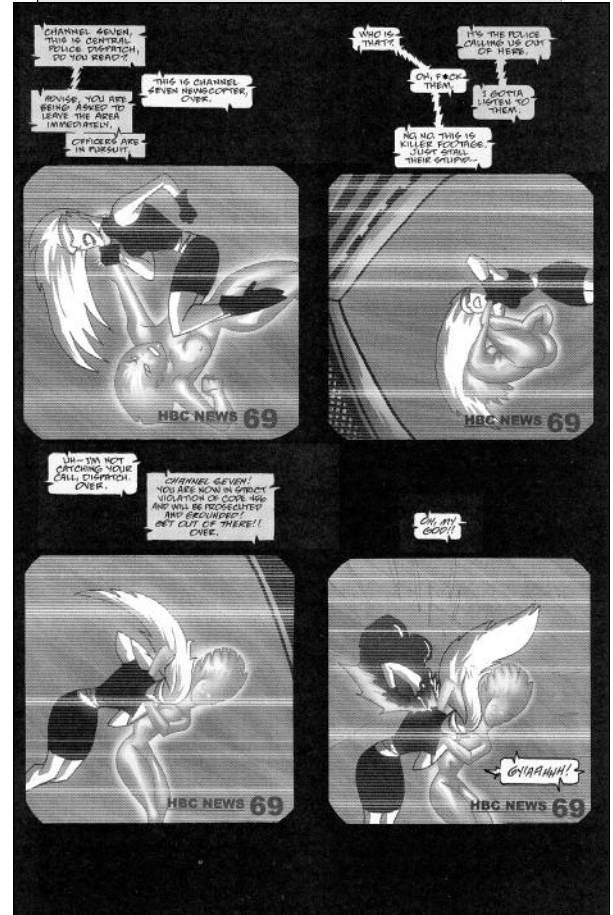
OFFICERS ARE IN PURSUIT.

2- TV SCREEN. THE AERIAL SUPERHERO FIGHT- WHICH HAS SWOOPED A LITTLE LOWER- UNDER THE COPTER. THE CAMERA MAN IS PANNING DOWN TO FOLLOW THE ACTION- WE SEE PART OF THE DOOR AND FLOOR OF THE COPTER. ZORA IS HURT BAD.

THE NEWSCOPTER IS A LITTLE TOO CLOSE TO THE ACTION.

VOICE OFF CAMERA
WHO IS THAT?

VOICE OFF CAMERA 2



[©2003 Jinxworld, Inc.]

ITS THE POLICE CALLING US OUT OF HERE.

VOICE OFF CAMERA
OH, F*CK THEM.

VOICE OFF CAMERA 2
I GOTTA LISTEN TO THEM.

VOICE OFF CAMERA
NO. NO THIS IS KILLER FOOTAGE. JUST STALL
THEIR STUPID-

3- TV SCREEN. ZORA IS IN A HEADLOCK OF BOOGIE GIRL'S- BOOGIE GIRL SEES THE COPTER. ZORA FIGHTING FOR HER LIFE.

DISPATCH
UH- I'M NOT CATCHING YOUR CALL DISPATCH,
OVER.

DISPATCH (CONT'D)
CHANNEL SEVEN! YOU ARE NOW IN STRICT
VIOLATION OF CODE 456 AND WILL BE
PROSECUTED AND GROUNDED.

GET OUT OF THERE!! OVER!

4- TV SCREEN. ZORA'S ARM GETS INCINERATED BY BOOGIE GIRL'S WHITE HOT BLASTS RIGHT ON CAMERA. SHE SCREAMS IN PAIN.

ZORA
GYIIAAHHH!!

VOICE OFF CAMERA
OH MY GOD!!

WRITE NOW!
IN-DEPTH
POWERS

Brian Michael Bendis

...talks about **POWERS**

Conducted via e-mail October 23, 2003
Edited by Danny Fingerroth / Copy-edited by Brian Michael Bendis

Brian Michael Bendis is today, even more so than when we interviewed him in early 2002 for *DFWN* #1, one of the hottest writers in comics, both creatively and commercially. Having taken the Marvel Ultimate line from vague concept to successful franchise, he also has amazed readers over and over with his work on titles such as *Daredevil* and *Alias*.

But Brian's roots are in independent publishing, for the most part in the crime genre. *Jinx*, *Torso*, *Goldfish* are noir-tinged stories of desperate people doing the best they can against odds that should make them just roll over and give up. The struggle of the "little guy" against a system stacked against them—and against their own failings—is what makes the crime films and novels of the last century so memorable. Raymond Chandler, Cornell Woolrich and Orson Welles are names that come to mind when discussing Bendis' work.

So it should come as no surprise that one of Bendis' most impressive achievements has been the noir/super-hero series *Powers*, published through Image. In *Powers*, Bendis—with his partner in crime-storytelling, Michael Avon Oeming—tells the story of homicide detective Christian Walker and his partner Deena Pilgrim as they investigate murders related to super-human denizens of their unnamed city. Walker, himself a former super-hero—or "power"—as they are colloquially called in the series' universe—is the consummate insider to the world of heroes and villains he investigates, but also an outsider. He's a cop, so he represents the authority that vigilantes and their prey are in opposition to. He's also lost his super-human abilities, and so we—and those he meets in his cases—must wonder what motivations he has for doing what he does now.

In this interview, Brian discusses the origins of, and inspiration for, *Powers*, as well as how he and Mike work together to produce the series. Elsewhere in this issue, we'll get Mike's point of view on the same topics, and then talk to each of them in more detail about the "SuperGroup" storyline as we examine it *In Depth*.



—DF

DANNY FINGERROTH: Can you discuss the way a *Powers* story arc in general and "SuperGroup" in particular came into being. Does it start with images or ideas or a theme/message you want to put across?

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS: It's always a mixture of things. It was the theme of it first, the desire to do a "SuperGroup" arc of *Powers*. Plus, I know the exploding bodies were very inspirational.

DF: How did the idea for *Powers* originate? Was it just: what would a crime series with super-heroes be like? Were you thinking about such a project when you were creating *Jinx*, *Goldfish*, etc.?

BMB: Years ago, Mike would send me his versions of *Kabuki* and *Jinx* in a rough *Powers*-like style, and it inspired me to tailor this homicide super-hero book towards him. I think Mike is amazing and it bothered me that he wasn't a bigger deal.

DF: When you pitched *Powers*, was there a "high concept" pitch line, the way *Miami Vice* was supposedly sold as "MTV Cops"?



Police and super-heroes mix in in the station house. Art from Michael Avon Oeming's preliminary pencils. [©2003 Jinxworld, Inc.]



Denna investigates. From Oeming's original art for *Powers* #30. ©2003 Jinxworld, Inc.]

BMB: Ha! There is one, I'm sure, like *Homicide* meets *Superfriends* or something.

DF: Another approach to cops dealing with super-human criminals would have been something like the original concept for Marvel's teams *X-Factor* or *Freedom Force*: the government hires super-powered cops to track super-villains. What made you decide to do a series with non-powered cops—including one with diminished powers and a super-heroic past?

BMB: I was amazed that no one had tried it from this angle. Everyone who heard the idea said: "good idea." I was amazed. But, honestly, the series isn't just the cross-pollination of genres. It's also got the celebrity and media theme. And, of course, the characters.

DF: What books, movies, TV series influenced the way *Powers*

developed? I see a lot of *NYPD Blue*. *Homicide*, too. Any others? What did you learn from your influences about what you wanted to do and what you didn't want to do in this series?

BMB: I have never seen *NYPD Blue* but the TV show, and especially the book, *Homicide* was a huge influence. So was Mamet's *Homicide* movie, and *Serpico*. Also, I have done a lot of actual cop research and ride-alongs and interviews on my own.

DF: When you started *Powers*, did you have the universe and the characters fleshed-out to any great degree, or were you improvising?

BMB: Oh, it's always both. We had a lot of the goods laid out, but other stuff has sprung into the imagination as we went along, or the characters have taken over. We like to leave it organic—leave ourselves open to ideas as they happen and not lock ourselves into things.

DF: *Powers* can be looked at as super-hero stories from the POV of the cops, who are usually relegated to roles as supporting characters in most super-hero tales. Do you ever think about how the story, if it were in say, the SuperGroup (FG-3) of the storyline's own comic, would be told?

BMB: Yes, and it would look a lot like every other damn comic book. This angle is the fresh angle. I think there's enough comics from the POV of the costumed dude.

DF: How would you compare *Powers* to *Alias*? What are the similarities? What are the differences?

BMB: *Powers* is a homicide book with two leads. *Alias* is a private eye book with one lead, and they have totally different views of the world and themes. The only similarity is the juxtaposition of crime and super-hero/pulp genres. Everything else is different.

DF: What's the appeal of writing comics scripts in screenplay style, as you usually do? Very few comics writers do. Even if they work full script, they still tend to break it down into some sort of action list (with dialogue) for the artist.

BMB: For me, it's about fully and concisely expressing an idea. Also, with the Final Draft screenplay program, all the scenes and characters' names are in smart type and I don't have to type the word 'Spider-Man' four thousand times.

DF: Do you work screenplay style for everyone, or just for Oeming?

BMB: Everyone.

DF: What's the appeal for you of the crime genre? What freedoms does the genre provide? What restrictions?

BMB: I like the fantasy of it. The real world fantasy of crime fiction thrills me. I am also so passionate about the visual language of film noir.



Michael Avon Oeming

Conducted via e-mail in October, 2003

Edited by Danny Fingerroth / Copy-edited by Michael Avon Oeming

...talks about **POWERS**

Michael Avon Oeming started his career inking comics for Marvel. He then moved to full art chores on **Judge Dredd** for DC Comics and **Foot Soldiers** for Dark Horse. His first creator-owned series, **Ship of Fools**, was published by Image Comics. Recent projects, in addition to **Powers**, include **Hammer of the Gods**, **Bastard Samurai** and (as writer) **Parliament of Justice**.

Along with the Oeming-specific questions, we asked Mike some

of the same questions we asked Brian, just to see how differently—or the same—they would answer them. You might find it interesting to compare the answers.

—DF

DANNY FINGERROTH: How did you come up with the style you use in **Powers**? Why the decision to go “cartoony” as opposed to super-realistic, which one could argue would be more in keeping with a noirish series?



MICHAEL AVON OEMING: The **Powers** style developed out of necessity. As many people know, I had fallen on hard times and had to get a “real job” for awhile. My son had just been born, so I needed a guaranteed income. I was in a dead end with my career and needed to back out of comics, editors and all that for a bit. With less time to draw, I needed a more simple style to allow for the time I had to work. I’d been playing with the animated look, trying to get onto **Batman Adventures**, but I couldn’t really do the style. But I found I really enjoyed what I was coming up with. Then my Alex Toth influence really kicked in. The influence of the animation style, soaking up Batman animated’s Bruce Timm and Toth, really just clicked something new in me, and all my years of hands-on experience in drawing and inking just kicked in, and this new style emerged. Beyond Timm and Toth, I took to studying animated films like **Iron Giant**, **Mulan** and such. I still do.

The more realistic stuff I had been doing actually wasn’t very realistic at all, just more lines. People confuse line work with realism.

Noir is tone, and it can be set by any style, cartoony or not.

DF: Briefly describe how a **Powers** story evolves. How much input do you have into the stories? Do they ever originate with you? Is any of the dialogue ever written by you?

MAO: Honestly, the stories all come from Brian’s mind. The monkey f*cking especially. That was him, not me! Really, Brian just tells me what the next story arc is and I’m all—“that’s cool!” There are things I suggest that he uses. At one point, part of “Foreverman” was going to be during the beginning of the 1980s Hip Hop movement, but the timing didn’t work out, so it was toned down to the group we see called the **Freshest**. He wanted to do a pirate story during “Foreverman,” but I wasn’t into it. He did the barbarian issue for me, as well as the China story. I suggested a sex tape story about the



Barbarian, **Powers**-style, as penciled by Mike for issue #32.

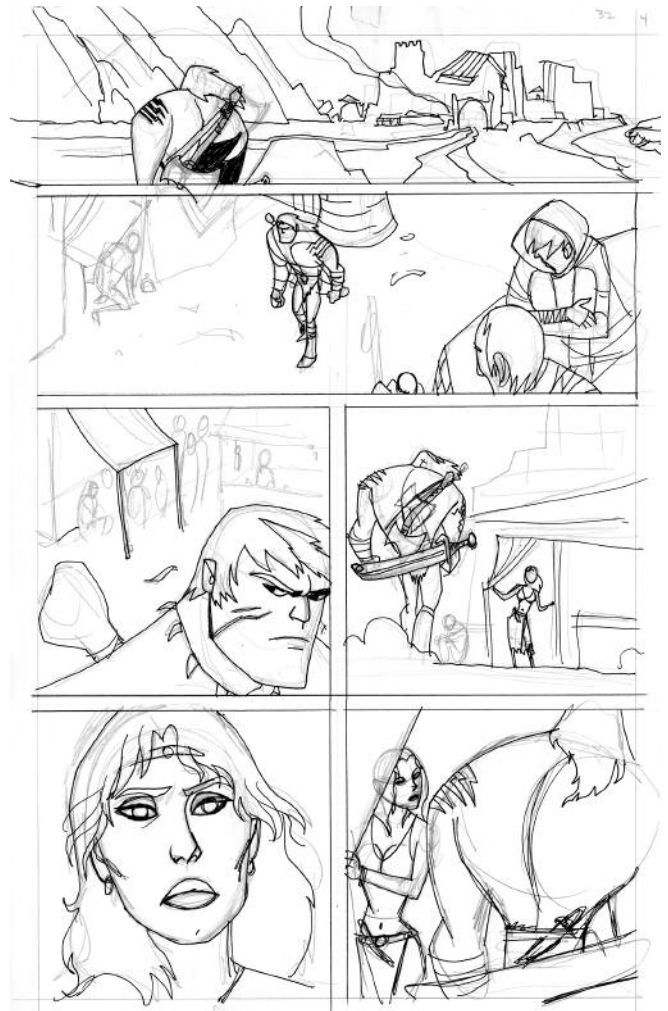
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same time as he came up with the whole Red Hawk thing, but I think that was more kismet than anything. There are a few stories I want to do in the future, but for the most part, Brian comes up with the stories, takes my suggestions and feedback. We talk things over a lot. We don't always agree, or sometimes I take the POV of the reader. I often say "I get it, I totally get it, but I think the readers might not get it." Brian trusts his readers, he knows they are some smart cats; we go with our instinct, we don't second-guess what the readers want. A good example of that is a long thread on the Bendis board about the "Foreverman" story and the clues left throughout the **Powers** series.

I don't write any dialogue. I think, in 37 issues, there's only been twice when I said a certain line reads out of place for me, so it's not much of an issue. I really don't think about the dialogue, other than how am I supposed to fit this on the same page with these characters! Plus, when it comes to dialogue, I'm in good hands with Brian, he has some talent there after all!

DF: As a writer yourself, if you see something in a **Powers** script that you think could be improved, are you free to change it?

MAO: Yes and no. I never change without talking to Brian, unless it's a minor layout thing. Man, we move around panels like no one's business. Peter Pantazis colors, does visual corrections, moves backgrounds and panels and word balloons. No one else does that kind of work. No colorist works harder than Peter.



This page, more of Mike's pencils for **Powers** #32, part of the "Forever" story arc. [©2003 Jinxworld, Inc.]

Also, when it comes to writing, Brian is the master, I am the student. I have insight and feedback to offer, but "improvements," no. Often what people think are improvements (especially editors) are really a change in story and direction. An ending with huge Brookheimer explosions is a very different story than say issue 30, where our Supershock ceases to be. Having him explode and having him fade away are two completely different things. One is a story about change on the surface, what you see, the other is a metamorphosis, a change in character, what you are.

DF: Since you write yourself, why would you want to give that control to someone else?

MAO: I'm not a writer. I'm a storyteller. I write, but I struggle with it. I'm not a control freak like most writers are. When I'm working with someone I respect or feel has a unique vision, like Bendis or Miles Gunter, I'm all about sharing that control and mixing it up. Also, Brian is such a good writer, I'd be happy working only with him and no one else when it comes down to it.

DF: Once you and Brian agree on a story, do you then do thumbnails? Or do you go right to art boards?

MAO: I used to. I used to fax him layouts. Now, we are so into the groove, I just do the pages, complete. I send him the pages done.



PAGE 2-

1- Ext. Manhattan- night
 Spidey swings through the city skyline- flinging his body through the air.

SPIDER-MAN NARATION

What the hell? Huh. I mean, what the hell?
 I got on my costume. I went to all the trouble to put on my tights and all...
 And what the hell?

2- Spidey sticks to a wall and looks down to a dozen blocks of quiet city New York street.

SPIDER-MAN NARATION

There's nothing going on.
 Nothing.

3- Spidey swings up and around and sticks to another wall. He is looking around- its a nice quiet night in new York city.

SPIDER-MAN VOICEOVER

This is New York city. Where are all our crazy people?
 Where's all the angry, sweaty, frustrated...

4- A gun shot rings out in the not too far distance. Spidey perks up.

Spx: bam

5- Spidey yanks a web and heads towards the sound. We see the warehouse piers in the distance.

SPIDER-MAN VOICEOVER

Aah, there you go...

In a more traditional super-hero vein, here's Brian's script for some pages of *Ultimate Spider-Man* #47, "Suspended," and the resulting pencils by Mark Bagley. (Inks by Art Thibert.)

Notice that here, as in *Powers*, Brian writes full script (panel-by-panel art descriptions with dialogue and captions) and specifically uses film script format (in his case, *Final Draft* software).



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Mr. Fantastic

The MARK WAID Interview

Conducted by **Jimmy Palmiotti** via e-mail June 4 2003
 Edited by **Danny Fingeroth** / Copy-edited by **Mark Waid**

I have known Mark for almost ten years now, and have been reading his work without knowing it even longer. When I started Event Comics with Joe Quesada, Mark was one of the writers we hired to help our characters along. We needed Mark's touch on our books to make us seem like a "legit" comic publisher and to make the books actually read better than the two inexperienced nuts that were running the company at the time ever could. Along with Brian Augustyn, Mark authored one of the best written and drawn comics I've ever had the pleasure to work on, **Painkiller Jane**.

Unlike a lot of people working in our industry, Mark has seen and done it all, and I think that's partly why we get along so well. He has had all the big hits and the long runs and everything that a successful writer in comics could ever dream about. He is known all over the world for his work and has influenced a generation of hacks like me to give it a try. He has been not only a great teacher, but a steady, inspirational and trustworthy friend to me, something that most of you have already learned is almost impossible to find in anyone's lifetime. He is one of those friends that, if we don't talk or see each other for months, the next time we meet or speak to each other, it's as if we just spoke the day before.

I can make a list of all of Mark's accomplishments, but really, I think the biggest one is the fact that he is still one of the top five outspoken and best-selling writers in comics today, and has been for the past ten years. Mark is doing everything right. Maybe with some of these questions, we can flush out not only how he does his magic, but gain a little insight into what makes this man tick.

—JP

JIMMY PALMIOTTI: Everyone likes to start from the beginning. So, where were you born, where have you lived and where are you right now as we speak?

MARK WAID: In brief—born in Hueytown, Alabama in March of '62, lived all over the Deep South in my youth. Bright kid, went through twelve grades in ten years at nine different schools, spent three-and-a-half years at Virginia Commonwealth University, and then fled academia forever. Today, I'm in Los Angeles, but how I got there is, I think, the road we're interested in mapping today...

JP: What was your first job in comics and what did you have to do to keep it?

MW: Jimmy, what on Earth makes you think I know anything about keeping a job? [laughter]

After a few years of writing freelance for fanzines, I was offered the editorship of **Amazing Heroes** [a popular fanzine of the '80s. —DF] at Fantagraphics.

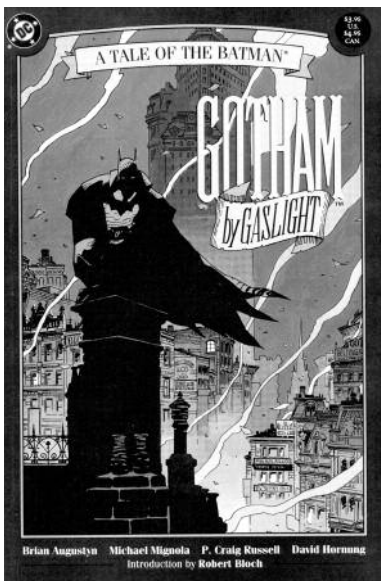
In retrospect, I guess my radar should have gone up on my first day, when I learned my initiation task would be firing my predecessor, who didn't know he'd been replaced. A few months later, I, in turn, was bounced. No tragedy. I can't guarantee that I'm any picnic to work around in an office environment on a day-to-day basis, but then, neither was the guy running the place.

I spent the next few months working as a temp clerk and having no idea what to do with my life until April 1, 1987, when then-DC-Editor-In-Chief Dick Giordano called to invite me to New York for a job interview. I was one of several interviewees. DC was very interested in starting up its own line of creator-owned properties with an "indy feel"—a mission that eventually became Piranha Press—and they were headhunting young, energetic, editorially experienced guys from the periphery of the field. This—all of this—I was told much later. When Dick phoned, in the interest of industrial secrecy, the condition laid down was that I wouldn't be told what I was being interviewed for, just that DC wanted to speak with me about "a top-secret editorial job."

So I took a red-eye into New York and, bright and early one Monday morning, I sat down in Publisher Jenette Kahn's office. I want to say



From **Flash** #115 (1996). Written by Mark Waid with art by Oscar Jimenez & Jose Marzan. [©2003 DC Comics.]



Mike Mignola's cover to the Waid-edited **Gotham by Gaslight** (written by Brian Augustyn), the birth of Elseworlds. [©2003 DC Comics.]

was the sound of two radios broadcasting at each other. The result was, arguably, the most disastrous job interview in business history. At one point, Jenette looked at me and asked—my hand to God—these exact words: “What have you done in your life that proves you have the business experience necessary to begin a company from the ground up?” And I just sat there, wide-eyed, big cartoon sweat radiating off my head, spinning clocks and calendar pages flying towards me through space as time crawled. Finally, trying desperately to salvage the situation with a laugh, I said, “Well, I sold band candy in high school.”

Jenette made a thoughtful “hmm” and scribbled this down on her notepad without a trace of amusement. The rest of her interview questions were kind of drowned out by the echo in my head that kept screaming, “Nice save, you moron.”

I didn't get the job.

I was, however, offered an Associate Editor position a few weeks later and took it gladly. I was first in a wave of five hired that Summer and Fall—along with Brian Augustyn, Dan Raspler, Renee Witterstaetter, and Art Young. I assisted on numerous books during my two-plus years there, including **Justice League**, **Wonder Woman**, and the train wreck that was **Action Comics Weekly**. I also handled Grant Morrison's **Doom Patrol**, **Secret Origins**, the two **Christmas With the Superheroes** specials. I also put together **Batman: Gotham By Gaslight** with Augustyn and Mike Mignola and started **Batman: Holy Terror** with writer Alan Brennert, thus damning my soul to hell forever for kicking off what became the “Elseworld” franchise, a publishing phenomenon that, like most, lumbered on a little too long before finally being phased out. “Elseworlds: What if the Flash fought in the Crimean War?” Who cares?

In December of '89, I went freelance and have held a few short-lived staff positions since, but overall, it's been a good life, and the freelance lifestyle suits me well.

that then-VP Paul Levitz joined us, but for reasons that will soon become apparent, I don't remember. Dick Giordano, my only real contact, was busy elsewhere... and that's where it got gruesome fast. Again, Dick had warned me I couldn't know what the job was that I was being interviewed for—but Jenette somehow assumed I *did* know, and all her questions presupposed this. She had no notion that I had no clue what she was talking about, and the whole process was less an exercise in communication than it

JP: Would it be correct to say that a lot of what you do and who you are in comics has to do with the books you read in your childhood?

MW: No. It would be correct to say that it has *everything* to do with that. As near as I can tell, my situation is relatively unique among pros. Not the part where I came in worshipping Adam West and Burt Ward at age five, because there's certainly a whole generation of us who were of just exactly the right age to believe that the live-action **Batman** show was high drama, but the part that has to do with bonding with the characters so intensely. My upbringing was the same as that of most comics fans; shrimpy, geeky, picked-upon, friendless—and being a couple years younger than my classmates didn't help—and to a large extent, Superman and Batman and Flash and the JLA and the world they lived in was my refuge. Other than stage magic and Elvis Presley, comics was about all I was ever seriously interested in for most of my growing-up years. What's more telling, though, is that I always loved the DC characters far more than the Marvel characters.

It took a long, long time to make the connection, but recently I realized that all my life, I'd preferred the DC heroes to Marvel's stable not because theirs were the first comics I'd encountered but because Marvel heroes were, in their own world, distrusted and feared and troubled. On the other hand, within their own “reality,” the DC heroes had one thing in common: *everyone loved them*. They weren't ostracized because of who they were; they were accepted and embraced. God, no wonder I wanted to be Superman instead of Iron Man. The DC heroes set my standards. “Yes, Mark, but isn't it easier to live up to the standards of, say, Spider-Man?” No. Not really. You know why? Because here's how I saw it from the very earliest age I can remember: in order to be like Spider-Man, you have to be a smart-ass and have an ailing aunt. In order to be like Dr. Strange, you have to study years' worth of mystical arts. In order to be like the Thing, you've got to be rough and gruff.

In order to be like Superman, all you have to do is always do good by others.

That was Superman's greatest super-power to me, always. Not heat vision, not flight, not super-strength. It was that given the fact that he could do *anything*, he chose to do *only good*.

[Waid continues on page 49.]



From the Waid-scripted **Captain America** Vol 3 #4. Art by Ron Garney & Bob Wiacek. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

Mark Waid's **SHOULDs** and **SHOULDN'Ts** Tips for Aspiring Writers

JP: Can you give the readers a short list of the things that every writer should and shouldn't do when trying to, not only learn how to write comics, but break into the business as well?

MW: Only a short one, because after this many issues of *Write Now!*, it's tough to make any observations that haven't already been made by other interviewees.

SHOULDs: Keep your proposals and correspondence as brief as possible, because writing comics is all about economy of storytelling. Read William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, a primer for story structure. Go through your scripts and remove any line of dialogue that you've ever heard somewhere else (Really, who can hear "Awright, let's lock and load!" and not groan by now?).

SHOULDN'Ts: Never compare yourself to anyone else ("I'm at least as good as that guy you've got writing JLA!"), unless you want to insult the editor who hired that person. Don't assume that having your proposal read is any kind of priority whatsoever for a hard-working editor, because it's not, not until they invent the thirty-hour day. Never blow a deadline, but if you have to, always call the editor and warn him. And don't ever settle when it comes to your work, because often the difference between an adequate comics script and a good comics script is about four more hours of tweaking. Moreover, if you read some line you wrote that sounds "off," it's not just the moment or just a fluke; it will sound just as tinny to you five hours or five years later when you re-read it. It will never stop bothering you, so fix it now. Read your dialogue out loud to make sure it doesn't sound preposterous. Lame-ass, unnatural dialogue is one of the three reddest of the red flags that show you're still a beginner.

The other two, by the way, are asking for impossible action in a panel and overcrowding a page. Let's address the former first. "The answering machine light blinks" is a good example and one I have seen in, literally, dozens of amateur scripts. Don't forget, this *isn't animation*. "Blinking," like many other seemingly simple actions, isn't something that can be conveyed with one static image. You can think of ten similar examples if you try.

"Overcrowding a page" is a phenomenon harder to define. Every artist is different, and some can easily draw six or seven panels on every single page without grouching and can find some way to work with even the most ludicrous script requests. ("PANEL ONE: An establishing shot of the Grand Canyon. A man in a Panama hat stands on the edge, taking a picture. On the floor of the canyon, a burro steps on a yellow daisy. PANEL TWO...") Still, whether you have any drawing talent or not, try hard to picture in your mind's eye every panel

description you write, and try to use common sense about what will and won't fit on a page. Do stick-figure breakdowns for your own reference if you must. Asking your artist to draw more than one action in a panel can be done but is almost never a good idea. ("PANEL FIVE: As Reed activates the communication console and the monitor screen springs to life, Sue drops her glass of milk on the floor, shattering it." What the hell are we supposed to be concentrating on here? You're asking your

artist to divide the reader's attention. Careful.) Likewise, asking someone to draw an establishing shot of the 142nd Cavalry Brigade coming on horseback over the hill as panel one of a six-panel page will get you shot.

Examine comics by, say, John Romita, Jr., Mike Wieringo, or Dave Gibbons—all of whom are excellent on detail and with conveying information visually—to get some sense of what will fit on a page. If you're going to err, err on the side of too few panels, not too many. On the other hand, don't deliberately pad your script to two or three panels a page "just 'cause Warren Ellis gets away with it" (an actual quote I once overheard). Every image on every page should be necessary and should convey some important piece of visual information. If you spend an entire silent panel showing your protagonist, say, filling a tumbler from a faucet, if that action doesn't have something to do with the plot or with character advancement, then you're just being lazy while jerking the reader around. Jesus, even in those situations where your plot dictates that

you need three pages of conversation to get some exposition across, pick a visually interesting locale for the scene. You can show us where your character likes to hang out (a Brooklyn deli) or where he's naturally uncomfortable (a frou-frou coffee bar). You can pepper the conversation with "stage business"—have the characters doing things that are character-revelatory. Gadgety guy in a bar? Have him idly building something out of cocktail cherries and plastic stir-straws while he's talking. Artist guy on the beach? Have him stick-drawing something interesting in the sand while he's getting his orders from his Secret Agency Boss. Anything. Anything. Garth Ennis and Brian Bendis are the only two writers I can think of who craft dialogue clever and interesting enough to drag us through five pages of exposition between two men in business suits standing inside a corporate office. For newbies, this is death, death, death. Don't even try. Be creative.



A Mark Waid written, Mike Wieringo penciled, Karl Kesel inked page from *Fantastic Four* Vol. 3 #70, a.k.a. #499. [©2003 Marvel Characters, Inc.]

PAGE SIXTEEN

PANEL ONE: REED LOOKS INTO THE ORB OF AGAMOTTO TO SEE STRANGE'S CORPoreal FORM (NO LONGER BONE-BROKEN) SCREAMING THAT SAME SCREAM--IN HELL, IN THE PAINFUL CLUTCHES OF WHICHEVER OF THE HAAZARETH DOESN'T/DON'T HAVE HOLD OF FRANKLIN (WHO'S THERE, BUT NO LONGER THE CENTER OF THE DEMONS' ATTENTION).

1 STRANGE/from orb/burst: AAAIIIEEEE!

PANEL TWO: REED TRIES (AND FAILS) TO COMMAND THE GLOWING, CLEARLY MAGIC-FILLED TALISMAN.

2 REED: "Magic words." Alakazam. ABRACADABRA.

3 REED: OPERATE! DO SOMETHING! COME ON!

4 REED: Nothing. I can't make it function. Damn it...

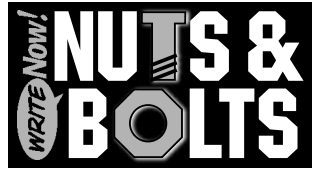
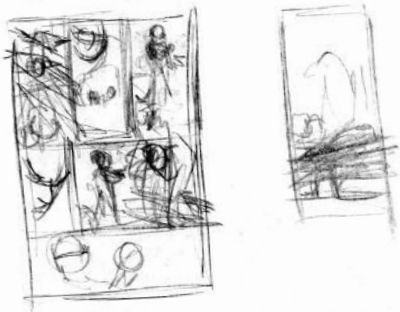
PANEL THREE: TIGHT ON REED, DEFEATED, FURIOUS AT HIMSELF.

5 REED: ...I'm an IDIOT.

PANEL FOUR: TO REED'S STUNNED SURPRISE, THE TALISMAN SUDDENLY FIRES A BOLT OF MAGICAL ENERGY, SHATTERING SOME INCONSEQUENTIAL BUT LARGE SOMETHING IN ITS PATH.

6 SFX: sssKOW!

PANEL FIVE: REED GAPES IN BAFFLEMENT ("HOW THE HELL DID I DO THAT?") AT THE TALISMAN (BACK AS IT WAS IN PANEL TWO, GLOWING BUT NOT FIRING). NO DIALOGUE.



Mark Waid's script for the landmark *Fantastic Four* v3 #71, a.k.a. *FF* #500. Here, Mark works full script, and Mike Wieringo does the penciling, with the finished pages inked by Karl Kesel. On these pages we have the added bonus of seeing Mike's thumbnails as he works out the best way to lay out the panels Mark describes.



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The Power of Passion

Close-up On

BATMAN: DETECTIVE #27

by MICHAEL USLAN

Michael Uslan's resume is as impressive as anybody's. He's a writer, producer, and entertainment lawyer, with a list of awards including an Emmy, a People's Choice and an Annie. Among other achievements, he's been the Executive Producer of all the *Batman* films, as well as the *Swamp*



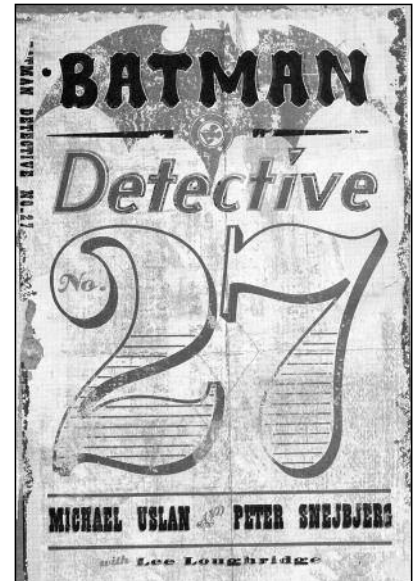
Thing live action and animated incarnations. Michael is also the man who brought Stan Lee and DC Comics together for the historic *Just Imagine Stan Lee Creating the DC Universe* line of graphic novels. Currently, through his Branded Entertainment Company, he's the man behind CrossGen's various media initiatives, including *Way of the Rat*, and is the Executive Producer of the new *Batman: Mystery of the Batwoman* video and *Catwoman* live action movie. Michael's career has focused in large part on comics-related concepts, to which he brings an enormous passion.

One of the most personal and heartfelt of projects is the current Elseworlds graphic novel he's writing for DC, *Batman: Detective #27*. In the article below, he reveals how the project came about. In case you're not sure why the title seems familiar, it's because Batman famously first appeared in *Detective Comics* #27 in 1939. In Michael's tale, Bruce Wayne does not become Batman, but he does become a crime-fighting detective, one designated by the organization he works for as "Detective #27." Here, in his own words, Michael tells the story behind the story, what it is and how it came to be...

-DF

Ask any comic book collector of any age what the most important issues in history have been and you'll keep hearing about three comic books: *Action Comics* #1; *Marvel Comics* #1; and *Detective Comics* #27. With the words "Detective #27" being so seminal not simply to Batman but to the entire future of the comic book industry, re-working Bruce Wayne into a hero who actually goes by that name was (in my fan-boy mind) a tremendously ironic device upon which to base my story. And it just reeked of that "pulp magazine" feel I wanted to evoke (Anybody out there besides me remember "Operator #5" or "Secret Agent X-9"?). I came up with the idea that an ongoing, growing secret society of detectives would allow me to tell the story I wanted to impart, a tale that spans 75 years. In addition, the phrase was the perfect title for the story.

It's rare when somebody gets to experience a life-long dream come true. Two of the times that such an event happened to me revolved around Batman. When I was eight years old, I dreamed of writing *Batman* comics. That dream came true in the mid-70's while I was a "Junior Woodchuck" (they hadn't yet coined the term "intern") at DC Comics, along with such luminaries as Paul Levitz. I had the opportunity of working with the king of kings, editor Julie Schwartz, and the emperor of comic book trivia, Bob Rozakis, on some stories for *Detective Comics*,



The distinctive cover to *Batman: Detective #27*. [©2003 DC Comics]

written amid bleary eyes and lots of black coffee late at night when I was supposed to be studying my law books at Indiana University School of Law. When the stories were published, I realized my dream had come true and it was time for another one. That night, I decided that one day I would produce a dark, serious, movie version of Batman the way Messrs. Kane, Finger, Robinson, et al. had created him in



On this and the next two pages, Peter Snejbjerg art from the Michael Uslan written graphic novel *Detective #27*. [©2003 DC Comics.]

Keeper of the Bat-Mythos

The BOB SCHRECK Interview

Conducted by Danny Fingerroth February 19, 2003 at the DC Comics offices.

Edited by **Danny Fingerroth** / Copy-edited by **Bob Schreck**

Part 2

Here we continue our interview with *Batman Group Editor Bob Schreck*. Bob was talking about his eclectic path from musician and actor to comics promotions guru to editor to co-founder of the award-winning independent publisher, *Oni Press*. We left off Bob's story as he was deciding whether or not to take the editorial gig that DC Comics was offering. Why would a figure so identified with being outside the mainstream decide to jump into it? How would it affect him, and vice versa? Read on...

—DF

DANNY FINGERROTH: What made you feel at that point that you had to do it?

BOB SCHRECK: A lot of factors. One of them was that I had already done *Oni*. And I did it, I thought, fairly successfully. I can look out the window and there's *Oni*, it's still there, and they're kicking butt. *The Fourth Rail Magazine* people just dubbed them the best independent publisher of the year, or was it the best publisher of the year, because they're so eclectic in what they present? And they're there and they make me proud. And I look back and say, "Holy Moley, look!" And I think my leaving at the time helped them, because I was an expensive date. Joe was ten years plus younger than me. I can't remember what our age difference is, but it's big. Perhaps it's more like fifteen years.

DF: I doubt they saw it that way.

BS: I'm sure they didn't, but I knew the reality of it. So my

leaving would free up a little extra cash during the year. And I have my family here—I grew up here. So, I don't know. Just everything pointed to, "Here's another challenge, something you haven't done before." I actually had a lot of people saying, "Oh, you'd never make it in a real corporation." But the truth is I was never in a real corporation. This is a real corporation. And while it has its frustrations, the reality is that 99.9% of the time—which is a much higher ratio than the other places I've worked—I find most of the usual confusing corporate speak here is cleared up very quickly and makes sense more often than not. And I think that because I have some insight into what Paul and others have to go through at their levels of responsibility, because I worked in such close proximity to decision-making at *Comico* and at *Dark Horse*. And at *Oni*, Joe and I... we were it. And it's a horrible, horrible line from *A Few Good Men*, but you know, the Nicholson character says, until you've stood guard on that wall and have had to make that decision with that gun, you can't criticize the person that sits on that wall every day.

DF: You've been on both the creative side and on the business side, so you can understand both sides' needs and problems.

BS: I think so.

DF: Now, the logical thing, one would think, would be to say, "Mr. *Oni* comes to DC Comics, we'll put him in the *Vertigo* line or give him his own imprint." How'd you end up in the super-hero end of things?

BS: Well, see, aside from *Green Lantern*... he's the only one with powers. *Green Arrow*—see, we've got to get technical here. [Danny laughs] *Green Arrow* has green arrows, but he has no super-powers.

DF: Costumed adventurers, then. Costumed adventurers! But how did you come to the costumed adventurers? Was it DC's idea, your idea?

BS: DC's idea. Denny O'Neil called me up and they said that he was retiring, and that DC'd like to get me in there so I could take a look at the shop before he left. I asked if I could think about it. It took me two weeks, I think, and then I came out here to DC.

Once in the offices it took almost a year before I actually took over the *Bat*-titles. And the answer is... I mean, I love Vaughn Bodé, I love Jack Kirby. You can't get any further apart aesthetically. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby on one end of the spectrum, Vaughn Bodé on the other. But I get them both. I love Peter Bagge,



This page and the rest of the interview's illustrations are from Bob Schreck-edited comics. Here, the *Green Arrow* battles *Onomatopoeia* in *Green Arrow* #15. Written by Kevin Smith with art by Phil Hester and Ande Parks.

[©2003 DC Comics.]

and yet I can pick up a really good run of an **Aliens** book and say, “Wow, that was really well-written and the art was amazing.”

DF: This seems to be sort of a trend in mainstream comics now where, say, a lot of the people over at Marvel are people who two years ago were strictly “independent” and they bring that sensibility with them. I imagine you bring a similar thing to the mix here at DC?

BS: Actually, I sit here and I look over and say, “Hey, Joey Cavalieri’s working with all the guys I used to work with! What’s going on?” And yeah, Axel Alonso at Marvel, formerly at DC, he’s worked with Paul Pope and many other folks I’ve worked with. It’s funny. Some editors actually believe that they have a claim on certain creators. But there’s a reason they’re called “freelancers.” I don’t want the responsibility of being the only source of income for Arthur Adams or Paul Pope, or whomever. I can’t do it. I’d love to. But it’s healthier for them to be happy bumblebees and fly around and go weird-out the Marvel world for a while and have some fun with their characters.

DF: The danger is, of course, they over-commit and don’t really weird out any world, they just get stuck in the middle of unfinished projects.

BS: Exactamundo. One of the things I say is, “Look, if you’re going to do this, you’ve got to do this.” I got as much out of Kevin Smith as I did because I made him write the entire story



The Batman “family” gathers at the bed of Commissioner Gordon in **Robin** #86, part of the “Officer Down” crossover. Written by Ed Brubaker with art by Arnold & Jacob Pander. [©2003 DC Comics.]

out in text. Broad strokes, not all the details. And then got six or seven issues in-house before we launched the first one. We still eventually started shipping late, but only by a month for the last six or so.

DF: Kind of miraculous.

BS: Pretty miraculous, considering that there’re two different books of his down the street that aren’t coming out at all.

DF: Now, specifically, your title at DC is Group Editor, correct??

BS: Yes.

DF: I counted up in the recent solicits, and there are something like 15 or 18 Batman-related titles a month.

BS: Yeah. I think what I actually have to physically oversee every month is like eleven, and then there’re other Bat-books that other editors are working on. I get the plots to those and just look at them and go, “Okay, fine.” And I get the scripts and I give them a go-ahead. The only monthly Bat-Books I edit hands-on are **Batman** and **Detective Comics**, and I edit **Green Arrow** and **Green Lantern**, as well. Matt Idelson has **Robin**, **Gotham Knights**, **Gotham Central**, **Catwoman** and **Harley Quinn**, and Michael Wright has **Batgirl** and **Nightwing**. Nachie Castro assists on a vast majority of the titles, as does Michael. I am absolutely blessed with the best team of qualified editorial support I could ever hope for. And to boot, they are just all-round good guys!

DF: And if it’s not fine, you’ll have them change it?

BS: Usually if it’s not fine, they agree with me, or their editor. Say, it might be something like, Batman wouldn’t be appearing on TV in the course of a given story. Aside from his appearances with the Justice League, he just wouldn’t be going out during the day, let alone being on TV. So let’s clean that up. I received a script the other day where Batman goes to this guy’s house to talk to him about something, and the Batmobile is parked out in front of the house. And then Batman knocks on the door and the guy inside opens the door and lets him in. I said, “No, that’s not how Batman would enter someone’s house!” And I get the script back, and now the Batmobile is gone, but he’s still knocking on the front door! [laughter] “No!”

DF: “Who’s there?”

DF & BS: “Batman.”

DF: “Batman who?” [laughter]

BS: No, no. The way it has to work is... the guy in the house is drinking his Scotch and water—he’s in his chair and it’s three in the morning, he’s about to fall asleep, the drink starts to spill, and Batman appears behind his chair, the guy jumps with start, [startled voice] “Ooooooh!” And says—

DF: “Don’t you knock?!”

BS: Exactly! But Batman doesn’t drive up, knock on the door and go, “Hey, it’s me, how ya doin’?”

DF: “Can I get my parking validated, please?”

BS: Yeah. So those types of things, you say, “Hey, c’mon, re-read what you wrote. Is that Batman?” And they say, “Oh! Yeah, what was I thinking?” And it’s fixed.

DF: So are you the backstop on all things Batman, in terms of making sure if he’s got a broken arm in one comic, he has it in the other one, or is it not that tightly monitored?

BS: We try not to make it that tight, but in terms of broader strokes, yes. Myself and Matt Idelson, who’s my right-hand man. I couldn’t do anything without him. He’s a phenomenal editor and a phenomenal organizer. We pretty much set the tone and we keep our eyes on it the bigger picture as much as we can. Sometimes we make conscious decisions to look the other way when it comes to a strict adherence to continuity.

Ride a Dark Horse

The DIANA SCHUTZ Interview

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

Last issue, Diana Schutz, Senior Editor at Dark Horse Comics, was talking about her career path from academia to comics retailing, with a brief stopover at Marvel Comics editorial, and ultimately to various editorial positions at Dark Horse. In this second half of the interview, Diana speaks, among other topics, about what she looks for in aspiring writers. But before that...

When we left off last time, Diana was starting to talk about her editing style and how it impacts on the creative people she works with.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: How do you edit a Frank Miller, a Will Eisner...?

DIANA SCHUTZ: [pause] With kid gloves. [laughter] Well, you become a sounding board. When you're editing creator-owned books—as opposed to work-for-hire books—as a representative of the publisher, you are a *partner* in the enterprise as opposed to *controlling* the enterprise. So... "facilitating vision"... what I meant by that was, my job, as I see it, is to do whatever I can do at the publishing end to help realize the creator's vision. In



Art from **Grendel** #10, written by Matt Wagner, with art by Arnold and Jacob Pander, edited by Diana. [Grendel ©2003 Matt Wagner.]

Part 2



Diana Schutz and artist Matt Wagner.

the case of, say, **300** by Frank Miller and Lynn Varley, that meant putting in the kind of effort like spending Saturday afternoon at the color

separation house, looking at the sixteenth or seventeenth color separation and still wanting it to be fine-tuned. I'll try not to get too technical, but, basically, when I get the art and story from a creator, I have to oversee a number of things at my end, at the publishing end, to present that art and story in the way that the creator intended. I can do that job badly, or I can work my ass off and do it right.

DF: Do you and the creator always agree on how it should be presented?

DS: Not necessarily.

DF: So that must be where the stories you can't tell are?

DS: No, I can tell those stories. It comes down to this. Here's a story that I like to tell, because it was a lesson that I learned early on in my editorial career. I was working with Matt Wagner on an issue of **Grendel**, which Matt was scripting. Matt's the creator/owner of **Grendel**. He's also my brother-in-law now, but he wasn't then. And he and I had a very strong friendship and professional relationship. Because Matt owns the copyright, when I would get the script from him, I wouldn't make any change to that script without discussing it with Matt first. And one day he and I ended up arguing over one word. And I no longer even remember the word, but we argued for twenty minutes, over the phone, about this one word, and about Matt's particular usage of the word. I maintained that his usage was incorrect, and we argued back-and-forth and back-and-forth, and finally Matt said, "Di, it's *my* book." End of argument. And that's the difference between a creator-owned property and a work-for-hire property. At the end of the day, as an editor, if you wind up in a serious disagreement with your creator, your only option then is to publish or not publish.

DF: And I would imagine that not publishing runs into all sorts of contractual difficulties.

DS: It depends on the contract.

DF: So is Dark Horse a place for newcomers, people who have a great idea and want to find a place for it, or is it more a place for established people who have a vision, a point-of-view, of their own?

DS: Really it's a little of both. Given the current marketplace, it's very difficult to be able to make it financially feasible for a young creator coming in the door to do a brand new, creator-owned property. But it can happen.

DF: And what about the licensed property end of the company? I'm asking with a view toward somebody reading this interview who wants to know, "If I'm sending out samples, if I'm making calls, is Dark Horse a place for me? And if it is, how should I approach it?"

DS: Well, I don't know if you've run into this in your own editorial career, but our problem with licensed books is that we're not allowed to look at story pitches for licensed properties, because our licensed properties are owned by movie studios who have very high-priced lawyers who cover their asses like you wouldn't believe. [laughter]

DF: Oh, I believe it!

DS: So what that means is, if somebody sends us an idea—and as you well know, ideas are a dime a dozen—

DF: That's what I hear. [laughs]

DS: But everybody thinks they have the greatest idea that nobody else has ever thought of. And they send in a one paragraph idea, and there's a line in there that resembles some movie premise that's already being worked on, and it opens up the studio to various lawsuits—copyright infringement, etc., etc. So consequently, the lawyers have spoken, and thus it shall be: we can't look at any story pitches.

DF: But say somebody sends in samples.

DS: Not cold ones. We have to invite writers to submit a pitch.

DF: So in theory, if you have an aspiring writer's samples and like them, you might invite him to pitch.

DS: Yes.

DF: So there is that hope.

DS: Yes. In terms of your readership and people looking to get work...

DF: Both established pros and new, unpublished people.

DS: Well, in terms of the new, unpublished people, what I recommend is this marvelous invention of the last fifteen or so years, which I see more and more of at conventions: the mini-comic. Anybody can do their own mini-comic, and if you only write and you don't draw, then find an artist and the two of you put together a mini-comic. It can be a four-page thing, a quick Xerox job. Even I have made a mini-comic.

DF: Even you? [laughs]

DS: Even me. You can put together your own quick little thing, and it's such a painless way for an editor to see whether you can write, whether you can draw, how you handle the mechanics of telling a story.

DF: Whether you can staple pages in order.

DS: Yes. And, if you're an artist, how your sensibilities are for reproduction, for instance. I take mini-comics from everyone at conventions. I will never, ever turn down a mini-comic. However, when people come up to me with their inch-thick magnum opus? I used to take them, in the past, when I would take everything handed to me. I would have to buy a new damn suitcase to go home from a convention, just to lug back all

these various submissions. I don't do that anymore. But there's always room for a mini-comic.

DF: Okay, that's a good tip. When you get away from the traditional super-hero comics structure, are there rules for what's likely to be accepted, or is it all kind of intuitive? When you read something, what tells you if it's good and/or saleable or not?

DS: Well, that's the million-dollar question.

DF: Even with a strict structure it's hard to know, but without it...

DS: I have to confess, I operate a lot by intuition. I suppose there are some standard things. I have a very difficult time evaluating something that's given to me in terms of a plot, for instance, because plots to me are like ideas, they're a dime a dozen. It's all in the execution.

DF: That's interesting, because a plot, especially a detailed plot, can at least give you the intended flavor.

DS: It can. Language is a wonderful tool, but it's a precision instrument. It's a scalpel. And by and large, we use it like a butter knife, you know?

DF: Or a chainsaw. [laughter]

DS: Yeah! So with a writer, I'm looking for someone who can use language. If somebody wants to write comics and all they've ever read is comics, they haven't read any of the classics, they don't read novels...

DF: So an aspiring writer should be widely read.

DS: Right. What else? Well, they should have the ability to make characters believable. Certainly, that's critical. If I don't believe a character, if I don't have some kind of sympathy—although sympathy's probably not the right word—if I can't feel that a character is real in some sense...

DF: It almost sounds like what you're saying, though, is that you can't know if you like it until it's finished. But I know there must be steps along the way that you use to evaluate a script.

DS: Well, there are. I mean, all these things that I'm looking at can be

evident in the way a writer has written a plot. But, again, I've gotten in some great plots, but then the execution sucks.

DF: The execution by the artist, or the execution by the writer scripting it?

DS: Well, in my case, those two tend to be one.

DF: Right, that's true.

DS: And frankly, if I have my druthers, I guess I prefer to work with an individual who is executing an individual vision. So I prefer to work with cartoonists—and by that I mean someone who both writes and draws.

DF: In the Frank Miller or Will Eisner mode. Is there enough diversity in the Dark Horse editorial structure that someone who is only a writer or only an artist can go there and show their work?

DS: Oh, sure! Yeah, absolutely.

DF: Can you talk a little bit about the Dark Horse structure? Are you the editor of a particular group, are there other editors who have groups with their style books? How's the system work?

DS: We're too small for the group structure. At one time, when



Diana even produced her own mini-comic, with cover art from Matt Wagner. [©2003 Diana Schutz.]

Platinum Reflections

The SCOTT MITCHELL ROSENBERG Interview

Part 2

Conducted by **Danny Fingeroth** via telephone February 4, 2003
 Transcribed by **Steven Tice** / Copy-edited by **Scott Mitchell Rosenberg**

From his days as founder and publisher of Malibu Comics, where such properties as **Men In Black** were launched, to his current role as head of Platinum Studios, home of Showtime's **Jeremiah** series, Scott Mitchell Rosenberg has always been focused on finding exciting new properties and bringing them to as wide an audience as possible. Unlike other studios, Platinum's emphasis is on developing properties originated by comics creators, as well as discovering new comics creators. In the first part of this interview, Scott described the road that brought him to where he is today. Now, the conversation continues as he talks in detail about what Platinum is looking for, how to present ideas to them, and what the future might bring for the company.

—DF

DANNY FINGEROTH: So you're not in the comic publishing business in the traditional sense. If it doesn't have that other thing going on for it, the movie/TV thing, then it's not really for you.

SCOTT ROSENBERG: We have to think that the characters, or the world, or the stories can live, breath and move around through other mediums. And we're willing to work to make that happen.

DF: Does someone need an agent to come work with Platinum?

SMR: No, to us, it doesn't matter one way or the other. It's best, though, if the creator's at least somewhat knowledgeable about how deals work, and what is and isn't realistic in terms of getting a film made. If the creator's main goal is a film, then I'm not sure they'll be happy since the odds are so horrible. It's best if their love is of making comics, and their hope is that it'll pay off economically some day.

Once the creators are knowledgeable about the Hollywood end of things, they have to go with their gut. There's lots of producers out there, so it's easy for a creator to talk to other creators and say, "Hey, which producer do I pitch to?" And there's totally different kinds of producers. We're willing to make a comic. We're willing to spend a few years even if everybody says "no." **Men in Black**, every studio said "no" to me on.

Jeremiah, I got tons of nos. So I'm used to no's. But we don't care. If we like something, we're going to keep at it. We've taken the same project and packaged it with three different screen-

writing teams to go out (meaning we went around and pitched a story with a screenwriter, all the studios said "no" to that particular story, so we waited a while, then went out with another screenwriter with a different take). So we're willing to do all that. A lot of producers will throw it against the wall, which may be appropriate for some properties (well, some already printed ones). A creator who wants instant satisfaction, for whatever reason—and some of the reasons are valid—he needs an answer. He's best going to someone who will throw it against the wall. Now, the thing's dead after that, but there's a chance that someone will say yes.

DF: I know you generate projects in-house. Is that the exception, or do you do a lot of that?

SMR: We also have the Platinum Megaverse Bible, which we have a team of people right now putting together, taking into account all of the last several years in our universe, stuff like **Cowboys and Aliens** and **Atlantis Rising** and a bunch of others that we've been creating. So that universe has its beginning, middle, and how far it goes in the future, the whole bit.

DF: The "Platinum Universe" in the same sense as the "Marvel Universe," that it's an interconnected fictional universe of characters?

SMR: Absolutely. It's very cool. So with that, we definitely have writers that write for us in that universe. Some of them create storylines or mini-bibles for us and put them in the universe. We've worked with probably ten writers in the past three months just working specifically on developing storylines in the bible, some of them writing comic books.

DF: That's the end I've been involved in with you guys.

SMR: Right!

DF: Now Marv Wolfman—is he involved somewhere in the



Concept art for the Platinum project **Jaunt**. Story by Dean Motter and art by Stefano Cardoselli. [Jaunt and all characters TM & ©2003 Platinum Studios, LLC.]



The cast of *Jeremiah*: Luke Perry, Sean Astin, and Malcolm Jamal-Warner. [©2003 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Inc.]

process?

SMR: Absolutely! He's done terrific stuff for us in our bible and on graphic novels.

DF: Do you have any competitors? Is there anyone in the same business as *Platinum*, or do you have a pretty unique niche?

SMR: There's tons of producers, but I don't think there's anyone like us. Do you?

DF: I don't. You have a unique aspect. I guess if you go to someone and you say you're the comic book guys, it's sort of "aren't Marvel and DC the comic book guys?" But you have a new take on it and a different approach to it, I think, and that would be the difference, it would be what sets you apart from them.

You once said producing hundreds of comics at Malibu was your most important professional accomplishment to date. I thought that was interesting considering all the cool stuff you've done since. Is that still something you believe, even with all the stuff you're doing at *Platinum* now?

SMR: Well, I guess I just have to add into that mix. And seeing *Men in Black* come to life, and *Jeremiah*... I like stories from comic books coming to life, as comics or as other media. And that's the thing that just gets me.

DF: It certainly was a great coup to get Joe Straczynski for *Jeremiah*. How did that come about? This guy must get offered a million projects. How did he come to agree to do the series? Did you have a previous relationship with him? Did you know him before?

SMR: No. I knew *Babylon 5* and was in love with that show creatively. From the business side, I knew that he had brought the episodes in on time, on or under budget, for five years. So basically, I loved his work, and met with him about *Jeremiah*. He was at first unsure, to say the least. And we just kept talking. Quite honestly, I chased him.

DF: Do you have input and approval over everything?

SMR: A lot of people have input. The network airing it and the studio financing it, honestly, can call all the shots. The executive producers, Ervin Rustemagic and myself and Joe Dante and Mike Finnel and others—we all said "we believe in Joe's vision," and then Joe and Sam Egan (EP, great guy, and ran the show with Joe for the first season) ran the show, and the world, so to speak. What also is important, and the writers also see this first hand, is how the characters play out, and things change, sometimes with the actor's suggestions, sometimes with executives'.

DF: Now, *Jeremiah* came from one of Ervin's properties that Herman had created, right? How did that come about?

SMR: Herman created it in the early '70s. There's been over 20 volumes. Malibu published it at the exact same time we published *Men in Black*, in '89 or '90. I was a big fan of it when I published it then. So when Ervin and I were starting up *Platinum*, playing around with this was a natural. We just

thought there would be a really good TV series in *Jeremiah*, because there's just so much to do with those characters.

DF: There were about a thousand properties that *Platinum* got through combining with Ervin at that point, correct?

SMR: Yeah. What we were doing was, we were reading through a lot of the different things that Ervin had asked us to. Some worked, some didn't work. This was one that stood out in our minds as totally working.

DF: Now, Ervin's no longer part of *Platinum*?

SMR: No, as companies, we're separate. He's had Strip Art Features since the '70s and decided to spend his full time and attention on that (and his family). In terms of projects that we started on together, we're partners, and there are quite a few projects.

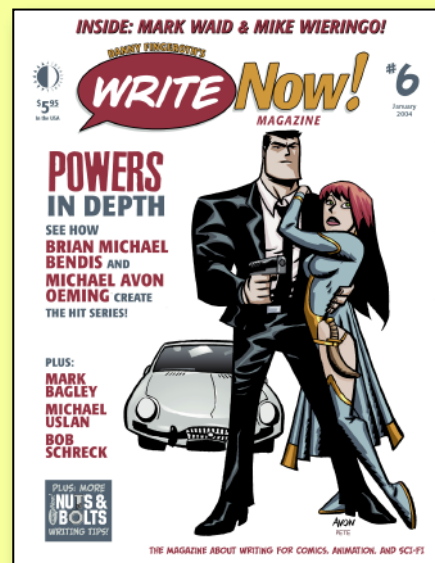
DF: Right. And he's still in...?

SMR: Slovenia. He has fantastic relationships with creators and he has a lot of different kinds of material.

DF: To backtrack a little bit, if I, as a comics creator, come to you with a property and you like it, is there any chance that I would get to write, direct, or produce the movie or series?

SMR: Film and TV are very different. The short answer is TV is a lot easier than features. But I'll answer that in a few ways. This is all coming from what is best for the property, which is

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